

The billion pound maintenance programme

Highways England, launched in April, is enthusiastic to deliver the £11 billion of investment set out by government over the next five years. In preparation for this, the network delivery and development team, responsible for maintenance and small scale improvements on England's major roads, were finishing a maintenance programme that had grown to over a billion pounds over the 2014/15 financial year. In total, 1,485 schemes were completed over 12 months. We sat down with David Brewer, director of network delivery and development at Highways England to find out more about delivering a billion pound maintenance programme in a year, the challenges over the next five years and engaging with local authorities



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David Brewer

Alec Peachey:

Your team has a lot to deliver over the next five years – you must be pleased that you're already delivering at such a pace?

A lot of people will be wondering how you've been able to deliver such an increase in work. How did you make it happen?

David Brewer:

It's been an incredibly busy year for all the teams working across the country and I'm pleased we've met the high expectations of government and our customers.

Initially we had planned to deliver £783 million over the year, but we recognised that the condition of the network meant that we needed to do more and agreed an increased budget. Through determination and hard work we were able to get a lot more done for our customers. At the close of the financial year we had delivered £1,085m of improvements including resurfacing 10 per cent of our network, an increase of 70 per cent on the year before.

For five of the last six months of the financial year we were delivering over £100m per month. It puts Highways England in a good position for delivering an ambitious programme over the next year.

It wasn't easy and it required sustained effort throughout the year but by working closely with our supply chain we were able to maximise delivery. I maintained an open dialogue with key members of the supply chain throughout the year which enabled the more strategic problems to be addressed quickly. This meant better planning and programming so that more work could be done in a shorter period of time.

An important point here, as well as the scale of delivery, is safety: while we were pushing our teams and partners to deliver more and more we were also focusing on the health, safety and wellbeing of our people. I've been out overnight and seen the work teams undertaking resurfacing and improving drainage, sometimes with traffic passing in nearby lanes, and safety has to be our top priority while work takes place. It makes me even prouder that we've been able to deliver more while accident frequency rates have fallen further.

Highways England completed 1,485 schemes in just a year

The case for more and better highways maintenance and improvements rests on the result for the economy. How do you quantify that?

Infrastructure, transport especially, supports economic growth and our road network plays a vital role in this respect. Our analysis shows that around half of all journeys on our network have a business element to them, whether freight traffic, commuters heading to work or even taxis heading to airports. Keeping traffic moving therefore has a big impact on our economic success.

On a scheme by scheme basis and from a regional perspective we do a great deal to understand how small scale improvements to our network can make a huge difference in supporting economic growth. We've delivered 100 schemes as part of our pinch point programme, addressing safety, congestion and capacity issues, which we calculate could facilitate the creation of 138,000 new homes and 280,000 jobs across the country. This makes a big difference, helping to unlock potential in cities and towns in England.

To what extent do Local Enterprise Partnerships and local councils play a role in the creation of your schemes?

Increasingly, we are working more and more with LEPs and local councils to ensure our priorities are aligned. This aligns our programme with their aspirations and results in the benefits being maximised across regions.

Our route strategies, for example, involved engaging locally from the outset to understand regional priorities. The outcomes of these strategies were fed into the Road Investment Strategy published by government and we'll be delivering schemes that meet these priorities over the next five years.

Looking ahead, you've already set out your programme for this financial year in the delivery plan – what are your priorities and what's your message to the supply chain?

That's right, we're already working on delivering for our customers over the next financial year; this includes laying 1,200 miles of new, smoother road surface and over 200,000 miles of drainage improvement and maintenance. There's a lot for us to do but we have proved that we can step up to the challenge.

Looking even further ahead, my regional teams are programming work so that we can have at least two years' worth of design work in place for future schemes and we are making a good start on delivering the improvement schemes that were announced in last year's autumn statement. This is a key benefit of having the certainty of funding provided by government and means we're better prepared.

Our supply chain plays a huge role in helping us meet our ambitious goals to deliver for our customers. We'll continue to work hand in hand over the next year to keep drivers moving and provide better, more reliable roads. ➔

CASE STUDY

Graham Hall, Hull City Council who said of the A1033 Northern Gateway: *"The Northern Gateway roundabout is one of the first things one million visitors to the UK arriving at the port see when they come to Hull. It's also a major route for hauliers and commuters, so it's important to keep traffic flowing and I welcomed this scheme which reduced congestion."*