



1. Home (<https://www.gov.uk/>)
 2. Regional and local government (<https://www.gov.uk/regional-and-local-government>)
 3. Local government (<https://www.gov.uk/regional-and-local-government/local-government>)
 4. Classifying roads and organising the primary route network
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-road-classification-and-the-primary-route-network>)
- Department
for Transport (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport>)

Statutory guidance

Guidance on road classification and the primary route network

Published 13 March 2012

Contents

Introduction

1. Definitions and principles
2. Primary route network
3. Road Classification

Appendix A – terminology

Annex A – Primary Destinations

Footnotes

[Print this page](#)



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Introduction

1. The classification of Britain's roads dates back to the 1920s, when it had become clear that it was necessary to have a system to help motorists identify good routes for driving. In the 1960s, the existing system was overhauled to help deal with an age of mass-motoring.
2. From April 2012, central government will be handing over greater responsibility to local highway authorities for the management of the roads classification system. While authorities had previously done the majority of the work involved in reclassifying a road, they always needed to secure the agreement of the Department for Transport. Under the new approach, authorities are allowed to exercise this power without the need for central approval.
3. Coupled with this, central government is also giving local highway authorities greater responsibility in the management of the primary route network (PRN). Again, all changes to this network previously needed to be approved by the department. Under the new approach, authorities will have greater freedom to reorganise the PRN.
4. Management of the strategic road network (SRN) remains the responsibility of the Highways Agency.
5. The government consulted on these proposals in February 2011 and issued a consultation response in December of the same year.
6. This guidance sets out how local highway authorities should approach the classification of roads and the organisation of the PRN in their own area.

1. Definitions and principles

1.1 To the user, the road network is a single entity. In order to help motorists navigate from one place to another, and to help with effective management of the network, there are three systems through which roads are organised and classified nationwide - the strategic road network, the primary route network and roads classification. Of these, the primary route network and roads classification are the focus of this guidance.

Primary route network

1.2 The primary route network (PRN) designates roads between places of traffic importance across the UK, with the aim of providing easily identifiable routes to access the whole of the country. Primary routes are marked green on most road maps, as opposed to the more common red of an ordinary A road; and road signs are green with white and yellow text.

1.3 The PRN is constructed from a series of locations (primary destinations) selected by the Department for Transport, which are then linked by roads (primary routes) selected by the local highway authority.

1.4 The PRN links together the whole of England, including areas that do not contain significant population. Outside of national parks, few places in England are more than ten miles from a primary route. A motorist making a regional or national journey should therefore be able to make all but the start and finish of their journey using the PRN should they wish.

1.5 The PRN is a devolved matter. Several primary routes run between England and Scotland or England and Wales, meaning cooperation between highways bodies across borders is required.

Primary destinations

1.6 The criteria for defining a primary destination are purposefully flexible, in order to allow the PRN to serve the whole of the country. Strict criteria based on population size or traffic levels would prevent the PRN reaching more rural corners of the country. The inclusion or exclusion of individual locations is therefore a matter of DfT discretion, taking the following factors into account:

- population – the size of the settlement
 - example Cheltenham
- attraction – the amount of traffic that will come to this location
 - example Stansted Airport
- nodes – locations that motorists are very likely to pass through in order to get to a final destination
 - example Scotch Corner
- density – the number of primary destinations in the area
 - example – as Stevenage is a primary destination, neither Letchworth Garden City nor Hitchin need to be

1.7 A primary destination does not refer to a specific point on the ground. The end-point of a primary route is likely to depend on the layout of the road network. In some cases, it may also reflect a decision about what is the most important location nearby - for example, Grimsby could refer to the town or the major port. It is for the local highway authority to decide where the primary route should end, consulting with nearby authorities and the Highways Agency where they are affected. Onward signing should be provided where appropriate.

1.8 The list of primary destinations in England can be found in Annex A. The Department for Transport is responsible for maintaining and updating the list.

Definition of a primary route

1.9 All primary routes (other than those included on the PRN because they are trunk roads^[footnote 1]) consist of an A road or sequence of A roads, forming a continuous route between two primary destinations.

1.10 The route does not need to have the same numbering between its 2 destinations, but it should be signed in a way that assists motorists in finding the way to the relevant primary destination.

1.11 A primary route will often pass through the jurisdiction of several highways authorities. In these cases, it is recognised that all authorities along the route have a stake in its successful operation. Authorities making changes to a route affecting other authorities should follow the principles laid out.

Roads classification

1.12 The system of roads classification is intended to direct motorists towards the most suitable routes for reaching their destination. It does this by identifying roads that are best suited for traffic.

1.13 All UK roads (excluding motorways) fall into the following 4 categories^[footnote 2]:

- A roads – major roads intended to provide large-scale transport links within or between areas
- B roads – roads intended to connect different areas, and to feed traffic between A roads and smaller roads on the network

- classified unnumbered – smaller roads intended to connect together unclassified roads with A and B roads, and often linking a housing estate or a village to the rest of the network. Similar to ‘minor roads’ on an Ordnance Survey map and sometimes known unofficially as C roads
- unclassified – local roads intended for local traffic. The vast majority (60%) of roads in the UK fall within this category

1.14 As originally conceived, these four classes form a hierarchy. Large volumes of traffic and traffic travelling long distances should be using higher classes of road; smaller amounts of traffic travelling at lower speeds over shorter distances should be using lower classes of road. Guidance for classifying a road is available.

1.15 Road classification uses a common system of route numbering, which is centrally administered for England and Wales by the Department for Transport. In all other respects roads classification is a devolved matter outside of England.

Strategic road network

1.16 The strategic road network (SRN) is owned by the Secretary of State for Transport, and operated on their behalf by the Highways Agency (HA). It is therefore the only road system that is defined by legal ownership, rather than policy decisions by officials. The HA acts as the highway authority.

1.17 This guidance does not cover the management of the SRN. However it should be noted that all roads on the SRN form part of the PRN.

1.18 The SRN is connected to the local road network, and the Highways Agency plays an important role in aiding navigation by signing destinations from its roads. Where a classification or PRN decision is likely to affect the SRN, the relevant authority should inform the Highways Agency.

Local highway authority responsibilities

1.19 Under the new approach, highway authorities have four responsibilities, the authority:

- will manage all local classification and PRN decisions, ensuring that the network is adequately signed
- must consult with neighbouring highway authorities (including the Highways Agency) where relevant
- must keep records and inform the National Street Gazetteer, Ordnance Survey and the department of any changes
- should be prepared to explain its decisions if challenged, in case of appeal

1.20 Within the context of these four points, authorities are free to set their own policies. Responsibility for classification decisions within an authority is generally expected to rest with the traffic manager.

1.21 The Secretary of State retains ultimate legal responsibility for roads classification and the PRN, and retains the right to intervene.

1.22 Where appropriate, authorities may organise centralised arrangements for classification or the PRN, whereby a central body or lead authority manages part or all of the classification/PRN system across a number of authorities. In such cases, the individual authorities should still ensure the responsibilities listed above are being fulfilled.

2. Primary route network

2.1 The primary route network (PRN) designates routes between major settlements and port/airports across Great Britain. Outside the national parks, few points in England are more than 10 miles from a primary route. A motorist making a regional or national journey should therefore be able to make all but the start and finish of their journey using the PRN.

2.2 The entirety of the strategic road network forms part of the PRN. For these roads, the highway authority is the Highways Agency.

2.3 Today the organisation of the PRN in Scotland and Wales is a devolved matter. It is nevertheless important that the PRN connects together to form a unified network, so cooperation remains important.

2.4 The following guidance is provided to aid local highway authorities in their decision-making, and in developing policies for managing the PRN in their area.

Responsibility

2.5 Responsibility for the PRN will be divided between central government and the local highway authority.

The:

- Department for Transport is responsible for producing and maintaining the list of primary destinations
- local highway authorities are responsible for linking primary destinations together with primary routes

2.6 It is generally expected that a primary destination should be linked to all other nearby primary destinations. In some cases, an authority may decide that there is no need for a primary route to link two destinations. In this case, the authority should be able to demonstrate either:

a) that direct traffic between the 2 locations is too low to justify a primary route

or

b) that a journey of broadly similar convenience is possible through the other sections of the PRN

2.7 Usually, there should be only one identified primary route between 2 primary destinations. The nature of the SRN may lead to situations where more than one primary route exists between two destinations, but authorities should not duplicate existing routes.

Selecting a primary route

2.8 Frequently, there is an obvious link from one primary destination to the next. Where there is a choice, the authority may consider the:

- directness of the potential routes
- standard and capacity of the potential routes
- environmental surroundings of each road

2.9 The PRN is designed to fit together as a network, and primary routes must link up to one another. If changes are made to a route, it must still form part of a coherent and sensible network. Primary routes must remain reasonably direct and viable for medium - and long - distance travel including, wherever possible, for freight traffic.

2.10 The department recognises that this will, in places, mean that primary routes will necessarily go through populated areas or sites with environmental issues. In situations where no suitable alternative route exists, we cannot envisage environmental issues in themselves being sufficient to justify changes to a primary route.

2.11 A primary route does not need to go to the heart of the primary destination, although the authority may continue the route into a town or city centre if they wish. If the primary route does not continue to the heart of the destination, an authority may wish to provide further signing to assist those for whom the destination represents the end of their journey.

As noted in chapter 1, there may be some locations where the town centre does not represent the primary destination, and signs will need to be arranged accordingly to avoid confusion for road users.

2.12 A local highway authority is responsible for any costs incurred in the creation of a new primary route, including the replacement of signs and the strengthening of bridges and other highway structures where necessary.

Consultation with affected authorities

2.13 A primary route must work as a single entity, even though it will often cross a number of jurisdictions in the process. The aim of a primary route is to ensure that traffic has a clear path between two primary destinations. Significant changes should be agreed between all of the authorities responsible for managing the primary route, to ensure consistency. In some cases, this will include the Highways Agency.

2.14 A significant change means a change that has a material impact on the route of a journey from one primary destination to another. Moving the 10 primary route to a different inter-urban road would count as a significant change, but updating the route to take account of, for example, a new junction layout would not. In some situations, the introduction of traffic restrictions (e.g. banned turns) may also constitute a significant change. Changes to a route within the primary destination itself would usually not be a significant change, unless they have a material impact on through-traffic.

2.15 Where an authority wishes to make a significant change to a primary route, they must consult the other highway authorities along the route about changes that may affect them. Where changes will have an impact on the SRN (directly or in terms of signing), or the network for the movement of abnormal loads, the authority should first consult the HA.

2.16 Unless the agreement of all affected authorities can be obtained, including the Highways Agency where appropriate, then changes to the primary route should not be made.

2.17 Where a primary route runs between England and Wales or England and Scotland, the authority should also discuss changes with the relevant local or devolved authority.

2.18 Where several authorities vest power in a single central body, the authorities may choose to allow the body to make decisions on their behalf for matters relating to primary routes. In such cases, neighbouring authorities should deal with the central body, rather than the individual authorities.

Consultation with the general public

2.19 Changes to the PRN do not require public consultation or advertisement, and local authorities do not traditionally do so. An authority is free to use such measures should they wish.

Recording primary routes

2.20 The department provides a standardised form for communicating any changes to interested parties (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-road-classification-and-the-primary-route-network>). Geoplace maintain an email account for forwarding completed forms to all interested parties, including Ordnance Survey and the department. All completed forms should be sent to roads.classification@geoplace.co.uk

Any updates to the procedure for recording routes will be found on the department's website.

2.21 The local highway authority is responsible for recording primary routes in their area which do not form part of the SRN. Any changes must be recorded in the authority's monthly update to the National Street Gazetteer in order to be valid.

2.22 For roads on the strategic road network, all changes are logged on the Trunk Road Street Gazetteer by the Highways Agency. A full picture of changes to the PRN from April 2012 would need to be combined from these 2 sources.

2.23 Elements of the PRN date back to the 1960s, and have been the responsibility of several national and regional bodies. The department recognises that neither local authorities nor central government will have comprehensive records of PRN decisions taken before 2012. Where an authority identifies a discrepancy in the treatment of a road, it may be advisable to complete a classification form to clarify the status of the road.

Maintaining primary routes

2.24 Under EU Directive 89/460/EC, the PRN must provide unrestricted access to 40 tonne vehicles. Since 1989, the Department for Transport has paid for the strengthening of all bridges and other structures on the PRN to meet this standard – a programme that is now complete. Should a local highway authority wish to alter a primary route, it should bear the obligations of this directive in mind. It is the responsibility of the authority to ensure that all infrastructure on the new primary route is of an appropriate standard.

2.25 Aside from this, there is no official maintenance standard for primary routes. However, these roads are intended to perform an important role in regional and national travel, and the department expects that these roads will be maintained in good order for all classes of vehicle traffic.

Signing the PRN

2.26 All signing of the PRN should be carried out in accordance with the DfT's traffic signs manual (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/traffic-signs-manual>) and successor documents.

Appeals

2.27 The Secretary of State retains ultimate power over the PRN. In the case of disputes over the location of a primary route, affected parties may appeal to the Department for Transport for a ruling. This applies both to 12 local authorities concerned with the actions of their neighbours, and to members of the public who are concerned about an authority's decisions.

2.28 Where there is a dispute, the department will expect interested parties to attempt to reconcile the matter through discussion at a local level. The highway authority can be expected to provide justification for its changes where:

- residents or road users are appealing against a decision of their local (highway) authority, the department would expect them to contact the authority and discuss the matter before taking forward any appeal to the department
- a neighbouring authority is appealing against a change, they should already have discussed the matter with the local authority responsible for the change (paragraphs 2.13 - 2.18). Even where the local authority has not secured the agreement of its neighbour, the neighbouring authority should still attempt to solve the matter through dialogue before involving the department

2.29 The appeals process is intended to focus primarily on procedural matters, such as where an authority has failed to properly consult neighbouring authorities before making a significant change.

2.30 If the principles outlined in paragraphs 2.8 to 2.10 of this guidance have not been followed, there may also be grounds for an appeal. However, the department recognises that it is unlikely to have a better understanding of the local road network than the local highway authority, and generally expects only to intervene in cases where the local decision is clearly unreasonable.

2.31 The appeals procedure is not intended to challenge the status of existing primary routes, and will only apply to changes after April 2012. Nor, is it intended to challenge primary routes that have been in force for more than 12 months, other than in exceptional circumstances.

2.32 The Secretary of State retains ultimate legal responsibility for the PRN. They may exercise these powers if an authority has managed or developed the PRN in its area to the significant detriment of road users or neighbouring authorities, or for other reasons of policy.

Applicability

2.33 This system will come into force on 1 April 2012. Until this point, local authorities should apply for changes directly to the department.

3. Road Classification

3.1 Road classifications primarily affect local people; particularly where a road has a moderate amount of traffic and travels through an urban area. It is also impractical for centrally-placed officials to take a view on the status of every road in England. Road classification is a responsibility that sits best with the local highway authority.

3.2 We expect that authorities will design their own policies to reflect local conditions. However, a degree of consistency is still important, and we expect authorities to consider the guidance that follows when designing that policy. It is also important that information is promptly distributed to mapping providers and to the Department for Transport.

Setting road classifications

3.3 Roads classification exists to ensure that there is a feasible, logical road network throughout the country. Roads classifications should be set to reflect the ways in which a community links to the wider world. It can also take into account the traffic management goals and road categorisation approach of the local highway authority.

3.4 There are wide disparities in the road networks in different parts of England. It is not helpful to adopt a single standard for selecting different classes of road in every part of the country. Classifications must be set in a way that reflects the road network in their local area.

3.5 Any standards must therefore be relative:

- an A road will generally be among the widest, most direct roads in an area, and will be of the greatest significance to through traffic
- A B road will still be of significance to traffic (including through traffic), but less so than an A road
- a classified unnumbered road will be of lower significance and be of primarily local importance, but will perform a more important function than an unclassified road
- an unclassified road will generally have very low significance to traffic, and be of only very local importance.

3.6 This may not appear to provide much certainty in the abstract, but when applied to an actual road network it should be reasonably clear how these principles will relate to local traffic movement.

3.7 Reasons for granting a road a higher classification can include the:

- role the road plays in letting people travel from one location to others
- volume or character of traffic that road should take
- traffic management objectives of the authority
- the standard of the road relative to other nearby roads

In the absence of clear reasons otherwise, the default state of a road is to be unclassified.

3.8 The department recognises that the pressures of connectivity will, in places, mean that A and B roads will necessarily go through populated areas or sites with environmental issues. In some cases it may be necessary to select one road from several broadly similar roads for a particular classification, in order to ensure that the overall network retains coherence.

3.9 There is no minimum capacity associated with any particular class of road, nor is there any requirement for a particular traffic management measure to be applied to a particular class of road.

3.10 Roads running through 2 or more local highway authorities should be treated in a consistent manner, and should not change classification at the boundary without a clear reason (paragraphs 3.13-3.18). Any changes to the classification of such roads must be agreed between the authorities involved, including those which cross into Wales or Scotland.

3.11 Any proposed changes that affect the SRN should be discussed with the Highways Agency.

3.12 The local highway authority will continue to be responsible for any costs incurred in changing the classification of a road, notably the replacement of signs along the road.

Consultation with affected authorities

3.13 It is important that roads classification is consistent from one authority to another. A road should not change its classification solely because of a change of jurisdiction.

3.14 When reclassifying a road across a local authority boundary, any changes will need to be agreed by both authorities. Although the formal administration can be carried out by one authority, the change should be implemented by both parties simultaneously. If agreement cannot be reached, the change should not go ahead. Where necessary, measures to avoid any confusion among motorists (e.g. recommended alternative routes for heavy vehicles) should also be put in place.

3.15 Authorities should take care not to unreasonably frustrate traffic from a neighbouring area. Before making changes to the classification of an A or B road carrying a substantial amount of traffic from one local authority area to another, the proposing authority should discuss their proposals with

the affected authority. Likewise, where there is a significant effect on flows of traffic from the strategic road network onto the local road network, the proposing authority should ensure traffic continues to flow effectively or contact the Highways Agency.

3.16 Where several authorities vest power in a single central body, the authorities may choose to pre-authorise changes within the affected area, without the need for consultation between authorities. They may also choose to give the central body responsibility for consulting with neighbouring areas.

3.17 By granting more power to local highway authorities, the department does not expect a radical change in the proportion of classified roads in a local authority area. If a local authority is considering a substantial revision to road classifications that will sharply increase the length of A roads or B roads under their control, we recommend that they contact the department beforehand.

3.18 The department will continue to monitor the length of different road categories in each local authority area for statistical reasons, and to identify significant changes that could trigger intervention on behalf of the Secretary of State.

Consultation with the general public

3.19 Changes to roads classification do not require public consultation or advertisement, and local authorities do not traditionally do so. An authority is free to use such measures should they wish.

Classification and future development

3.20 Some elements of the planning regime rely on the classification of new roads before they are built, such as for side roads orders.

3.21 These classifications, together with any attendant numberings, should exist on a provisional basis only. Changes should not be made to the National Street Gazetteer, and surrounding roads should not change their classification until the provisional road is complete. The standard form for classification changes contains an option for provisional classifications - and a copy should be kept for the authority's internal records. There is no need to inform the Ordnance Survey or any other organisation.

3.22 When a classification is brought into active use, an updated copy of the form should be prepared. The details of the change should be recorded in the National Street Gazetteer and a completed copy of the standard form should be sent to the relevant organisations as set out below.

3.23 The department is able to allocate new road numbers on a provisional basis, but will expect to be contacted again before the number enters real world use.

Signing classified roads

3.24 All signing of road classifications and numbering should be carried out in accordance with the DfT's Traffic Signs Manual and successor documents.

Road numbering

3.25 Numbers are allocated to A and B roads to aid road users when navigating the network. To avoid confusion, it is important that numbers are used in a consistent fashion. To ensure this, the Department for Transport will maintain a central register of all road numbers in England and Wales^[footnote 3]. This will avoid duplications and ensure that road numbers are not reused so quickly as to cause confusion.

3.26 A road number should apply to a single route. This route can be composed of a number of different physical roads, and can change direction at junctions. Where two roads temporarily merge together (for example the A11 and the A14 in Cambridgeshire), a number can reemerge at a later point. Authorities should avoid situations where a number 'forks' onto two distinct roads, other than at junctions, slip roads or one way systems. In all cases, the overriding aim must be to avoid confusion for the motorist.

3.27 If an authority wishes to create a newly numbered A or B road, they will need to contact the department for Transport to obtain an unused number. Before doing so, we recommend that the authority first considers whether a particular number would fit with existing numbers in the surrounding area. If an authority applies for a specific number, which they know to be available, it is likely that official approval will be a formality (provided that it fits with the traditional sectoral system of road numbering). Authorities are welcome to reserve specific numbers with the department for future use. Where a number ceases to be used, the authority should inform the department, to allow its re-use.

3.28 Some authorities choose to number their classified unnumbered roads, and can refer to them as C roads. This has no national standing, but we recognise that an authority may put in place measures to help identify a road. In the absence of a standardised national system of numbering, we advise that any local numbering is not displayed on signs.

Recording classification

3.29 The department provides a standardised form for communicating any changes in classification to interested parties (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-road-classification-and-the-primary-route-network>). Geoplace maintain an email account for forwarding completed forms to all interested parties, including Ordnance Survey and the department. All completed forms should be sent to roads.classification@geoplace.co.uk.

Any updates to the procedure for recording routes will be found on the department's website.

3.30 The local highway authority is responsible for recording classification in their area. Any changes must be included in the authority's monthly update to the National Street Gazetteer in order to be valid.

3.31 Given that road classification is an ongoing process, and classifications may date back to the 1920s, the department recognises that neither local authorities nor central government will have comprehensive records of classification decisions taken before 2012. Where an authority identifies a discrepancy in the treatment of a road, it may be advisable to complete a classification form to clarify the status of the road.

Operational questions

3.32 Authorities may want to consider whether a road's classification should be associated with a particular standard of maintenance, or any other operational consideration. This is entirely a matter for the individual authority.

3.33 Classification (as anything other than an unclassified road) may also have implications for development control, streetworks, pipelines and side roads orders. In all cases, classifying a road imparts a degree of protection, and usually means that approval for alterations must be granted either by the local authority, or by the Secretary of State.

Appeals

3.34 The Secretary of State retains ultimate power over roads classification. In the case of disputes over the classification of a road, affected parties may appeal to the Department for Transport for a ruling. This applies both to local authorities concerned with the actions of their neighbours, and to members of the public who are concerned about an authority's decisions.

3.35 Where there is a dispute, the department will expect interested parties to attempt to reconcile the matter through discussion at a local level. The highway authority can be expected to provide justification for its changes:

- where residents or road users are appealing against a decision of their local authority, the department would expect them to contact the authority and discuss the matter before taking forward any appeal to the department
- any changes to roads at the boundary of a neighbouring local authority should already have been discussed, and the support of the neighbouring authority agreed (paragraphs 3.13 - 3.18). Where a local authority is concerned that the actions of its neighbours will have a significant impact on their own situation, prior discussions should have taken place.

3.36 The appeals process is intended to focus primarily on procedural matters, such as where an authority has failed to properly consult neighbouring authorities before making a significant change.

3.37 If the principles outlined in paragraphs 3.3 to 3.12 of this guidance have not been followed, there may also be grounds for an appeal. However, the department recognises that it is unlikely to have a better understanding of the local road network than the local highway authority, and generally expects only to intervene in cases where the local decision is clearly unreasonable.

3.38 The appeals procedure is not intended to challenge the status of existing classification, and will only apply to changes after April 2012. Nor, is it intended to challenge classifications that have been in force for more than 12 months, other than in exceptional circumstances.

3.39 The Secretary of State retains ultimate legal responsibility for roads classification. They may exercise these powers if an authority has managed or developed the roads classification system in its area to the detriment of road users or neighbouring authorities; or for other reasons of policy.

Applicability

3.40 This system will come into force on 1 April 2012. Until this point, local authorities should apply for changes directly to the department.

Appendix A – terminology

Road types - official

Strategic road network (SRN) – nationally significant roads used for the distribution of goods and services, and a network for the travelling public. In legal terms, it can be defined as those roads which are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport. It is managed by the Highways Agency. Any road on the SRN is known as a trunk road.

For analytical purposes, the department has identified a framework of strategic national corridors (SNCs). Individual roads in the SNCs are known as routes of strategic national importance (RSNI).

Primary road network (PRN) – roads used for transport on a regional or county level, or for feeding in to the SRN for longer journeys. Defined as roads that provide the most satisfactory route between places of traffic importance. The PRN includes the entirety of the strategic road network. No roads

classified lower than an A road should be included in the PRN. A roads on the PRN are coloured green on most maps, as opposed to the red of ordinary A roads.

The PRN is constructed around a series of primary destinations – significant locations that are likely to attract traffic. A road on the PRN is known as a primary route.

A road – highest class of classified road, and top tier of the roads classification system. They are identified by the local highway authority (where they are not in the SRN) and approved by the Secretary of State. Each A road is given a unique identifying number from a list maintained by the Department for Transport.

All sections of the strategic road network and primary route network which are not classified as motorways are classified as A roads.

B road – second tier in the classified road system. Identified by the local highway authority and approved by the Secretary of State. Each B road is given a unique identifying number from a list maintained by central government.

Classified unnumbered road – third class of classified road, and a tier in the roads classification system. Identified by the local highway authority and approved by the Secretary of State. No number is officially associated with a classified unnumbered road, although the local highway authority is entitled to develop its own methods to identify it.

Unclassified road – fourth and lowest class of classified road in the classification system. If not stated otherwise, roads are assumed to be unclassified. No number is officially associated with an unclassified road, although the local highway authority is entitled to develop its own methods to identify it.

Special road – a road on which certain types of traffic are prohibited, under the Highways Act 1980. All motorways are Special Roads, together with some high-grade dual carriageways.

Principal road – a category of road identified in the Highways Act 1980, consisting of all A roads and motorways. This term is now largely unused except in legislation.

Secondary road – roads that are not principal roads – ie B roads, classified unnumbered roads and unclassified roads.

Road types - unofficial

C road – another term for a classified unnumbered road. Any numbering system around C roads is peculiar to the authority and is not coordinated on a national basis; as a result, we advise that it is not displayed.

D road – another term for an unclassified road. Any numbering system around.

D roads is peculiar to the authority and is not coordinated on a national basis, as a result, we advise that it is not displayed.

Major roads – generally defined as consisting of all A roads and motorways, although no consistent definition exists.

Minor roads – no consistent term exists, but can describe:

a) all roads that are not major roads b) roads on an Ordnance Survey map that perform a function similar to classified unnumbered roads

or

c) the sum total of all classified unnumbered and unclassified roads – i.e. all roads which do not have a national number associated with them

Other terms

Detrunking - the process of transferring a road from the control of the Secretary of State to a local authority.

Highways Agency (HA) – an executive agency of the Department for Transport, responsible for managing the SRN in England on behalf of the Secretary of State.

Local Highway Authority (LHA) – the owner of adopted roads in a given area, with legal obligations with regard to maintenance and management. In England, depending on the roads in question, this will be either the county council, the unitary authority, the metropolitan district council, the London borough or Transport for London. The LHA is not responsible for the SRN, as this is owned by the Secretary of State for Transport and operated by the Highways Agency (known in this context as the National Authority), which performs the functions that would elsewhere be carried out by the LHA.

Ordnance Survey – UK's national mapping agency.

National Street Gazetteer – a database of all streets in England and Wales compiled from the responsible local highway authorities.

Annex A – Primary Destinations

Arranged by ceremonial county

Bedfordshire

Bedford

Dunstable

Luton

Luton Airport

Berkshire

Bracknell

Maidenhead

Newbury

Reading

Slough

Bristol

Bristol

Buckinghamshire

Amersham

Aylesbury

Beaconsfield

High Wycombe

Milton Keynes

Cambridgeshire

Cambridge

Ely

Huntingdon

Peterborough

Wisbech

Cheshire

Chester

Congleton

Crewe

Ellesmere Port

Macclesfield

Nantwich

Northwich

Runcorn

Warrington

Widnes

Cornwall

Bodmin

Bude

Falmouth

Helston

Launceston

Liskeard

Newquay

Penzance

Redruth

St Austell

Tavistock

Truro

Wadebridge

County Durham

Bishop Auckland

Consett

Darlington

Durham

Hartlepool

Stockton

Teesside

Cumbria

Barrow-in-Furness

Carlisle

Kendal

Keswick

Kirkby Lonsdale

Penrith

Whitehaven

Windermere

Derbyshire

Ashbourne

Buxton

Chesterfield

Derby

Matlock

Devon

Barnstaple

Bideford

Exeter

Exmouth

Honiton

Okehampton

Paignton

Plymouth

Torquay

Dorset

Blandford

Bournemouth

Dorchester

Poole

Weymouth

East Riding of Yorkshire

Bridlington

Brough

Hull

Humber Bridge

East Sussex

Brighton

Eastbourne

Hastings

Lewes

Newhaven

Uckfield

Essex

Basildon

Chelmsford

Clacton

Colchester

Dartford Crossing

Harlow

Harwich

Port of Tilbury

Southend

Stansted Airport

Gloucestershire

Cheltenham

Cirencester

Gloucester

Greater London

(NB. Primary destinations in Greater London, other than Heathrow Airport, are usually only signed within the boundary of the M25)

Barking

Bexleyheath

Brent Cross

Brixton

Bromley

Central London

Clapham Junction

Croydon

Dalston

Docklands

Ealing

Enfield

Hammersmith

Harrow

Heathrow Airport

Holloway

Hounslow

Ilford

Kilburn

Kingston

Lewisham

London

Peckham

Richmond

Romford

Stratford

Sutton

The City

Uxbridge

Walthamstow

Wembley

West End

Westminster

Wimbledon

Wood Green

Woolwich

Greater Manchester

Altrincham

Ashton-under-Lyne

Bolton

Bury

Leigh

Manchester

Manchester Airport

Oldham

Rochdale

Salford

Stockport

Trafford Park

Hampshire

Andover

Basingstoke

Fareham

Petersfield

Portsmouth

Ringwood

Southampton

Winchester

Herefordshire

Hereford

Leominster

Ross-on-Wye

Hertfordshire

Hemel Hempstead

Hertford

St Albans

Stevenage

Watford

Kent

Ashford

Canterbury

Channel Tunnel

Dartford Crossing

Dover

Folkestone

Maidstone

Margate

Ramsgate

Sevenoaks

Sheerness

Thamesport

Tunbridge Wells

Lancashire

Blackburn

Blackpool

Burnley

Clitheroe

Colne

Fleetwood

Heysham

Lancaster

Morecambe

Preston

Skelmersdale

Wigan

Leicestershire

East Midlands Airport

Hinckley

Leicester

Loughborough

Market Harborough

Melton Mowbray

Lincolnshire

Boston

Gainsborough

Goole

Grantham

Grimsby

Humber Bridge

Immingham

Lincoln

Scunthorpe

Skegness

Sleaford

Spalding

Stamford

Merseyside

Birkenhead

Bootle

Garston

Huyton

Liverpool

Southport

Speke

St Helens

Wallasey

Norfolk

Cromer

Diss

Downham Market

Great Yarmouth

King's Lynn

Norwich

Swaffham

Thetford

North Yorkshire

Harrogate

Middlesbrough

Ripon

Scarborough

Scotch Corner

Selby

Stockton

Skipton

Thirsk

Whitby

York

Northamptonshire

Corby

Kettering

Northampton

Wellingborough

Northumberland

Alnwick

Ashington

Berwick-upon-Tweed

Corbridge

Hexham

Morpeth

Nottinghamshire

Mansfield

Newark

Nottingham

Worksop

Oxfordshire

Banbury

Oxford

Rutland

Oakham

Shropshire

Bridgnorth

Oswestry

Shrewsbury

Telford

Whitchurch

Somerset

Bath

Bridgwater

Frome

Glastonbury

Minehead

Shepton Mallet

Taunton

Weston-super-Mare

Yeovil

South Yorkshire

Barnsley

Doncaster

Rotherham

Sheffield

Staffordshire

Burton-upon-Trent

Cannock

Leek

Lichfield

Newcastle-under-Lyme

Rugeley

Stafford

Stoke-on-Trent

Stone

Tamworth

Uttoxeter

Suffolk

Beccles

Bury St Edmunds

Felixstowe

Ipswich

Lowestoft

Newmarket

Sudbury

Surrey

Dorking

Farnham

Guildford

Reigate

Staines

Tyne & Wear

Gateshead

Newcastle

South Shields

Sunderland

Tyne Tunnel

Tynemouth

Warwickshire

Leamington Spa

Nuneaton

Rugby

Stratford-upon-Avon

Warwick

West Midlands

Birmingham

Birmingham International Airport

Brownhills

Coventry

Dudley

Solihull

Stourbridge

Walsall

West Bromwich

Wolverhampton

West Sussex

Bognor Regis

Chichester

Crawley

East Grinstead

Gatwick Airport

Horsham

Worthing

West Yorkshire

Bradford

Dewsbury

Halifax

Huddersfield

Keighley

Leeds

Pontefract

Wakefield

Wetherby

Wiltshire

Chippenham

Marlborough

Salisbury

Swindon

Trowbridge

Warminster

Worcestershire

Bromsgrove

Evesham

Kidderminster

Redditch

Worcester

Footnotes

1. A trunk road is a road owned and operated by the Secretary of State for Transport. Trunks roads form part of the Strategic Road Network (paragraphs 1.16-1.18)
2. Motorways are classified as Special Roads – roads where certain types of traffic are prohibited. This arrangement is determined by statute, and is not covered in this consultation. Historically, there has been a distinction between principal and non-principal/secondary roads, with principal roads assumed to be A-roads or better. Although this term can be found in legislation, we aim to avoid using it when describing current policy.
3. While roads policy is a devolved matter, the English and Welsh road numbering systems are intrinsically linked. We request that Welsh LAs inform the department of any numbering changes, to help avoid confusion. Likewise, the department is able to clarify the status of any particular number for any Welsh LA, and to reserve any numbers for their use (individually or en bloc).

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