

Raising the bar on safety



Chief highways engineer Mike Wilson tells *Highways Magazine* about Highways England's new approach to health and safety.

What's with the new approach to safety?

Safety has always been the top priority for Highways England but as a government-owned company we're taking a fresh look at what we do, bringing it together under one umbrella and setting ourselves new goals. We are creating a culture where safety is embedded deep within our daily operations and those of our supply chain.

Importantly this is also about ensuring that while we deliver the Road Investment Strategy, with £15 billion of projects across the country until 2021, we are on top of health and safety at all times and constantly improving it as we work to deliver on time.

Do you have any objectives?

To start with it's our belief that no one should be harmed when travelling or working on the strategic road network.

The government has asked us to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on the network by 40 per cent by the end of 2020.

There will also be a focus on improving the safety of our staff, such as traffic officers, and those who work within our supply chain.

So what are you going to do?

We have just published our approach to address the safety and well-being of road users, road workers and our staff. For the first time we are bringing together our activity in a holistic way, recognising the interaction between the various groups.

To improve road user safety we will be focusing on improvements in three areas; safer roads, safer people and safer vehicles.

For safer roads and people we'll be delivering the record levels of investment to modernise and maintain the network including a range of safety measures. Such as removing bottlenecks and widening junctions, upgrading barriers and verges, improving signage and delivering a new standard of A roads.

I'm proud to say we're also committed to new research and with regard to safer vehicles for example, we'll be looking more closely at how roadworthy vehicles are on the roads to see how some are falling short and what we can do to affect standards.

To make workers safer, we'll be working closely with our supply chain to improve standards and develop new ways of working. We recognise that consultants and contractors at every tier of our supply chain have a role to play in ensuring that safety is the primary consideration. We want to work with suppliers who share our ambition.

"We want to work with suppliers who share our ambition"

Mike Wilson

Tell us about some of the work taking place

An example of how we can work together to reduce road worker risk is the work that we have done to eliminate the need for road workers to cross live carriageways. Working together, we have been able to demonstrate that road users can safely negotiate roadworks with new arrangements using less temporary traffic management signs. Importantly we have removed the need for signs in the central reserve for many roadworks saving an estimated 3.7 million live lane crossings.

But we're not stopping there. We're now researching whether this technique could be safely used for the nearside when road workers need to be working in the central reservation. In this instance roadwork signs would be installed in the central reservation only and would still potentially eliminate crossings.

We're also trialling using more of our fixed infrastructure to highlight roadworks, such as gantries and remote controlled signs, instead of ground signs to further reduce the risk to road workers.

Meanwhile, we're preparing to carry out new on road trials with impact protection vehicles (IPVs) to potentially expand their use to make the road worker and user safer. One trial will involve making them more conspicuous to the road user to prevent incidents. Currently IPVs are used for the installation and removal of temporary traffic management but another trial will examine using the vehicles while roadworks are being carried out. This is just a taste of the trials we're carrying out to improve safety.

What specifically are you looking to do for the road user?

We'll be working closely with vulnerable road user groups, such as cyclists and motorcyclists, to ensure their needs are met in the design of schemes.

We'll also be improving our roads so that 90 per cent of travel will be on those with a safety rating of EuroRAP 3* or equivalent by 2020. By producing our own star rating system we'll be able to see where there's a need for improvement so we can invest appropriately. This is in the early stages but we're working to have a baseline score by March 2016. We'll also be looking at alternative ways of assessing our roads from abroad so we can harness international best practice. ➔

