

Key route networks: devolving more powers and responsibilities for locally important roads to metro mayors and their combined authorities

RoSPA's response to Department for Transport's consultation

Response to DfT consultation: Key route networks: devolving more power and responsibilities for locally important roads to metro mayors and their combined authorities

Introduction

This is the response of The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) to the Department for Transport's (DfT) consultation on key route networks and devolving more power and responsibility for locally important roads to metro mayors and their combined authorities. It has been produced following consultation with RoSPA's National Road Safety Committee. We have no objection to our response being reproduced or attributed.

The consultation seeks views on proposals to give metro mayors and their combined authorities greater decision-making powers and accountability for Key Route Networks (KRN).

The proposals include:

- providing mayors with additional highway management powers
- providing mayors with sole or concurrent highway powers over the KRN
- giving mayoral combined authorities the ability to delegate highway powers to local authorities
- providing mayors with the power to direct a local authority to deliver schemes agreed in their local transport plan
- giving mayors or constituent local authorities the ability to request responsibility for a route by order of the Transport Secretary



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Your details

Name

Rebecca Needham

Email

rneedham@rospa.com

Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

On behalf of an organisation.

Your organisation's name

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA)

Your organisation's main business activity

Accident prevention.



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Proposals

Should, in your view, mayors hold highway authority powers for managing KRNs?

RoSPA response

RoSPA agrees that mayors should hold highway authority powers for managing key route networks. This approach would be sensible because Metro mayors and Mayoral Combined Authorities have an important role to play in travel policy and safe and efficient road networks. Currently, mayors have strategic transport responsibilities but have limited powers over the most important part of their strategic transport network, their strategic roads.

Mayors need to have the highway powers necessary to deliver on their transport priorities and make the changes that are needed to ensure that transport functions well across their city region. This would enable a more integrated approach across mayoral combined authorities to the allocation of road space and new infrastructure, supporting improved traffic flow and the installation of new cycling and walking infrastructure.

As the paper states, in London, the Mayor plays a vital role in developing and applying policies to promote and encourage integrated, safe, efficient and economic transport facilities and services to, from and within London. This is not the case for England's other city regions but RoSPA believes that this is an option that should be available to every city region.

The current split of powers between mayoral combined authorities and local authorities has meant there is no clear responsibility or accountability over the key route network. This has often meant neither mayoral combined authorities nor local authorities have been able to make strategic investment decisions on the key route networks or implement changes. To optimise the efficiency and safety of our key route networks, it is important that there is clear responsibility for decision-making and management of the key route network in every city region. However, it must be ensured that there are a clearly defined set of rules about the key route network, and where the mayor's authority starts and the highways authority's ends must be clarified.

Which, if any, functions or powers do you think should be transferred to mayors, including those listed in table 1? Please include any powers you think are missing.

RoSPA response

RoSPA would agree that all functions in table one, highways maintenance, making traffic orders, road signage, managing parking and operating street works permit schemes should be transferred to mayors.

It is recognised that mayoral combined are not currently set up to be highway authorities. Therefore, where appropriate, some powers, such as highways maintenance, traffic signs and signalling and enforcement of traffic offences could be delegated to local authorities. There will need to be flexibility, decided locally, to tailor powers and functions to what works best for each city region.



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With reference to the functions listed in table 1, to what extent, do you think, transferring these functions will allow for effective management of the KRN?

RoSPA response

RoSPA agrees that transferring these functions will allow for effective management of the key route network. As the paper states, to ensure that the benefits of integrating the key route network across a city region can be realised, mayors should hold the key decision-making powers. The complexity of highways legislation means there is not a single or small group of powers that mayors could hold to become the key decision maker, meaning mayors need to assume the Highway Authority functions over their key route network.

This approach would enable a more standardised set of powers over roads, enabling all mayors to improve their key route networks. It would also mean that there would be a consistent approach to delivery and highway standards across a city region.

Please explain what impact these changes could have for the following on the KRN (congestion, air quality, bus priority and cycling and walking infrastructure)

RoSPA response

Our understanding is that the aim of the proposed approach is to allow for roads to be managed in a strategic way to improve traffic flow, reduce congestion, introduce bus priority, or cycle infrastructure across a city region.

A key feature of the proposed approach is that it will improve roads by integrating highways across a city region. This can improve traffic management, reducing congestion and therefore improving air quality.

In terms of bus priority, the proposed approach would allow for the creation of bus lanes and corridors that cross borough boundaries.

In terms of walking and cycling infrastructure, Gear Change, the Prime Minister's cycling and walking plan for England, sets out a vision to make England a great walking and cycling nation. The decisions made about key route networks have the potential to contribute to this vision. Mayoral combined authorities will have the opportunity, where main cycling and walking routes are included in the key route network, to ensure that these are well connected with public transport services, and are safe, attractive and well-maintained. In London, where this approach has been adopted, TfL has introduced dedicated infrastructure on its network, such as cycle superhighways.



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Sole and concurrent highway powers

Should, in your view, mayors solely hold any highway powers over the KRN?

RoSPA response

RoSPA agrees with the proposal that mayors should solely hold highways powers over the key route network, making it clear that they are responsible and accountable for use of those powers. This is to avoid the current situation where concurrent powers have created a barrier to mayors using these powers as they are required to get unanimous agreement from all local authorities before they can be used. However, mayoral combined authorities and local authorities should of course continue to work closely together.

If powers are held concurrently, should, in your view, the exercise of those powers be subject to the majority agreement of constituent authorities or unanimous agreement of constituent authorities?

RoSPA response

If powers are held concurrently, we believe that the exercise of those powers should be subject to the majority agreement of constituent authorities, rather than on unanimous agreement. This is because unanimous agreement can present a barrier to these powers being used. As above, mayoral combined authorities and local authorities should of course continue to work closely together.

Which, if any, highway powers should mayors hold for all roads in the city region? Please list the powers that should be transferred.

RoSPA response

RoSPA is not in a position to comment.

Please give the reasons why you think mayors should hold these powers.

RoSPA response

RoSPA is not in a position to comment.



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Ability to delegate highways powers

Which, if any, highway powers do you think should MCAs be able to delegate to local authorities?

RoSPA response

Where appropriate, MCAs should be able to delegate the below to local authorities:

- highways maintenance
- traffic signs and signalling
- enforcement of traffic offences

What, in your view, are the benefits and risks?

RoSPA response

The key benefit of delegating some activities is that mayoral combined authorities will not need to duplicate all of the operational capabilities of local authorities, who already efficiently deliver many of these functions, such as highways maintenance. Mayoral combined authorities are not set up as highways authorities, and if certain functions can be delegated to local authorities, mayoral combined authorities will not be required to build the full operational capability of a highway authority.

Unless for any reason capacity in highways authorities is reduced, RoSPA does not foresee any risks of this approach, as the local authority is most likely already performing these functions.



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Mayors to have powers to direct an LA to deliver schemes

Should, in your view, mayors have a power of direction on the KRN, or in certain circumstances on other roads?

RoSPA response

RoSPA is not in a position to comment, but believes that it may be feasible to adopt an approach similar to that used in London.

In what circumstances should such a power be used?

RoSPA response

RoSPA is not in a position to comment.

What, in your view, are the benefits and risks of using such a power?

RoSPA response

RoSPA is not in a position to comment.



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Power to change responsibility for a KRN route

Should, in your view, mayors and local authorities be able to request from the Secretary of State for Transport that a route is added or removed from the KRN?

RoSPA response

RoSPA agrees that as local areas change, areas should be able to change which routes form part of the key route network.

What, in your view, are the benefits and risks?

RoSPA response

As the paper states, the key benefit would be that where new schemes/improvements to the road network are unable to be agreed on by the MCA and its constituent members, this could solve local issues and prevent inaction.

RoSPA does not foresee any risks of this approach.



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Additional questions

What, in your opinion, would the impacts of the above proposals be on affected organisations and road users?

RoSPA response

RoSPA hopes that if the approach is successful and the road network is more efficient, this will be beneficial for all road user groups. Improved cycling and walking infrastructure will encourage people to cycle or walk for short journeys, or as part of longer journeys. Less congestion and improved air quality will also make areas in city regions much more pleasant for people to walk and cycle. Finally, better connected public transport, such as buses, may encourage people to make the modal shift from private car to public transport.

RoSPA expects that local authorities will be the organisations most affected by these proposals, although we are not in a position to comment on the ways in which they could be impacted.

What are the main issues with the way KRN currently operate in your area?

RoSPA response

RoSPA is not in a position to comment.

What other actions beyond our proposals, if any, do you think are required to overcome the issues on the KRN?

RoSPA response

RoSPA has no further comment.

Any other comments?

RoSPA response

RoSPA has no further comments to make on the consultation process, other than to thank Department for Transport for the opportunity to comment. We have no objection to our response being reproduced or attributed.

