

# Developing asset delivery

**You may have heard about the asset delivery contract that Highways England is introducing – but what is it exactly, and how will it affect the way the company operates? *Highways Magazine* put some of the key questions to Martin Hobbs, the national director who led its early stages of development**

## What is asset delivery?

Asset delivery is a completely new approach to how we deliver some areas of our work. Put simply, it is a way for us to take greater control of what we do, bringing much more responsibility in-house.

In some instances our suppliers have been making decisions about what maintenance and renewal work needs doing, choosing how best to do it and then delivering that work, with Highways England inputting into the decision making process along the way.

Under asset delivery we will be deciding what asset improvements and maintenance are needed and when. We will also be in direct control of any operational decisions, giving more consistency to how we operate creating a better customer experience.

## Why change now?

We have the biggest road investment programme in a generation to deliver and Highways England needs to operate differently to deliver its programme of work. Bringing more decision-making in-house means we can be more effective in making sure the nation gets what it needs.

## How will it affect operations?

We are bringing together colleagues from our service providers and our existing staff, which will further enhance our knowledge and skills within the business.

With the new approach, it will be Highways England staff carrying out routine inspections of our asset rather than contractors driving the network, spotting issues and making decisions about what needs to be done – for instance filling a pothole or fixing a damaged sign. A work order would then be issued for a contractor to do the job.

Another example is associated with road renewals. We will monitor when a road is getting towards the end of its life and plan the work that will be required to address this. In this way we will be in a better position to identify priorities and develop the programme to enable us to optimise our investments and deliver efficiencies. For instance, considering whether a programme of renewal work could be easier to deliver through an existing major improvement scheme that is underway or to carry out the work separately if that is deemed to be more beneficial or efficient.

Asset delivery also makes us more agile and flexible. We can adapt much more quickly to changing customer and operational needs.

## What does it mean for frontline operations?

It brings Highways England closer to the customer. Of course our traffic officers are already on that front line, but a lot of our people are not.

We will have more of our own staff making decisions on the ground, for instance, our traffic officers could take a more active role in the inspection regime across our network than they have previously. They would report back to the relevant team and a work order would then be issued for a contractor to do the job.

Having traffic officers and engineering employees working closer together will certainly make us more effective when dealing with incidents, which is very good news for our customers, too.

## Who will benefit?

We've got a huge programme of work to deliver. Asset delivery offers the chance to make sure that the important work we are doing doesn't unnecessarily have an impact on our customers. There is a high level of expectation from our customers and we are determined to maintain and even improve customer satisfaction while we deliver the work.

Small and medium companies will also benefit. In many cases larger contracts will be broken down into smaller lots, so it gives the opportunity for smaller companies to get in on the act. This also means we can tap into a rich source of ideas and innovation in these businesses.

Our people will also benefit. As well as the stability offered to those who will join us – they won't necessarily be moving on when contracts change – there will be opportunities for existing colleagues to move into new roles to develop their careers.





## What changes can we expect to see in Highways England?

Asset delivery went live in the East Midlands at the start of July and we have recently awarded two contracts that cover Cumbria and North Lancashire, and the North East. These are scheduled to go live in Spring 2017, with further contracts going live in the South West in the Summer.

We've already had people join us from the incumbent service provider in the East Midlands and the knowledge they are bringing is superb for our organisation.

And – although we'll work together in new ways – we'll continue to value the support we get from our colleagues in the supply chain, with whom we've always had good relationships.

There's always apprehension when change occurs, but while it's early days, the signs are positive. We are still learning a lot from the East Midlands and we are already working with people in the North and South West regions to make sure the transition goes as smoothly as possible.

**"In many cases larger contracts will be broken down into smaller lots, so it gives the opportunity for smaller companies to get in on the act"**

**Martin Hobbs**

## What is the biggest challenge in implementing asset delivery?

Changing the way we think as well as work – we've been doing things in a similar way for a long time.

But, once that penny drops, I've seen people's eyes light up when they see what's possible.

Asset delivery enables us to do things we haven't done before. That means real opportunities for Highways England, for our people and for road users.

