



# Light Rail (UK) Group

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## Shapps 'agreed to avoid cutting CO2 from roads'

Chris Ames  
12 November 2021

**Campaigners have accused the transport secretary of undermining his own decarbonisation pledges after it emerged he secretly agreed to keep road transport emissions 'stable' – an approach that would see rising traffic cancel out lower emissions from electric vehicles.**

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Grant Shapps also sought advice from officials on how to minimise 'the chilling effect on road building' of his decision to review the National Networks National Policy Statement (NPS), which provides the planning framework for decisions on major infrastructure projects.



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Transport Action Network (TAN) is challenging Mr Shapps' decision to not suspend the NPS pending the review, in the courts. It has pointed out that planning decisions on 20 major road schemes, including the Lower Thames Crossing and the Stonehenge tunnel, are due before the review completes in 2023.

As part of its case, TAN highlighted Mr Shapps' requests for advice from officials after agreeing to the review and briefings from officials. The review itself was prompted by a legal challenge from TAN.

Although campaigners are not able to publish these documents, the Department for Transport's (DfT) legal response **is in the public domain**.

The DfT's lawyers argued that 'keeping emissions stable in the medium term despite historic increases in traffic requires substantial policy changes' - although, under the existing government policy to accelerate the uptake of lower carbon vehicles, traffic levels could indeed grow while emissions remain stable.

However, this would not meet existing pledges to cut emissions. As Mr Shapps stated in his foreword to the DfT's **Transport Decarbonisation Plan**: 'We cannot, of course, simply rely on the electrification of road transport, or believe that zero emission cars and lorries will solve all our problems, particularly for meeting our medium-term carbon reduction targets to 2035. Road traffic, even on pre-pandemic trends, was predicted to grow by 22 percent from 2015 to 2035.'

The DfT's lawyers also referenced 'the fact that following the Review Decision the Secretary of State sought further advice on "minimising the chilling effect on road building and completion by 2023"'.

They argued that this demonstrated that he had not 'already made up his mind' on whether to suspend the NPS.

Chris Todd, director of TAN, accused the DfT of 'resisting significant modal shift in order to protect its roads programme'.

He said: 'Despite the public appetite for climate action being stronger than ever, these staggering revelations show the gap between politicians' words and actions is as wide as ever.'

'By shamelessly keeping high carbon policy in force for four years after putting net zero into law, ministers are trying to oil the way for massive road building. Their addiction to asphalt knows no limits.'

Phil Goodwin, Emeritus Professor at University College London and University of the West of England, said: 'With surface transport emissions having been largely stable since 1990, it is hard to understand quite how ministers think this can continue. Scotland is seeking to cut traffic by 20% to deliver radical reductions in emissions.'

'To meet its climate targets, England is likely to require similar action, which would make increasing road capacity unnecessary. A road-building moratorium pending an independent review like Wales is now surely the right way forward.'

National Highways chief executive, Nick Harris, has said that only one project in the second road investment strategy (2020-2025) could be seen as a wholly new road - the Lower Thames Crossing, which is in the process of being brought to the delivery stage but has run into planning issues.

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