

REES JEFFREYS ROAD FUND: A MAJOR ROAD NETWORK FOR ENGLAND

Conclusions from Seminar 8 December 2016

The leading roads stakeholders bodies, including DfT, met earlier this month at senior level to explore how the Major Road Network (MRN) concept, as proposed in October by the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund, might be taken forward¹. It was agreed that the MRN approach provided a coherent analytical basis for bringing greater planning and financial stability to the vital asset of local authorities' major roads, and for extending to them the key principles of the regime already now in place for Highways England.

The focus of attention should be on the service provided by all these Major Roads, to users and to communities alongside. But we need to move on from traditional standards based around physical infrastructure and new construction, to target instead enhanced operational effectiveness and higher levels of asset health. The MRN needs a framework based on:

- outcomes - implementing any new arrangements needs to be fully aligned with wider strategies for growth, and
- the processes needed to achieve those outcomes - with increasing reliance on virtual infrastructure, including mobile data connectivity

There was indeed scope for the prospective National Road Fund to be applied to local authority as well as Highways England parts of the MRN; but it should not be seen as a silver bullet, and should not replace the need for broader reform of local road funding, including shifting the balance of funding in favour of revenue as opposed to capital allocations. Possible new funding instruments led by LEP consortia or the Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) should also be explored.

There is a case for focusing progress on the MRN at the regional level, noting the confidence of the STBs that they are ready for this challenge. They are well-positioned to determine objectives for MRN roads in their areas, using Rees Jeffreys' six-point Fitness for Purpose framework. However, central Government will need to ensure there is sufficient consistency in how the MRN is designated, particularly if some funding is to be provided centrally.

Key issues remain to be resolved around:

- the balance between local determination and consistent application of underlying principles;
- how to turn thinking around standards and fitness for purpose into practical targets and mechanisms;
- the best mix of funding sources for the MRN: there is an encouraging field of potential new channels, and the more that funding is raised from sources other than local government, the stronger the case for delegating responsibility around network definition and standards.

DfT undertook to consider these issues carefully, and will share their emerging thinking with key stakeholders in the new year.

¹ *A Major Road Network for England*, David Quarmby and Phil Carey, Rees Jeffreys Road Fund, October 2016, and *A Major Road Network for England – Report Summary*, David Quarmby and Phil Carey, Rees Jeffreys Road Fund, October 2016 - both available at www.futureroadsengland.org where the 10 Supporting Documents can also be accessed, and at www.reesjeffreys.co.uk/transport-reports.