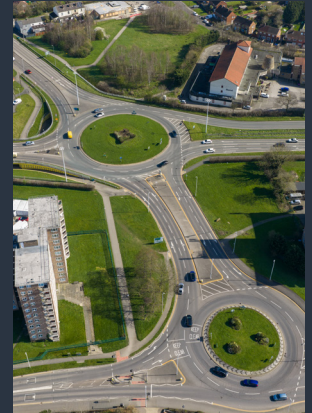


Key takeaways: Roundtable on the future of roads

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Introduction

This roundtable convened representatives from across transport, housing, construction and mobility to explore the current challenges and future direction of the UK's road network with the Minister for Local Transport. The discussion focused on how roads policy intersects with housing delivery, emerging transport modes and the realities of local infrastructure funding.

A central thread throughout was the disconnect between ambition and on-the-ground realities. While there is broad agreement that roads are critical to enabling housing growth and supporting integrated transport systems, participants highlighted persistent structural barriers and stakeholder complexity that limit effective implementation. These ranged from unclear responsibilities and lack of consistent regulation around road adoption to inconsistent funding for maintenance and a lack of long-term certainty for new mobility solutions.

The conversation also reflected the growing complexity of the roads ecosystem. Traditional highways infrastructure now sits alongside new forms of transport such as e-scooters, private hire vehicles and now autonomous vehicles, raising questions about access, regulation and fairness. With such a broad and potent future for the UK's transport system, the inability of government to maintain and improve roads will limit its scope for shaping that future.

What emerged was a clear sense that reform is needed to create a more joined-up, predictable and equitable system. The following sections summarise the key recommendations, the challenges identified and the Minister's contributions.

Key Takeaways

- **Integrate roads, housing and transport planning from the outset**

Participants stressed that roads infrastructure needs to be integrated in planning from the outset, with local highways authorities too uninformed at the planning stage. Transport and road planning should be embedded at the earliest stages, ensuring that developments are connected, accessible and functional from day one. This would support better place-making and reduce the need for costly retrofitting.
- **Provide greater certainty for emerging transport modes**

There was a strong call for clear, long-term legislation for e-scooters. The current trial-based system creates uncertainty, limiting private investment and slowing expansion. A permanent regulatory framework would unlock funding, support innovation and enable better integration with the wider transport network.
- **Ensure fair and consistent access to transport infrastructure**

Access to key infrastructure such as train stations was raised as an issue, particularly for private hire vehicles. Participants argued for a more equitable approach to access, ensuring that different transport modes can connect effectively and that policy does not inadvertently privilege one mode over another.
- **Address inefficiencies in road adoption processes**

The adoption of roads within new developments was highlighted as a recurring issue. Delays and inconsistencies in adoption can leave residents in limbo and create uncertainty for developers. Streamlining and clarifying this process would improve outcomes for all parties.
- **Move toward a more sustainable model for road maintenance**

Participants emphasised the need for a more strategic approach to maintenance, moving away from reactive fixes toward planned, preventative work. This would improve road quality over time and reduce long-term costs.
- **Strengthen coordination across sectors and stakeholders**

The discussion highlighted the fragmented nature of infrastructure delivery, with different sectors operating in silos. Greater coordination between housing developers, highway authorities, transport planners and infrastructure providers would support more coherent and effective outcomes.
- **Support investment through clearer policy signals**

Uncertainty, whether around legislation or funding, was seen as a barrier to investment, especially for emerging industries like micromobility. Clearer and more stable policy frameworks would give organisations the confidence to invest in infrastructure, vehicles and new technologies.
- **Recognise roads as part of a wider mobility ecosystem**

Participants noted that roads must accommodate a growing mix of users and technologies. Policy should reflect this by supporting integration between traditional road use and newer forms of mobility, rather than treating them separately.

Issues Raised

- **Inconsistent and unclear road adoption practices**

A lack of clarity around when and how roads are adopted by local authorities creates delays and confusion. Particularly, a lack of a standardised framework across Local Authority Districts prevents developers being able to prepare efficiently for adoption-ready levels of development. This can leave developments with unadopted infrastructure and residents uncertain about responsibility for upkeep.
- **Double charging for road maintenance in some developments**

Concerns were raised about a two-tier system where residents effectively pay twice for road maintenance, once through council tax and again through private charges. This raises fairness issues and can undermine trust in the system.
- **Underinvestment in maintenance leading to declining road quality**

Participants highlighted data suggesting that only a small proportion of roads receive maintenance each year. This points to a growing backlog and a system that is struggling to keep pace with deterioration.
- **Funding constraints within local authorities**

Local authorities were described as lacking the resources needed to maintain existing infrastructure effectively, as new adoption requires ongoing increased maintenance cost. This contributes to reactive maintenance practices and limits the ability to plan strategically.
- **Regulatory uncertainty for e-scooters and e-bikes**

The prolonged trial period for micromobility providers, without a clear long-term decision, creates a challenging environment for operators. This uncertainty restricts investment and slows the development of new mobility options.
- **Barriers to integration between transport modes**

Difficulties in accessing key nodes such as train stations limit the effectiveness of multimodal journeys. This reduces connectivity, causes accessibility impediments and undermines efforts to create seamless transport systems.
- **Fragmentation across infrastructure planning and delivery**

Participants noted that no single organisation takes a fully integrated view of infrastructure, leading to disjointed decision-making. This fragmentation makes it harder to deliver coherent, joined-up systems.
- **End-of-project infrastructure challenges in housing developments**

Even where housing developments are completed, associated roads infrastructure may lag behind or remain unresolved. This creates practical challenges for residents and can reduce the overall quality of developments - as well as incurring greater cost through maintenance charges for roads which ought to be maintained under council tax.

Minister's Contributions

- **Emphasised the importance of integrating housing and transport policy**
The Minister highlighted the government's focus on aligning housing delivery with transport infrastructure. He noted that effective integration is essential to creating well-functioning communities and supporting broader policy objectives.
- **Acknowledged the need for planning reform and cross-government working**
He pointed to ongoing collaboration with departments responsible for housing and planning, recognising that roads policy cannot be addressed in isolation and must be part of a wider reform agenda.
- **Recognised the role of roads in supporting new development**
The Minister underlined the importance of getting infrastructure right to enable housing growth, noting that roads are a critical component of successful development. He cited that the government has commissioned research from Ipsos into the ways in which Section 38 adoptions work in practice.
- **Highlighted the importance of active travel and public transport integration**
He referenced the need to ensure that road planning supports not just cars, but also public transport and active travel, helping to create more balanced and sustainable transport systems.
- **Acknowledged stakeholder concerns around delivery challenges**
The Minister engaged with the issues raised by participants, including adoption processes and infrastructure standards, indicating an awareness of the practical barriers faced on the ground.
- **Reinforced the value of stakeholder engagement**
He welcomed input from industry and practitioners, emphasising that discussions like ours are important for informing policy development and identifying workable solutions.

Conclusion

The roundtable underscored the extent to which roads policy is intertwined with some of the government's most pressing challenges, particularly housing delivery and the transition to a more integrated transport system. Yet it also revealed a system that is too often fragmented, reactive and uncertain. Issues around maintenance, adoption and regulatory clarity are not isolated problems, but symptoms of a wider lack of coordination and long-term planning.

There is, however, a clear opportunity to address these challenges. By embedding roads within a more joined-up approach to housing and transport, providing greater certainty for investment and tackling structural inefficiencies, government can unlock better outcomes for communities and the economy. The Minister's contributions suggest an openness to this agenda, but sustained focus and reform will be needed to turn intent into delivery.

We would like to thank the members of our Advisory Board for their contributions and continuing support.



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