

Strategic highways

I met Highways England yesterday to talk about the state of the national network.

A successful modern economy needs sufficient motorway capacity to allow easy transport of goods and people. Motorways are our safest and fastest roads. Like railways they segregate traffic moving in opposite directions to avoid head on crashes, and like railways they prevent pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable users from using them. Their junctions can flow freely, with easy access and exit when capacity allows. Motorway travel should allow greater levels of fuel efficiency and improved journey times.

Highways England controls most of our motorways and our major trunk roads. Most of the roads it looks after are dual carriageway or better. Many have grade separated interchanges. The problem is we do not have enough principal route capacity. We have invited in many more people who need roads for their own travel and for the supply of the goods they need. As our economy and the individuals in it enjoy rising real incomes so they can afford to spend more and need more goods supply. We need to be realistic about the amount of capacity we need.

In my local area Highways England has just increased capacity on the eastern part of the M3 by 33% and plans to do the same for the eastern section of the M4. We also lack north-south capacity. There the A 34 trunk experiences congestion as lorries struggle with inclines, whilst we do not have a good sized bridge over the Thames to the east of Reading.

Nationally there are various routes that lack sufficient capacity. We need a better south coast highway, better links to the east coast ports, a completed dual carriageway to the south west on the A 303 and similar extra capacity in the North and Midlands.

Highways England pointed out that there is now more money for road improvement, and the government does understand the need for more capacity. I would be interested to hear your priorities for improvement.