

Investing in north east roads

Here the Highways Agency outlines how major and smaller road improvement schemes will improve the road network in the north east for years to come

Free flowing and safe roads are vital for the UK economy. Whether it's lorries transporting goods, family trips to the seaside or the routes taken by commuters every day, many of these journeys take place on the country's motorways and trunk roads. This year the Highways Agency in the north east is embarking on delivering a record amount of road investment which is aimed at improving the strategic road network for drivers and building a stronger economy in the region.

The north east is currently at the beginning of a £500 million roads investment journey. Drivers will see an increased amount of roadworks taking place on the Agency's network this year and beyond, and these roadworks will bring long term benefits to the region.

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Highways Agency regional director, Vanessa Gilbert, said: *"This investment is good news for road users travelling across the north east region. The Agency is carrying out a large programme of work in order to invest in the economy and support growth in the region, and is doing so as quickly and efficiently as possible to minimise disruption to our customers. These road improvements will deliver benefits to drivers and businesses in the medium and longer term by tackling congestion, making journey times more reliable and improving safety."*

One of the major schemes beginning this summer is the Coal House to Metro Centre upgrade on the A1. At present very high volumes of traffic move on and off the A1 at closely positioned junctions, which causes very heavy congestion, leading to stationary or slow moving traffic on the A1 and the strategic links into and out of Gateshead.

Work being carried out on the A1 Leeming to Barton scheme

Widening

This scheme will see 3.98 miles of the A1 Western Bypass widened to three lanes in both directions from the Coal House junction up to the Metro Centre junction. This is an additional 3.05 miles to the original scheme planned for between Lobley Hill and Dunston. The extension has been made possible through £19m savings identified in the design phase of the original scheme, with the Department for Transport agreeing to reinvest these savings into the north east. This extended scheme aims to improve journey time reliability, increase capacity, reduce the number and severity of accidents, and support local regeneration and development plans in the Newcastle and Gateshead area.

Divisional director for major projects in the north, Jeremy Bloom, added: *"The Agency is working to an extremely tight accelerated programme to deliver the benefits of this key improvement more quickly than usual. By delivering, efficiency savings, we have also been able to provide more for less, which is positive news for people in the north east."*



The region is also benefitting from its share of the £317 million pinch point funding. In May the north east's four pinch point schemes got underway, totalling an investment of £21m. Pinch point schemes are designed to deliver smaller scale improvements to the road network that will help to stimulate growth in the local economy, relieve congestion and improve safety. Pinch point schemes are being delivered at:

- The A19/A689 Wolviston Interchange near Wynyard
- The A19/A174 Parkway junction in Middlesbrough
- The A1/A19 Seaton Burn Interchange and Fisher Lane junction in Northumberland
- The A19/A1231 Hilton Grange Interchange in Sunderland.

Resurfacing

In addition, drivers in the region will also benefit from a major programme of resurfacing work, providing smoother and safer journeys across the north east. The focus of this £22m investment is on the A1 north of Newcastle, with 11 large schemes planned to take place from April to December. Resurfacing work will also be taking place, on the A1(M) north of Durham and on the A66 and A66(M).

Just south of the region, the £380m A1 upgrade between Leeming and Barton has now started. The existing 12-mile dual carriageway is being replaced with a new three lane motorway as well as new local access roads. This route carries between 59,000 to 69,000 vehicles per day and is the only section of non-motorway on the strategic M1/A1(M) route between London and Newcastle. This project is vital for the north east economy and will improve safety and journey times between London and the major urban centres in the north of England and Scotland.

While work is taking place to deliver this investment, which will ultimately provide real and long-term benefits, the Agency recognises there will be disruption to drivers. Work is being carefully planned to minimise disruption wherever possible, including lifting as many roadworks as possible at busier times, for instance at peak holiday times when people are more likely to use the network. Drivers navigating their way through roadworks in the region can hopefully look forward to the lasting positive benefits which are being made for the region and its economy. ➔

