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Thank you for your letter of 27 August, on behalf of your constituent, John Shorter of 14 Whins Avenue, Sabden, about HGVs being directed on unsuitable routes by satnavs.

On 1 February 2011 the Government opened a consultation proposing to decentralise responsibility for the primary route network (PRN) and roads classification, and restating its policy on the principles of the strategic road network (SRN) and detrunking policy. This consultation included a chapter on satellite navigation, which discussed the merits of satnav devices and the problems associated with them, but stressed that neither the Department nor individual local authorities have any direct power over the routing of satnav devices.

Satnav manufacturers produce special satnav devices for lorries to provide them with routing information appropriate to their vehicle, including warning them about narrow roads and low bridges. However, one of the problems manufacturers face is that lorry drivers sometimes use a satnav device intended for an ordinary car and therefore do not receive the appropriate guidance.

Similarly, some devices require regular updates to mapping information, which is the responsibility of individual device owners, who should use devices responsibly and with a proper understanding of their limitations.

It is also important to ensure that mapping information used in satnavs is up to date. The two companies that make most of the maps in satnavs, Navteq/Nokia and Tomtom, both have the facility (through their websites) to provide feedback and offer corrections; I would recommend this as a route for your constituents to raise their concerns.

In our 2011 consultation, we said we would look for ways in which private satnav companies can work together with central and local government to manage traffic and provide better information to motorists. Following consultation, there was clear agreement among respondents that the existing situation was not ideal, but there was less certainty about a potential solution. We made clear that the most practical approach to improving the situation around satnav devices was greater data-sharing between highway authorities (including the Highways Agency) and, in particular, mapping providers.


We committed to organise a workshop between local authorities and satnav companies, and in March 2012 we hosted a Satnav Summit, run by ITS (UK) and ADEPT, to engage device manufacturers, mapping companies, local authorities and other industry organisations to discuss how they can communicate better with one another to overcome challenges and exploit opportunities presented by satnav technology. Discussions focused on how to help local authorities in directing traffic on their network, allow satnav manufacturers to provide the best and most accurate products, avoiding the provision of incorrect routing information to users and ultimately giving motorists a better service from their satnav devices.

There was a strong sense amongst participants at the Summit that cooperation and communication on all sides are vital to improving the situation around satnavs. Local authorities need to provide the right data; satnav companies need to provide the right contacts to help solve any problems; and users need to make sure that their maps are up to date and they are driving with the right equipment.

Recent developments in HGV-specific satnavs have meant that properly-equipped lorry drivers can now avoid low bridges and narrow lanes, saving time, fuel and money as well as reducing the impact on local communities. Further cooperation can help satnav companies to cut their costs and provide a better service. ITS (UK) are currently seeking to work with the freight and haulage industry to promote the use of appropriate satnav devices, designed specifically for use by HGVs, by the Industry.

ITS (UK) and ADEPT are now working together to lead further communication and cooperation between industry and local government, in taking forward the outcomes from the Summit. If you would like more information on this ongoing work, ITS (UK) may be able to provide you with more details on the actions emerging from the event and on next steps - and can be contacted via mailbox@its-uk.org.uk.

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STEPHEN HAMMOND