

RAC Response to the ORR consultation on Monitoring Highways England investment

About the RAC

With more than eight million members, the RAC is the oldest and one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists. As such, it is committed to making driving easier, safer, more affordable and more enjoyable for all road users.

The RAC, which employs more than 1,500 patrols, provides roadside assistance across the entire UK road network and as a result has significant insight into how the country's road networks are managed and maintained.

The RAC is separate from the RAC Foundation which is a transport policy and research organisation which explores the economic, mobility, safety and environmental issues relating to roads and their users.

The RAC website can be found at www.rac.co.uk.

In September 2016, the RAC published its latest [Report on Motoring](#).

RAC Response

Do you understand and agree with the scope of our role with respect to monitoring Highways England's network investment, as set out in this consultation?

Yes. We believe that the current framework in which the ORR operates with responsibility for monitoring Highways England, whilst still relatively new, is working well and is starting to deliver benefits for motorists. The 2016 RAC Report on Monitoring found that whilst there was a great deal of concern about the condition of local roads (38% listed it as one of their top four concerns), roads managed by Highways England fared better, with only 12% listing the condition as a top four concern, a 1% drop on 2015. Of more concern, will be rising concerns about congestion and slower journey times: 27% now list this as a top four concern, compared to 18% in 2015. It is therefore important that the three key areas identified to be monitored - portfolios, programmes and projects – include assessments of the impact on congestion both during construction and after completion and takes steps to minimise this.

Overall, the RAC supports the monitoring proposals set down in the Consultation document. We have further suggestions in our response to question three.

Does our proposed approach for monitoring Highways England's network investment fulfil our role in a way which meets your requirements as a stakeholder?

The RAC has further comments below.

Are there aspects of our monitoring of Highways England's network investment that you think require more or less emphasis?

Overall, the RAC supports the monitoring proposals set down in the Consultation document. However we have several specific points that we should like to raise:

- The ORR places much emphasis on monitoring performance “in the round”. Essentially what this infers is that there will be overspends and underspends and some projects will complete early whilst others complete late. Given the resource available, ORR have few alternatives to such an approach. The RAC therefore supports this provided the “standard deviation” (i.e. the average variance to plan) is small. However, large variations for a high proportion of projects would signify a lack of control and poor risk management, ORR should therefore express a view as to what level of variation is acceptable and at what point HE’s controls and ability to manage risk are brought into question.
- According to these proposals, the performance measures for major schemes are primarily associated with the scheme deliverables (adherence to milestones, expenditure against plan, efficiencies and value for money). However, where schemes involve upgrading or modifying existing roads, the way in which such schemes are implemented will in many instances have an impact on the extent to which road users are inconvenienced. For example, it may be possible to save cost or time at the expense of excessive and unreasonable delays or inconvenience to road users. The RAC is unclear how ORR will satisfy themselves that Highways England are not off-setting project delays or overspends by cost or time saving measures that unreasonably increase the delays or inconvenience to road users.
- In the case of ring-fenced funds and particularly strategic studies, the output will be less tangible than in major projects. Where the deliverable is a report or proposal, the RAC is unclear how ORR will assess the quality of the output. We can envisage situations in which the objectives of a study may appear to have been met but the study may be superficial and of poor quality and conceivably lacking impartiality. In such situations, value for money for the taxpayer would be poor. We would therefore like to understand how ORR will satisfy themselves on the adequacy of the quality of deliverables of this type?