



2 May 2024

Nick Smallwood,
Chief Executive,
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Sent by email to: nick.smallwood@ipa.gov.uk

Dear Mr Smallwood

Offer to assist the IPA in assessing National Highways capital road projects

We have previously written to you on 21 July 2023 and 17 August 2023. In both letters we offered to assist the Infrastructure Projects Authority (IPA) in its work overseeing National Highways road projects in the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP). Although the IPA replied to our specific request to assist in the A66 Northern Trans Pennine review in the 21 July 2023 letter, we did not receive a reply to our wider offer contained in that letter and our 17 August letter to provide additional input for other road schemes in the GMPP.

We are a national organisation that campaigns for sustainable transport. Part of our remit is to support local communities who are opposed to major capital road projects proposed by National Highways. We have had a great deal of experience dealing with National Highways and their road schemes in the GMPP, including challenging RIS2 in the High Court, and bringing challenges to the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet and the A66 Northern Trans-Pennine. We have also assisted in legal challenges to the A303 Stonehenge and the A12 Chelmsford to A120. We also have extensive knowledge of the Lower Thames Crossing. We were called to give evidence to the Commons' Transport Committee twice in 2023, and have raised concerns with the Office for Rail and Road about National Highways.

It would be difficult to find a group that has had more experience and expertise in dealing with the challenges and delivery risks for National Highways projects.

We would like to offer the IPA our input on:

- the IPA's annual report 2023-24;
- its assurance reviews of National Highways' major projects;
- the delivery review of the third Road Investment Strategy (RIS3).

We are concerned that the IPA may be solely reliant on the information supplied by National Highways which may not be accurate and may downplay risks to its schemes. It is in the interests of the public for the IPA to have a holistic view and wider understanding of the challenges faced by National Highways.

The need for greater transparency and for wider stakeholder input was a key recommendation in the Transport Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2022–23, [Strategic Road Investment](#):

"The Government should implement more robust and transparent measures to assess deliverability when setting a RIS so that a wider range of stakeholders can flag risks to completing projects on time." (para 54 and Recommendation 11)

In its [response](#) to Recommendation 11, the Government said:

"The IPA undertook a delivery review of the plans for RIS2. We plan to engage the IPA in a similar delivery review for RIS3. Neither the ORR nor the IPA suggested that any fundamental changes were needed to the RIS2 proposed approach or the balance of risk versus deliverability"

However, there have been considerable challenges to RIS2 that were not predicted, indicating that the existing oversight is not working. The Government's rather dismissive response fails to address the very real concerns raised by the Committee and that lessons have been learnt this time round. This is further exemplified by the fact that schemes continue to be pursued with poor value for money and where risks to delivery are high.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Lush
Roads and climate campaigner
Transport Action Network

CC

Dame Meg Hillier MP, Chair, Public Accounts Committee (PAC)
Iain Stewart MP, Chair, Transport Select Committee
Gareth Davies, Comptroller and Auditor General, National Audit Office (NAO)
David Fairbrother, Treasury Officer of Accounts
John Larkinson, Chief Executive, Office for Rail and Road (ORR)