“Plan for Drivers” – This is it!

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Author:
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New Government plan for drivers is officially launched – by Dave Moss.

Early in October, Transport Secretary Mark Harper announced a “Plan for Drivers” – a bold and in places already controversial 30-point agenda, which Mr Harper headlined as a “plan to support people’s freedom to use their cars, and curb over-zealous enforcement measures.” He went on to say: “We’re backing drivers, and our new long-term plan will improve journeys for millions across the country, whether they’re commuting to work or college, parking up for a day trip, or charging their electric car. Our plan for drivers will support thousands of skilled jobs, and help grow the economy, sitting alongside our continued record investment in public transport and active travel – ensuring people have the freedom to travel how they want.”

According to the Transport Secretary, the measures announced fulfil the government's commitment to support families, and grow the economy, by making driving easier for Britain's 50 million car licence holders. He also feels it will help people make the switch to electric vehicles as the country continues its journey towards net zero.

The full plan includes a number of measures ranging from the novel to what some drivers might feel are actually long overdue. There are also several proposed consultations, along with ideas for work "behind the scenes", the benefits of which may only become apparent with time.

Plans for the here and now – and the near future.

The most controversial aspect of the announcements is for updating official 20mph zone guidance in England, apparently aimed at preventing inappropriate blanket use of such areas. There is also to be a new focus on the importance of local support for such limits, and as part of a new "Low Traffic Neighbourhood" review, the government will also consider how to address existing schemes that have not secured local consent.

There is to be strengthened guidance on the enforcement of moving traffic offences, such as entering yellow box junctions, to ensure consistency – and to stop drivers from being unfairly penalised. A call for evidence is also to be launched on options to restrict local authorities' ability to generate cash surpluses from traffic offences, as well as over-zealous use of traffic enforcement powers.

Some £70 million has been allocated in a bid to improve traffic flows. This includes £30 million to upgrade traffic signal systems to improve reliability, and £20 million for a 'Green Light Fund' to improve their efficiency, to better reflect changing conditions, and "get traffic flowing". Another £20 million is earmarked for deployment of more advanced traffic signal technology, making use of machine learning and AI to optimise traffic flows and balance traffic across city centres.

Official guidance is to be strengthened to ensure bus lanes operate only when buses are

actually running – and that local authorities both understand and utilise opportunities for allowing motorcycles to use those lanes.

Red flashing lights are to be permitted on breakdown vehicles, helping to protect recovery drivers by improving visibility when roadside work is under way.

Parking is to be made easier. A new “National Parking Platform” will be operational by autumn 2024, which the government predicts will end any need for multiple parking apps to be used in different places. Though no dates are mentioned, advanced technology will also be introduced to simplify parking payment, and new digitised traffic regulation orders will ultimately help drivers identify legal parking places – anywhere in the country.

Councils are to be allowed to introduce more so-called “contractor lane rental” schemes, which can reduce roadworks by incentivising utilities to avoid working on the busiest roads at the busiest times. Provisions for fining contractors where roadworks overrun will be included.

A communications campaign is to be launched, backed by enforcement, focussed on tackling inconsiderate driving, especially “lane hogs” and other inconsiderate driving on motorways.

Local councils are to receive over £100 million to increase general spending on filling potholes and other road repairs. This cash will, however, be distributed over a 10 year period. Councils are also to be allowed to roll out “noise cameras” to target unacceptable vehicle modifications.

A clampdown on roadside littering is also amongst the announcements, along with extended trials on camera enforcement of this offence, covering the strategic road network.

Key upcoming consultations.

Drivers, and indeed anyone interested in current transport matters, will be invited to contribute to various consultations on Government plans. These range from whether

allowing motorcycle access to bus lanes should be standardised, to whether local authorities operating “lane rental” schemes for carriageway repairs should use at least 50% of any surplus generated on pothole repairs or resurfacing work. A consultation is also planned on various new measures aimed at stopping unfair enforcement practices generally. Amongst the suggested changes here will be the possible removal of local authorities’ access to DVLA data to enforce traffic schemes and restrictions by camera.

Other promised consultations…

- revising guidance about the public’s right to challenge local authority parking policies;
- removing the right of uninsured drivers to claim compensation for property damage;
- measures to speed up approvals for electric vehicle chargepoint installation;
- measures expanding permitted development rights, to make private chargepoint installation cheaper and easier.

Further ahead…

Driver benefits are promised through the roll-out of a programme to explore new, low-carbon and high-tech ways of managing local road networks, supporting a transition to net zero-carbon local roads and their infrastructure. A new Road Condition Data Standard is to be developed, providing local authorities with access to new technologies, enabling them to identify and rectify road defects like potholes more easily than at present.

The Transport Secretary also believes that, in the longer term, journeys will be made smoother and quicker through “digitisation” of traffic regulation orders, which, he says, will pave the way for autonomous vehicles, as well as making life easier for motorists by ensuring sat-navs have up-to-date information on the location of parking spaces, road closures, and speed limits.

‘Zero emission’ driving

The government will review the grid connection process for EV chargepoints, with the aim of speeding things up. There is also to be dedicated, targeted support for installation of

chargepoints at schools, using existing grants.

Eligibility for EV chargepoint grants is to be widened to include cross-pavement applications, with guidance on appropriate cabling solutions, intended particularly to make EV ownership more practical for those without off-street parking spaces.

Finally, the Government says it will work with industry to “myth-bust” concerns about EVs…