

Proposals for the creation of a Major Road Network

1. Introduction

As part of the Transport Investment Strategy, the government announced that it would take forward proposals to create the Major Road Network (MRN).

This middle-tier of economically and strategically important local authority 'A' roads will sit between the nationally-managed Strategic Road Network (SRN) and the rest of the Local Road Network. These roads will benefit from targeted funding available through a share of the National Roads Fund, with the aim to improve productivity and connectivity in our towns and cities.

In creating this network, the government has 5 central policy objectives. These are:

- **Reduce congestion** – alleviating local and regional congestion, reducing traffic jams and bottlenecks.
- **Support economic growth and rebalancing** – support the delivery of the industrial strategy, contributing to a positive economic impact that is felt across the regions.
- **Support housing delivery** – unlocking land for new housing developments.
- **Support all road users** – recognising the needs of all users, including cyclists, pedestrians and disabled people.
- **Support the SRN** – complementing and supporting the existing SRN by creating a more resilient road network in England.

This consultation seeks views on the government's proposals for how the MRN will achieve these policy objectives across 3 themes. These are:

- **defining the network**
- **investment planning**
- **eligibility and investment assessment criteria**

The proposals in this consultation outline how the MRN will:

- form a consistent, coherent network alongside the SRN that brings about the opportunity to better co-ordinate roads investment
- provide funding certainty to roads in the network, through use of the National Roads Fund, and raise standards and performance across the new network
- provide clear roles for local and regional partners, who will support the government to deliver and develop MRN schemes

Confidentiality

We thank all respondents for taking the time to read the consultation document and to respond to the consultation questions. Your views on the programme's core objectives and principles, as well as the major themes set out in the consultation, will contribute to the formulation of MRN policy.

2. Respondent details

Your contact details. We will only contact you if we need to clarify any of the answers you give us.

Your name

Your email

In what capacity are you responding?

Central government, executive agency or non-departmental public body

Local authority or combined authority

Sub-national transport body, ADEPT or other regional partnership (public sector)

Industry or business (private sector)

MP / Councillor

Member of the public

Other (please specify):

In which region are you based?

East Midlands

London

East of England

North East

North West

South East

South West

West Midlands

Yorkshire and the Humber

3. MRN core principles

Questions in this section relate to pages 20 to 21 of the consultation document, 'MRN Core Principles'.

In order to deliver our objectives for the MRN, we believe there are a number of fundamental principles that must be at the heart of our plans for a MRN and its programme of investment. These are:

- **increased certainty of funding**
- **a consistent network**
- **a coordinated investment programme**
- **a focus on enhancement and major renewals**
- **clear local, regional and national roles**
- **strengthening links with the Strategic Road Network**

Q1. Do you agree with the proposed core principles for the MRN outlined in the consultation document?

Yes

No

Don't know

4. MRN core principles

If you answered no, which core principle(s) do you disagree with? Provide an explanation why.

5. Defining the network

Questions in this section relate to pages 22 to 27 of the consultation document, 'Defining the Network'.

The extent of the network must strike a balance between capturing the most economically important regional roads and ensuring that its size is appropriate, enabling investments that can drive an improvement to the level of funding available.

Any definition must make the best use of local and regional knowledge to ensure that the most economically important roads are captured. To strike this balance appropriately, we are proposing the use of both quantitative and qualitative criteria to define the network. This approach ensures:

- the network is coherent, i.e. more than just a set of fragmented sections of road
- the network has a sound, objective analytical basis, yet also has the flexibility to factor in local knowledge and requirements

Q2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the quantitative criteria outlined in the consultation document and their proposed application?



Strongly agree



Agree



Neither agree nor disagree



Disagree



Strongly disagree

6. Defining the network - quantitative criteria

If you disagree or strongly disagree, what should be the quantitative criteria?

7. Defining the network - qualitative criteria

Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the qualitative criteria outlined in the consultation document and their application?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

8. Defining the network - qualitative criteria

If you disagree or strongly disagree, what should be the qualitative criteria?

9. Defining the network

Q4. Have both the quantitative and qualitative criteria proposed in the consultation document identified all sections of road you feel should be included in the MRN?



Yes



No



Don't know

If no, explain how the criteria are failing to identify a section of road you feel should be included.

Wiltshire Council believes that there is one significant exclusion being the A350 south of A36 (to Poole).

The A350 between M4 (J17) and the south coast is a National Primary Route, and plays a significant role for local economies.

The map accompanying the consultation indicates the section of the A350 between M4 and A36 as MRN - the remainder not.

In quantitative terms, the 'missing' section of the A350 qualifies due to:

- A350 Poole to Blandford 10,900 AADT with 6% HGVs and 17% LGVs
- A350 and C13 Blandford to Shaftesbury combined flows 11,000 AADT with 10.6% HGVs and 19.2% LGVs (flows on both routes need to be taken together because there is an advertised one way HGV route management plan in place - vehicles travelling north use the A350 and those travelling south use the C13)
- A350 Shaftesbury to Dorset boundary 10,500 AADT with 7% HGVs and 20% LGVs.¹

In qualitative terms, it is argued that

- The absence of this link would not achieve the consistency and coherence proposed to lie at the heart of the planned network
- The link is an important North/South connection from the south coast to the SRN (M4) and
- It provides a connection to the major port of Poole (with significant plans for growth)

DfT colleagues will also be aware of the proposition being advanced by BaNES, Wiltshire and Dorset Councils, respective LEPs, West of England Combined Authority and Poole Harbour Commissioners, who have developed a 'case for action' that highlights the economic value of improving connectivity across this North South corridor – see here http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/connectivity_prospectus_single_page_version.pdf

¹ Data supplied by Dorset County Council

Q5. Have the quantitative or qualitative criteria proposed in the consultation document identified sections of road you feel should not be included in the MRN?

Yes

No

Don't know

If they have, explain why these roads should not be included in the MRN.

· **A362 between A361 (Frome) and A36 (Warminster)**

The average daily two way flow from counts taken in 2014 shows that the A362 at the Warminster (A36) end only carried 9,415 vehicles.

The quantitative data alone suggests the inclusion of the A362 as part of the MRN is questionable because the 10,000 vehicles per day threshold is not met.

In addition, it is a road which is not currently or planned to be managed in a way to support MRN status. In context, the A362 has a westbound weight limit which is not commensurate to supporting MRN status. The presence of a weight limit restricts HGV flow. Consequently, data shows that the proportion of HGV traffic westbound is less than 5%.

Moreover, the Council is keen to introduce a two way weight limit on the A362, which further undermines its inclusion in the MRN.

For these reasons, the Council suggests that the A362 should not be afforded MRN status.

10. Defining the network – refreshing the MRN

It will be important for the MRN to remain relevant and reflect the latest data and changes to economic centres and road use. However, this must be balanced against the need to provide a stable platform on which the MRN investment programme can be delivered.

We propose to review the MRN every 5 years to coincide with the existing Road Investment Strategy (RIS) timetable. This will involve updating and reviewing the data that are used and engagement with all bodies involved in the delivery of the MRN programme.

Q6. Do you agree with the proposal for how the MRN should be reviewed in future years?

Yes

No

Don't know

If you answered no, how should the MRN be reviewed in future years?

11. Investment planning













Questions in this section relate to pages 28 to 31 of the consultation document, 'Investment Planning'.

The creation of the MRN should support long-term strategic consideration of investment needs in order to make best use of the targeted funding that will be made available from the National Roads Fund and deliver the best possible result for the user. The important national and regional role played by roads included in the MRN means that individual local authorities cannot plan investments in isolation, nor can decisions be completely centralised at either a regional or national level.

As set out in the core principles section of the consultation document we propose that, alongside the local role of highways authorities, there needs to be a strong regional focus for investment planning within a consistent national network. The consultation document sets out roles for:

- **local bodies (such as local authorities and local highways authorities)**
- **regional bodies (such as sub-national transport bodies)**
- **national bodies (such as the department)**

Q7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the roles outlined in the consultation document for:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree not disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Local bodies		<input checked="" type="radio"/>			
Regional bodies		<input checked="" type="radio"/>			
National bodies		<input checked="" type="radio"/>			

If you have selected Disagree or Disagree Strongly for any of the proposed roles, what should the role involve? Specify which role you're referring to, ie local, regional or national.

12. Additional roles and responsibilities

Q8. What additional responsibilities, if any, should be included? State at which level these roles should be allocated.

Q9. Do you agree with our proposals to agree regional groupings to support the investment planning of the MRN in areas where no sub-national transport bodies (STBs) exist?

Yes

No

Don't know

If you answered no, explain how the MRN should be managed in regions where no STBs exist.

To maximise the role of local authorities in the Major Road Network decision making process, local authorities in South West England are currently engaged in discussions to determine options for forming at least two Sub-National Transport Bodies for the region.

Current proposals have this split on an east / west basis. Regardless of the outcome of this discussion the South West region will retain a co-operative narrative focussing on shared strategic travel corridors.

The development of the Sub-National Transport Bodies will enable flexibility in determining investment priorities.

13. Investment planning – regional evidence base

We propose that STBs or regional groups would be responsible for developing a regional evidence base which would be the basis for the development of the MRN investment programme. Where STBs exist we expect that the regional evidence base would be developed from the existing statutory transport strategies for which STBs are responsible.

The regional evidence base would be evidence-based and should not be limited to performing a mechanical sifting exercise. As a minimum, the department would expect them to comprise the following:

- an assessment of the overall condition of the existing network and its performance.
- the identification of network-wide issues and priority corridors.
- analysis of potential region-wide solutions and the development of specific interventions to tackle the issues identified over at least a 5 year period, although we expect and encourage STBs or regions to look beyond this in their strategic planning.
- an assessment of the potential sequencing of the schemes identified.

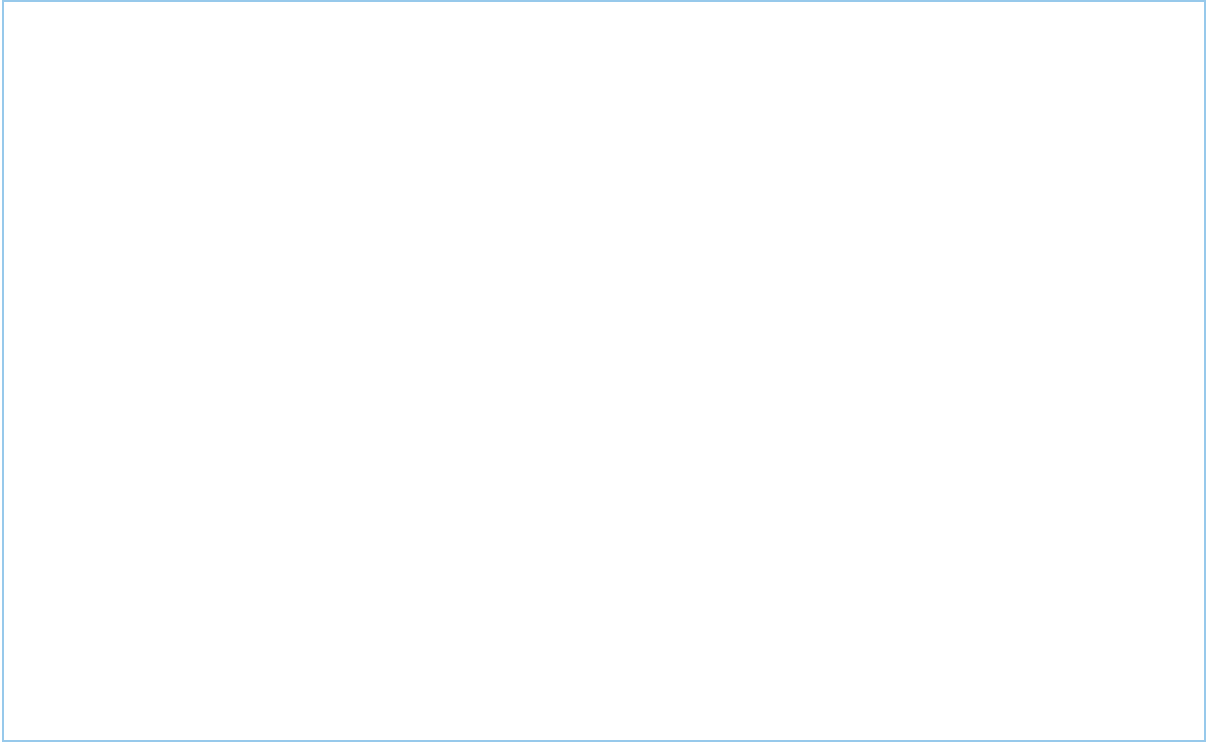
Q10. Are there any other factors, or evidence, that should be included within the scope of the regional evidence bases?

Yes

No

Don't know

If you answered yes, describe the additional factors or evidence you feel should be within the scope of the regional evidence bases.



14. Investment planning – the role of Highways England

A core principle of the MRN programme is to bring more coordinated planning to these important roads. Given Highways England's experience in road investment planning, and the need to ensure a seamless transition between the SRN and MRN, we propose that Highways England, the body responsible for running the SRN, should also have a role in the MRN Programme. This role could include:

- **programme support** - Highways England could have a role in the governance of the MRN investment programme advising the department on the development of the MRN pipeline and its interactions with the SRN, and providing wider support as needed.
- **analytical support** - Highways England could support the department in analysing the regional evidence bases in order to prepare advice to ministers on the MRN investment programme.
- **cost estimate support** - Highways England could support the department in assessing scheme cost estimates.
- **delivery support** - Highways England could support, if required, LAs in the delivery of agreed MRN schemes. This could include advising LAs on design and development as well as supporting access to the supply chain to enable LAs to take advantage of economies of scale that may be available.

Q11. Do you agree with the role that has been outlined in the consultation document for Highways England?



Yes



No



Don't know

If you answered no, what should be the role of Highways England?

The programme and analysis roles seem appropriate for HE in the context of any interactions with the SRN.

Where there is no significant impact on the SRN, the suggested value of HE becoming involved in cost estimating and delivery is not persuasive.

Experience suggests that HE's processes can be overly complex, and may not be either helpful or effective when considering schemes on the local highway network that require a more proportional approach.

Aside from the above, HE's capacity to resource their existing commitments is extremely stretched – it seems unlikely that they would have sufficient capacity to support an additional demand such as that proposed.

15. Eligibility criteria

Questions in this section relate to pages 32 to 35 of the consultation document, 'Eligibility and investment assessment criteria'.

The department does not intend to replace existing funding streams such as formula funding for Highway Maintenance or Integrated Transport Block funding which may be directed to any LA roads including the MRN network. For that reason, we propose that funding to improve and enhance the MRN should be targeted towards significant interventions that will transform important stretches of the network.

We propose that only proposals for contributions of £20 million or over will be considered for MRN funding. As we want this fund to benefit all areas of the country and produce an improvement for users across the network we would expect that most funding requests would not exceed £50 million, where there is a strong case we would be willing to consider scheme proposals requiring higher contributions, up to a maximum of £100 million.

To get the best value for money, regions and local authority promoters should work to minimise scheme costs through scheme optimisation and the securing of third party contributions, alongside local contributions. We are proposing the following schemes would be eligible for MRN funding:

- **bypasses**
- **missing road links**
- **widening of existing MRN roads**
- **major structural renewals**
- **major junction improvements**
- **variable message signs**
- **traffic management and the use of smart technology and data**
- **packages of improvements**

Q12. Do you agree with the cost thresholds outlined in the consultation document?

Yes

No

Don't know

If you answered no, what should be the cost thresholds?

Wiltshire Council suggests that the entry level minimum of £20m should be lower – at £10m.

Although bypass schemes will typically exceed the £20m threshold, the other scheme types may not.

They represent the range of lower cost/high value initiatives that are capable of securing precisely the sort of outcomes envisaged from the Fund – an entry level of £20m may well have the perverse effect of excluding them from consideration.

Q13. Do you agree with the eligibility criteria outlined in the consultation document?

Yes

No

Don't know

If you answered no, what should the eligibility criteria be?

16. Investment assessment criteria

To support the development of regional evidence bases and a national investment programme we are proposing that a clear set of criteria be developed. These support the government's overarching objectives for the MRN programme whilst providing local and regional bodies the flexibility to develop proposals that support the delivery of local and regional objectives.

We propose that these criteria should be as follows:

Objective	Criteria
Reduce Congestion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Alleviate Congestion ○ Environmental Impacts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve air quality and biodiversity ○ Reduce noise and risk of flooding ○ Protect water quality, landscape and cultural heritage sites
Support Economic Growth & Rebalancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Industrial Strategy: Supports regional strategic goals to boost economic growth ○ Economic Impact: Improve ability to access new or existing employment sites ○ Trade & Gateways Impact: Improve international connectivity, e.g. access to ports & airports
Support Housing Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Support the creation of new housing developments by improving access to future development sites and boosting suitable land capacity
Supporting All Road Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Deliver benefits for non-motorised users, including cyclists, pedestrians and disabled people ○ Safety Benefits: Reduce the risk of deaths/serious injuries for all users of the MRN
Support the SRN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve end to end journey times across both networks. ○ Improve journey time reliability ○ Improve SRN resilience

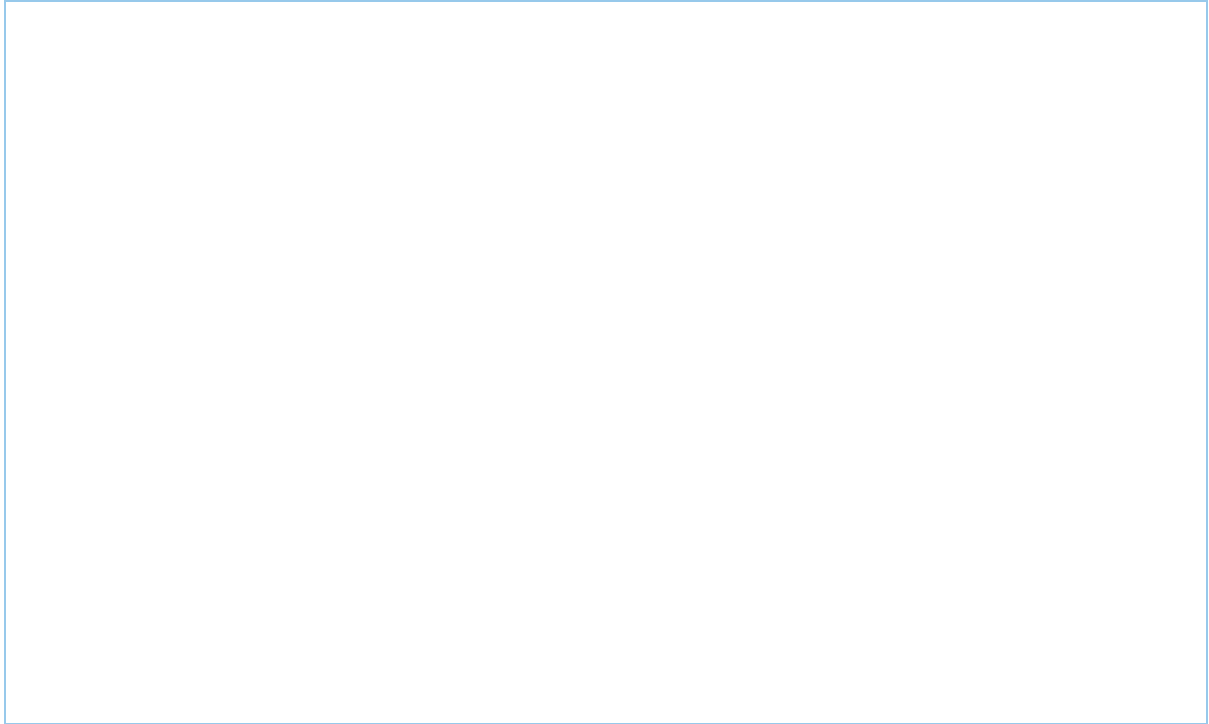
Q14. Do you agree with the investment assessment criteria outlined in the consultation document?

Yes

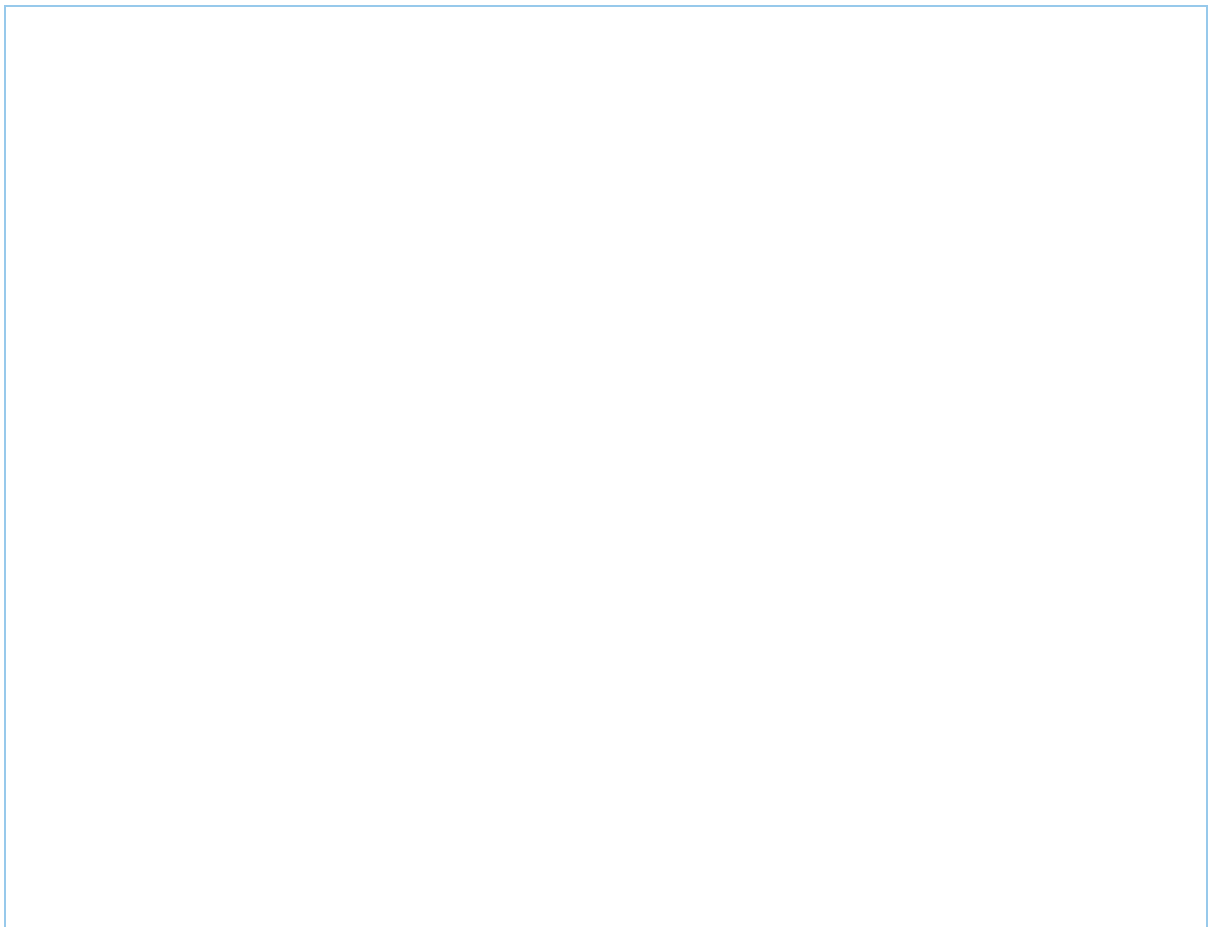
No

Don't know

If you answered no, what should the investment assessment criteria be?

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Q15. In addition to the eligibility and assessment criteria described what, if any, additional criteria should be included in the proposal? Please be as detailed as possible.

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17. Other considerations

Q16. Is there anything further you would like added to the MRN proposal?**Resource Funding**

It is understood that scheme promoters will have to fund development costs up to OBC stage.

When the Large Local Majors Fund was announced in 2016, it explicitly acknowledged that the inability of local bodies to afford early stage development costs was a significant barrier to schemes being brought forward.

The 'development fund' was a way of addressing that.

The initial resource challenge for local bodies will be the work required to produce Regional Evidence Bases – the unsupported funding for development of Outline Business Cases will present an even greater dilemma.

Rough science puts OBC costs at around 3-4% of estimated scheme costs.

Competitive funding streams are typically overbid by at least 5 times over - with an annual MRN budget of, say, £1bn, that might attract an at risk gamble of around £150 - 200m across the country pa.

That will be unaffordable.

MRN should acknowledge this issue in the same way as was recognised by the Large Local Majors Fund.

Not to do so will inhibit the capacity of LAs to bring forward schemes, and inevitably compromise the pipeline of projects.

The creation of a 'development fund' to assist with:

- The assembly of Regional Evidence Bases and
- Pre OBC development work

should be given serious consideration.

MRN/PRN

There may be unintended confusion comparing MRN with PRN.

The consultation suggests that there are only two types of road – the Strategic Road Network (SRN), and the Local Road Network (LRN).

The MRN is put forward as a type of road that would lie between those two categories, broadly described as “...*the most economically important local authority 'A' roads...*”.

There is not a single mention in the document of the Primary Route Network (PRN) – however DfT elsewhere² describe the PRN as “...roads between places of traffic importance across the UK...”

To many they will appear much the same, however the way in which they are defined is subtly different.

By way of example in Wiltshire, there will be situations where parts of the PRN form part of the advisory freight network, although those links will not be part of the MRN.

It would be useful if the distinction in status could be acknowledged and explained.

² Guidance on Road Classification and the Primary Route Network - DfT 2013

