National Audit Office

A SHORT GUIDE

The NAO's work on the Department for Transport

Our vision is to help the nation spend wisely.

We apply the unique perspective of public audit to help Parliament and government drive lasting improvement in public services.

The National Audit Office scrutinises public spending on behalf of Parliament. The Comptroller and Auditor General, Amyas Morse, is an Officer of the House of Commons. He is the head of the National Audit Office which employs some 900 staff. He and the National Audit Office are totally independent of Government. He certifies the accounts of all Government departments and a wide range of other public sector bodies; and he has statutory authority to report to Parliament on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and other bodies have used their resources. Our work leads to savings and other efficiency gains worth many millions of pounds: £890 million in 2009-10.

Contents

This short guide is one of 17 we have produced covering our work on each major government department. It summarises our work during the last Parliament, reflecting programmes and spending before the May 2010 General Election, and as such does not reflect changes introduced by the new Government.

These guides are designed to provide Members of Parliament, and particularly select committees, with a quick and accessible overview of our recent work and how we can help with the scrutiny of government. The guides are not intended to provide an overall assessment of the departments' performance but simply to illustrate, with examples, the range of our work. Where the examples refer to specific weaknesses and recommendations, departments have in many cases taken action since to address them.

In the last year, we also supported the Transport Select Committee by preparing a Performance Briefing which gave an overview of the work and performance of the Department based on 2008-09 data. We will continue to support all select committees in 2010-11, providing further briefing on each major department and supporting specific inquiries where our expertise and perspective can add value.

introduction

about

About the Department

The Department's Responsibilities

The Department for Transport (the Department) is responsible for Government policy on transport. The Department's aim is a transport system which balances the needs of the ecomony, the environment and society.

Transport is provided by a wide variety of public and private transport operators and large numbers of private citizens travel independently using various modes of transport. All these journeys depend on an appropriate infrastructure, which is provided and funded by both public and private organisations. The Department is directly responsible for only a small part of this system. It devolves the delivery of many of the services needed to achieve its aims to a wide range of third parties including its Executive Agencies (Appendix 1) and regional, local and private sector organisations.

Where the Department spends its money

In 2008-09 the Department's net operating costs were £14.7 billion, net of £1 billion income.

Core departmental costs were £4.3 billion, with the remaining £10.4 billion distributed to other spending bodies, reflecting the devolved delivery of many of the Department's services (opposite). The £4.3 billion core departmental costs included £3.9 billion in grants paid to Network Rail.

The Department employed around 1,900 staff at a cost of £120 million.

As at March 2009 the Department had also provided financial indemnities and guarantees totalling around £27.2 billion, £26.3 billion of which related to the financial indemnity in support of Network Rail's borrowing.

Our Briefing to the Transport Select Committee[1] provides more detail on the Department's financial performance in 2008-09.
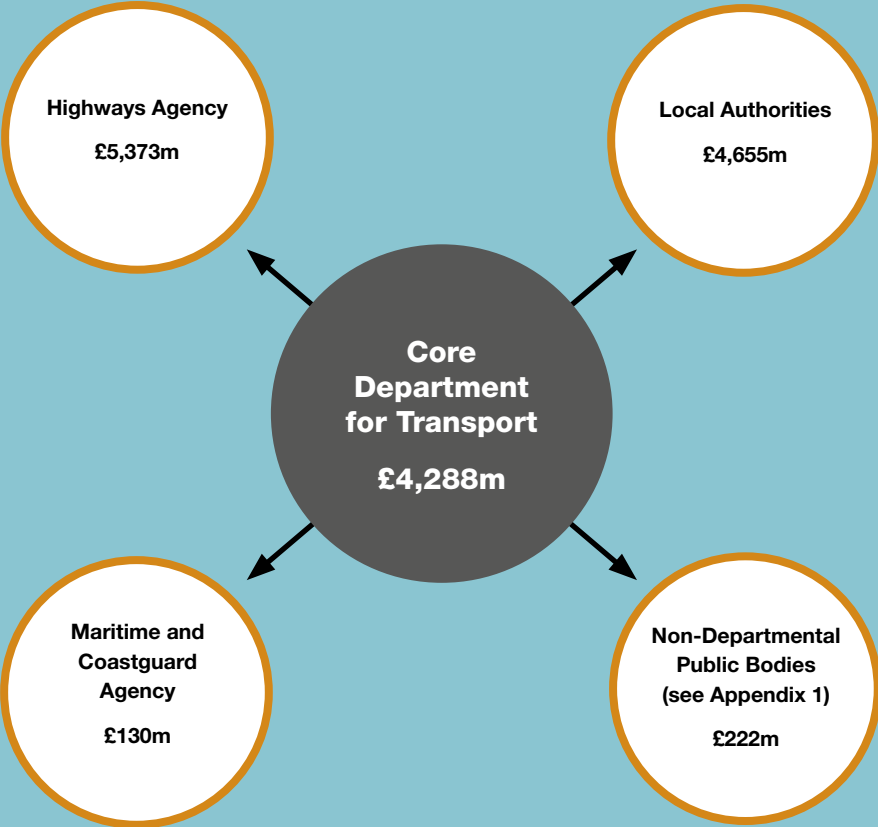
In 2008-09 the Department's operating costs were £14.7 billion, net of £1 billion income.

TO FIND OUT MORE ON OUR WORK IN THIS SECTOR VISIT WWW.NAO.ORG.UK →

1   *Performance of the Department for Transport 2008-09 – Briefing for the House of Commons Transport Select Committee*, www.nao.org.uk/publications/0910/depart_for_transport_briefing.aspx

Where the money goes (2008-09 data)

Highways Agency
£5,373m

Local Authorities
£4,655m

Core Department for Transport
£4,288m

Maritime and Coastguard Agency
£130m

Non-Departmental Public Bodies (see Appendix 1)
£222m

financial management

Financial management

The ability of departments to control costs and drive out waste requires professional financial management and reporting. In particular, departments need to be better at linking costs to services and benchmarking performance to determine whether costs are justified and value for money can be improved. To provide assurance that resources are being appropriately managed and controlled, organisations have to publish Statements on Internal Control with their annual financial statements.[2]

Financial governance and reporting

We audit the accounts of the Department, its three trading funds, four Non-Departmental Public Bodies and a number of other smaller bodies in the sector. Our audit work involves understanding the business of each organisation, examining internal controls, agreeing the accounting policies, auditing their transactions, liabilities and assets and confirming that the accounts present a true and fair view. We also consider whether the transactions of the Department are in accordance with Parliament's intentions.

In the last five years, we have given four unqualified opinions on the Department's accounts. The exception was in 2007-08 when we qualified the audit opinion in respect of a technical breach of the accounting protocols when the Department funded £3 million of spend on Crossrail from the wrong source of funding. This was an extremely unusual occurrence and was not indicative of any underlying systemic weaknesses in control. There have been no significant matters affecting our opinions on any of the other accounts in recent years.

We work with the Department and its sponsored bodies to improve their published Statements on Internal Control to ensure that they are supported by robust evidence that controls are sufficiently reliable and that they comply with Treasury guidance.

In recent years, the Department has been transferring its financial and HR services to a new shared services platform. In its latest published Statement on Internal Control for 2008-09, the Department made specific reference to weaknesses in control at its Shared Service Centre although it also noted that compensating controls had been implemented by customers of the centre. In the same statement, the Department referred to weaknesses in internal control at the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency, one of the Department's trading funds, but added that strategies had been developed to improve the situation.

In 2010, we are working with the Department to identify how its Statement on Internal Control could be developed further to increase the usefulness and transparency of reporting. We have also provided the Department's Audit Committee with our own **guidance on the Statement**.[3]

TO FIND OUT MORE ON OUR FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT WORK VISIT WWW.NAO.ORG.UK →

2   *NAO Strategy 2010-11 to 2012-13*, www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/nao_strategy_2010-11_to_2012-1.aspx

3   *The Statement on Internal Control: A Guide for Audit Committees*, www.nao.org.uk/guidance__good_practice/audit_of_financial_statements.aspx

Efficiency

We are undertaking a programme of work to validate the value for money savings reported by major government departments between 2008-09 to 2010-11.

The Department had an ongoing programme of efficiency savings at the time of the May 2010 General Election, which involved efficiency savings of £90 million a year, based on streamlining back office functions, reducing spending on consultancies, marketing and communications, freezing senior civil service salaries and reducing days lost to sickness across the Department.

We reported in December 2009 on the Department's reported **cash releasing savings**[4] of £892 million as at 31 March 2009. We found that the basis for claimed savings totalling £387 million (43 per cent) was sound but there was some uncertainty in one or more areas for £198 million (23 per cent). We had significant concerns over £307 million (34 per cent) of the claimed savings. We concluded that:

'elements of the Department's governance arrangements for the programme are good but that the Department's lack of control over and visibility of third party grant recipients reduces it's ability to gain or provide assurance on savings reported in these areas. Our areas of concern with the savings reported mainly relate to the calculation of baselines, rather than the governance arrangements.'

In June 2007, we reported on the **management of staff sickness absences**[5] in the Department and its agencies and concluded that:

'Although some parts of the Department … report average levels of sickness absence comparable to the best performing similar organisations in both the public and private sectors, all businesses could do more in at least some respects to manage sickness absence.'

Since our report, the Department has made changes which reflect our recommendations, driving a programme of improvement and securing a downward trend in sickness absence rates from 10.5 days per full time equivalent employee in 2005 to 8.9 days in 2008.

The NAO also produces a wide range of cross-cutting work that considers aspects of efficiency across government (Appendix 3).

TO FIND OUT MORE ON OUR WORK ON EFFICIENCY VISIT WWW.NAO.ORG.UK

4   *Independent Reviews of reported CSR07 Value for Money savings*, www.nao.org.uk/publications/0910/independent_reviews_of_vfm_sav.aspx

5   *The management of staff sickness absence in the Department for Transport and its agencies,* www.nao.org.uk/publications/0607/staff_sickness_in_the_dft.aspx

information

Use of information

The life blood of a successful organisation is the quality of information on which it makes decisions and monitors and assesses performance. Poor quality information leads to inefficiency and waste and can result in excess or unnecessary costs. Departments need reliable information on which to design and deliver services and monitor quality, be confident about their productivity, and drive continuous improvement.[6]

Testing the reliability of performance data across government

We carry out work across government to test the systems used by departments to report on their performance. This work provides assurance to Parliament and the public about whether these systems are adequate, and supports better performance management by Government.

Under the previous Government, Public Service Agreements (PSAs) were the agreements between the Treasury and individual departments which set out priority areas for the Government's work and against which the departments reported their performance. For the period 2008-2011, 30 PSAs were used by departments to measure and report progress, each underpinned by several indicators.

In October 2009 we published our **Fifth Validation Compendium Report,**[7] which reviewed data systems underpinning 13 of the Government's PSAs:

'... the slow progress being made by some government departments in achieving better quality information about their own performance is a matter for concern. The NAO has found that one third of the PSA data systems used by departments have weaknesses and just over a tenth remain unsatisfactory.'

Our Sixth Compendium Report, for PSAs across the whole of government, will be published shortly.

The Treasury announced in June 2010 that it had ended the system of Public Service Agreements and that in future departmental business plans would include the data the public can use to hold departments to account.[8] We will continue to apply the lessons from our work validating the PSA data systems when looking at Government's performance data in future.

TO FIND OUT MORE ON OUR PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT WORK VISIT WWW.NAO.ORG.UK →

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6 *NAO Strategy 2010-11 to 2012-13*, www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/nao_strategy_2010-11_to_2012-1.aspx

7 *Measuring Up: How good are the Government's data systems for monitoring performance against Public Service Agreements?* www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/5th_validation_report.aspx

8 *HM Treasury: The Spending Review framework*, June 2010 (paragraph 2.7).

Use of information by the Department

The Department for Transport had lead responsibility for PSA 5 to 'Deliver reliable and efficient transport networks that support economic growth'. Our **June 2010 report**[9] looked at the Department's data systems to support PSA 5. We concluded that three of the four data systems were fit for purpose but the remaining one (for the level of capacity and crowding on the rail network) was not fit for the purpose of reliably measuring and reporting performance.

We also provided **Briefing to the Transport Select Committee**[10] in December 2009, which covered the Department's assessment of its progress against its PSA and other objectives. The most recent public statement by the Department on progress against its PSA and other performance indicators was in its 2009 Autumn Performance report.[11]

In May 2009, we reported on an example of how the Department uses information in developing strategy as part of our report, **Improving road safety for pedestrians and cyclists in Great Britain**,[12] which found that:

'Through its research programme, [the Department] has developed a good understanding of which pedestrians and cyclists are most at risk and where and when accidents occur, and provided evidence of the effectiveness of engineering solutions in reducing the incidence and severity of casualties … But evaluation of the lessons from innovative road safety projects in some areas could be better.'

Similarly, we have reported on how the Department's agencies use data to manage their businesses and target activity. In our February 2009 report on how the **Maritime and Coastguard Agency**[13] had responded to growth in the UK registered merchant fleet, we noted that the different data systems to which the Agency had access were poorly integrated and that:

'it is important that the Agency uses all available information to assess risk and target resources effectively.'

More positively, in reporting in January 2008 on the **introduction of electronic services**[14] by the Department's driver, vehicle and operator agencies, we found that:

'The services have also resulted in improved and more timely data, better management information and the computer infrastructure necessary for future business modernisation.'

9   *Public Service Agreement data systems reviews 2010,* www.nao.org.uk/PSA-validation-2010
10 *Performance of the Department for Transport 2008-09 – Briefing for the House of Commons Transport Select Committee,* www.nao.org.uk/publications/0910/depart_for_transport_briefing.aspx
11 *Department for Transport: Autumn Performance Report 2009.*
12 *Department for Transport: Improving road safety for pedestrians and cyclists in Great Britain,* www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/improving_road_safety_for_ped.aspx
13 *The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's response to growth in the UK merchant fleet,* www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/maritime_and_coastguard_agency.aspx
14 *Department for Transport: Electronic service delivery in the driver, vehicle and operator agencies in Great Britain,* www.nao.org.uk/publications/0708/electronic_service_delivery_in.aspx

delivery

Service delivery

Public services are different in the way they are delivered but their quality and cost effectiveness depends on a number of common minimum requirements. For example, service delivery requires sound programme and project management, strong commercial skills, effective IT enabled business change, and a real understanding of customer needs. Many of our reports to Parliament cover these issues. We summarise below some of this work, organised by key areas of the Department's business.[15]

The focus of our reports reflects the Department's reliance on a wide range of third parties including its Executive Agencies and regional, local and private sector organisations to deliver many of the services necessary to achieve its transport objectives across all sectors.

Rail

We have reported on various aspects of the effectiveness of the Department's relationships with train operating companies. For example, our October 2008 report, **Letting Rail Franchises 2005-2007**,[16] found that:

'The Department's approach to rail franchising produces generally well thought through service specifications and generates keen bidding competition. This approach has resulted in better value for money for the taxpayer on the eight franchises let since the Department took over from the Strategic Rail Authority.'

Delivery through third parties exposes the Department to particular risks. Our June 2009 report, **The failure of Metronet**,[17] examined the Department's management of risk associated with the project. We concluded that:

'The Department had few formal levers to influence outcomes as it was constrained by devolved oversight arrangements and was not itself a party to the contracts. Instead, it relied on other parties whose ability to identify risks was hampered by the poor quality of information available from Metronet. The fact that these other parties did not mitigate the risks effectively exposed the Department to major residual risks which it had few levers to manage. As a result, the taxpayer was not effectively protected.

TO READ MORE OF OUR REPORTS ON THE DEPARTMENT VISIT WWW.NAO.ORG.UK →

15 *NAO Strategy 2010-11 to 2012-13*, www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/nao_strategy_2010-11_to_2012-1.aspx
16 *Department for Transport: Letting Rail Franchises 2005-2007,* www.nao.org.uk/publications/0708/letting_rail_franchises.aspx
17 *Department for Transport: The failure of Metronet,* www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/the_failure_of_metronet.aspx

Roads

We have reported on the Highways Agency's management of projects to build, improve and maintain England's network of motorways and trunk roads. For example, our 2007 report, **Estimating and monitoring the costs of building roads in England,**[18] noted that the Agency was taking action to improve its estimating processes, and the Department to improve its review of proposals put forward by local authorities, but that:

'There is scope to further tighten procedures by improving 'intelligent buyer' skills through better evaluation of time and cost variances on completed schemes and dissemination of lessons learned.'

We also reported in October 2009 on the Highways Agency's management of a series of single contractor arrangements to **maintain the strategic road network**[19] in England. We concluded that:

'The contracts offer the potential to secure value for money by providing visibility of costs and the ability to allocate risk appropriately… But costs have increased, for both routine and planned maintenance. The Agency has few quantity surveyors and has lost engineers whose skills are needed for effective contract management.'

In our January 2008 report we examined the **Department's driver, vehicle and operator agencies' investment in making services available electronically,**[20] including booking driving tests and buying car tax. As a result of the investments, we found that services are:

'… easier and quicker for customers to access and less burdensome to use. After taking account of the development cost, the services should also lead to savings of at least £33 million but to achieve these, take-up must increase and some aspects of the services must improve.'

We reported in May 2009 on whether the Department is **improving road safety for pedestrians and cyclists in Great Britain**.[21] We found that it relies on other organisations such as local highway authorities to improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists and other road users but that it did not have an explicit strategy for working with them.

Regulation

Two of our recent reports looked at how effectively some of the Department's Executive Agencies regulate transport operators within their respective sectors. On the response of the **Maritime and Coastguard Agency to growth in the UK merchant fleet,**[22] we reported in February 2009 that, as the fleet increased, the Agency:

'Tsed its staff resources more efficiently. Until recently it had met its targets for inspections and its plans for surveys, but it is now struggling to meet its inspection targets.'

And that:

'The Agency has maintained the quality of the UK flag in terms of the accident rate for UK merchant vessels and the proportion detained overseas because of shortcomings relative to international standards. But its quality advantage in its main trading area – the North Atlantic – has been eroded as other flags have improved and overseas inspectors are finding more defects on UK flagged vessels.'

Our January 2010 report on the **Vehicle and Operator Services Agency**[23] found that while the Agency successfully meets the requirements placed upon it for enforcing regulations against commercial vehicles and has succeeded in increasing the number of dangerous commercial vehicles and drivers it removes from the roads:

'The Agency could deliver significantly better value for money through refining its systems for scoring risk and its targets and deploying staff so as to make better use of its resources.'

18   *Department for Transport: Estimating and monitoring the costs of building roads in England,* www.nao.org.uk/publications/0607/department_for_transport.aspx
19   *Highways Agency: Contracting for Highways Maintenance,* www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/highways_maintenance.aspx
20   *Department for Transport: Electronic service delivery in the driver, vehicle and operator agencies in Great Britain,* www.nao.org.uk/publications/0708/electronic_service_delivery_in.aspx
21   *Department for Transport: Improving road safety for pedestrians and cyclists in Great Britain,* www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/improving_road_safety_for_ped.aspx
22   *The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's response to growth in the UK merchant fleet,* www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/maritime_and_coastguard_agency.aspx
23   *Vehicle and Operator Services Agency: Enforcement of regulations on commercial vehicles,* www.nao.org.uk/publications/0910/commercial_vehicles.aspx

Appendices

1 The Department's sponsored bodies

Entities within the Departmental boundary and reported as part of the Departmental Resource Account

Executive Agencies

Highways Agency

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Government Car and Despatch Agency

Vehicle Certification Agency

Advisory Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs)

Commission for Integrated Transport

Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee

Executive NDPBs

Railway Heritage Committee

Entities not reported as part of the Departmental Resource account, which publish their own accounts

Tribunal NDPBs

Traffic Commissioners and Licensing Authorities (Traffic Areas) – This entity is reported within the accounts of the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency

Executive NDPBs

British Transport Police

Passenger Focus

Renewable Fuels Agency

Trading Funds

Driving Standards Agency

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Vehicle and Operator Services Agency

Entities not reported as part of the Departmental Resource account, which publish their own accounts *continued*

Public corporations

Aberdeen Harbour Board

Civil Aviation Authority

Dover Harbour Board

General Lighthouse Fund, incorporating:

- Commissioner for Irish Lights;
- Northern Lighthouse Board (also recognised as an Executive NDPB); and
- Trinity House Lighthouse Service (also recognised as an Executive NDPB).

Milford Haven Port Authority

Poole Harbour Commissioners

Port of London Authority

Port of Tyne Authority

Shoreham Port Authority

Other entities

British Railways Board (Residuary) Limited

Channel Tunnel Rail Link Complaints Commissioner

Cross London Rail Links Limited

High Speed 2 (HS2) Limited

London and Continental Railways Limited

London and Continental Railways Finance PLC

Channel Tunnel Section 1 Finance PLC

Marine and Aviation Insurance (War Risks) Fund

NATS Holdings Limited

Network Rail Limited

Office of the PPP Arbiter

SRA Investments Company Limited

Directly Operated Railways Limited

2 Reports by the National Audit Office on the transport sector since 2005

			Parliamentary Session
8 January 2010	Vehicle and Operator Services Agency: Enforcement of regulations on commercial vehicles	HC 210	2009-2010
16 October 2009	Highways Agency: Contracting for Highways Maintenance	HC 959	2008-2009
5 June 2009	Department for Transport: The failure of Metronet	HC 512	2008-2009
8 May 2009	Department for Transport: Improving road safety for pedestrians and cyclists in Great Britain	HC 437	2008-2009
11 February 2009	The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's response to growth in the UK merchant fleet	HC 131	2008-2009
15 October 2008	Department for Transport: Letting Rail Franchises 2005-2007	HC 1047	2007-2008
23 May 2008	Shared services in the Department for Transport and its agencies	HC 481	2007-2008
4 April 2008	The Procurement of the National Roads Telecommunications Services	HC 340	2007-2008
14 March 2008	Reducing passenger rail delays by better management of incidents	HC 308	2007-2008
16 January 2008	Department for Transport: Electronic service delivery in the driver, vehicle and operator agencies in Great Britain	HC 204	2007-2008
8 June 2007	The management of staff sickness absence in the Department for Transport and its agencies	HC 527	2006-2007
15 March 2007	Department for Transport: Estimating and monitoring the costs of building roads in England	HC 321	2006-2007
22 November 2006	The Modernisation of the West Coast Main Line	HC 22	2006-2007
28 April 2006	Highways Agency: A5 Queue relocation in Dunstable – Wider Lessons	HC 1043	2005-2006
9 December 2005	Delivery Chain Analysis for Bus Services in England	HC 677	2005-2006
2 December 2005	The South Eastern Passenger Rail Franchise	HC 457	2005-2006
20 July 2005	Maintaining and improving Britain's railway stations	HC 132	2005-2006

3 Recent cross-government NAO reports of relevance to the transport sector

			Parliamentary Session
18 March 2010	Reorganising central government	HC 452	2009-2010
16 December 2009	Independent Reviews of reported CSR07 Value for Money savings	HC 86	2009-2010
6 November 2009	Commercial skills for complex government projects	HC 962	2008-2009
21 October 2009	Measuring Up: How good are the Government's data systems for monitoring perfomance against Public Service Agreements?	HC 465	2008-2009
16 October 2009	Government cash management	HC 546	2008-2009
29 April 2009	Addressing the environmental impacts of government procurement	HC 420	2008-2009
26 March 2009	Innovation across central government	HC 12	2008-2009
27 February 2009	Helping Government Learn	HC 129	2008-2009
13 February 2009	Recruiting civil servants efficiently	HC 134	2008-2009
5 February 2009	Assessment of the Capability Review programme	HC 123	2008-2009
19 December 2008	Central government's management of service contracts	HC 65	2008-2009
20 February 2008	Managing financial resources to deliver better public services	HC 240	2007-2008
29 November 2007	Improving corporate functions using shared services	HC 9	2007-2008
28 November 2007	Improving the efficiency of central government's office property	HC 8	2007-2008

4 Other sources of information

Reports from the Committee of Public Accounts

2 March 2010	Fourteenth Report of Session 2009-10 Department for Transport: The failure of Metronet	HC 390
11 March 2010	Eighteenth Report of Session 2009-10 Vehicle and Operator Services Agency: Enforcement of regulations on commercial vehicles	HC 284
7 January 2010	Fourth Report of Session 2009-10 Highways Agency: Contracting for Highways Maintenance	HC 188
22 October 2009	Forty-ninth Report of Session 2008-09 Improving road safety for pedestrians and cyclists in Great Britain	HC 665
29 October 2009	Forty-fourth Report of Session 2008-09 The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's response to growth in the UK merchant fleet	HC 586
19 May 2009	Twenty-first Report of Session 2008-09 The Department for Transport: Letting Rail Franchises 2005-2007	HC 191
16 December 2008	Fifty-seventh Report of Session 2007-08 Shared services in the Department for Transport and its agencies	HC 684
18 November 2008	Fifty-third Report of Session 2007-08 Reducing passenger rail delays by better management of incidents	HC 655
28 October 2008	Forty-sixth Report of Session 2007-08 The procurement of the National Roads Telecommunications Services	HC 508
20 November 2007	Sixty-fourth Report of Session 2006-07 The management of staff sickness absence in the Department for Transport and its agencies	HC 791
8 November 2007	Fifty-eighth Report of Session 2006-07 Estimating and monitoring the costs of building roads in England	HC 321
14 June 2007	Thirtieth Report of Session 2006-07 The Modernisation of the West Coast Main Line	HC 189
23 May 2006	Forty-third Report of Session 2005-06 Delivery chain analysis for bus services in England	HC 851
11 May 2006	Forty-first Report of Session 2005-06 The South Eastern Passenger Rail Franchise	HC 770
2 February 2006	Twenty-second Report of Session 2005-06 Maintaining and improving Britain's railway stations	HC 535

Reports from Central Government

December 2009	HM Government	Putting the Frontline First: smarter government

Office of Government Commerce Procurement Review

November 2007	Office of Government Commerce	Procurement Capability Review Programme: Department for Transport

Cabinet Office Capability Reviews

http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/about/improving/capability/reports.aspx

July 2009	Cabinet Office	Department for Transport: Progress and next steps
July 2008	Cabinet Office	Capability Review of Department for Transport: One Year Update
July 2007	Cabinet Office	Capability Review of the Department for Transport

Where to find out more

The National Audit Office website is
www.nao.org.uk

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