



HOUSE OF COMMONS

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**Response to the Department for Transport's Public Consultation on
Proposals for the Creation of a Major Road Network**

Core Principles:

1. **Yes**, I welcome the core principles of the creation of the Major Road Network (MRN) which will reduce congestion and improve journey reliability. I have campaigned for such a program to ensure central government funding for local major roads that fall outside the Strategic Road Network (SRN) and welcome this scheme's broad outline. Considering the existing SRN together with major local authority roads is a welcome step, and providing a dedicated funding stream for the MRN will enable growth and development to be more effectively planned.

Defining the MRN:

2. **I agree** with the quantitative criteria outlined and their proposed application, **but only as a starting point**. It is logical to use current traffic flows to identify an initial set of roads for inclusion in the network, but attention does need to be given to the future of the network and how future growth will effect traffic flows and congestion.

West Oxfordshire and surrounding areas will experience significant growth in the coming years, and consideration must be given as to how this growth will affect the status of existing routes and the development of new routes. There should be a forward look to what the MRN for Oxfordshire (and elsewhere) will eventually look like. For Oxfordshire that data already exists, but where it does not local authorities should be encouraged to provide it.

It is illogical to plan for a traffic situation that exists now, as it will be out of date by the time roads are built. A sensible projection of future flows can be made on the basis of the WODC Local Plan. That is the housing that West Oxfordshire is expected to take, and that is the infrastructure that is required.

3. **I agree in part** with the qualitative criteria outlined and their application. I agree that the qualitative criteria must explicitly recognise the importance of linking economic centres. This is vital for the growth of our regions.

*From the Member of Parliament for the constituency of Witney in West Oxfordshire
including Bampton, Burford, Carterton, Charlbury, Chipping Norton, Eynsham, Witney and Woodstock.*



Consideration should also be given to potential multi-modal transport corridors, with the opportunity to support strategic public transport connections.

The criteria outlined for significant locations should be expanded to include, along with ports and airports, other major transport hubs and strategic employment areas, such as major military bases – for example RAF Brize Norton in West Oxfordshire.

4. **No.** The criteria proposed has not identified all sections of road I feel should be included in the MRN.

I fully welcome the inclusion of the A40, the most strategically and economically important road in West Oxfordshire, which links Witney and Oxford.

The current levels of congestion on the road are unsustainable. During school term times the average journey speed on the A40 between Cassington and Wolvercote in peak times is 17 mph, while on the worst days it can be as low as 10 mph. The Oxfordshire Strategic Traffic Model forecasts an increase in highway demand on the A40 between Witney and Oxford of between 70 and 140 movements per peak hour by 2031. Without improvements this will lead to even greater over-capacity on the road and increase the severity of the congestion. Peak journey times between Witney and Oxford could increase by around 15 minutes. This would have untold economic consequences for West Oxfordshire and, indeed, the wider Oxfordshire area.

The A40 route was ‘de-trunked’ in 2002. This has resulted in the road falling through the cracks and not receiving the significant central government funding that has been required to tackle the severe congestion on the road. With the projected growth along the A40 corridor, including the Cotswold Garden Village scheme, the need for significant capital funding for improvements to the road are all the more urgent.

It is absolutely vital for the future economic prosperity of West Oxfordshire, and the wider region, for the congestion on the A40 to be resolved. **Considering the route as part of the MRN is therefore a welcome and much-needed step.**

I do, however, have concerns over the omission of the A44 route between Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire from the proposals.

The route should be included as it forms part of the Primary Route Network and connects Oxfordshire Growth Towns along the corridor. Considering the planned housing growth in the area, and the proportion of HGVs which use the route, it must be considered a major strategic road.

I am also conscious that the volume of HGVs on this route cause significant distress to residents in both Woodstock and Chipping Norton, two historic market towns which suffer from heavy traffic flows. The inclusion of the route in the MRN could unlock funding for bypasses around both towns, which may be necessary in the coming years.



The MRN needs to concentrate on North-South traffic in West Oxfordshire as well as East-West.

5. **No.**
6. **Yes.** I agree with the proposal for how the MRN should be reviewed in future years, and this should be carried out during the development phase of each Road Investment Strategy. This would ensure that the MRN reflects the relevant data and changes to road use. It would also ensure that future work on the MRN and SRN can complement each other.

Investment Planning:

7. **Yes.** I agree with the roles outlined for local, regional and national bodies to a large extent. It is right for assessments to be made by local authorities alongside contributions from Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). These bodies are best placed to understand the local and wider regional needs.

I appreciate the need for local authorities to make submissions to the Department, complete with extensive research and assessment, and for the DfT to prioritise investment in schemes for which the business case is most compelling. However, consideration should be given to the costs local authorities will incur preparing their submissions, particularly when there is no guarantee of success, and would suggest assistance for them.

8. **Yes.** It might be necessary to review local authority compulsory purchase powers to ensure they are adequate.
9. **Yes,** I agree with the proposals to form regional groupings where no sub-national transport bodies exist. It is important to have a consistent framework and for there to be a level playing field for all areas seeking investment.
10. **Yes,** other factors should be included within the scope of the Regional Evidence Base. Housing costs should be considered and their role in generating longer commutes. This is a significant factor in West Oxfordshire where there is often a lack of affordable housing near jobs.
11. **Yes,** I agree with the role that has been outlined for Highways England. It is important to ensure integration with the SRN and, given Highways England's role in shaping this network, it is appropriate for them to have a role in the development of the MRN. Highways England will also be able to contribute significant expertise and provide valuable cost-estimate and delivery support.



Eligibility & Investment Assessment:

12. **No**, I do not agree with the cost thresholds outlined. Whilst the £20 million lower threshold seems appropriate, the upper threshold of £100 million is too restrictive, especially in light of the fact that there is a presumption that schemes would only exceed £50 million in exceptional circumstances.

It needs to be considered that many of the 'de-trunked' local authority roads have often suffered from decades of under-investment. These roads will often require significant investment – greater than the sums outlined – to alleviate congestion and improve journey reliability on a long-term basis.

The full program of necessary improvements to the A40, for example, is estimated to cost roughly £150 million.

13. **Yes**, I broadly agree with the eligibility criteria outlined. However, consideration needs to be given for funding alternative routes, which are used when congestion is high or are on formal diversion routes.

I would also suggest that the section on public transport currently in the exclusion section be reworded and moved to the eligibility section. This would provide greater clarity and a more positive message on the eligibility of public transport schemes.

14. **Yes**, I broadly agree with the investment assessment criteria outlined. Consideration should be given as to whether 'Environmental Impacts', which are currently included in the 'Reduce Congestion' section, justifies being an objective in its own right.
15. Consideration should be given as to how investment of the MRN can promote the use of technology to enable routes to be managed more intelligently.
16. West Oxfordshire's economy has long been restrained by the severe congestion on the A40. The future economic prosperity of West Oxfordshire, as well as the welfare of its residents, hinges on delivering a long-term solution to this road.

I therefore welcome and support the proposals for the creation of a MRN and am encouraged that these proposals have the potential to unlock significant funding for improvements to the road.

However, the levels of funding currently proposed are at risk of being insufficient to provide the scale of upgrade likely to be needed in the context of the level of development proposed along the A40 corridor. Serious consideration needs to be given to the cost thresholds proposed in light of the level of investment needed to deliver a full solution to roads such as the A40.



It must also be noted that the consultation does not at present identify the full extent of what I would consider the West Oxfordshire MRN, due to the omission of the A44. The network outlined in the proposals should therefore be viewed as the result of evidence at this point in time, and it is likely that it will need to be updated in the years ahead to account for the growth and development projected for West Oxfordshire.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Robert Courts".

Robert Courts MP
Member of Parliament for Witney and West Oxfordshire