

## Changing the customer experience through information The Highways Agency Information Strategy

The text below has been extracted from 'Changing the customer experience through information – The Highways Agency Information Strategy'.

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### Foreword

Dr Stephen Ladyman MP

Everyone reading this is involved with England's national road network in some way. You may be a member of the public who travels on our motorways and trunk roads.

You are almost certainly using goods delivered on them. You may be a professional driver, working in the freight or passenger transport industries. Some of you may also work with or for the Highways Agency. Whatever your involvement, this new information strategy from the Highways Agency will affect you.

I want everyone's experience of using our national road network to get better. I want us to do everything we can to make people's journeys more reliable. We have an enormous opportunity to do this by improving the way we collect and use information, and the way we give it back to you.

Information is an asset that we all instinctively recognise as important. The Highways Agency operates England's network of motorway and

trunk roads and their challenge is to determine how best to realise the potential of information to benefit us all. They are looking at how they work with their partners to provide the best information to customers, partners and stakeholders to achieve their overarching aim of safe roads, reliable journeys, informed travellers.

All Highways Agency activities use information as an important resource. The Highways Agency needs to extract best value for customers from the Government's significant investment in information services and technology. I want to see new and improved information services that will help us all. I want the Highways Agency to make their services more readily and easily available to everyone.

I welcome the implementation of this strategy. It is in keeping with the Prime Ministers' vision of transformational government, which is about using technology to give citizens choice, with personalised services designed around their needs. This strategy defines how the Highways Agency is going to change our experience through information.

# Our Information Strategy

## Denise Plumpton, Director of Information

This document sets out the Highways Agency's information strategy. It gives us a framework for our vision of providing better information, more efficiently and effectively, to more people. It also sets out the principles we shall follow in pursuing this vision.

Our vision is about information and technology. Importantly, it is also about transforming the way we do business, benefiting our customers, our own people and our partners across our industry.

## The importance of information

Better information and better ways of making it available can help to improve all the services we provide.

- Informing drivers' behaviour can help improve safety.
- Helping drivers to choose when to travel can make journey times more reliable.
- Better real-time information can give our traffic officers more control of incidents, helping them to clear up more quickly so that disruption to traffic is reduced.
- Actively advising drivers about diversion opportunities at key points on our network can also help cope with unplanned events such as accidents.

We shall reduce delays for everyone by improving the way we coordinate roadworks on our network and by working with local highway authorities where local roads interact with ours. We can also help drivers by providing accurate and timely information about any delays including their location, duration and impact.

We shall use existing and emerging technologies to communicate better with drivers in ways that will help them to make decisions that could improve their journeys. This includes keeping

them accurately informed about the traffic conditions they face.

Providing quality information will be an integral and sustained part of our activities for the foreseeable future. We shall also work closely with other organisations that can use our information and add value to it, and who can tailor the information for special groups such as heavy goods vehicle drivers and bus companies.

## Our vision

We have three strands to our information strategy:

1. To inform our customers through providing Trusted, Reliable, Useful, Effective information.
2. To make best use of our information asset to improve our performance and the performance of our partners.
3. To deliver efficient, effective, reliable and robust information systems and services support to our customers, staff and stakeholders.

### 1. To inform our customers through providing TRUE - Trusted, Reliable, Useful, Effective - information.

We want to encourage people to use our information and, importantly, we want to give everyone the confidence and trust to act on it. To achieve this, we must make our information easily available, when and where our customers need it and we must make sure it is TRUE:

**Trusted** – Our customers can believe and trust the information to be accurate.

**Reliable** – Our customers can rely on us to provide the information, consistently.

**Useful** – Our information will be meaningful and help our customers make better decisions for themselves about their journeys.

**Effective** – Our information will enable and encourage customers to act in response to what they learn.

We shall advise them on possible actions, for example suggesting diversion routes around incidents and events, and inform them about current traffic conditions, journey times and expected delays.

We understand that different people prefer to receive information in different ways. So we shall give our customers a choice by providing our information through a variety of easy-to-use channels. More and more, we shall provide personalised information that helps individuals to make well-informed decisions when they are choosing how and when to use our national road network.

## **2. To make best use of our information asset to improve our performance and the performance of our partners.**

We shall seek out opportunities to improve our performance and that of our partners through better use of information. We all need to appreciate the importance of reliable information and effective information systems, and how this can benefit our customers as a result. We shall therefore:

- Work with our partners to improve the way they provide us with data that we share with our customers. This data will be quality-assured, consistent in its meaning, formats and level of detail and regularly provided.
- Encourage better collaboration with and between our partners.
- Encourage and enable everyone to work together in innovative ways, improving our productivity and reducing costs.
- Facilitate effective information sharing within the Highways Agency and with other organisations.

Working together, increasing collaboration and encouraging innovation will make us collectively more able to respond to our customers' current and changing needs. We aim to become a truly learning organisation, encouraging feedback from our partners and customers and using it to improve what we do for our customers.

## **3. To deliver efficient, effective, reliable and robust information systems and services support to our customers, staff and stakeholders.**

We shall be efficient in achieving our aims by:

- Using developing and emerging technologies where they can help us.
- Streamlining and increasing the automation of our information processes so that we can spend more time helping customers directly.

We shall make sure we use innovation and technological advances effectively. Technology will be very important in supporting our transformation journey from a traditional office-based organisation to one which is focused on serving customers directly out on our network.

It is important that we organise ourselves effectively to provide and support our information systems. This will give the framework and control we need to achieve better value from our investment in information systems.

Finally, we shall actively identify what our customers need from information systems and services so that we can give them the best possible service.

## Our guiding principles

We shall follow eight principles in delivering our strategy. These will underpin the way we develop our strategy and our programme of work.

### 1. Understand what our customers want

We shall ensure we understand and appreciate how our information is most useful to our customers and stakeholders now, and what they would like in the future. We shall ask them regularly so we do not let our own assumptions and preferences override theirs.

### 2. Provide high quality information

Our information will be designed and presented in ways that encourage and help our customers to use it. Information should be available when and where they want it. We must keep it relevant and up-to-date, and its quality must inspire our customers' confidence and trust.

### 3. Build an efficient delivery chain

By working with our supply chain partners we shall design an information delivery chain that meets our customers' needs.

We shall ensure that it is resilient, reliable and scalable, and able to respond to changes in our customers needs. We shall also avoid duplicating existing information services that are reliable and effective.

### 4. Communicate effectively

We shall address our customers' and stakeholders' needs simply and consistently, linking closely with the Agency's other communications work. To make sure that we get our messages through, our language will focus on being helpful, easy to understand and concise. We shall promote all the places that customers can get our information so that they can take full advantage of them. We shall do the same with our internal information systems so our staff know

what information is available to help them with our drive in putting customers first.

### 5. Future-proof our systems

We recognise that our world is changing all the time. We shall ensure our information systems respond to developments in government policy and legislation.

Our systems will be designed and developed so that they deliver the information our customers want, well into the future.

### 6. Collaboration

We can achieve more for our customers by exploiting opportunities for better collaboration. We shall improve the way that we collaborate on information systems and technological developments with our supply chain, our stakeholders and the private sector.

### 7. Governance

We shall make sure we improve the way we provide information and information systems by controlling what we do within a clear framework based on proven management principles.

We shall be open to scrutiny, encouraging our customers to tell us where we are going wrong and learning methodically from our mistakes. Equally, we shall celebrate success. We shall evaluate the full costs and benefits of everything we do.

### 8. Support technological developments

We shall understand customer preferences for the technologies they use, and influence the development of that technology.

In particular, we shall support the development of in-vehicle systems to deliver information safely to our customers.

## The benefits for our customers

### 1. More useful and better quality information that will make it easier for them to plan their journeys and respond to conditions on our network as they happen.

#### 2. More information on variable message signs including:

- Expected journey times on all major motorway routes.
- Details of delays and likely journey times.
- Diversion advice for planned and unplanned events.
- Constantly updated information during construction and maintenance work.

We shall provide more of these signs, especially on our non-motorway roads and at important junctions where drivers join or leave our network.

#### 3. A choice of ways to receive information. We shall provide and develop:

- Highways Agency radio – continuous, up-to-date, spoken traffic information on the internet, with plans to extend this to in-vehicle digital radio.
- Extensive traffic information on our website to help travellers plan their journeys before they set out.
- Better information through our two telephone services - HAIL and our automated real-time traffic information line.
- Interactive information points at 24 motorway service areas this year, with more to follow.

Our National Traffic Control Centre will provide most of the improved information that we give our customers. It will be TRUE information; trusted, reliable, useful and effective.

#### 4. More information services from the private sector. We shall work closely with them to:

- Develop new, and improve existing in-vehicle information systems.
- Encourage a move towards more tailored information by supplying information service providers with the data they need and promoting the benefits to our customers.
- Use advances in technology without compromising safety.

Any information we supply will be clearly identifiable as the Highways Agency's.

#### 5. More 'whole journey' information. We intend to develop closer working relationships with local authorities and look for opportunities to:

- Display constantly updated information about local roads at exits from our network.
- Encourage and enable them to display constantly updated information about our network on their roads.
- Co-ordinate information on maintenance works to help reduce congestion.

#### 6. Providing our front-line managers and suppliers with accurate and timely information about the network's performance.

This will help them make better decisions when tackling the causes and effects of congestion and to improve road safety.

#### Denise Plumpton

Director of Information  
Highways Agency

# Helping you plan your journeys

Now that you have read about our strategy for developing the way we use information, take a look at what we currently offer and some of the developments we are planning. This is here to help you whether you are a member of the public, a stakeholder, a supplier or a member of staff.

Please use our information to plan your journeys whenever you can, especially if you intend making an unfamiliar one. If you are able to change the time you travel and avoid the worst congestion it could make a real difference to your journey time.

## Our National Traffic Control Centre

Situated in the centre of England at the heart of our network, the National Traffic Control Centre (NTCC) is the information hub of the Highways Agency.

Staff in our NTCC constantly monitor a network of some 1,730 CCTV cameras and over 4,450 traffic sensors. They work 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They review the network and deliver vital information to the news media and our operational partners including the police and our own traffic officer service. They also set real time messages on our 350 large, information-giving VMS at strategic points across our network.

Millions of customers access the information that is gathered and analysed by the NTCC live on our web site, as it happens.

If you are planning a journey the Traffic England section of the Highways Agency website is a great place to start planning your journey. Go to [www.highways.gov.uk/traffic](http://www.highways.gov.uk/traffic)

## The Highways Agency Information Line (HAIL) – 08457 50 40 30

HAIL is our own telephone information service. You can talk to a HAIL advisor to get help and information about our network, including:

- Current travel conditions along your route, including the effect of incidents such as accidents or breakdowns.
- What conditions are likely to be on your route when you intend to travel.
- The locations and progress of roadworks that might affect your journey.

You can also ask a HAIL advisor about other things to do with the Highways Agency, such as our longer-term plans for road improvements, or environmental issues that may be concerning you.

We recognise that you need to be able to contact us at any time so we have increased HAIL opening times to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year.

*Calls from BT landlines cost no more than 4p per minute. Calls from mobiles usually cost more.*

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*When it is safe to do so, you can help us give everyone a better service by contacting HAIL if you see anything that we should know about – for example, something wrong with one of our signs. We shall act on the information you give us.*

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*In 2005 alone, the team at HAIL answered 75,000 calls and over 13,000 e-mails.*

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## Automated telephone updates – 08700 660 115

Our automated Traffic England telephone service gives you real-time information on live and forecast traffic conditions on our network, including:

- The location and description of events including congestion, roadworks, and accidents.
- How long we expect them to last.
- How much disruption we anticipate.

You can use this service from any touch-tone telephone, or use it hands-free if you have a voice-activated telephone.

Our National Traffic Control Centre keeps the telephone service information up-to-date all day, every day.

*Calls from BT landlines cost no more than 8p per minute. Calls from mobiles usually cost more.*

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*Call our automated Traffic England service before you set out or during breaks in your journey for the very latest traffic information.*

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## Variable message signs

Electronic variable message signs (VMS) are now a familiar sight across England's motorways and trunk roads. These signs can give you advance warning of emergencies, incidents and traffic management, and are aimed at improving safety and minimising the effects of congestion. We limit our messages to those that will help you complete your journey safely and efficiently.

We have 350 large variable message signs at key points around our network. We use these signs to tell you about major incidents and any

available diversion routes. We have a further 1,850 large signs, mostly on motorways, which we use to manage traffic locally around incidents and emergencies, and to provide warnings of slow moving or stationary traffic ahead. We are currently operating them jointly with the Police from our regional control centres. We shall take on sole responsibility for operating them when we finish rolling out our Traffic Officer Service across the network in the near future.

We are planning to improve our variable message signs to give you:

- Expected journey times on all major motorway routes.
- Details of delays and likely journey times.
- Diversion advice for planned and unplanned events.
- Constantly updated information during construction and maintenance work.
- Conditions on local highway authority roads.

We are going to provide more of these signs, especially on our non-motorway roads and at important junctions where you join or leave our network.

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*A system called Motorway Incident Detection and Automated Signalling (MIDAS) makes VMS more responsive to traffic conditions on the road. MIDAS identifies incidents or congestion using detectors under the road and automatically sets appropriate messages to warn drivers of the conditions ahead and advise a maximum speed limit. Between April 2004 and March 2005 almost 4 million messages were set. Of these 90% were set automatically.*

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## Live web updates – [www.highways.gov.uk](http://www.highways.gov.uk)

Clicking 'Traffic Information' on our homepage takes you to our real-time Traffic England information which gives you a view of the network conditions before you start a journey.

This includes details of any incidents, the delays being caused and how long they may last. You can even see the messages being shown on our variable message signs and details of planned roadworks along your route.

You can find our traffic forecaster here. Use this to see how busy the network is likely to be when you intend to travel. If you are able to vary when you travel you can use this to plan to travel at a quieter time.

Our website also gives you a weather forecast specifically for our network. We work closely with the Met Office and have a team of weather forecasters located in our National Traffic Control Centre.

We provide regular up-to-date information to news services such as TV and local radio stations.

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*Our website provides other useful information about all our activities. For example, our plans for major improvement schemes, environmental information, our research programme, and information about our organisation.*

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## Traffic conditions – direct to your mobile phone

In early 2006 we began a trial service, providing closed circuit television images from the cameras on our network direct to mobile phones. These images were previously only shared with the police and other emergency services.

We are initially offering images from 100 cameras on the M25, M1, M6, M4, M5, M40 M42, M54, M60, M61 and A1M.

More cameras will come on line during the year and we plan to extend the service to the whole of our network by the end of 2006, subject to this trial demonstrating a clear business case and good customer feedback.

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*You should never use your mobile phone when driving. Only use this service before you start your journey, or if you are a passenger or when you are taking a break from driving, for example at a service area.*

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## Information points at motorway service areas

On long journeys it is important to take breaks at regular intervals. Apart from helping to avoid accidents due to tiredness you can check traffic conditions for the rest of your journey.

This year we are installing over 20 interactive information points at motorway service areas across the country where you will be able to access our website to check on the latest traffic conditions. We shall monitor how you use these information points and if you find them useful we hope to provide more in the future.

## Information at shopping centres, ports and airports

We are encouraging operators of large traffic-generating sites, such as major shopping centres, ports and airports, to make our information easily available to their customers. This can be displayed on large screens, as at Birmingham International Airport, or through continuous ticker messages. We hope you will find this useful, and that more operators undertake to provide this service.

## Highways Agency radio

You can now receive continuous, up-to-date, spoken traffic information on the internet at [www.trafficradio.org.uk](http://www.trafficradio.org.uk). You can log onto this service and hear about the latest traffic conditions on our network and even specify which region you want to hear about.

We intend to develop this trial service by making it available via Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) so that you will be able to tune into it from your DAB-equipped vehicle.

## Regional leaflets

We produce a set of six leaflets every three months to help you plan your journeys around the regions of England: South East; South West; East; Central; North East; North West. These give you a roadworks planner in a handy map format, details of regional events that you should allow extra time around, and other relevant news and updates.

You can pick up any copies you need from most motorway service areas or order them on **0870 1226 236** or by email to [highwaysagency@twoten.press.net](mailto:highwaysagency@twoten.press.net)

# Working together to achieve more

## The private sector

We aim to stimulate the private sector to offer more information services to the public. We shall be proactive in developing new services and work with the private sector to promote the customer benefits of more useful and tailored products.

We shall maintain our own information services as long as our customers need and want them, at the same time helping private sector companies to provide more and better services wherever they can.

We shall remain involved in these services until they are established and sustainable in the market place, when we shall plan to hand them over to the private sector.

We are inviting information service providers in the private sector to find new ways of using our data to help road users and to create demand for these services in the market place. We shall ensure our information is always of the appropriate quality. We only stipulate that any information we supply should be clearly branded as Highways Agency when presented to the end-user customer.

## Local authorities

Our strategic road network accounts for only 3% by length of all the public roads in England. All of our customers start and finish their journeys on local roads. More “whole journey” information would really help everyone.

We have always recognised the need to co-ordinate our information on maintenance works with local authorities to help reduce congestion. We now want to extend that co-ordination to whole-journey information.

We therefore intend to look for opportunities to work closely with local authorities to develop and provide integrated information services, where these will help our customers. In practice we hope this will lead to initiatives such as us displaying constantly updated information about traffic conditions on local roads at major exit points from our network. We also want to look for opportunities for local authorities to display similar information about our network, on their roads.

# Organising ourselves to succeed

## Our information programme

We are now developing our information programme and prioritising the high number of information-based projects currently underway across the Agency. Our priorities will be based on the level of customer benefits from each project, their likely costs, and our overall ability to deliver the service in the required timescales. We shall remove any duplication, identify gaps and ensure that all our information services, both current and new, support the aims of our strategy.

We shall support the outcomes set out by our strategy, giving our customers information that is always TRUE. We shall use information to improve our performance and that of our suppliers and partners. We shall provide efficient and effective information services and systems to our customers, staff and stakeholders.

An Information Programme Board, chaired by the Director of Information and with representatives from across the Highways Agency, will lead the information programme.

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*We shall follow best practice in the way we organise, communicate and collaborate on our information programme.*

*We shall publish details on our website and our web-based extranet, PartnerNet.*

*We shall encourage everyone involved, both inside and outside the Agency, to participate fully in the development of the information programme.*

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## Our structure

We need to ensure we have the appropriate organisational structure to help us succeed in implementing our strategy. We shall build a robust structure, one that will be effective, efficient and reliable and will allow us to exploit our information asset to the full.

We shall learn from information service models elsewhere in industry and base our structure on established best practice. Our structure focuses strongly on customer services, stakeholder engagement and the building of productive relationships.

Our Information Directorate will have three components: Strategy and Programme Development, Service Development, and Service Delivery.

For real time traffic information:

**08700 660 115**

[www.highways.gov.uk/trafficinfo](http://www.highways.gov.uk/trafficinfo)

24 hours a day, 365 days a year

(Calls from BT landlines to 0870 numbers will cost no more than 8p per minute; mobile calls usually cost more)

For general Highways Agency information:

**08457 50 40 30**

email: [ha\\_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ha_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk)

24 hours a day, 365 days a year

(Calls from BT landlines to 0845 numbers will cost no more than 4p per minute; mobile calls usually cost more)