



Department
for Transport

Creation of the Major Road Network Government Response

Moving Britain Ahead

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Executive Summary

- 1 Building on the work of the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund Report, *A Major Road Network for England*¹, the Government is committed to creating a Major Road Network (MRN). This will create a specific new funding stream to raise the standards of economically and regionally important roads in England that will join seamlessly with and complement the existing Strategic Road Network (SRN) which is made up of the nation's motorways and major A roads.
- 2 Earlier this year the Government consulted on the creation of the MRN. This document is the Government's response to the consultation and outlines the views expressed in responses, along with the Government's conclusions and subsequent plan for developing and implementing the MRN programme.
- 3 The consultation attracted over 1,400 responses from members of the public, local government, and organisations with an interest in transport. Over two-thirds of these responses were in relation to specific campaigns calling for certain features of the programme to be emphasised and the inclusion of certain roads and schemes. Outside of the campaigns, responses to the specific questions raised in the consultation generally supported the creation of an MRN investment programme and the specific proposals set out in the consultation.
- 4 Some respondents did suggest changes to the consultation proposals. Themes identified by significant number of responses are:
 - **Environmental impact** - ensuring environmental matters, including air quality are a consideration when making MRN investment decisions.
 - **Public transport** - investing in public transport schemes as a means of reducing congestion through mode shift.
 - **Housing development** - using the MRN to prepare and open up opportunities for new housing.
 - **Managing safety** - delivering safety benefits through MRN investments.
 - **Economic growth** - using the MRN to stimulate and support sustainable local growth.
 - **Non-motorised users** - supporting the public transport and managing safety themes and suggesting investment in provisions for cycling and pedestrians.
- 5 In light of the consultation responses and the themes raised, the Department has reviewed its MRN programme proposals and has adapted and refined certain aspects.
- 6 In reviewing the network, the Department has set out the specific quantitative and qualitative criteria that have been used. We have also adopted a number of

¹ <http://www.reesjeffreys.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/A-Major-Road-Network-for-England-David-Quarmby-and-Phil-Carey-Rees-Jeffreys-Road-Fund-October-2016.pdf>

suggestions that came from the consultation responses. These include not automatically including roads that were de-trunked; flexibility for including roads just below the traffic flow thresholds; and adding in roads that are under construction and due to be completed by 2020/21. Response suggestions for specific roads to be included or excluded from the network have also been considered and accepted where they fit with the overall programme criteria and do not distort the network.

- 7 The roles set out in the consultation for local, regional and national bodies were generally supported in responses. We will provide more details of how these roles will work in the investment planning process. Based on consultation responses, we have refined the role of Highways England to focus on supporting Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) and regional groupings in the development of their regional evidence base and supporting the Department in assessing the validity of cost estimates for proposed MRN schemes. STBs are bodies designed to enable regions to speak with one voice on strategic transport planning. Where STBs have yet to be formed, local authorities across a region will work together to develop their regional evidence base that will provide the data on which future investment decisions can be made.
- 8 Numerous responses to the consultation concerned the environmental impact of schemes, and asked for the MRN to include public transport measures. The environmental impact of a scheme is already an important consideration when an individual scheme is assessed, and the Department will continue with this approach. MRN schemes will be able to include public transport measures as part of a wider intervention where their inclusion can be shown to support MRN objectives.
- 9 There are no planned changes to the types of schemes eligible for funding. Taking on board the views expressed in the responses, we will be pragmatic in the application of financial thresholds allowing, in exceptional cases, scheme proposals with a strong case to be considered for MRN funding even if they are outside of the prescribed thresholds.
- 10 Work is underway to design the investment planning process and provisions have been made for a small number of schemes to have early entry on to the programme. Guidance on investment planning will be launched shortly.

1. What We Consulted On

- 1.1 On 23 December 2017, the Government launched a consultation, setting out a proposal to create a Major Road Network (MRN). This will form a middle tier of the country's busiest and most economically important local authority 'A' roads, sitting between the national Strategic Road Network (SRN) i.e. the nation's motorways and major A roads, and the rest of the local road network. A specific new funding stream will be dedicated to improvements on this network that will join seamlessly with and complement the existing SRN². This consultation ran for twelve weeks until 19 March 2018.
- 1.2 Building on the commitment made in the Transport Investment Strategy, the Government confirmed its five central policy objectives for the MRN, which formed the basis for the consultation. These are:
 - **Reduce congestion** – alleviating local and regional congestion, reducing traffic jams and bottlenecks.
 - **Support economic growth and rebalancing** – supporting the delivery of the Industrial Strategy, contributing to a positive economic impact that is felt across the regions.
 - **Support housing delivery** – unlocking land for new housing developments.
 - **Support all road users** – recognising the needs of all users, including cyclists, pedestrians and disabled people.
 - **Support the Strategic Road Network** – complementing and supporting the existing SRN by creating a more resilient road network in England.
- 1.3 The core principles of the MRN proposed were around providing long-term funding certainty to enable coordinated investment to raise standards and performance of the network. A network that is consistent, coherent and seamlessly integrated with the Strategic Road Network is central to this. Equally important is how local, regional and national bodies will work together to deliver this programme.
- 1.4 Consequently, the consultation focused on the following three key questions:
 - **How to define the MRN** - the consultation proposed that the MRN be defined using current traffic data as quantitative criteria supported by qualitative criteria in order to create a logical and purposeful network.
 - **The role that local, regional and national bodies will play in the MRN investment programme** - it invited comments on the regional groupings that

² The SRN is comprised of nationally significant roads which connect the main centres of population in England. These roads provide access to major ports, airports and inter-modal freight terminals and the main cross border routes to Scotland and Wales. It is also the busiest part of the road network consisting of 4,400 miles (2% of our road network), but carrying a third of traffic and two-thirds of HGV traffic.

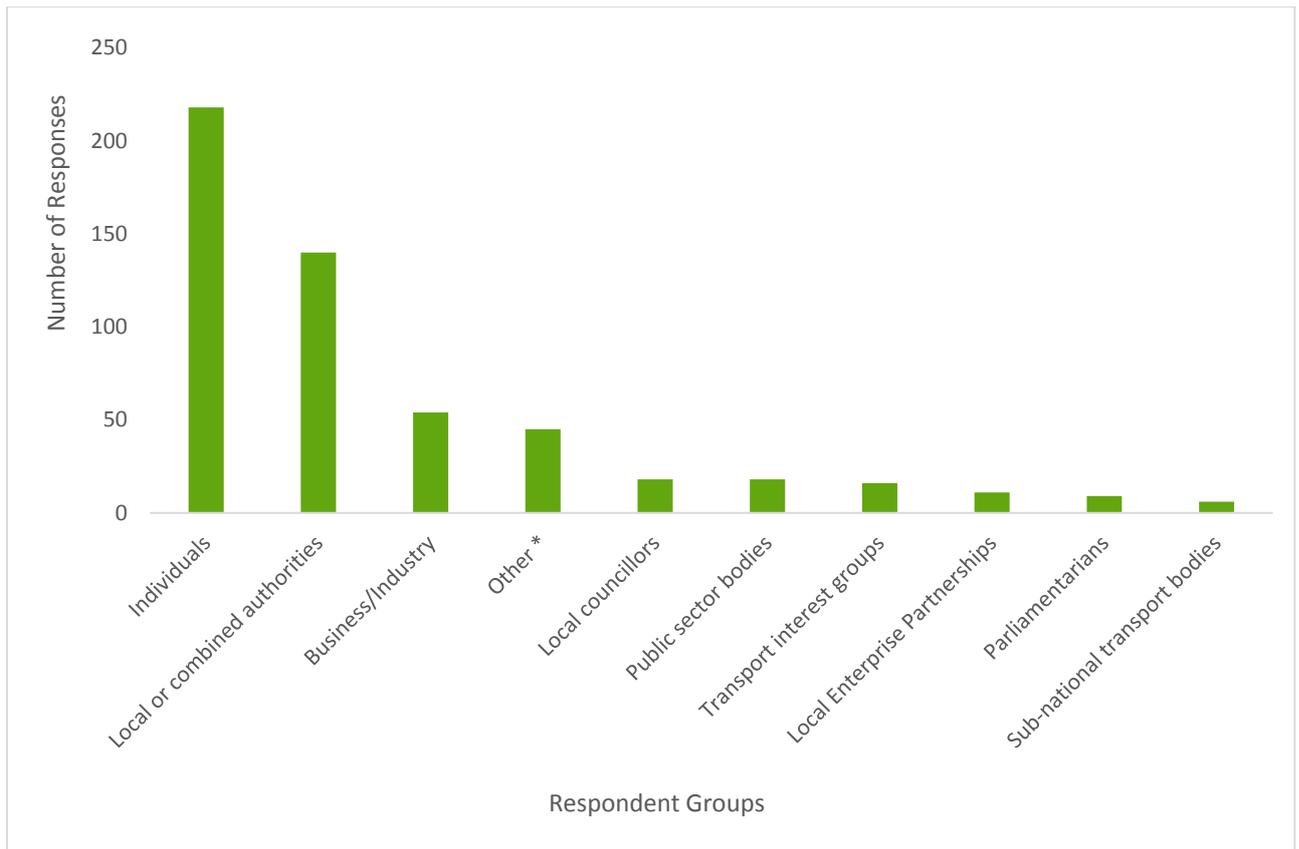
would provide strategic transport planning for the MRN and how regional evidence will inform the programme.

- **Which schemes will be eligible for MRN funding** - it set out propositions for funding thresholds and eligibility and investment criteria.

2. Breakdown of Responses Received

Headline Numbers

- 2.1 In total, 1,465 responses were received to the consultation. The majority (930) were as part of campaigns. Campaigns are defined as responses that identified the same stretch of road or scheme proposal and that did not address other aspects of the consultation, or responses which used standardised wording. Responses that fell into this category were typically from individual members of the public. The campaign responses are discussed in further detail later in this chapter.
- 2.2 The remaining 535 responses came from a range of stakeholders. Chart 1 indicates the breakdown of these non-campaign responses by group. Unless stated otherwise, the views summarised in this Government response are predominantly based on the detailed analysis of these non-campaign responses.
- 2.3 The level of responses from individuals and businesses shows how important road-based transport is to the public, communities and commercial enterprises. The second largest group of responses were from local or combined authorities. This underlines the strong interest in the concept of the MRN shared by authorities responsible for local transport, planning, and promoting positive outcomes for the communities they represent.
- 2.4 Responses were also received from all of the established Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs), reflecting the important strategic role for the MRN that STBs were assigned in the consultation proposals. Many of their constituent local and combined authorities endorsed or supported the STB responses in their own response. Importantly, in the South West and East of England, where there were no established STBs at the time of the consultation, we received responses from regional groupings and a number of the constituent local and combined authorities from both regions.

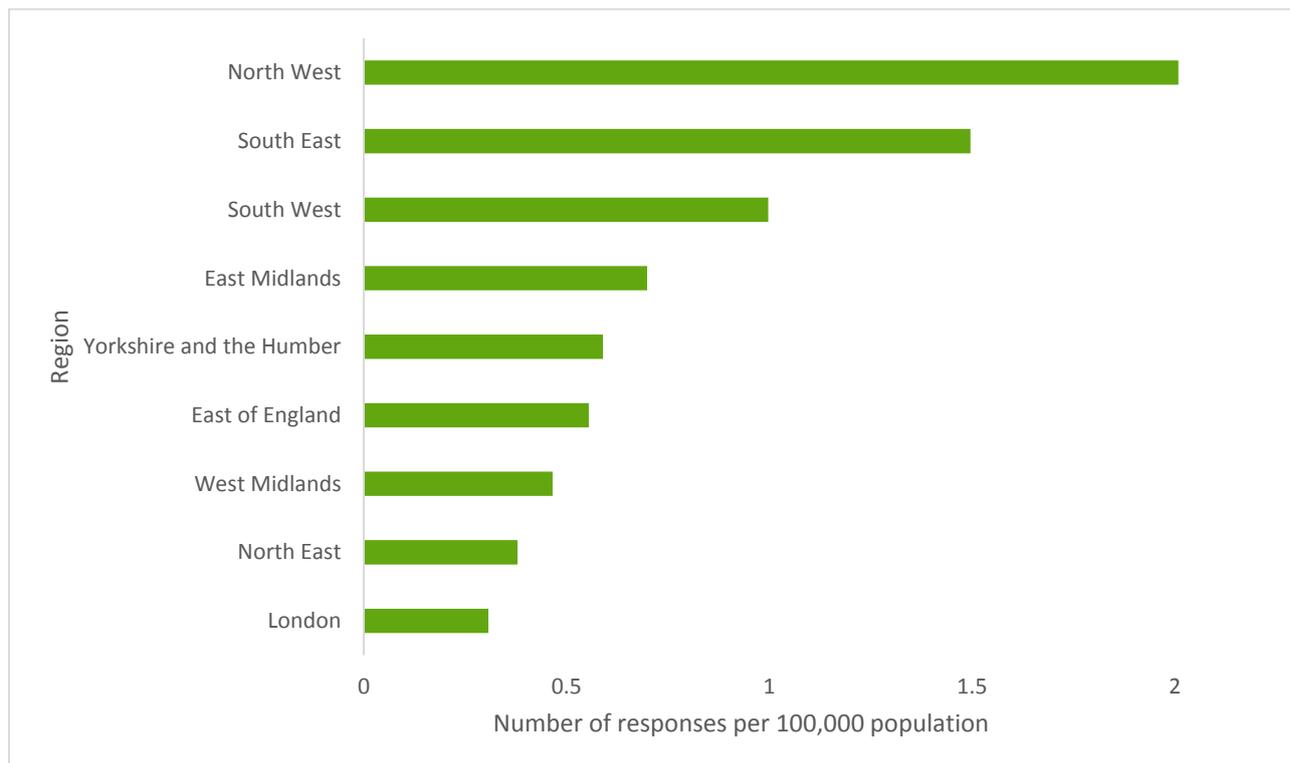


Group	Number of responses
Individuals	218
Local or combined authorities	140
Business/Industry	54
Other *	45
Local councillors	18
Public sector bodies	18
Transport interest groups	16
Local Enterprise Partnerships	11
Parliamentarians	9
Sub-national transport bodies	6
Total	535

**Other category includes charities/third sector, consumer groups, environment interest groups, local/residents associations, professional bodies and all other national partnership groups.*

Chart 1 Number of responses, by type of respondent

2.5 Chart 2 gives a breakdown of how responses were spread across the English regions, with the population of each region factored in. The consultation initiated responses across all regions, and in addition 37 responses were received from national organisations or other regional groupings (these are excluded for Chart 2). There were particularly high response rates in the South East and the North West. In both cases this was driven largely by a high number of individuals responding, although in the South East a particularly high response rate was seen amongst local authorities.



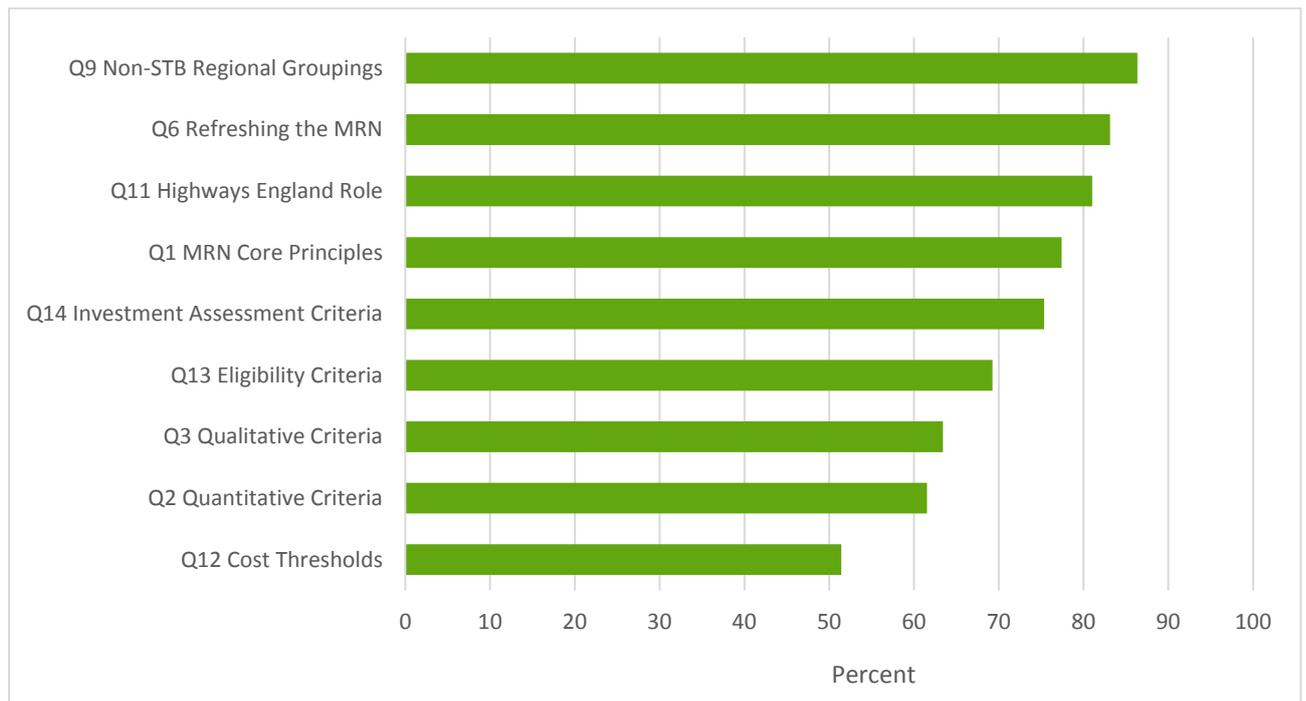
Area	Responses per 100,000 population
North West	2.01
South East	1.50
South West	1.00
East Midlands	0.70
Yorkshire and the Humber	0.59
East of England	0.55
West Midlands	0.47
North East	0.38
London	0.31

Based on ONS mid-2016 population estimates

Chart 2 Number of responses per 100,000 population, by region

Response Themes

- 2.6 In this section, we present the prevailing themes arising from the consultation responses not submitted as part of campaigns. These non-campaign responses communicated a broad range of views across the proposals in the consultation.
- 2.7 Chart/Table 3 shows the overall approval among non-campaign responses against the affirmative questions they answered in the consultation. This demonstrates a high level of support for most of the main proposals in the consultation and more generally the creation of the MRN programme.

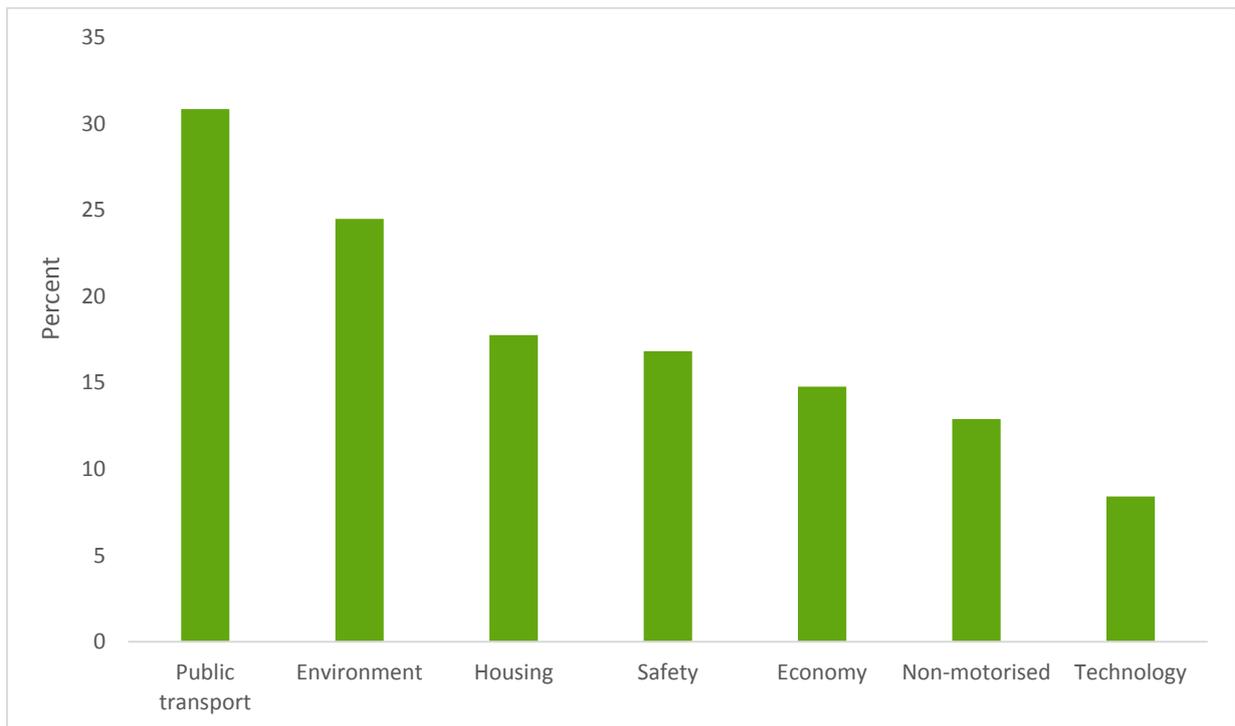


Questions	Percentage approval
Q9 Non-STB Regional Groupings	86
Q6 Refreshing the MRN	83
Q11 Highways England Role	81
Q1 MRN Core Principles	77
Q14 Investment Assessment Criteria	75
Q13 Eligibility Criteria	69
Q3 Qualitative Criteria	63
Q2 Quantitative Criteria	62
Q12 Cost Thresholds	51

Chart shows the percentage of positive acknowledgements ("yes" or "strongly yes") where the respondent has answered the question (blanks are excluded).

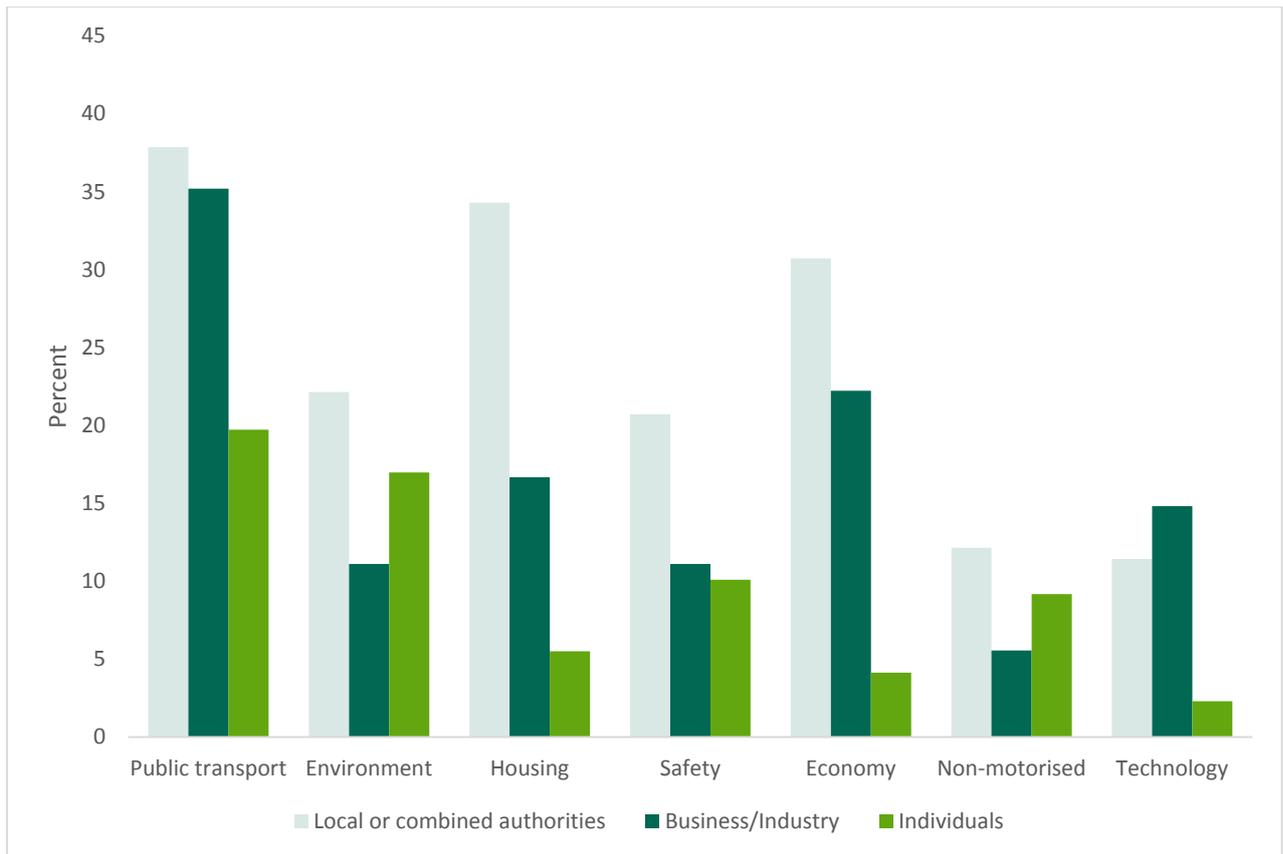
Chart 3 Percentage approval ratings by consultation question

- 2.8 The themes summarised in Charts/Tables 4 and 5 were those most commonly mentioned in non-campaign responses. Figures reflect the percentage of respondents who mentioned a theme, with cases where respondents mentioned a theme multiple times only being counted once. Chart 5 shows how frequently each of the three largest respondent groups (local or combined authorities, individuals and business/industry) mentioned each theme.
- 2.9 Public transport was the theme that received most mentions especially among local authorities and business. There was also support for housing and planning and economic growth from the local and combined authority group. Business and industry responses raised the importance of all modes of transport and economic growth the most. Among sub-national transport bodies, public transport and housing were the themes that were mentioned most frequently (by three of the six respondents).



Theme	Percentage of responses
Public transport	31
Environment	24
Housing	18
Safety	17
Economy	15
Non-motorised	13
Technology	8

Chart 4 Top themes and percentage of mentions by respondents



Theme	Business/Industry	Individuals	Local or combined authorities
Public transport	35	20	38
Environment	11	17	22
Housing	17	6	34
Safety	11	10	21
Economy	22	4	31
Non-motorised	6	9	12
Technology	15	2	11

Chart 5 Percentage of the three largest respondent groups who mentioned each theme

Campaigns

2.10 More than 930 responses were associated with a handful of campaigns. The most notable was that led by the Campaign for Better Transport, which gave rise to 438 responses from individuals, following a standardised wording. These responses called for the MRN to be designed around people not cars. They specifically sought to reduce the minimum funding threshold from £20 million and to allow for funding to be spent on safety, maintenance, and on public transport, walking or cycling specific schemes. These themes mirror popular themes raised by non-campaign responses and are discussed later in the document.

2.11 The Wrecclesham Village Voice campaign elicited 390 responses from individuals supporting the inclusion of the A325 in the MRN. The majority of the responses used standardised wording to request that criteria for 'Fitness for communities' and/or 'Managing safety' were included in the assessment criteria. The remaining campaign responses were split between specific scheme proposals for the A21/M25/M26 junction (M25 junction 5) and suggestions for the A595. Network suggestions are considered in more detail in Chapter 4.

3. MRN Core Principles

- 3.1 Non-campaign responses supported the approach taken in the consultation as demonstrated by the 77% approval rating.

Quote

As part of our work we have considered what should be the core principles that define the MRN. Our work is very closely aligned with the consultation document and we support the Core Principles defined.

Responses included a wide range of suggestions to expand or refine the principles to include multi-modal transport and provisions for the environment, safety and regular maintenance funding. Many of the suggestions relating to the principles were also made in relation to other elements of the consultation, most notably the eligibility criteria and the investment assessment criteria.

- 3.2 The most popular theme raised in relation to the principles was the desire for regular maintenance of MRN roads to be included. Around half of the responses that raised this were from local and combined authorities. This demonstrates the concern across stakeholders (especially local authorities) about the importance of tackling this issue. The Department recognises the scale of this issue and is investing £6.6 billion between 2015 and 2021 in maintaining the whole network of local roads through the Highways Maintenance Fund and Pothole Action Fund. Funding for the MRN is separate to that already committed to maintaining local roads. As such funding for projects on the MRN will be used to fund major road enhancements such as structural renewals and bypasses.

Quote

That focus on capital investment should not however be at the expense of revenue funding for roads included in the MRN; the ‘guiding principle... that local highway maintenance funding should not be adversely affected by the creation of the MRN’ is crucial, and we welcome this commitment.

- 3.3 Mentions of the environment and public transport were respectively the second and third most popular suggestions in relation to the principles and the first and second most mentioned themes overall. However, the mentions specific to the principles lacked supporting detail and were mainly related to raising the profile of these two themes. The environmental impact of a scheme and its benefits to public transport are already important considerations when an individual scheme is assessed, and the Department will continue with this approach. Importantly, MRN schemes which increase capacity and smooth traffic flows, such as bypasses and dualling roads, will benefit all journeys including those made on public transport. Scheme promoters are

also free to include public transport enhancements as part of a wider intervention where their inclusion can be shown to support MRN objectives.

- 3.4 There was a fairly even split between responses that requested managing safety to be added to the principles or supported its continued inclusion in the investment assessment criteria. The Department intends to continue with the current method where safety is included as part of the investment assessment.
- 3.5 In light of the above, the Department is not planning any changes to the core principles proposed in the consultation. However, changes have been made to other aspects of the MRN programmes to reflect the themes that were raised.

4. Defining the Network

- 4.1 The analysis of non-campaign responses to questions on defining the network indicates broad support for the 'two stage' approach outlined in the consultation. This approach involves identifying an initial set of roads to be considered for inclusion using quantitative criteria, followed by the application of qualitative criteria to ensure a coherent network. Some responses did suggest minor changes to the criteria as explained below. STBs included proposals for the network in their region as part of their consultation responses. These regional networks are likely to fulfil an important purpose for STBs when developing their strategic transport plans as well as supporting operational functions and cross-boundary coordination.

The Department has integrated parts of these regional networks into the MRN where they contribute to a consistent network across the country, which focuses on the most important routes that connect regions and economic centres.

Quantitative Criteria

- 4.2 There was a 62% approval rating for the proposed quantitative criteria and their application. There was broad support for using traffic flows (measured by average annual daily flow - AADF) as a starting point to identify a set of roads as candidates for inclusion in the network, although some respondents suggested alternatives, such as a network focused primarily on connecting economic centres.
- 4.3 This support also extended to using the two tiered traffic criteria to identify the initial set of candidate roads. Our analysis of the most recent available traffic data suggests that the original thresholds proposed by the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund report remain appropriate. These criteria were:
- Roads where traffic flow is greater than 20,000
 - Roads where traffic flow is greater than 10,000 and in addition, the proportion of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) or large goods vehicles (LGVs) on that section of road is greater than 5% or 15% respectively.
- 4.4 Several respondents expressed concerns that 'near miss' roads that were close to several of these thresholds would not be considered for inclusion. We have therefore adopted an approach suggested by one respondent, whereby any road section that falls close to several of the thresholds is also eligible for inclusion. The revised methodology then has roads between 10,000 and 20,000 daily traffic flow qualifying for inclusion if they either fully meet one of the three qualifying criteria, or score more than the equivalent of meeting two out of three³. By adopting this approach, links that

³ $(A+B+C)/3$ is greater than 0.67. Where $A = (AADF - 10,000) / (20,000 - 10,000)$; $B = \text{HGV percentage}/5\%$; and $C = \text{LGV percentage}/15\%$.

are close to meeting several of the thresholds are eligible for inclusion, as well as those that only meet one of them.

- 4.5 A suggested addition to the criteria included factoring in seasonal traffic flows for roads in and around tourist hotspots. Suggestions also included using peak hour traffic and adding roads with significant long distance traffic. While the Department recognises the argument for these criteria, we believe that the existing set of criteria are the most appropriate to identify the most essential local authority roads, and that the addition of further criteria risks diluting the focus of the MRN.

Quote

We feel this strikes the right balance by identifying strategically important local A-roads based on objective criteria.

- 4.6 One of the issues raised was the automatic inclusion of roads in the MRN that were de-trunked between 2001 and 2009. Although some responses agreed with this proposal, the majority disagreed with their automatic inclusion in cases where they do not meet other criteria.

Quote

However, we challenge the suggestion that this should be augmented by the automatic inclusion of all recently de-trunked roads: many of these roads were removed from the SRN because of the development of new higher standard links, such that they now carry insufficient traffic to pass any nationally consistent threshold..... We disagree with the consultation proposal to include all de-trunked roads

The Department accepts this argument, and acknowledges that some roads may have been de-trunked as a result of new roads making the old road less important. Where de-trunked roads do not merit inclusion based on other criteria, the Department agrees that they should not be included.

- 4.7 The Department also consulted on using 'current' traffic levels rather than attempting to project these into the future, given the uncertainty involved in this. Less than 10% of responses that gave an opinion on the quantitative criteria advocated the use of projected traffic levels rather than current data. Other responses specifically supported the Department's rationale for using current data, while ensuring the network remains relevant through periodic reviews. The need to ensure that the network was 'future-proofed' was a theme that came up several times in responses.

Quote

While using projected traffic data would be useful, we understand that this may overcomplicate the proposals because of the numerous projection scenarios.

- 4.8 Differing views on the balance between the inclusion of urban and rural roads were raised in a number of responses. As well as requests for the inclusion of more urban roads, there was some confusion as to why some urban roads that meet traffic

thresholds were missing from the indicative MRN. The focus of the MRN is connecting different places and as a result the network is purposely focused on roads that play a regional role and make connections between cities, rather than connections within city centres. This has been reflected in the network.

- 4.9 Conversely, some responses were advocating the inclusion of more rural roads and suggested the application of a lower thresholds on rural roads to facilitate this.

Quote

However, for rural areas, a road might have less traffic but be crucial in terms of connectivity, therefore could the MRN be tiered depending on its location?

The Department acknowledges this suggestion, and has introduced an additional quantitative criterion to ensure that 'near miss' roads are considered for inclusion (see section 4.4). However, we do not believe that roads that neither meet the criteria nor are 'near miss' roads should be routinely included. We believe the combined impact of focusing on urban roads that help connect cities to the wider area and applying the qualitative criteria provides a suitable balance between urban and rural roads, and should capture regionally important roads.

Qualitative Criteria

- 4.10 The level of approval (63%) from non-campaign responses to the qualitative criteria proposed underlined the importance of defining a set of roads that is regionally balanced and which, in combination with the SRN, provides a coherent joined-up network for the country as a whole.
- 4.11 The Department's approach to linking significant economic centres, as defined in the consultation, was generally supported. STBs and local authorities in one region favoured an approach that defines the network based almost solely on a broader definition of economic centres. This resulted in a significantly larger network that despite being important for operational functions and other purposes, dilutes the focus of the MRN from the most important and heavily trafficked roads.
- 4.12 An alternative approach for future proofing the network by including roads under construction and roads that will serve known or planned housing and local economic developments was suggested by a small proportion of responses.

Quote

In setting the MRN we think it should consider schemes that are approved or under construction, as these may be a reason for changes to the current network (in terms of MRN definition) on completion of committed schemes.

Similarly, if there are housing or employment sites currently under construction then it would be logical to include any forecast changes in traffic flow associated with such developments within the baseline MRN at the start of that five year period.

The Department agrees that roads currently under construction that are expected to meet the criteria should be factored into the network now. When looking at roads to be opened after 2020/21 or local housing/economic developments, the level of uncertainty is much greater. This could mean including roads where no immediate congestion problems exist. Therefore, these developments will be considered as part of the refresh process set out below.

- 4.13 Some responses raised resilience for the SRN as an extra criterion by proposing parallel routes alongside certain stretches of the SRN, particularly in one region.

Quote

Diversion routes which are used in cases of disruption on other parts of the network should also be considered for inclusion

As an important consideration in defining the MRN is its interplay with the SRN, the Department agrees that this should be a consideration in defining the network. Some diversionary or parallel routes have been included, where they meet other quantitative criteria. However, if they do not meet other criteria these routes have not been included.

- 4.14 In line with the consultation responses received, the Department has also reconsidered the port and airport connectivity criteria used to define the network. In the Rees Jeffreys report, the indicative network connected the 20 largest airports in England, and any port with over 2 million tonnes of traffic per year. To ensure that ports of high regional importance are captured as well, the Department has expanded the port criterion to include all ports with over 500,000 tonnes of traffic per year. While many of these were already connected to the network, some additional sections of road were included to meet this criterion.
- 4.15 Another criterion raised in non-campaign responses was the removal of roads in and around Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and national parks from the indicative network. This was generally due to concerns about the environmental impacts of schemes in these areas. MRN investment status does not in any way circumvent existing planning requirements for AONBs and national parks. Investments on the MRN are covered by the National Planning Policy Framework which sets out that Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks have the highest status of protection with regards to landscape and scenic beauty and that the scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited. Considerations to secure positive environmental enhancements in line with the 25 Year Environment Plan (A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment) will be central to the investment planning and assessment process, and where negative impacts cannot be avoided we expect scheme promoters to minimise and mitigate these impacts in line with existing requirements. This makes the removal of such roads from the MRN on the basis of the environment unnecessary.

Quote

The environment through which the road passes should also be considered e.g. National Parks and AONBs

The Department has also considered responses suggesting the inclusion of cross-border roads connecting England with Wales and Scotland. Roads that are important for cross-border connectivity have been included in the network.

Refreshing the MRN

- 4.16 A clear majority of non-campaign responses agreed with the proposal to refresh the network every five years to align with the existing Road Investment Strategy (RIS) timetable. The first Road Investment strategy⁴ (RIS 1) covered investment in England's motorways and major roads (the 'Strategic Road Network') during the 2015 to 2020 road period. This was the initial step in a long-term programme to improve England's motorways and major roads. The process is repeatable and work is now underway to develop the second RIS — known as RIS 2 — covering the second road period post 2020. Similar to the RIS process, in practice this will mean completing a comprehensive review of the MRN before the end of the five year cycle to inform the next round of investment decisions.

Quote

...agrees that a five year cycle for reviewing the MRN is appropriate. Aligning the MRN review process with that of the Road Investment Strategy is a logical course of action and will allow investment decisions to be made in a co-ordinated way

Network Suggestions

- 4.17 Together, all responses (campaign and non-campaign) to the consultation resulted in over 1,000 network suggestions. The majority of these (over three quarters) related to additions to the indicative network, while the remainder suggested roads that should be removed. Where network suggestions related to a criteria change, this has been addressed above. Given the numbers of suggestions involved, suggestions from STBs and from local and combined authorities not covered by a STB were prioritised. Priority was also given to suggestions that had multiple mentions from different responses.
- 4.18 As a principle, road suggestions that were not A-roads were automatically excluded. This was done on the basis that we want to prioritise the most significant strategically important roads and would not expect roads below this level to fall into this category. Where, exceptionally, they do, the local highway authority should consider the case for reclassifying them as 'A' roads.

The Network

- 4.19 In summary, the Department has adopted the following suggested changes and additions for the network:
- using the latest traffic data available at the time of analysis (2017)

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-investment-strategy>

- considering roads that are 'near misses', meaning that they are close to meeting several of the traffic thresholds proposed
- not automatically including roads that were de-trunked between 2001 and 2009 where they do not meet other criteria
- the inclusion of roads under construction and due to complete by 2020/21, where there is a clear indication that they would meet quantitative criteria once open
- expanding the port connectivity criteria to connect regionally important ports
- considering all population centres with greater than 25,000 residents. Not all of these will be connected by the network, but they have been reconsidered in light of consultation responses;
- considering roads that are important for cross-border connectivity with Scotland and Wales
- acting on response suggestions for road inclusions and removals where there was a good rationale that supported the MRN objectives

4.20 The Department also engaged with STB and local and combined authorities where STB do not exist to sense check the changes and additions to the network described above. This resulted in a small number of changes, such as replacements of certain roads for others where local knowledge suggest they were more suitable. Any minor errors and inconsistencies in the application of the criteria identified were also amended.

4.21 Work is continuing with Highways England to investigate trunking and de-trunking options. As a result there may be some reclassifications of roads between the SRN and MRN designations that will be incorporated into the network in due course.

5. Investment Planning

Role of Local, Regional and National Bodies

- 5.1 There was a strong level of support for the roles of local, regional and national bodies set out in the consultation, particularly the formation of regional groups where Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) do not exist.

Quote

We agree with the roles and responsibilities outlined in the document and we are pleased to see the emphasis on evidence collated at the regional level.

I therefore welcome the proposals that, where Sub-national Transport Boards have yet to be formed, local authorities and local enterprise partnerships should jointly agree to deliver investment and upgrade works.

Concerns were raised in approximately 60 responses about the balance between the local and regional roles. In particular, these concerns related to keeping local bodies and communities consulted and for them not to be excluded from the decision making process.

- 5.2 Local and combined authority responses provided further insight into this issue. Many of these responses supported the role of regional bodies as a strategic priority-setting level, but wanted to safeguard local level involvement in developing the regional evidence base and putting forward MRN scheme proposals.

Quote

...local authorities have a significant role in managing and maintaining local roads and so may be better placed to carry out the investment planning. If decisions are made at sub-national grouping level, there is a danger that fringe areas may get overlooked.

Some responses were advocating the ability for local and combined authority to propose schemes directly to the Department if not prioritised at a regional level. Conversely, others responses saw regional prioritisation as essential to avoid local bodies promoting their own schemes irrespective of what would be of higher priority at a regional level, especially within a finite funding situation.

The Department considers regional level prioritisation of suggested schemes to be the optimum approach for balancing local knowledge and needs with minimising the

burden of investment planning process. Making investment decisions on individual scheme suggestions without a regional context would mean the Department would have to employ a more competitive and potentially less strategic process. STBs, where they exist, are well placed to facilitate this strategic approach. They are bodies designed to enable regions to speak with one voice on strategic transport planning, filling the existing gap between national and local transport authorities. The Department expects STBs to fully involve all their constituent authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) as part of this process.

Quote

Local and regional bodies should not be able to waste scarce public funds by promoting their own pet schemes which make no sense in comparison to those elsewhere.

- 5.3 A subset of local and combined authority responses also made the case for multi-year indicative regional funding allocations. It was felt that this would enable them to plan schemes based on the level of resource available and avoid wasted resources planning for schemes that are not affordable.

Quote

As part of the construction of regional evidence bases and in advance of generating the evidence, each region should receive an indicative multi-year allocation. This will help STBs and local authorities to plan programmes as the level of resource available will influence the priority that schemes are given and should be known before money is wasted planning an evidence base for schemes that are not realistic.

The Government agrees that planning for MRN investments should not cause an undue burden on resources. While it may not possible to provide multi-year indicative regional funding allocations, the Department expects to provide guidance on the scale of required MRN investment planning. Further details on this and the wider process for planning MRN investments will be set out in the guidance to be published shortly.

- 5.4 Overall, the Department has found response suggestions about the roles of local, regional and national bodies insightful and where appropriate has considered these in the design of the investment planning process.

Role of Highways England

- 5.5 Most respondents (81%) who gave an opinion on the proposed role of Highways England agreed with the role outlined in the consultation document. Responses stressed the importance of greater collaboration between Highways England and local authorities in investment planning and acknowledged the input and advice Highways England could contribute in a supportive role.

Quote

We attach greater importance to Highways England working with each STB on joint analysis and planning of the MRN and the regional part of the SRN together.

- 5.6 Respondents did voice a number of concerns about the potential involvement of Highways England in the MRN. These include:
- Not to increase the burden on Highways England when they already have a significant RIS programme to deliver;
 - Highways England schemes and MRN schemes often differ in scale and approach;
 - Any Highways England role should not lead to an increase in bureaucracy; Highways England advice should not be at the expense of local and regional knowledge
- 5.7 The Department agrees that the focus of Highways England's role with the MRN should be supporting Sub-national Transport Bodies and regional groupings in the development of evidence bases, and to support the Department in assessing the validity of cost estimates for proposed MRN schemes.
- 5.8 Since local authorities will remain responsible for the management of MRN roads, we expect that local authorities will deliver MRN schemes. The delivery body for MRN schemes which include SRN roads will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Regional Evidence Base

- 5.9 The non-campaign respondents put forward a number of high-level suggestions and ideas they would want to see reflected in the regional evidence base. There was no disagreement with the stated purpose of the regional evidence base or with the minimum requirements set out in the consultation.
- 5.10 Local planning, particularly for housing development and economic growth, was the prevailing theme raised in responses to be considered in the regional evidence base. This theme was mirrored in responses directed at the investment assessment criteria.

Quote

More emphasis should be given to the role of MRN investment in unlocking economic growth and housing, and the investment prioritisation process should be designed to encourage the promotion of schemes that are particularly central to the region's economic priorities

It is important to clarify the relationship between the regional evidence base and the investment assessment criteria. The Department considers these two consultation proposals to be complementary, with regional evidence supporting the case for individual schemes, and with schemes being assessed in detail using the established five case model.

- 5.11 We do not intend to place a large burden on regional bodies to produce and maintain extensive new regional evidence. Rather we want to see the appropriate use of evidence to support the prioritisation of transport interventions. What should be included in regional evidence and how it relates to investment decisions will be included in the investment planning guidance to be published shortly.
- 5.12 One suggestion that was raised, often in local and combined authority and STB responses but also by other stakeholder groups, was for additional funding to cover the cost of developing the regional evidence base. Some responses indicated that this was an important factor for creating a level playing field between regions.

Quote

We believe that STBs and local authority groupings may need to be supported financially by central government if they are to produce comprehensive and consistent Regional Evidence Bases

- 5.13 The Department recognises the potential resource burden of developing the regional evidence base and that regional bodies tasked with leading this work are at different stages of maturity and resourcing. Central to our approach is ensuring that developing the MRN investment programme does not cause an undue resource burden.
- 5.14 Designing the investment planning process is underway and due to be launched shortly. Guidance on developing the regional evidence base will form part of that. It is important to clarify that although the regional evidence base will be an important document in providing the evidence on which future investment decisions can be

made, this does not need to be a long or detailed submission. We recommend that full use is made of existing data and analysis, such as local and regional transport strategies, and we do not expect to provide additional funding.

- 5.15 A number of STBs responses suggested a cycle of reviews that aligns with the five-year planning and funding cycle for the MRN and SRN and that the regional evidence base itself should look beyond five years.

Quote

The shared Department and STBs responsibility for updating the Programme and Evidence Bases every two years should be adapted to ensure the process remains aligned with the five-year cycle for the MRN and SRN as a whole.

We accept that aligning with the existing five-year planning and funding cycle will help streamline the process. This should allow local and regional bodies to plan longer term and refine these plans at intervals suitable to them and linked to the next phase of investment decisions.

- 5.16 Although not raised in a significant number of responses, a small number of regional bodies and local and combined authorities, mainly in the South East, raised the long-term prospect of introducing performance/minimum standards for MRN roads. This was based on the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund report proposal. The aim of these suggestions included ensuring, as a minimum, that height and weight restrictions do not exclude certain classes of vehicles, identifying investment priorities, and raising the overall capability of the network. This was also seen by some as the only way to fully realise the objectives of the MRN.

Quote

The consultation document makes only passing references to the goal of improving the performance of roads in the MRN, but this must be a pre-condition for the network achieving its objective of supporting the economy.

Local Highway Authorities already have a duty to maintain local highways and receive funding to do so. The Government's priority for the MRN will be to increase capacity through enhancements to the network. However, as set out in the consultation document, the department would expect the REB to include an assessment of the overall condition of the existing network and its performance.

- 5.17 There were several brief references to ensuring an appropriate level of stakeholder engagement with the public, businesses, all tiers of local government and locally elected representatives. The Department supports this principle, but recognises that it will be for local and regional bodies to decide how best this can be achieved taking into account local circumstances. For example, where the regional evidence base is based on an existing transport strategy that has already undergone an extensive public consultation, additional consultation may only be required when specific schemes are being developed and in line with existing planning requirements.

6. Eligibility & Investment Assessment Criteria

Eligibility

- 6.1 The cost thresholds outlined in the consultation - DfT contribution of between £20 million and £50 million and up to a maximum of £100 million - received a near 50:50 split between non-campaign responses who agreed or disagreed with this proposal. Even among those who disagreed, there was recognition of the need for thresholds. The concern was that a rigid application of these thresholds could rule out investments that could deliver significant benefits, or encourage less cost effective scheme proposals in an attempt to meet the thresholds. The lower threshold of £20 million was seen as a particular problem with both campaign and non-campaign respondents suggesting it be lowered.

Quote

..the lower threshold would exclude schemes which would otherwise offer high value for money. Such schemes often have a lower cost as a consequence of requiring little or no land-take, rather than being “insignificant” in terms of transport or economic impact

A smaller proportion of responses also raised concern about the upper thresholds of £50 million for most funding requests up to a maximum of £100 million in exceptional circumstance being too low.

Quote

...a less prescriptive approach should be adopted to ensure that schemes valued in excess of £100 million that will deliver a wide range of strategic benefits are not automatically excluded from the MRN programme.

- 6.2 The Department accepts that a rigid application of the thresholds may limit otherwise sound scheme proposals from being eligible for MRN funding. Where there is a strong case for a scheme that sits below the £20 million thresholds, this will be considered based on merit. However, it is expected that the majority of scheme proposals will fall within these thresholds.

Types of Schemes that will be Eligible for Funding and Exclusions

- 6.3 Support for the types of schemes that will be eligible for MRN funding and exclusion criteria was at 69% approval rating. There were very few responses that disagreed with the types of schemes eligible, with positive mentions in responses in relation to major structural renewals, improvement packages and technology.
- 6.4 The only theme that was raised consistently in non-campaign responses was the exclusion of public transport schemes except where these are included as part of a wider intervention.

Quote

We believe that public transport schemes should not be excluded. Public transport schemes can positively contribute to improving the operation of the MRN and should be able to be funded where this is demonstrable

While some responses suggested that public transport specific schemes should be eligible for MRN funding, others recognised the importance of it as part of the overall picture.

Quote

On exclusions, it is important that enhancements to the MRN that particularly benefit bus and coach passengers (such as bus lanes, priority in traffic management systems, access management) – and indeed facilities to encourage cycling – are not excluded where they are part of a wider transport policy to restrain road traffic to the benefit of the performance of the MRN.

- 6.5 The current position allows for public transport enhancements where they are part of a wider scheme proposal. The Department considers this to be the most practical approach for a network focused on roads serving all users that play a regional role and make connections between cities, rather than roads within individual city centres.
- 6.6 With a wider range of scheme types that are eligible for funding, the Department is planning initially to give priority to schemes that local authorities will find most difficult to fund themselves. However, that will be subject to local prioritisation through the investment planning process.

MRN Investment Assessment

- 6.7 The investment assessment criteria set out in the consultation received a 75% approval rating. The inclusion of criteria around economic growth, safety and journey reliability was highlighted favourably. Nevertheless, there were a number of suggestions on how these criteria may be improved. The two themes identified most in responses were the impact on the environment and public transport.
- 6.8 Environmental impact, being the most mentioned theme overall, was referred to most often in relation to its inclusion as a criterion under the ‘Reduce Congestion’ objective. This was perceived as not giving sufficient priority to the environment.

Quote

Yes, I broadly agree with the assessment criteria outlined. However, consideration should be given as to whether 'Environmental Impact' which is currently included in the 'Reduce Congestion' section, justifies being an objective in its own right.

The Department recognises the importance of giving due consideration to the environmental impacts of any potential road investment and wants to ensure this is appropriately incorporated into the MRN programme. Our view is that this can be done effectively within the 'Reduce Congestion' objective, and importantly, environmental aspects already feature in the assessment of individual schemes.

- 6.9 Public transport was the top theme raised in responses to the investment assessment criteria. This was in addition to other mentions in relation to the core principles, defining the network and eligibility criteria. Recognising the strong support for better inclusion of public transport in the MRN programmes, the investment assessment criteria for the 'Support All Road Users' objective have been amended to include an additional bullet – Deliver benefits to public transport. This gives a clearer mandate for including public transport provisions as part of a wider intervention.
- 6.10 Better provision for non-motorised users came up frequently in responses across the various elements of the consultations. The responses were usually connected to a number of other themes raised including wanting more prominence for safety management or for public transport, cycling and walking based schemes to be eligible for MRN funding.

Quote

The document could be improved by more consistently acknowledging that the MRN raise the standards and performance for public transport and non-motorised users as well as motorists and freight movements.

Provisions for non-motorised users are already in place under the 'Supporting All Road Users' objective and the related investment assessment criteria. The Department agrees these should remain central features of the MRN programme. It also provides an appropriate mandate for public transport, cycling and walking enhancements to be included as part of wider interventions.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 The Department will shortly issue guidance on the investment planning process for the MRN investment programme. This will include guidance on the development of the regional evidence bases and individual scheme proposals. It will also set out how the Department will assess and prioritise scheme proposals ahead of entry into the MRN investment programme and development of a full business case. A provisional timetable will also be issued.
- 7.2 A separate process for identifying schemes for early entry to the MRN investment programme is underway. This enabled local and regional bodies to put forward schemes that are already well developed and which would be eligible for MRN funding in the first year of the funding. This will give local and regional bodies sufficient time to navigate the full investment planning process while still being able to access funding in the early years of the programme.
- 7.3 Integral to the design and implementation of the investment planning process, will be partnership working with local and regional bodies. These bodies have been invited to input into the design of the guidance and timetable. We continue to work closely with them to analyse proposals for investment and to bring schemes to fruition.