

— OFFICE OF THE — SCOTTISH ROAD WORKS COMMISSIONER

Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010

Sustainability, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Economy Statement

The Scottish Road Works Commissioner (SRWC) has a duty to report measures taken to promote and increase sustainable growth and to improve efficiency, effectiveness and economy in exercising his functions.

This is the SRWC's statement for the financial year 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025.

Functions of the Commissioner

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 details the three statutory functions that the Commissioner is required to carry out –

- a) Monitoring the carrying out of works in roads in Scotland;
- b) Promoting compliance with the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 Act and the obligations imposed under it; and
- c) Promoting the pursuit of good practice.

Efficiency, Effectiveness and Economy

The office of the Scottish Road Works Commissioner (oSRWC) is a small organisation, with 6 permanent members of staff and the Commissioner. During the financial year 2024-25, efficiency, effectiveness and economy were forefront in guiding the development of the business and corporate plans, as well as in relation to management of the office.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

The majority of the oSRWC resources are dedicated to helping the SRWC meet the statutory obligations set out by the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005. There is a significant requirement for experienced, competent staff in order to carry out the core functions of the five business areas of the office as defined within the 2024-25 business plan. In practice this means that the majority of the oSRWC's financial resource is spent on staffing.

The staff working for the Commissioner remain the main asset for the organisation. In order to focus on staff development and retention, the oSRWC has committed to on-going training opportunities for staff, on subjects such as Cyber Resilience and Records Management. As with previous years, accountancy support is still sought on an 'as required' basis from a Chartered Accountant. This has represented a significant continued saving for the organisation.

Staff work mainly from home but with regular face-to-face team meetings embedded through the year. Technology already in place has been developed with better online collaboration tools now available. Again, this technology was used to facilitate wider webinar events which offer considerable savings and efficiencies over in-person events.

The Commissioner's two recently appointed Compliance Officers have been active throughout 2024-25. This has allowed the Commissioner to inspect sites and to issue Compliance Notices. Over 2000 observations of road works sites were made during the year and three compliance notices were issued. It is considered that these activities are likely to play a positive role in the Commissioner achieving his above noted statutory functions.

Economy

As the office of a 'Significant Other Body' and independent public official, the oSRWC has the option to be based in any location. The office of the Scottish Road Works Commissioner is located in Saughton House, which is part of the Scottish Government estate. In addition to the financial benefits of co-location, the oSRWC also utilises the following shared services, benefiting from economies of scale:

- IT, payroll and pension services provided by the Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government banking services, including the cost benefits from competitive rates.
- Scottish Government meeting and conference rooms.

The office adopted Oracle Fusion for its HR function in 2024-25 in line with Scottish Government, who replaced their corporate e-HR and finance platforms with it.

The Scottish Road Works Register (SRWR) is a centralised database where organisations planning and undertaking road works in Scotland record details of their works. This central database is the key tool used by road works authorities to co-ordinate works to minimise disruption. The contract for the supply of the SRWR expired on 31 March 2025 and therefore a procurement exercise was undertaken through 2023-24 and concluded in 2024-25.

This process utilised the support and resources of Scottish Government procurement and digital specialists along with road works community stakeholders. The procurement was subject to scrutiny as a major project through the Scottish Government's Technology Assurance Framework, with support from Scottish Government Digital staff right up to contract award in July 2024.

The SRWC and community stakeholders can therefore have confidence that the associated risk with such procurement exercises has been limited as far as possible.

Sustainability

The Commissioner's primary functions are those laid out in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 and are detailed at the start of this report. The oSWRC is a small organisation with a specific remit. Whilst it is challenging to make a significant contribution to sustainable growth, the oSRWC uses all reasonable endeavours in pursuance of sustainability through management of staff and resources.

The Commissioner continues to play a lead role in administration of the revised materials trial process introduced by version 5 of the Specification for the Reinstatement of Openings in Roads (SROR). This allows information about the efficacy of new materials to be collected and shared, meaning the Commissioner can closely monitor developments and help shape best practice around use. Where new materials can be judged to offer a satisfactory alternative, these may help deliver a sustainability and climate change benefit.

The Commissioner remains committed to supporting the Highways and Utilities Committee project 'The Road to Net Zero' which aims to identify carbon emissions from road works and provide support to organisations to reduce the industry's carbon footprint.

Carbon Management

The oSRWC is accommodated within a Scottish Government building and as such, benefits from facilities provided to promote Carbon Management. In pursuance of sustainability, the staff of the oSRWC are encouraged to:

- Reduce the need to travel;
- Use the electric pool vehicle and also to use public transport and joint journeys to meetings etc;
- Choose more sustainable transport for commuting when possible;
- Use recycling facilities where available in Saughton House;
- Use recycled office materials where possible;
- Use reusable cups for beverages at meetings and within the office;

- Reduce the quantity of publications issued on paper e.g. the Annual Report, using electronic means as the prime method for distribution; Formal letters, issued by electronic mail and Invoices, issued by electronic mail.

Saughton House is situated near excellent integrated public transport links, including links to an international airport and train services. This benefits the oSRWC in terms of travel opportunities, and visitors to the SRWC who can make use of public transport.

Staff travel has increased significantly due to field deployment of the Compliance Officers; this role unavoidably requires that sites be visited. Unfortunately, it is not possible in most cases to visit such locations using public transport, meaning that car journeys are necessary. However all journeys have been undertaken using the Commissioner's leased electric vehicle. It should also be noted that the activities of the Compliance Officers are planned at a monthly meeting, meaning that effective and efficient use is made of this resource and unnecessary site visits are avoided.

All publications and correspondence are now electronic with hard copy reserved for special requests.

Pursuance of Commissioner's Functions

In undertaking the functions outlined above, the Commissioner contributes towards improved planning, co-ordination and quality of road works in Scotland. This, in turn, leads to a reduction in the disruption caused by such works and contributes towards sustainable growth within Scotland. Less disruption means less delay. Reduced delays on roads reduce carbon emissions from waiting traffic.

In 2024-25, the number of road works increased slightly against 2023-24. This was largely due to an increase in the number of works by electricity undertakers, which may be associated with decarbonisation of the economy. The number of telecoms works stabilised, suggesting that the works associated with the roll-out of fibre broadband have peaked. Updated traffic volume information for the period has not yet been published, however trends show a general increase that may show a return to, or an exceeding of pre-pandemic levels.

The Scottish Roads Research Board (SRRB) annually commissions research and development work to deliver improvements in safety, construction, operation and maintenance of the Scottish road network. The SRRB is a partnership between Transport Scotland, the Society of Chief Officers for Transportation in Scotland (SCOTS) and the Scottish Road Works Commissioner (SRWC). Improvement and innovation in this field will lead to a reduction in disruption caused by road works and deliver cost savings to roads authorities.

In 2023-24, the Commissioner submitted a bid to the SRRB to undertake a research project into the use of Ground Penetrating Radar as a mechanism to identify the location of underground services. This offers the opportunity to improve safety when excavating around underground services and, through provision of improved location information, the opportunity to reduce the length of time taken to complete road works. Reduction in the duration of road works can lead to reductions in carbon emissions, both directly and from reduced traffic congestion. There is also potential to reduce the financial costs of road works. Unfortunately whilst the bid was supported by the SRRB, there was no procurement mechanism available to the commissioner to progress the study. However the bid has been carried over for consideration for implementation in 2025-26. If this is successful, the Commissioner will report the outcome of the research project in due course.

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