Transport Action Network

Response to:

Review of DfT roads capital spend - July 2026

Introduction

Transport Action Network (TAN) would like to make suggestions for the DfT's consideration during its review of £700 million cut to the capital roads budget due to the defence investment plan (DIP). We hope this is useful, and can help identify poor value projects with high environmental impacts that could be cancelled.

RIS3

Privatised Lower Thames Crossing

The privatised Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) is an obvious candidate to cut in RIS3 (despite having ring fenced funding in RIS3). The privatised LTC is in the DfT's poor value for money bracket (with a BCR of just 0.48, inflated to just 1.22 with unevidenced 'wider economic impacts'), will require at least £1.655bn of public funds during the RIS3 and spending review period (and over £3 billion public funding overall), yet will only provide five years relief at Dartford. Progressing with this unaffordable scheme will also require the privatisation of important public assets and the loss of significant toll revenues at LTC and Dartford in perpetuity. Cancelling the privatised LTC now would save at least £890 million committed at the Autumn Budget for 2027-29. Cancellation would also secure the user charges at the Dartford Crossings for the exchequer in perpetuity. Cancellation is a revenue raiser, rather than a loss to the UK economy.

A66 Northern Trans Pennine

Scrapping 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 is the project with the lowest BCR 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 have achieved the same objectives at a much reduced cost[1]. Alternatively, the 8-part project could be significantly scaled back. The most expensive section, the Temple Sowerby to Appleby section, around Kirkby Thore, has a very low BCR and crosses the most ecologically rich part of the route - the Trout Beck part of the River Eden SAC. Instead, reducing and enforcing speed limits and junction improvements would reduce collision rates at a fraction of the cost.

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

A38 Derby Junctions

We agree that the £600 million A38 Derby project is also another obvious example of a poor value road project, with hugely escalating costs. It is an anachronism in the twenty-first century, being an urban road scheme which will drive up traffic locally and regionally. It is very unpopular and controversially locally, including amongst Labour politicians. It has not had a published up to date business case for many years, but due to significant cost escalation (over 200% since RIS2), it is likely the BCR is negative and the scheme would cost more to build than it would ever deliver in supposed economic benefit.

A46 Newark Bypass

We agree with the proposed cancellation of the £700 million A46 Newark Bypass. It is another expensive yet poor value for money project, with an adjusted BCR of just 1.2. It will increase traffic, air and noise pollution, and carbon emissions.

Safeguarding capital spend on renewals, National Programmes and Designated Funds

It is vital that cuts to RIS3 capital spend is not at the expense of renewals, National Programmes on safety and the environment (including tackling high-risk outfalls), and the Designated Funds. Cuts should come from poor value road schemes, as above.

Road safety improvements deliver good value for money, as well as saving lives, and it would be a mistake to cut the new National Programme for Safety capital budget. Likewise, the new Environmental National Programme will be critical for ensuring that National Highways mitigates high-risk outfalls, preventing toxic runoff from entering our watercourses. Any cuts to capital budgets for these vital programmes will be very unpopular and hugely controversial.

The large increase in capital spending on renewals was welcomed by all - from environmentalists to the motorists lobby. It is vital we maintain the existing infrastructure, and the renewals budget is not cut.

This would be a good time to reassess the Designated Funds to address the increased need for active travel, by reversing the cuts to active travel funding since RIS2.

MRN / LLM schemes

We would strongly argue that MRN / LLM schemes with committed DfT funding (since March 2026) should also be in scope to be included in the £700 million cuts. There are a number of highly controversial, very expensive, poor value, and environmentally damaging schemes with confirmed DfT funding. These include the £270 million Norwich Western Link (NWL) and the £187 million A326 Waterside 'Improvements'.

The environmental impacts of the NWL are well known and documented, and have been for many years. Any route for a new road would inevitably impact on the highly protected River Wensum Valley and the maternity roosts of extremely rare Barbestrelle bats. The road is simply undeliverable. Any new road will be fiercely fought, and it is time that non-road solutions were fully examined. A clear message from DfT to Norfolk County Council, and the withdrawal of development funding would ensure this finally happens.

The A326 Waterside scheme is actually a Trojan horse for the development of highly protected Dibden Bay, which became a huge and successful national campaign in the 2000s. Associated British Ports (ABP) wants to turn the Dibden Bay Ramsar site and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA) into a multi-storey car park for imported cars (known euphemistically as 'Solent Gateway 2'). This too will be fiercely opposed. The A326 includes a double roundabout to allow access to Dibden Bay. Public funds should not be used to advance private interests, particularly when the environmental impacts will be enormous.

The 26 MRN / LLM schemes without confirmed DfT funding should be finally cancelled as unaffordable, including the A350 Melksham Bypass, so that the local authorities can finally move on and invest in sustainable non-road solutions instead which will reduce rather than increase traffic.

Conclusion

We hope this short submission is helpful for DfT deliberations to deliver the cuts needed to the capital roads budget. We would be happy to discuss further. Please email becca@transportactionnetwork.org.uk

23 July 2026

Rebecca Lush
Transport Action Network

Transport Action Network provides free support to people and groups pressing for more sustainable transport in their area and opposing cuts to bus and rail services, damaging road schemes and large unsustainable developments

254 Upper Shoreham Road, Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex, BN43 6BF

Not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales: 12100114