

New smart motorways will see an additional 400 road miles added to the network

A new dawn for England's major roads

The launch of Highways England this month signals a new beginning for the country's motorways and major A roads. Here we find out more about what the changes will mean on the ground

Changes to the way England's motorways and major roads are managed become a reality this month as Highways England replaces the Highways Agency. The new government company is tasked with delivering £11 billion

of major improvements over the next five years which will bring significant benefits for drivers and regional economies across the country - as well as sparking a renaissance for the highways industry.



"We will be putting our customers at the forefront of everything we do"

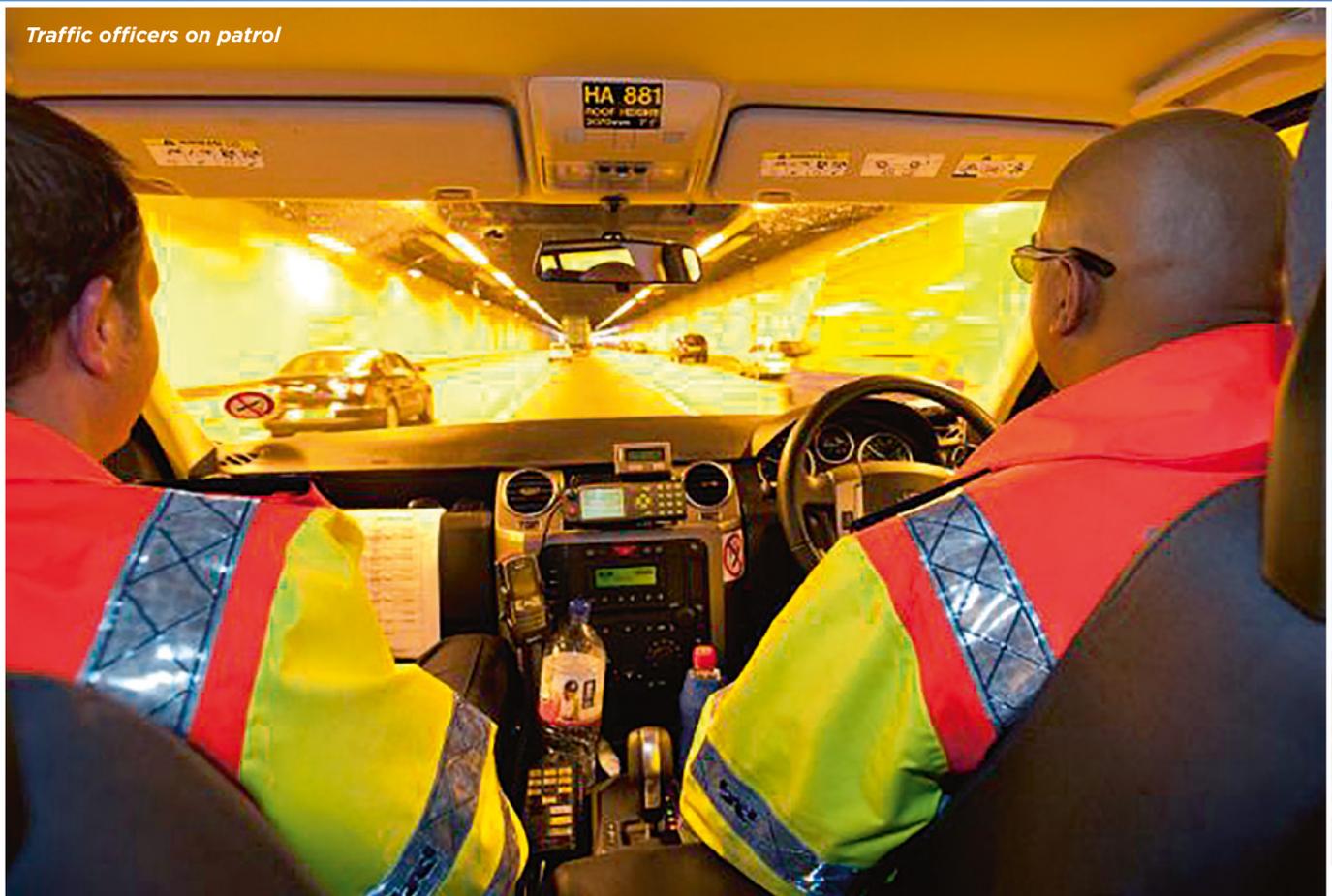
Graham Dalton

The changes are a result of a 'roads revolution' pioneered by the Department for Transport (DfT) and enacted by the Infrastructure Act 2015. It means that for the first time, and similarly to the Rail network, there will be a five-year Road Investment Strategy for England's major roads with a company set up to deliver it.

"Everyone knows that modern, well maintained infrastructure is central to a nation's economy and our strategic road network is a vital part," said Graham Dalton, the chief executive of Highways England.

"The five-year road investment strategy coupled with the flexibility of being a government company means we will be able to plan ahead and deliver on time while saving more than £1bn for the taxpayer."

Expanding on what this will mean in practice, Dalton added: *"There will be fundamental changes to the way motorways and major A roads are maintained and operated. We will be putting our customers at the forefront of everything we do, issuing better travel information before and during*

Traffic officers on patrol

their journey, improving safety across the road network and reducing the impact of roadworks.

“Highways England is the organisation that will meet this challenge. We are committed to a major road network in England that is far safer, more free-flowing and more integrated that, in turn, sits in an improved environment and supports economic growth across the country.”

A customer focus

The government-owned company will be geared towards the ethos of a commercial organisation by focusing on value for money and customer service. Crucially it will still be owned by government and therefore working on behalf of drivers and the country as a whole.

With greater focus on the first-hand experience of using roads, more emphasis will be placed on reducing the disruption caused by roadworks, clearing incidents quickly, and ensuring local communities face less commotion when schemes are delivered near their homes.

Dalton said: *“We recognise, for example, the disruption that noise can have on the lives of those living near to our network.*

“We will be carrying out substantial low noise resurfacing and other noise reduction measures at more than 1,150 locations.

“Separately our Traffic Officer Service has dealt with more than 437,000 incidents in the last year – helping to keep traffic moving and minimise disruption to our customers.

“We’re committed to improving the service by working even more so with the emergency services, helping to open roads or lanes more quickly and using new technology to remove stranded and overturned vehicles.”

Additionally, to ensure the new company is held to account for what it does, two new bodies will provide a monitor and a watchdog role: The Office of Rail and Road, formerly the Office of Rail Regulation, and Transport Focus, formerly Passenger Focus. Transport Focus will work in the interests of road users themselves while The Office of Rail and Road will monitor the actual performance of the organisation’s highways.

Spending on roads

Highways England’s Delivery Plan has since set out how it will allocate its spend in the next five years until 2020, and how it will be changed to perform

more efficiently. It also describes the major improvement schemes that are planned for construction, or to be open to traffic, between 2015 and 2020.

Meanwhile, there is an ambitious plan to improve the safety of roads by bringing 90 per cent of the network up to a three-star rating by 2020. This will be carried out partly by working with industry on emerging vehicle technology and helping to promote a road safety culture with motorists that tackles poor driver behaviour. More road safety and incident detection pilots are also to be targeted to help improve standards.

Overall, Highways England will be delivering the equivalent of almost two Olympics over the next five years – with almost twice as much spend on infrastructure as the London Olympics in 2012, which was £6.71bn.

Essential to the journey will be the ongoing introduction of more smart motorways across the country in a bid to bring further lane capacity. These new smart motorways will introduce an additional 400 new road miles to the network. Meanwhile, the organisation will continue to improve specific areas of road to support local economies, such as the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon scheme and the A63 in Hull. ●