

EVOLUTION OF ROAD ADMINISTRATIONS – TRAFFIC OFFICER SERVICE

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1. TRAFFIC OFFICER SERVICE

The Government's 'New Deal for Transport' published in 1998 set out the Highways Agency's change of focus to become a network operator. The Agency and the Association of Chief Police Officers, (ACPO) commissioned a review which, in its report of November 2002, indicated a strong case for the transfer of some general traffic and road management tasks away from the Police, thus allowing them to concentrate more on tackling crime, investigating collisions and enforcing the law.

The review made a number of specific recommendations:

- The development of protocols agreed with ACPO and the Highways Agency on all aspects of incident management and control on the network
- The development of a network of regional control centres and the introduction of a new HA on-road service
- A communications strategy to manage public expectations and improve Highways Agency branding in its new role
- Sufficient resources allocated to the network operator role
- The introduction of effective performance management systems, and
- Effective management of the change.

In June 2003, the Secretary of State for Transport announced the findings of the review, and committed the government to implement it. The authors of the review, a combined client/consultant team, were tasked with delivery. The objective was clear but also challenging – to introduce a completely new service within the Highways Agency.

Over the period June 2003 to October 2006, the Traffic Officer Service was established. During 2004 the Traffic Management Bill was put through Parliament, and with Royal Assent became the Traffic Management Act (2004). The Act provides Highways Agency Traffic Officers with special powers enabling them to undertake certain traffic management tasks previously carried out by the police.

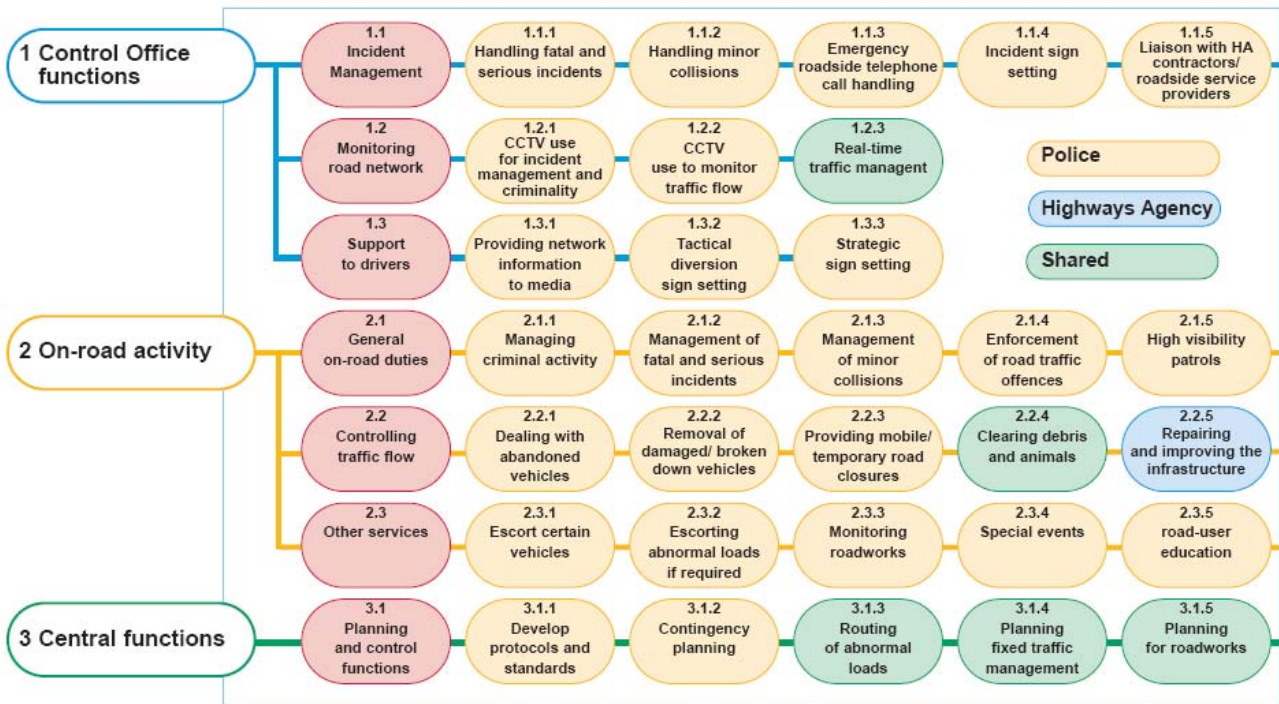
The powers include stopping traffic, closing roads, directing and diverting traffic and managing traffic at traffic surveys. Secondary legislation under the Act's powers will cover further issues such as arranging the removal of abandoned or broken-down vehicles, which are causing obstruction or are a safety hazard.

The key to establishing the Traffic Officer Service was agreement between the Highways Agency and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) that certain traffic management functions would transfer from the Police to the Agency. The review team considered which functions required the skills and powers of a police officer. Those which

did not were deemed suitable to transfer to the Agency. A small number of functions remain solely with the police, and some are shared. The review led to establishing an HA/ACPO partnership agreement set out in a document called the National Guidance Framework. The tables below (figures 1 and 2) show the transfer of functions from the police to the Agency.

1.1. Traditional Roles and Responsibilities of the Police

Figure 1 - Traditional Roles and Responsibilities



1.2. Traffic Officers Current Roles and Responsibilities

Figure 2 - Current Roles and Responsibilities



The HA and police work closely together in order to deal with incidents in the most efficient way. For example, when debris is reported to be on the carriageway, the nearest resource will attend as removing it is critical to the safety of the network. While the police and HA compliment each other they do still have distinct roles. For example, all incidents involving potential criminality, such as fatal road collisions or drivers drinking while under the influence of drugs or alcohol will be dealt with by the police. Traffic Officers still play a crucial role in police led incidents. They support the police by providing emergency coning of the scene and assist the motoring public by managing the traffic delays by routing diversions, giving regular updates of information, and in extreme circumstances can even offer emergency welfare.

Traffic Officer Service - Programme Timeline

The programme and timeline for setting up the Traffic Officer Service was a challenging one. Seven regions were created, and the service was established and functions transferred in three phases described below.

The following definition of terms adopted by the programme is helpful in assisting understanding of the programme delivery milestones.

First Service in each police area starts when their Police Control Office (PCO) migrates to the HA Regional Control Centre (RCC) and a 24/7, 365 RCC operation is in place, but potentially with reduced resources. The Traffic Officer operation is sufficient to provide a minimum two-shift day service for migrated PCO areas with on-road activity restricted to controlled environments.

Full Capability is where all resources are in place for the entire area, both within the RCC and on-road, meaning that a three-shift, 24/7/365 Traffic Officer service is deployed for the area but on-road activity may be limited, as all functions may not have yet been transferred from the police to the HA. Full capability within the region occurs when all areas have reached full capability.

Full Service only occurs in the area once all functions for which there is legislation in place have been transferred from the police to the HA. Full service within the region occurs when all areas have reached full service.

Figure 3 shows the overall timeline for the development and delivery programme for the Traffic Officer Service.

The most complicated aspect of the programme was the scheduling of the PCO migrations: 39 in total. Each region started with one PCO transferring to the RCC. As the seven regions were established, more PCOs were migrated: at one point at the rate of 1 per week. Each PCO migration required:

- Transfer of technology to the RCC
- Recruitment and training of control room and on-road staff
- Delivery of vehicles, uniforms and equipment
- Building and fitting out of Traffic Officer outstations

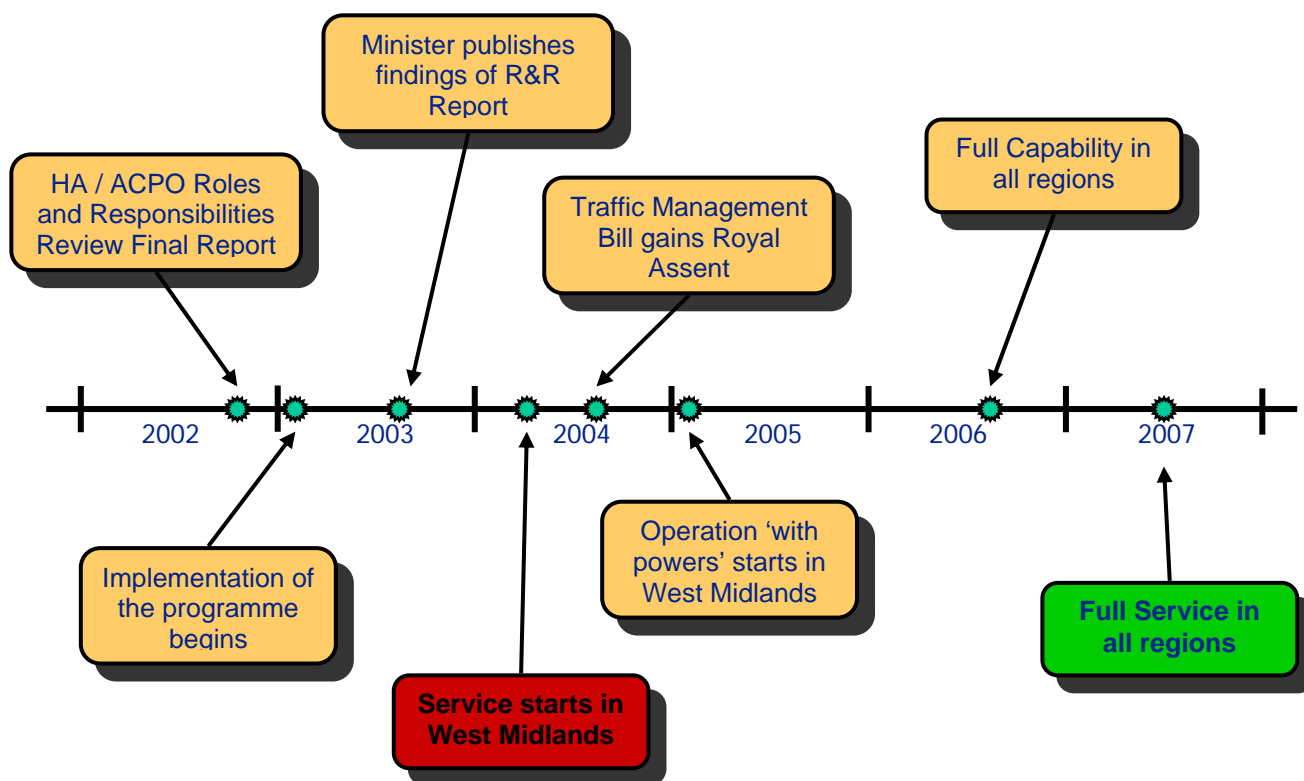


Figure 3 – Traffic Officer Service Programme Timeline

1.3. The RCC Delivery Programme

- **West Midlands** – First service commenced on 26 April 2004 - achieved on programme: Full Service from September 2005.
- **South East** - First service commenced on 1 August 2005 - achieved on programme: Full Service from November 2006.
- **North West** - First service commenced on 6 September 2005 - achieved on programme: Full Service from January 2007.
- **North East** - First service commenced on 27 September 2005 - achieved on programme: Full Service from December 2006
- **East** - First service commenced on 31 October 2005 - achieved on programme: Full Service from January 2007.
- **South West** - First service commenced on 6 December 2005 - achieved on programme: Full Service from October 2006.
- **East Midlands** - First service commenced on 21 February 2006 - achieved on programme: Full Service from October 2006.

1.4. Success factors and challenges

The objectives of the original study were to review the roles and responsibilities of the HA and the police in supporting the road network.

A high level partnership agreement was established at national level between the HA and ACPO. This agreement was delivered on a regional basis, with each region encompassing between 4 and 7 police forces. The key to this regional delivery were the seven regional partnership forums made up of representatives from the Agency and relevant police forces. The forums signed up to a Detailed Regional Operating Agreement, which translated the high level principles of the NGF into a framework for operations in the

region. Police liaison officers were appointed in each region to ensure that the transfer of functions was promoted, communicated and understood from the top of the police force to the officers patrolling the network. The joint HA/ACPO partnership was a key success factor.

1.5. Overcoming challenges - Critical Success Factors for delivery

- Cultural Change
- Timescales
- Smooth handover from Police to TOS
- Traffic Officer Service properly trained and equipped
- Public perceptions

Cultural Change

The main challenge was the cultural change required to make the concept happen. The Agency was predominately an office-based civil engineering organisation, so to take on a 24-hour customer-facing role was highly ambitious.

The approach was to have one programme that focused on establishing the Traffic Officer Service with another programme focused on integrating this service within the existing organisation. The determination and drive of key individuals within HA and the police was the defining factor in embedding the change.

Timing

As figure 3 in section 1.2 demonstrates, a considerable amount was achieved in the 4 years between the completion of the Roles and Responsibilities review in late 2003, and reaching full capability in October 2006. At one point in the delivery programme, the service went live in 23 police force areas over a seven month period. Coordinating such rapid delivery was a significant challenge for the Agency and the police forces involved.

Smooth handover from Police to TOS

Although the police were supportive, the HA had to deal with 39 police forces with their own cultural challenges. National agreements secured between the HA and ACPO laid the foundations for agreements in the seven regions. The Agency and police agreed to appoint a police liaison officer in each of the seven regions to help plan the programme and ease any tensions which occurred from time to time.

Traffic Officer Service Properly Trained and Equipped

The Agency faced challenges in delivering the right number of professionally trained staff at the right time to deliver the new HA traffic management services. The Traffic Learning centre was established to:

- Design a brand new foundation training programme for a brand new role
- Deliver foundation course training for 1500 staff within an 18 month timescale - equating to 35,000 training days
- Select trainers with the appropriate experience and attitude to deliver training. Then transfer delivery from an external to an internal capability with training being delivered by Traffic Officers with actual experience of the role

- Capture and utilise the knowledge and experience gained operationally and feeding this back into foundation training – the Traffic Learning Centre published 10 versions of foundation training throughout national rollout.
- Provide post-foundation course development to newly trained staff by providing tutors (external and internal) to give on-the-job instruction and assessment until a new recruit is able to carry out their full role unsupervised

The Traffic Learning Centre was able to overcome these challenges by working closely with regional delivery teams to co-ordinate delivery; working with a variety of diverse and experienced professionals dedicated to delivering the highest level of learning and development; developing a training evaluation strategy to assure quality; and implementing an internal tutor programme. The TLC delivered 1500 trained traffic officers enabling the Highways Agency to roll out the service to the entire network in England.

Public Perceptions

The start of operations in each Traffic Officer Service region was accompanied by a media launch for both the print and broadcast media.

As part of the communications plan for the HA Traffic Officer Service, Transport & Travel Research Ltd were commissioned to undertake quarterly surveys of users of the HA network following the introduction of Traffic Officers in each region, in order to monitor awareness of HA Traffic Officers over time.

As a result of the phased roll-out of the service, surveys have been undertaken at different times throughout the past 36 months. Baseline surveys were undertaken in each of the HA regions as the Traffic Officer Service was rolled out.

Responses to the latest survey prepared for the Agency in January 2007, which presents the views of respondents across all of the regions, show:

- Awareness of the Traffic Officer Service is good with most regions having a positive 60% or higher response. The regions with the least prior awareness of the Service were the North East and East, where 40% and 55% of respondents respectively had heard of the Traffic Officer Service before. Awareness of the Service was highest in the South West (73%).
- In all regions, respondents who had heard of the Traffic Officer Service previously most commonly stated that they had heard about the service through seeing Traffic Officers on the motorway network.
- In most regions, more than 75% of respondents recognised the Traffic Officer vehicle (when shown to them) with only the North East falling below this level.
- Overall awareness of the Highways Agency itself is good, and is highest in the West Midlands, where the Traffic Officer Service was first introduced; and lowest in the North East region.

Below is an extract taken from our National Road User Satisfaction Survey -10 April 2007

We asked respondents how important it was that there were Traffic Officers. Of the 2159 respondents that answered this question, 40% thought that it was 'very important' and 46% thought it was 'important'. Thus in total more than four-fifths (86%) of respondents thought that having a TO service is important. Less than one-fifth (14%) thought it was 'not very important' or 'not important'.

1.6. Programme Objectives

The Traffic Officer Service is expected to contribute to:

- A reduction in incident-related congestion in the areas in which the service operates
- A reduction in the overall numbers of fatal, serious and slight injuries on the motorways from debris related incidents, where the service operates.
- An overall increase of in pro-active roads policing – particularly road safety and those offences that are recordable.

The Traffic Officer Service was first established in the West Midlands (WM) region in April 2004, and experience gained here has enabled the Highways Agency to identify a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the service. These indicators will be used to measure the activities that will contribute to delivery of the Public Sector Agreement (PSA) target for journey reliability 2007/08 and to the delivery of the financial benefits of the service.

These KPI's are set around improved response and clearance times, setting accurate and timely signs and signals, answering ERT calls quickly, and focusing our attention on the routes that make the greatest contribution to the Agency's congestion reduction target. The KPI's have been established to enable us to understand whether we are setting the best targets to help us achieve the PSA reliability target.

It has been difficult to accurately measure the contribution that the Traffic Officer Service is making to wider Agency objectives, but analysis done so far indicates that the benefits predicted at the inception of the service will be realised.

In the medium term, the output measures have been defined, that will act as leading indicators of an eventual achievement of the outcome.

1.7. Benefits achieved to date

Quicker response times.

In the West Midlands (the first area to introduce the service) response times to incidents have exceeded expectations (Table 1).

Table 1: The new traffic officers are getting to and dealing with incidents quicker

Target	Achievement
Response times – 75% inside 15 minutes	92% inside 15 minutes
Clearance times – 75% inside 30 minutes	84% inside 30 minutes
Congestion – 5% reduction on 8 out of 24 routes	Achieved or exceeded on 11 routes

Source: June 2006 performance report to ministers

Reduced incident-related congestion.

In the West Midlands incident-related congestion is down by 2% and in the South-East by 3%. This puts the Agency on track to realize congestion benefits in the region of £100 million per annum.

Improved signs.

National Road User Satisfaction Surveys (summarised in Table 2) suggested that motorway users have recognised improvements in the accuracy of sign setting.

Table 2: Usefulness of messages compared with 12 months ago

	% (n= 690)
More useful	47
Less useful	3
About the same	50

Source: HA survey 2006

More arrests on the strategic road network.

The introduction of the traffic officer service has freed up police resource to focus attention on crime. Police have made improvements in intelligence-led activity (such as exploitation of Automatic Number Plate Recognition systems). In one region alone, the number of arrests made on the network has doubled in the last year – to around 1,000 per annum – and is still rising.

Encouraging signs of road safety benefits.

The number of fatal and serious collisions on the network in the last year has fallen. Although it is too early to attribute this as a statistically significant reduction, it is an encouraging sign.

Intangible benefits

The introduction of Traffic Officers has increased the number of highly visible vehicles patrolling the network. This provides reassurance to the motoring public and has doubled resources available to respond to incidents. It has also increased the number of ‘eyes’ and ‘ears’ for gathering intelligence about network conditions.

We are in the process of improving the quality of data we hold, and are developing our understanding of the complex relationships that contribute to congestion. For the first time, decision-makers can now evaluate the costs and benefits of road improvement schemes consistently.

1.8. Outcomes of the programme to develop and implement the Traffic Officer Service

A number of significant achievements have been made since the programme began:

- We have delivered our 2006/07 Business Plan target to reach full capability across the regions. This was achieved in October 2006, two months earlier than planned.
- Our high visibility on road presence gives the public confidence in our network operator role.
- The Traffic Officer Service provides a foundation upon which we can build other strategic initiatives in developing our role and the service that we offer. Active Traffic Management is a good example of this.
- We are now operating at Full Service in all regions, and are working towards fully documenting the transfer of functions with our police partners.
- We have built effective operational partnerships with the Police, allowing them to focus on their priorities, and enhancing the overall level of service to the public through greater resources being available to manage incidents.
- The Traffic Officer Service is making a major positive contribution to the development of the Agency as a network operator, and provides a valuable service to the public which has now been fully migrated from the police.
- We are aligning our performance measures with the safety and reliability PSA targets. This will allow us to develop our assessment of how the service contributes to wider Agency objectives.

1.9. Future Strategy

The Traffic Officer Service is a key contributor to the Agency's aim to be a world class strategic road network operator.

Customers First - As part of our continuing commitment to our customers we will be looking to providing vehicle removal capabilities and assessing the business case for extending the service onto other all purpose trunk roads.

Safe Roads - Further developing our engagement with other service providers and responders on our network to ensure that we manage both day to day operations and incidents to provide our customers with the best service we can on an extremely busy and hard working network.

Constantly reviewing and seeking to improve our approach to the safety of our staff, customers and other responder organisations.

Reliable Journeys - Developing and embedding performance measures for the Traffic Officer Service to create the right incentives and a clear and transparent basis on which to judge its effectiveness and efficiency.

Informed Travellers - Making the best use of technology both on road and in the control rooms to maximise the impact and effectiveness of the Traffic Officer Service.

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