



How roads are managed in the UK: frequently asked questions

The Department for Transport is;

- playing a key role in ensuring that we are able to meet the challenges of the future whilst
- ensuring that policies are sustainable and environmentally sound.

Car ownership is expanding and the Department expects traffic to grow significantly over the next decade. Just building new roads in isolation, however, isn't a solution so the Government has actively promoted an integrated transport policy - investing heavily in public transport and exploring how all modes of transport can be developed to meet rising demand.

Developing new approaches to transport takes time. Many are already in place. More are coming together with proper management of the existing road network, which will be a key step in tackling congestion.

What do we do?

The Secretary of State for Transport retains responsibility for overall Government policy on roads. He determines road policy, sets the strategic framework for new developments and establishes financial parameters. The Department delivers transport improvements through a number of executive agencies with responsibility for the various modes of transport. More information about the role of the executive agencies can be found at:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/about/how/aboutthedftexecutiveagencies>

Who Looks After Our Roads

The key agencies involved are the Highways Agency, the Scottish and Welsh Executives, the Northern Ireland Roads Service, Transport for London and Local Authorities.

- The Highways Agency has the main responsibility for managing major roads in England.
- Local authorities look after local roads in their own area.
- In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, individual agencies reporting to the respective regional assemblies take responsibility for major roads.
- In London, Transport for London takes responsibility for a sizeable network of main arterial roads.

What do the Highways Agency do?

The Highways Agency was established in 1994, as an executive agency of the Department for Transport. The Agency operates, maintains and improves the strategic road network - most motorways and all purpose trunk roads - in England, on behalf of the Secretary of State .

The Highways Agency manages some of the busiest roads in Britain, looking after over 5000 miles of road valued at over £65 billion. A third of all road traffic in England and over two thirds of heavy freight vehicles use the strategic road network and so the Agency plays a crucial role in maintaining the flow of goods and services across the UK and impacts on the lives of most communities.

There are many ways that the Agency is looking to improve England's roads. The prime aim is to improve safety and reliability and reduce congestion through a programme of road improvements, better management of road works and providing better information to motorists. In addition, the Agency seeks to safeguard the environment. A key part of the Agency's strategy has been to closely involve the public in the development of new plans and a coherent and managed system of consultations is in place.

The Agency seeks to help all road users, whether they be drivers or pedestrians or just happen to live in close proximity to a motorway or all purpose trunk road. Activities range from basic road maintenance, providing adequate lighting and supplying footbridges and cycle ways. Drivers will also be familiar with the variable message signs on many motorways.. These play a key role in keeping the motorist informed about road conditions, possible diversions and other crucial information. A recent initiative employed this technology to warn motorway drivers about the dangers of sticking to the middle lane. For more information on this scheme see:

Don't hog the middle lane <http://www.highways.gov.uk/news/articles/3588067.htm>

The Highways Agency also have responsibility for delivering the projects that make up the Targeted Programme of Improvements. These are larger-scale road improvement schemes that aim to tackle the most significant safety and congestion problems on England's motorways and all purpose trunk roads. There are a number of major schemes, some funded publicly and some via private-public partnership.

The Highways Agency do not operate the speed cameras on motorways and all purpose trunk roads. These are the responsibility of the Police.

More information on the role of the Highways Agency can be found at:

<http://www.highways.gov.uk>

What about roads in Scotland?

The Scottish Executive takes responsibility for motorways and all purpose trunk roads in Scotland. The Executive plays a similar role with respect to roads as the Highways Agency in England, ensuring that the strategic road network is operated and maintained to appropriate standards, promoting safety, safeguarding the environment and managing congestion. More information about the transport powers of the Executive can be seen at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Transport>

The Executive has recently launched the National Driver Information and Control System (NADICS) which monitors traffic flow on Scotland's roads and provides information to drivers via a system of road-side display units. The Executive hopes that the NADICS will play a significant role in reducing congestion and improving safety. More information about NADICS can be seen at:

<http://www.nadics.org.uk/>

What about roads in Wales?

The Transport Directorate of the Welsh Assembly takes responsibility for motorways and all purpose trunk roads in Wales. The Directorate works closely with local government and other bodies and delivers the trunk road programme of improvement and maintenance through consultants and agent local authorities. In addition, close links are maintained with the Department for Transport and the Highways Agency on all matters affecting transport and trunk roads. Directorate staff are frequently and regularly involved with their counterparts in the Department for Transport in the development and review of standards and policy.

More information about the transport work of the Welsh Assembly can be found at:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/transport/?lang=en>

What about roads in Northern Ireland?

All roads in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of Roads Service, an Executive Agency established within the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. Following devolution on 2 December 1999, the Agency moved to the new Department for Regional Development.

More information about Roads Service can be found at:

<http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/>

What about other roads?

All roads except most motorways and all purpose trunk roads are the responsibility of the *local highway authorities*. - which is usually the County Council in two-tier authorities although they may give some executive functions to the district council.

More information about the powers of local authorities with respect to transport can be found on the Local Government Association site at:

<http://www.lga.gov.uk>

What about roads in London?

The situation in London is different because of the presence of an elected Mayor and the creation of Transport for London.

Transport for London (TfL) is the principal responsible body for all forms of public transport in London. TfL manages a 580km network of main roads, all of London's 4,600 traffic lights and regulates taxi's and the private hire trade. The main role of the body is to implement the Mayor's Transport Strategy for London and manage the transport services across the capital for which the Mayor has responsibility. TfL is directed by a management board whose Members are chosen for their understanding of transport matters and appointed by Ken Livingstone, the current Mayor of London, who chairs the TfL Board.

More information about the work of TfL can be found at:

<http://www.tfl.gov.uk>

The remainder of London's vast road network is administered by the thirty two London boroughs and the Common Council of the City of London.

For related documents, pages and internet links, see the column on the right.