

Draft correspondence to minister regarding MRN/LLM review

September 2025

Dear Minister,

I write to you on behalf of England's Economic Heartland's Board of elected leaders and cabinet members, in relation to the review your Department is undertaking into the Major Road Network and Large Local Majors (MRN and LLM) programmes.

Of the 42 schemes under consideration, seven are in the England's Economic Heartland region.

As public sector leaders, we recognise the current challenging fiscal environment and realise that difficult choices are being made by Government. We appreciate that deliverability and affordability are key in delivering the purpose of the MRN/LLM programme: supporting growth, connectivity and resilience in strategically important corridors.

However, it is concerning that years of work and investment are being compressed into a single survey response, with a very short timescale for completion over the constrained summer period.

We are concerned that the review may not adequately reflect the significant local authority investment, resource and risk put into developing early-stage business cases for the MRN/LLM programme. The process to develop business cases is complex and given that capital funding is not released until approval of the Strategic Outline Case (SOC) to support development to Outline Business Case (OBC) and beyond, it is local authorities who have taken the revenue risk associated with these early stages of the schemes.

We feel strongly that the review should acknowledge the additional costs local authorities have incurred to modify schemes to meet changing Government policy requirements; and that significant delays have been caused by Department review timescales and ministerial prioritisation decisions. Moreover, due to the over 18-month delay in DfT approving strategic outline cases, some of our local authorities have been working at-risk to develop elements of the outline business case to progress key infrastructure for unlocking economic growth in their areas.

We appreciate the DfT's support and additional training that they have provided officers. We also welcome the commitment that local authorities are now being given the opportunity to have discussions at an officer-level to provide further information in support of the review. This engagement is critical to enable us to reiterate positions on authorities' respective schemes.

Local authorities developed their schemes in good faith. Yet, the LLM/MRN process has, for some of our authorities, felt like trying to design and deliver a scheme with an ever-moving set of goalposts that generates significant additional costs, borne by the local authority, and increased time scales to keep up with changing requirements.

Moreover, local authorities have been given ambitious targets for increasing the numbers of houses built within their areas. These MRN/LLM schemes were crucial elements of supporting housing growth with the required infrastructure.

If the review ultimately decides not to progress certain schemes, it means millions of local taxpayers' money will have been wasted at a time when local authority finances are increasingly constrained. In these circumstances, we believe the review should give serious consideration to reimbursing local authorities with some of these development costs.

We would welcome the opportunity to engage with this process further and wanted to provide our feedback in the spirit of continuous improvement.