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## A fresh approach to the roads that matter most – designating a Major Road Network for England

Thousands of miles of England's more important 'A' roads are at risk of not being up to the task of supporting regional economies.

Currently 4,200 miles of England's motorways and 'A' roads – the Strategic Road Network managed by Highways England - are benefitting from a £15bn five-year improvement programme and a new regime for long-term planning.

However, a new independent study for the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund identifies another 3,800 miles of council-controlled 'A' roads in England that also deserve special recognition because of their importance to the economic wellbeing of regions and the country as a whole. These roads are losing out because many of the local authorities struggle for funds as their budgets continue to be squeezed.

Putting these local authority 'A' roads alongside the SRN forms the 8,000-mile **Major Road Network** – a new concept network with the connectivity and broad geographical scope to meet the needs of business across the country. This network carries 43% of the England's traffic on just 4% of road mileage.

In the Rees Jeffreys report - *A Major Road Network for England* - published today the authors David Quarmby and Phil Carey see no need to transfer control of these additional 'A' roads to Highways England.

But the report argues that, while these roads remain under local authority management, they need long-term planning and funding commitments comparable to those now in place for the Strategic Road Network. This will help ensure they become fit for purpose, alongside the SRN. The new devolved organisations coming into being like Transport for the North and Midlands Connect can do much to make this longer-term planning effective.

From 2020 Highways England is expected to be largely funded from a new National Roads Fund, which should receive over £5 billion a year from Vehicle Excise Duty in England. The Rees Jeffreys report suggests that some of the National Roads Fund money could also contribute to improving those local authority roads designated as part of this Major Road Network.

David Quarmby, lead author of the report, said:

“You clearly have to draw the line somewhere, but there is a strong argument for the economic importance of many more miles of 'A' road being acknowledged – while recognising the value of them remaining under local control. If they are given premier league status they should have access to premier league planning, funding and continuity.

“Just last week the Chancellor committed to continuing public investment in our infrastructure, while ensuring economic growth is distributed more evenly across the regions. Investing in the Major Road Network will – through its greater connectivity and broader geographical scope than the Strategic Road Network alone – help to achieve that wider spread of growth.

“In return for appropriate levels of funding the Major Road Network must become ‘fit for purpose’. This means being driven by the needs and concerns of users; tackling adverse impacts on communities and the environment, including fitting in with the particular challenges of larger urban areas; and ensuring the network is safe, effectively managed and well-maintained.”

Phil Carey, co-author, added:

“This report is a toolkit, not a detailed blueprint. But we think it’s what’s needed to help ensure a better service from our Major Roads – one that meets the needs of users, businesses and communities, across the country.”

David Hutchinson, Chair of the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund, said:

“The Rees Jeffreys Road Fund has a long-standing interest in our country’s road system, recognising that the vast majority of travel takes place on roads. In commissioning this study, the Trustees wanted to focus on the roads that matter most in supporting our national and regional economies. We welcome the authors’ innovative idea of a Major Road Network – and the focus on the planning, funding and governance issues that flow from it. We believe it merits serious consideration by central and local government and by the bodies responsible for planning and operating our important highways.”

## NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. From publication day Wednesday 12 October, the main Study Report and the Report Summary can be found at both:  
[www.futureroadsengland.org](http://www.futureroadsengland.org) and [www.reesjeffreys.co.uk/transport-reports](http://www.reesjeffreys.co.uk/transport-reports)
2. An indicative map of the Major Road Network is available now for download and publication: <http://www.futureroadsengland.org/s/MRN-England-fig-31.jpg>
3. The **Rees Jeffreys Road Fund** has, since its inception in 1950, provided support for education and research in all forms of transport. It also helps to fund projects that improve safety, the roadside environment and rest facilities for motorists and other road users. For more information visit [www.reesjeffreys.co.uk](http://www.reesjeffreys.co.uk).
4. The Study was commissioned by the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund.
5. About the authors
  - a. **David Quarmby CBE** has had a long career in policy, planning, management, operations and research, mostly in transport, with 38 years’ board-level experience in government, public agencies and the private sector.

For the past 18 years he has had an extensive portfolio of chairman and board appointments in transport, railways and tourism, and in transport research and consultancy.

David was Chairman of the RAC Foundation to 2013, a member of the London Mayor's Roads Task Force, and an Adviser to the Airports Commission. He led the Government Review of Winter Resilience of England's Transport Systems in 2010 and was a member of the A12 Commission in 2008. Prior to 1996 he was a main board director and joint Managing Director of Sainsbury's; up to 1984 he was a board member and Managing Director (Buses), London Transport after a period as Head of Research and then Chief Planning Officer.

- b. **Phil Carey** has been working as an independent consultant specialising in roads strategy challenges since leaving the Department for Transport (DfT) in 2011.

He is the Road User Policy Advisor to Transport Focus, which now has the role of statutory consumer representative for users of the Strategic Road Network in England; he is also Vice-Chair of the Transport Associates' Network.

In a series of Deputy Director roles in DfT and elsewhere in the Civil Service, he led projects ranging from the Transport Strategy Review for the Cabinet Office in 2001-02 and the Ports Policy Review in 2006-7, through to the road pricing research programme in 2007-9, and the cross-cutting transport security and contingencies team after that.

- 6. For further information, and for photographs of the authors, contact them as follows

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