

ADEPT Engineering Board meeting notes

April 2024

The ADEPT Engineering Board met on 12th April 2024 and welcomed speakers from National Highways. With growing emphasis nationally on developing electric vehicle charging infrastructure, the Board were advised of National Highways' roadmap to net zero by 2050. This includes the plans to future proof electricity connections at motorway service areas up and down the country using the 'Rapid Charging Fund', providing £13m to support the development of energy storage solutions to enable charger roll-out, supporting the Zero Emission HGV and Infrastructure trials – a £300m programme to test the effectiveness and cost of battery and hydrogen fuel cells and the decarbonisation of the National Highways fleet. However, National Highways flagged the challenges to achieve the objectives of the Rapid Charging Fund including the problems faced by distribution network operators in coping with the increasing demand in electricity generation and the need to get power to the right places, the regulatory framework needing reform and that battery and hydrogen power will be central to decarbonising heavier vehicles.

This was followed by a plea from the Department for Transport to provide as much fresh information as possible to support it as it seeks to secure additional funding for highway maintenance and improvement in the future. Both the Engineering Board and Asset Management Board has provided information in the past, but more is needed to fight this fiscal corner. The recent publication of the Asphalt Industry Alliance ALARM report showing that the backlog in road maintenance in 2024 had risen to £16.4bn from £14.02bn in 2023 was cited as an indication of the scale of shortfall at present and the need to address this sooner rather than later. The Network North funding on its own will not be enough to halt continuing deterioration. Linkage with the Department for Transport then continued with some discussion on the development of its Transport Adaptation Strategy. The consultation document issued by the DfT sets out what it hopes to develop, based upon feedback received, so it was concluded that the views across ADEPT would be sought, and a response duly compiled.

Karen Farquharson attended and introduced the work of the Future Highways Research Group to the Board. The intention is to bring the work of the Engineering Board and the FHRG closer together through continued attendance. Also on the agenda was an update on the Commuted Sums guidance – reported as entering the final stages of editing, prior to progressing through to going to print, a much-awaited outcome!