

Justin Madders MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Roads)
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
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Sent by email to: DFT.Ministers@dft.gov.uk

24 August 2026

Subject: Priorities for roads and delivering value for money

Dear Minister,

Many congratulations on your appointment as Minister for Roads. This is an important time with urgent decisions to be taken on the Lower Thames Crossing, the variation of the third Roads Investment Strategy (RIS3), and further cuts to the Department's roads capital spending ahead of the Autumn Budget.

I am writing to introduce myself as the new CEO of Transport Action Network (TAN), a national organisation that helps communities across England and Wales campaign for better, more sustainable transport. We wish to briefly outline where we believe the Department could deliver on its objectives for the roads network, whilst also delivering cuts to capital spending, value for money and remaining consistent with other government objectives. We would also like to formally request a meeting to discuss this further.

Lower Thames Crossing

As the single largest road scheme ever developed, with more than £3.1 billion of public funding already committed, we urge you to take a fresh look at the Lower Thames Crossing and cancel the scheme before further public money is spent. With costs now estimated at around £11 billion, a weak Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of just 1.22 and only around five years of congestion relief expected at the Dartford Crossings, the case for proceeding is increasingly difficult to justify.

The proposed financing model would also result in the loss of valuable national assets at the Dartford Crossings, and hundreds of millions lost annually in toll revenue at the Lower Thames Crossing and Dartford, while taxpayers remain exposed to significant financial and delivery risks. With the National Audit Office due to investigate the scheme and report in Spring 2027, it would be prudent to pause further commitments until full and transparent

scrutiny has taken place. Cancelling the scheme now would immediately save the £890 million in public funding already committed for 2027-29.

The Lower Thames Crossing is also unlikely to provide a lasting solution to congestion, while generating additional traffic and causing significant environmental damage to landscapes, habitats and communities across Kent and Essex. As transport remains the UK's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, the scheme's estimated 6.5 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions would further undermine progress towards net zero. We recognise the need to improve resilience and connectivity across the Thames. However, we believe this can be achieved through a new rail link and rail freight network improvements, enabling 50-100 million passenger journeys annually at a cost of just £2.5 billion, as outlined in our [Essex-Kent Superlinks report](#). As Roads Minister, you have an opportunity to demonstrate that major infrastructure decisions will be based on value for money and long-term public benefit, rather than sunk costs. We therefore urge you to cancel the Lower Thames Crossing, ensure full scrutiny through the forthcoming NAO investigation, and redirect the funding towards maintaining existing roads and investing in sustainable transport and active travel.

Further cuts to poor value roads in RIS3

On 30th June, the Department committed to making £700 million of cuts to its capital spend on roads as its contribution towards the Defence Investment Plan. Of those cuts, £428 million will fall within RIS3, leaving £272 million of capital savings to be found elsewhere from DfT's capital roads budgets. For RIS3, we agree with the Department's proposal (currently being consulted on) to cancel the £600 million A38 Derby Junctions and £700 million A46 Newark projects. Both are low value for money but with high environmental impacts, and are very controversial locally. Funding for renewals, maintenance, and improving safety, active travel and environmental outcomes should be ringfenced within RIS3 and not subject to further cuts. We will be contributing to your Department's consultation on the proposed variation to RIS3.

However, further savings could be made within RIS3 by cancelling other low value road schemes. Cancelling the ill-conceived £2.2 billion A66 project would deliver significant savings now as spending on the project is scheduled for the start of the RIS3 period, not the end. This project has the lowest BCR of all the enhancements in RIS3 at just 0.48, or inflated to 0.92 with 'wider economic impacts'. We have long argued that investing in rail freight alternatives and safety improvements would achieve the same objectives at a much reduced cost¹.

¹ [Improving safety on the A66 - faster, cheaper](#) (February 2025)

Major Road Network / Large Local Major road projects

Sixteen MRN / LLM road projects were confirmed in the Department's programme on 26 March 2026. However, it is unclear how much public funding DfT is committing to these local authority projects as there has not been any transparency about these decisions and on what basis they were taken. There are some extremely expensive and environmentally controversial schemes amongst them, including the Norwich Western Link and the A326 Waterside Improvements (which facilitates development of the highly protected Dibden Bay Special Protection Area).

Likewise it is unclear whether the remaining 26 MRN / LLM schemes that were **not** confirmed on 26 March (as per our [7 April letter to your officials](#)) already have DfT capital committed or not. Therefore it is not at all clear whether their cancellation would reduce DfT's committed capital spending. There are also controversial and poor-value projects amongst the 26 unconfirmed schemes, including the Kendal Northern Access Route, the A350 Melksham Bypass and the Chesterfield Staveley Regeneration Route. Their cancellation will enable those local authorities to move forward and seek more sustainable transport solutions.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the Lower Thames Crossing and how the Government can deliver better value for money through a more sustainable approach to roads and transport investment.

Yours sincerely,



Abby Coften

Chief Executive
Transport Action Network