



Connecting our  
customers  
2020-21



# Foreword

Our first five years as Highways England have seen enormous change in our customer focus, our ambition and our service capabilities. We've made significant improvements for our customers. In particular, we've made progress in the way our roadworks are managed, and the usefulness of our on-road electronic variable message signs. Feedback gathered through independent watchdog Transport Focus' National Road Users' Satisfaction Survey (NRUSS) shows us that our customers are noticing the difference.

As we move in to our second five-year Road Period, there's still much more to do. Our customers' expectations are ever-changing, with increasing demand on our road network and the move to a more digital world. This year, our *Customer service plan* builds on activities from previous years and does more to acknowledge the diverse range of customers we serve. Our focus is on areas of improvement that mean the most to our customers including improving accuracy, information provision and the highest safe speed through roadworks.

The activities detailed in this plan complement our *Delivery plan*, which describes the physical improvements we'll be making to our roads to improve our customers' journeys.

**Mike Wilson**, executive lead for customer service

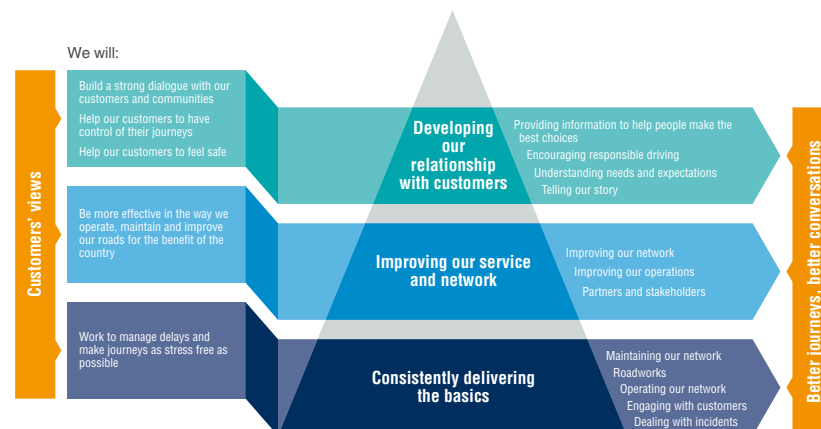


Diagram 1:  
Our customer service strategy

*“Highways England is on a journey, and we’ve seen definite movement and positive improvements. One of the areas where we’ve seen Highways England take a definite step forward is around how they communicate with their customers.*

*The work they’ve done to provide advanced warnings, be more visible and give much more ‘in the moment’ advice has been fantastic. It helps people to understand what is going on so that they can make the right decisions for them. That’s a significant improvement and makes a definite difference for customers.”*

Interview with Jo Causon,  
CEO, Institute of Customer  
Service, on 3 February  
2020.

# Introduction

**We care about our customers and are committed to improving our service to them. Highways England exists to connect the country, and customer service is one of our priorities. This plan summarises our key activities for improving customer experiences in 2020-21.**

This is our first annual customer service plan for the second Road Period (2020-2025). It builds on the work we've done since 2015, underpinned by our customer service strategy and driven by what our customers are telling us.

We're maintaining our focus on consistently delivering the basics, such as the way we safely manage incidents and roadworks. We're also determined to keep making real service improvements for our customers, and building our relationships with them.

## How we'll measure success

This year sees the introduction of Transport Focus' Strategic Roads User Survey (SRUS) as our key measure of customer satisfaction. Among other things, the survey measures overall satisfaction of a customer's recent journey on one of our roads. Our performance target, set by the Department for Transport, is an overall satisfaction score of 82%.

## Speaking up for road users

We work closely with Transport Focus – Britain's independent watchdog for transport users – to make a real difference for road users. We worked with them to develop the Strategic Roads User Survey so that we can measure our customers' experiences more effectively.

SRUS is providing us with a wealth of insight on how customers feel about using our network – from journey time, safety and roadworks management to roadside information and surface quality. Around 9,000 face-to-face interviews with road users are carried out for the survey each year, helping us meet our customers' needs and expectations.

This plan is primarily about improving our road user satisfaction, as measured by SRUS. But our customer service ambition goes far beyond achieving our customer satisfaction target. We're also determined to improve the service we provide to specific customer groups, like our freight customers, customers with disabilities, walkers, cyclists and horse riders, and our bus and coach customers

We also recognise that people's journeys don't just start and end on our network, so we're working closely with transport partners and local road authorities to improve customers' end-to-end experience.

We care about our customers and their journeys; our commitment is to get those using our roads home safe and well.

*"Road users will see actions in this plan to tackle things that matter to them, whether they be private motorists, freight companies, cyclists or pedestrians. Highways England has focused on the things Transport Focus has identified that road users want to see improved. We will continue to work with them to help bring about change in these areas and will measure success through our Strategic Roads User Survey and other insight."*

**Anthony Smith, Chief Executive, Transport Focus**



# Improving our service

This year, we'll be enhancing our information provision, refining the service we provide to our freight customers and safely increasing speed limits through roadworks. We'll measure how well we're doing through Transport Focus' Strategic Roads User Survey, and a new target to provide accurate information about roadworks seven days in advance.

## Our customers will experience:

### 1 Better information about when we're closing the road, so they can plan their journeys more effectively

#### We'll:

- keep improving the accuracy of information about what roads we're closing for roadworks. Our target for this year is to make sure our closure information is 40% accurate seven days in advance of the work

### 2 Better information on electronic signs, with speed limits appropriate to the conditions, helping customers feel safer and more in control of their journeys

#### We're:

- introducing 30 new messages on our electronic signs this year, to better explain what's happening when the roads are disrupted. These messages include updates for those in trapped traffic, such as 'TRAFFIC HELD REMOVING DEBRIS' and 'RECOVERY IN PROGRESS', and other information to help our customers understand what is happening ahead
- improving how we set variable speed limits to save customers time on their journeys
- introducing a performance measure for roadside electronic signs and signals that are set manually by our teams. We'll be measuring the timeliness and quality of incident related information displayed on these signs so that we can keep improving

### 3 Better digital information

#### We'll:

- make information about our roads and services easier and safer for our customers to use. For example, helping emergency and responder services locate incidents more quickly by providing marker post information in a more useful format
- explore opportunities for sharing information with other providers who support our customers' journeys. For example, sharing road closure information with satellite navigation providers so that our customers have increased access to accurate information
- trial using crowd-sourced data to help us identify where incidents are on areas of our network which we don't routinely patrol, and where we don't have CCTV

### 4 More reliable movement of road freight

#### We're:

- developing better relationships with our freight customers at a national and regional level, and working more closely with them to tailor the service we provide. For example:
  - Supporting logistics planning and operations through better information provision
  - Collaborating to develop a more aligned approach to key strategic diversion routes

These relationships will help shape future plans for our roads.



## Reduced journey times and better experiences as we increasingly use 60mph speed limits in roadworks

Our aim is to be using 60mph speed limits in 75% of our major motorway projects by 2022. We'll:

- review speed limits on all our planned and existing major road projects, using the latest evidence on how to use 60mph in roadworks while keeping everyone safe. The review will allow us to increase speed limits in existing roadworks where possible
- increasing transparency through the publication of half-yearly monitoring reports

### Faster journeys through roadworks

We're committed to minimising disruption from roadworks. So, where it's safe to do so, we've been increasing speed limits in roadworks to 60mph. We've seen positive results, including improved speed compliance and journey time savings of up to 10% compared to the 50mph baseline.

We asked our customers for their views on the increased speed limits. Here's what they had to say:

*"The speed felt appropriate and the workers were not as close to traffic as in other roadworks. Traffic was moving more smoothly, not as many hold-ups... just better"*

Coach driver who travelled through 60mph roadworks on the M5

*"When you do quite long journeys through 50mph, it can be quite laborious, 60mph is plenty"*

Commuter who travelled through 60mph roadworks on the M20



# Continuous improvement

We'll get the basics right that our customers expect

## Our customers will experience:

1

### Quicker incident clearance, in line with our new target

#### We're:

- investing in new equipment so we can move more vehicles if they breakdown to a place of safety
- improving the lighting we use at incidents so our traffic officers, and other emergency services, can work more safely and quickly
- enhancing our ability to clear spillages more efficiently

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### Less litter by the roadside

#### We'll:

- clean our top 25 litter hotspots at least twice a year, trialling targeted interventions at two locations to reduce littering
- enhance collaboration with local road authorities on litter clearance on our trunk roads
- review our progress with our customer service standard for reducing litter on the Strategic Road Network

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, local road authorities are responsible for cleaning most of our all-purpose trunk roads. We work with local authorities to safely co-ordinate litter picking with routine maintenance work to minimise disruption to road users. We also seek ways to improve collaborative working arrangements to help reduce the need for litter picking on our network.



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### Easier to use diversion routes when there is an incident on our roads

**We're working with local road authorities to review and improve diversion routes. We have over 2700 pre-designated and signed diversion routes that cover 98% of our network for use in emergency situations. We have committed to review and improve these routes over Road Period 2. This year we will:**

- engage local road authorities to review at least 20% of these diversion routes and establish if any improvements are required
- develop a programme to deliver diversion route improvements
- deliver diversion route improvements





## Finding the most suitable route

**The challenge:** Between J21 and J22 of the M62 is the most frequently used diversion route for unplanned events in the north-west. However, feedback from customers and MPs suggested that a new diversion route needed to be found. With residents along the diversion route, whose properties are directly at the roadside, telling us that they are concerned for their safety when there is an increase in traffic at a five-way intersection that has no controlled traffic management. And safety concerns from drivers about the narrow lanes and soft verges of some very high and isolated roads.

**The solution:** Working with several local road authorities, we've identified and signed an alternative diversion route between J24 and J20. This alternative route will provide a diversion route for eastbound traffic when there is a full motorway closure. This will mean that only westbound traffic will be using the original diversion route between J22 and J21; reducing the volume of traffic using the interchange. And at times of expected severe weather (snow and ice), this alternative route will be used in both directions.

*"We want our customers to feel safe using our network and diversion routes. Diversion routes are only ever meant to be used for short durations while incidents are cleared, so many people may not be familiar with how to use them."*

*We're working hard to ensure we find the best diversion route available to each section of the network, to improve diversion signage and to help keep traffic moving along the diversion route. With the aim to improve the experience for both our customers who use our roads, and the communities who live near to them."*

**Phil Stockford**  
Emergency Planning Manager  
for the North West

**Diversion**

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### Smoother journeys on improved road surfaces

**We're:**

- working with Transport Focus to develop a revised ride quality metric which reflects what our customers are telling us
- targeting our maintenance works to address road surface issues that are most important to our customers

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### A commitment that roadside facilities are essential to our customers' journeys

**We're:**

- working closely with roadside facilities operators to improve the experience our customers have when they use roadside service areas
- working with the Department for Transport to review legislation and policy for roadside facilities, so that we would be able to provide the information our customers need about these facilities on road signs

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### Less congestion during major road projects and in congestion 'hotspots'

**We'll:**

- roll out measures for managing travel demand to reduce disruption during major road projects
- trial managing travel demand in the Yorkshire and North-East region to target areas of recurring congestion, with a view to rolling out further if successful
- work with the local authorities that form Solent Transport to encourage customers to look at alternative modes, routes and times of travel as part of the M27 and M3 smart motorway schemes

## Managing travel demand

Travel demand management is a set of strategies that can influence travel behaviour (how, when, why and where people travel) to increase the efficiency of transport systems and deliver economic, environmental and social benefits.

We're helping people to make better travel decisions by making their journeys to work less time consuming, more convenient and cheaper. These changes support business continuity and contribute to improvements in local air quality by alleviating congestion at critical times and locations.

This year, we're investing £1.7 million in a Travel Demand Management programme on our M27 and M3 smart motorway schemes. In collaboration with Southampton City Council, Portsmouth City Council and Hampshire County Council, which together form Solent Transport, we're working with local employers and other stakeholders along the M27 and M3 to improve journey experiences for their employees.

*"There was a collective recognition that, given the scale and duration of the roadworks spanning from Portsmouth through to Winchester across multiple schemes, there was a clear need to mitigate the impacts, particularly for those dependent on the motorway corridor to access work.*

*As one of the largest employers in Southampton, Southampton City Council was keen to get the ball rolling and demonstrate our own commitment to travel demand management by piloting a flexible working policy for colleagues. The timing of the pilot meant that our organisation was more resilient to the dramatic changes in working practices caused by the COVID-19 lockdown.*

*Working with Highways England, we've been able to share local expertise, work in an open way and focus on measures that will continue to support journeys to work in the long term, leaving a legacy in sustainable travel."*

Neil Tuck  
Sustainable Transport Team Leader, Southampton City Council

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### Fewer defects which could impact customers' journeys

#### We'll:

- make sure we know what defects are impacting our customers journeys, for example faulty signs and bumpy roads, and where they are on our network. Our customers can now report defects on our [website](#)
- improve reporting on defects which are impacting customer journeys to ensure we identify and tackle the most outstanding defects which are frustrating our customers

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### A more accessible and inclusive journey experience

#### We're:

- improving the information available about accessibility services at motorway service areas
- making it easier for our deaf and hard of hearing customers to get in touch with us

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### A better experience through our roadworks

#### We're:

- providing 'in-journey customer insight' across all major project schemes, with the use of mystery shoppers to audit the roadworks; providing their opinions and perceptions on signage, visible activity, road surface quality and other areas

Since December 2017, we've carried out almost 3,500 customer audits of our major road projects to improve customer experiences





## 10 Better integration with other transport modes and networks, and a better experience for users of sustainable transport

### We'll:

- work with our partners and stakeholders to improve how our roads connect with other transport modes and networks by providing more sustainable options for our customers
- make improvements for walkers, cyclists and horse riders based on what they tell us they want to see. For example, building better cycle routes and safer crossing points
- work with Transport Focus to understand more about how we can improve the experience of bus and coach passengers on our roads
- improve bus passenger facilities on our network

## 11 More confidence in using smart motorways

### We'll help our customers feel safer and more confident when driving on our roads. We're:

- progressing delivery of the Government's smart motorway 18-point plan, including starting to install sensors that can detect a stopped vehicle
- This year we'll also be giving our customers more information about how to drive safely on all types of motorways.



A556 Green Bridge

## 12 Better experience when contacting us

### We'll:

- use real-time customer feedback to improve our customer contact services
- provide better access to the information our customers need through self-service channels

### Every customer has an opinion

We're building better relationships with our customers, and part of this is helping them to quickly and easily tell us about their experience of using our services.

In 2019, we started using a real-time feedback tool called ECHO, which stands for Every Customer Has an Opinion. Right now, we're using ECHO to learn more about how our customers feel after they've been assisted by traffic officers at the roadside. We're also using it to improve our digital channels and services, including our website. Soon, our customers will be able to use ECHO to feedback on their experience when they call or write into us.

It's a real step forward that will inform many of our future service improvements.

**We've used over 3000 responses gathered in the first 5 months of using ECHO to make our services better.**



# Enablers

In addition to the changes we're making that are visible to our customers, we'll also deliver a range of key enabling activities to support future improvements

## We will:

- listen to our customers and understand what they're telling us
- build our understanding of our customers; their experiences, attitudes and preferences, so that what we deliver is what they want
- continue to use customer surveys, and working with customer panels and focus groups, to understand what people see, feel, and want when they're using our roads and services

Since 2015, we've spoken to over 90,000 customers as part of our insight research work to improve customer experiences



## Our partnership with independent watchdog, Transport Focus

### We're:

- using insight from Transport Focus' Strategic Roads User Survey (SRUS), and their bespoke research, to drive the changes that our customers want to see
- working with Transport Focus to develop new satisfaction surveys, including surveys for cyclists and pedestrians, and for logistics and coach managers
- supporting Transport Focus' *sort my sign* campaign by acting on customer feedback generated by the campaign. We're fixing problems with signs, and improving our policies and standards to deliver better signage

## Understanding how behaviours impact experiences

### We'll:

- explore how we can influence driver behaviour to improve customer satisfaction
- support our employees to understand how their behaviours affect customer experience, and what their contribution to customer service is

## Supporting and leading our supply chain to be customer-focused with their thinking, design and delivery

### We'll:

- review and improve the customer metrics we use to monitor supplier customer performance
- assess the customer service maturity of our supply chain, helping them to identify areas for improvement





## Connecting with our customers

### We'll:

- make sure the language we use to communicate with our customers is transparent and meaningful to them
- provide information about our work that is helpful and relevant to the diverse range of customers we serve
- find more and better ways to engage with the people who use our roads, or are affected by our work, by modernising and evaluating our communications approach

## Developing and building a customer-focused culture internally

### We're increasing the level of customer focus among our people, including:

- Making sure good customer service is part of our values and behaviours, and how we manage and work with our people
- Reviewing how we recognise, reward and celebrate customer service achievements
- Developing our people's capabilities so that they're well equipped to achieve the customer service improvements outlined in this plan





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