

Suffolk  
Chamber of  
Commerce

## Broken Down

The Economic Impact of the A14 in Suffolk

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## CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	2
Strategic Context.....	3
Key Findings.....	4
Disruption Hotspots.....	4
Wider Impacts.....	6
Future Risks.....	7
Policy Recommendations.....	8
Call to Action.....	10
References.....	11
Appendix A – Survey Quantitative Data.....	12
Appendix B – Survey Qualitative Data.....	15

# **Broken Down:** *the economic impact of the A14 in Suffolk*

The A14 is a vital national corridor, connecting Suffolk's key industries to the Port of Felixstowe – Britain's busiest container port – and linking regional trade to national and international markets. While the A14 supports significant economic activity, growing congestion, infrastructure challenges, and delays in policy implementation are creating barriers to unlocking Suffolk's full economic potential.

This report builds on insights from over 350 businesses surveyed by the Suffolk Chamber's A14 Improvement Group. It underscores the economic toll of disruptions along the A14 to businesses in this region, and calls for immediate, coordinated action at regional and national levels to strengthen the A14's capacity, ensuring Suffolk continues to contribute to the UK's economic growth and global competitiveness.

***“It is vital that the voice of business gets some proper cut through amidst the ongoing chatter about the A14. The aim of our research is to provide clear and unequivocal evidence as to how the continued delays, re-routings and congestion is negatively affecting the business community, as well as residents, and how unless this is addressed there is a risk of investment being siphoned off to other parts of the country as a result.”***

*John Dugmore, Suffolk Chamber Chief Executive*



## Strategic Context

The Orwell Bridge, first opened in 1982, is a critical piece of infrastructure for Suffolk and the UK, handling approximately 67,000 users each day—89% of its maximum capacity (75,000 vehicles per day).<sup>1</sup> Vehicle use has risen 42% since 2000, in part driven by housing growth in Suffolk and a fourfold increase in freight at the Port of Felixstowe since the bridge was built.

While the bridge has a life expectancy of 120 years, its bearings—essential for managing weight loads and movement—will need replacement within the next decade.<sup>2</sup> This necessary maintenance will likely require further closures or capacity reductions, compounding existing challenges.

These trends underscore the need to future-proof the A14, but fragmented decision-making has delayed progress. The Roads Investment Strategy (RIS) has yet to prioritise the Orwell Bridge, with improvements unlikely before 2035. Projects like the Ipswich Northern Bypass and the Upper Orwell Crossing, which could have alleviated pressure, have been abandoned, leaving limited options for managing future demand.

The A14 not only supports Suffolk's local economy but also plays an essential role in connecting the region to global trade networks. The Port of Felixstowe handles 48% of the UK's container trade, highlighting the strategic importance of dependable infrastructure for maintaining national trade flows.<sup>3</sup> Ensuring the A14 meets the needs of businesses, residents, and the economy must remain a national priority.

## Key Findings

The recent survey, conducted in November 2024, gathered responses from over 350 businesses across Suffolk, spanning a broad range of sectors such as logistics, construction, healthcare, and hospitality. It revealed widespread disruption:

- 87% of businesses reported negative impacts from A14 disruptions in the past year.
- Over 50% cited increased costs as a result of disruption, and 49% reported negative effects on client retention and customer satisfaction.
- Some businesses estimated individual losses ranging from a couple of hundred pounds per delay to £80,000 per year.

## Disruption Hotspots

The Orwell Bridge was reported as the single largest source of disruption, impacting 81% of businesses who experienced disruptions along the A14 corridor.

Businesses overwhelmingly (84%) rated the Orwell Bridge as either very critical or important to their operations, underscoring its significance to economic connectivity in the region and the need for targeted interventions to address capacity and efficiency issues.

Focusing specifically on disruptions around the Orwell Bridge:

- Over 70% of businesses reported that they felt current closures of the Orwell Bridge are poorly managed and often result in more widespread disruption. Businesses urged for better measures to manage bridge closures, such as greater communications and warnings, and demanded improvements to local infrastructure to offer greater diversionary routes for road users.

- Over 70% of businesses felt that communication around Orwell Bridge closures were inadequate and/or required improvement. Whilst some voiced frustration and urged the bridge to remain open to avoid disruption, others called for greater signage, additional communications, and better forward planning by local authorities in handling closures.
- Nearly 80% of businesses felt that diversionary routes available during bridge closures were ill-suited to road users and traffic, particularly HGVs, and reported the gridlock conditions such routes caused in and around Ipswich.

Beyond the Orwell Bridge, congestion on the A14 affects businesses throughout the region:

- 46% reported broader, knock-on disruptions along the corridor impacting their business operations.
- 39% of respondents highlighted the Copdock Interchange as a source of disruption, highlighting infrastructure issues in and around Ipswich as a key challenge for business in Suffolk.
- Some noted disruption in Ipswich, as well as a Stowmarket, Newmarket, and Bury St Edmunds, indicating that challenges on the A14 have a broader regional impact.

***“...when the bridge is shut it is a nightmare for businesses who rely on roads and alternative routes, some of which are not suitable for HGVs and causes more problems and accidents because of the volume of traffic on them.”***

## **Wider Impacts**

The survey revealed several broader concerns beyond immediate disruptions. Businesses expressed challenges such as increased costs, missed opportunities, and reputational impacts linked to A14 disruptions. Many respondents highlighted the need for more effective management of local infrastructure to address these ongoing issues and create greater opportunities for improvement.

## **Staff Wellbeing**

Significantly, businesses reported that disruptions were affecting their workforce personally. Some respondents were concerned about the impact of disruption on staff wellbeing, citing concerns around staff mental health, additional childcare fees and travel costs. Some expressed concerns with recruitment, as prospective employees increasingly seek to avoid the A14. These factors have implications for workforce retention and the availability of talent across the region.

## **Environmental Concerns**

Concern was also raised about the environmental impact of growing congestion in surrounding towns as a result of A14 disruption. Ipswich, in particular, was cited as a key area affected by increased traffic flows during bridge closures. According to the Suffolk County Council Air Quality Strategy and Action Plan, Ipswich already experiences elevated levels of air pollution, with several Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) designated due to high nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) levels from road traffic.<sup>4</sup> Increased congestion caused by A14 disruptions exacerbates these issues, contributing to poorer air quality in the town. This highlights the need for mitigation strategies to address the knock-on effects of major infrastructure disruption on local communities and their environments.

## Future Risks

Suffolk's infrastructure challenges, particularly the A14 and Orwell Bridge, are putting the region's economy and growth potential at risk. Without proactive investment, these challenges could hinder Suffolk's economic potential.

- 81% of businesses are concerned about capacity constraints on the Orwell Bridge and A14, emphasising the need for timely intervention.

Of these respondents:

- 85% believe their investment plans in Suffolk will be moderately or significantly affected without improvements to infrastructure in the next decade.
- 83% predict potential reductions in job numbers if issues persist, underscoring the importance of reliable infrastructure for workforce stability.

Previous estimates have indicated that closures of the Orwell Bridge cost the economy up to £1 million per day, illustrating the significant financial stakes of inaction.<sup>5</sup>

Survey responses have revealed that lack of investment in infrastructure capacity and resilience is already prompting businesses to reconsider their presence in Suffolk. Respondents highlighted relocation concerns and reluctance to expand without guaranteed improvements.

Ensuring the A14's reliability and resilience is essential for Suffolk's future. Strategic investment and coordinated planning can mitigate current risks, allowing the region to maintain its competitive edge and unlock further economic growth.

***“The Port of Felixstowe, the A14 and by association, the Orwell Crossing – are perhaps the three most significant elements of supply-chain/logistics infrastructure Suffolk has. These are its 'jewels' and are the key elements of why Suffolk currently has a thriving and prosperous logistics industry. Without the Port, the A14 and the Bridge - it would be a very different situation.”***

## Policy Recommendations

Suffolk's economic growth and connectivity depend on a reliable and efficient transport network, yet persistent infrastructure challenges, particularly along the A14, risk undermining business confidence and economic performance.

To address these issues and safeguard the region's long-term potential, a series of targeted actions must be prioritised. These recommendations outline immediate, medium-term, and long-term measures to improve capacity, reduce disruption, and support sustainable growth.

### Short-term Actions

1

#### **Strategic Rail Infrastructure Investments**

Confirmed funding of upgrades to Ely and Haughley rail junctions announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review, as once completed, these projects will remove 98,000 lorry journeys per year from the local and regional roads system.<sup>6</sup>

2

#### **Quantifying Business Impacts**

Commission an in-depth study of the A14, specifically the Orwell Bridge, to quantify aggregate business losses per hour of delay or closure.

3

#### **Improved Communication**

National Highways should invest in an automated messaging service to provide real-time alerts for accidents and closures, ensuring wider and faster communication to businesses and road users.

4

#### **Enhanced Planning for Diversions**

Ipswich Borough and Suffolk County Councils should extend the remit of the Ipswich Transport Taskforce to cover the A14 and surrounding roads, enabling the investigation of potential diversion routes for smaller commercial vehicles.

### **Medium-term Actions**

5

#### **Improved Traffic Incident Management**

National Highways should deploy its traffic officers to major incidents on the A14, working alongside Suffolk Police to enhance the management of diversions and improve traffic flow.

6

#### **Accelerated Investment**

National Highways should bring forward plans to improve the Copdock Interchange into the RIS3 period (2025-2030) to address growing congestion and capacity challenges.

### **Long-term Actions**

7

#### **Growing Capacity**

A Government Taskforce should be established to explore options for adding capacity to the regional road network in and out of Felixstowe. This is especially critical as maintenance demands on the Orwell Bridge are expected to increase as the structure nears the end of its lifespan.

These measures are essential to address immediate risks, resolve systemic infrastructure challenges, and rebuild business confidence in Suffolk's transport network. Coordinated action will ensure the region remains competitive and well-connected, driving both local and national economic growth.

## **Call to Action**

**This report underscores an urgent need for action in improving the capacity and resilience of Suffolk's key infrastructure. The challenges faced by businesses relying on the A14 as a result of ongoing disruption extend beyond regional concerns and touch on broader national priorities. The Port of Felixstowe, the A14, and the Orwell Bridge are vital to the UK's trade flow and economic growth. Targeted investment in these assets will support national ambitions for growth, allowing Suffolk to reach its full economic potential.**

**Suffolk Chamber of Commerce calls on National Highways, the Department of Transport, the Treasury and both current local authorities and those to be created under the current Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation proposals to urgently deliver actionable solutions that enhance capacity, improve reliability, and reduce disruption along this vital corridor.**

**Treating the A14 and Orwell Bridge as critical national infrastructure is not optional; it is essential. Investing in Suffolk's infrastructure is an investment in the UK's economic future. The time to act is now.**



## References

- <sup>1</sup> Department for Transport. *Road Traffic Statistics*. Accessed January 2025. <https://roadtraffic.dft.gov.uk/manualcountpoints/38454>
- <sup>2</sup> Ipswich Borough Council. Agenda for Executive Meeting: Tuesday, 5 July 2022. Accessed January 2025. <https://democracy.ipswich.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=136&MIId=2061>.
- <sup>3</sup> Reuters. "What Impact Will Strike at Britain's Busiest Container Port Have?" Reuters, August 22, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/what-impact-will-strike-britains-busiest-container-port-have-2022-08-22/#:~:text=HOW%20BIG%20IS%20THE%20PORT,8%20million%20TEUs%20by%202030>.
- <sup>4</sup> Suffolk County Council. *Air Quality Strategy & Action Plan*. May 2023.
- <sup>5</sup> Ipswich Central. "£1m Lost When Orwell Bridge Closes." Ipswich Central. Accessed January 2025. <https://ipswichcentral.com/news-and-events/1m-orwell-bridge-closes>.
- <sup>6</sup> Transport East. *Keeping Trade on Track*. Spring 2023.

## Appendix A - A14 Quantitative Survey Data

Figure A1

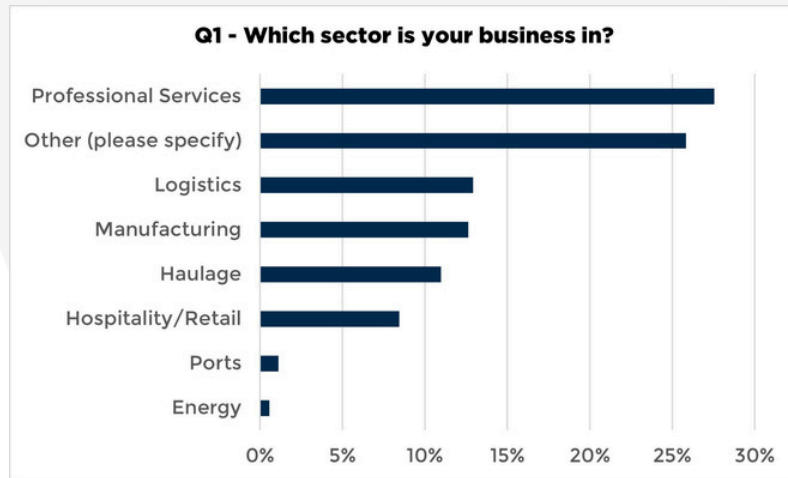


Figure A2

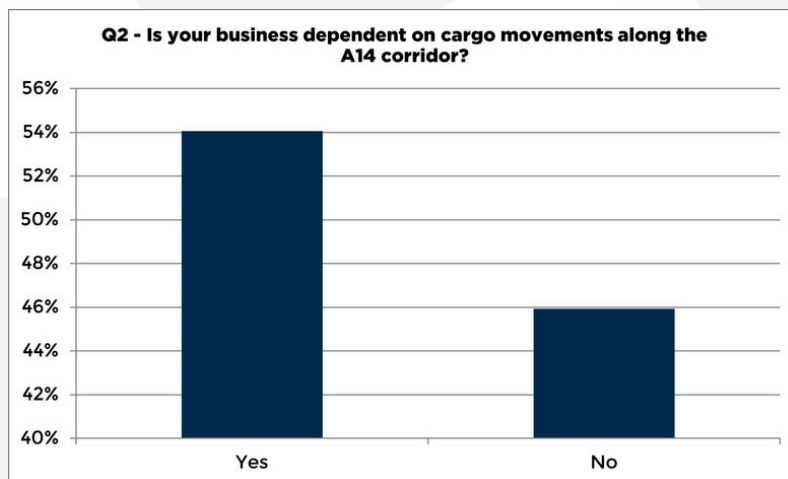
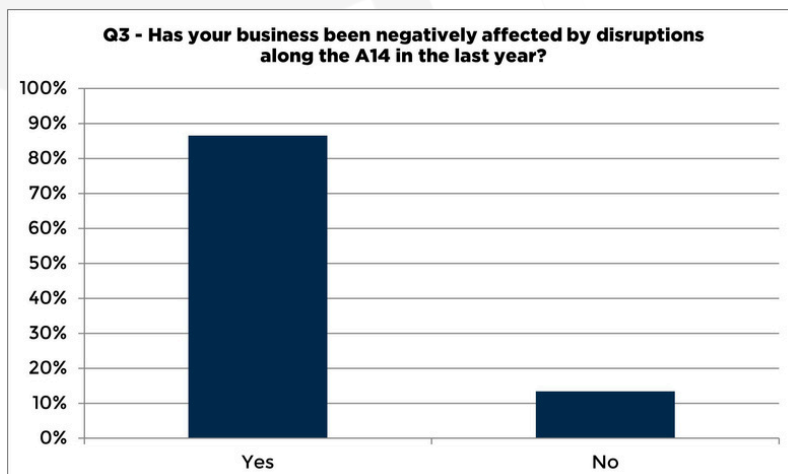
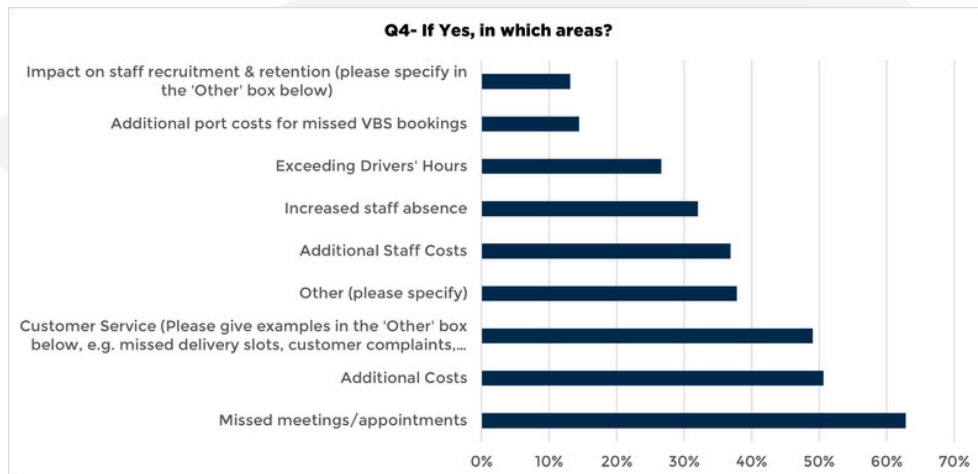


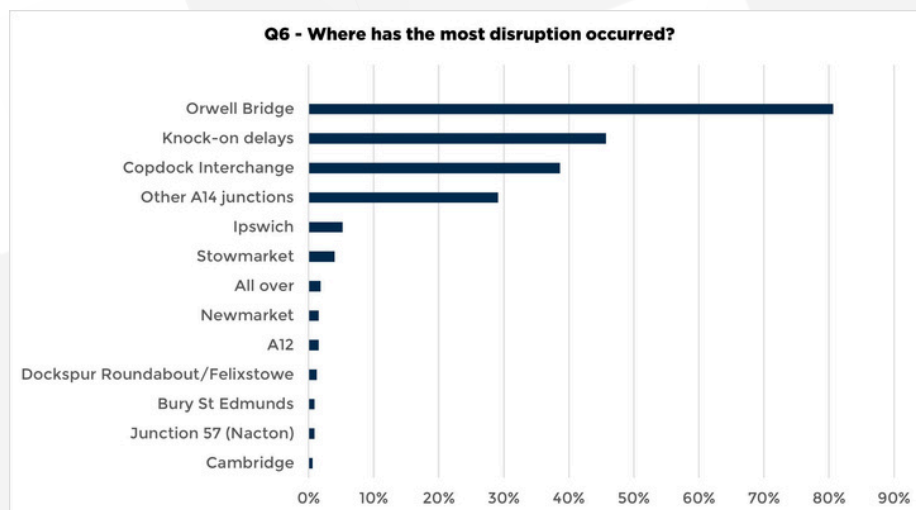
Figure A3



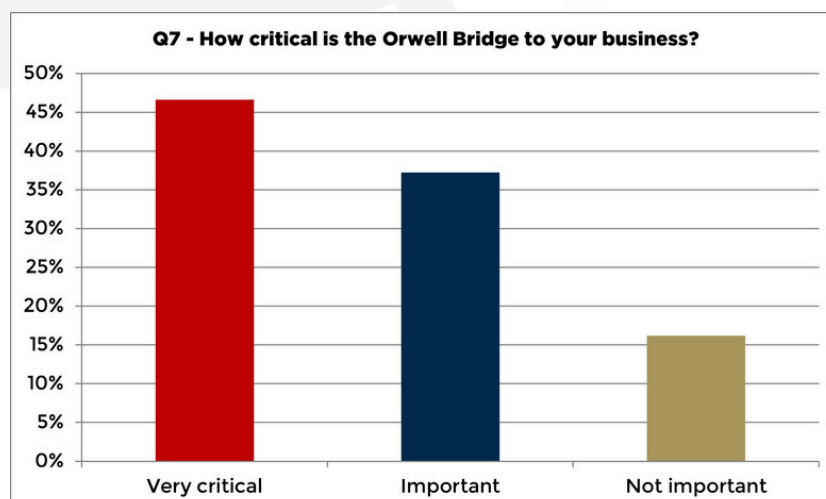
**Figure A4**



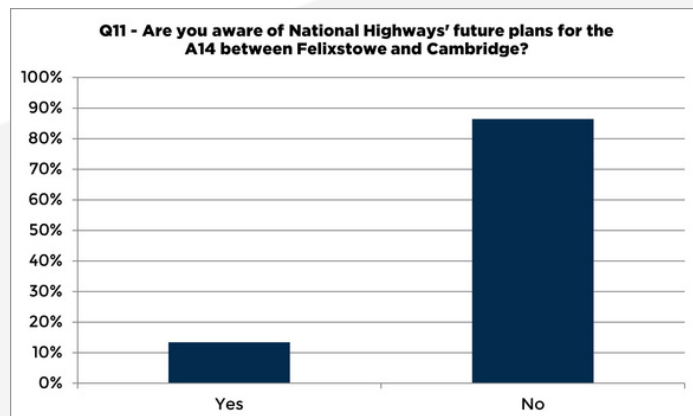
**Figure A5**



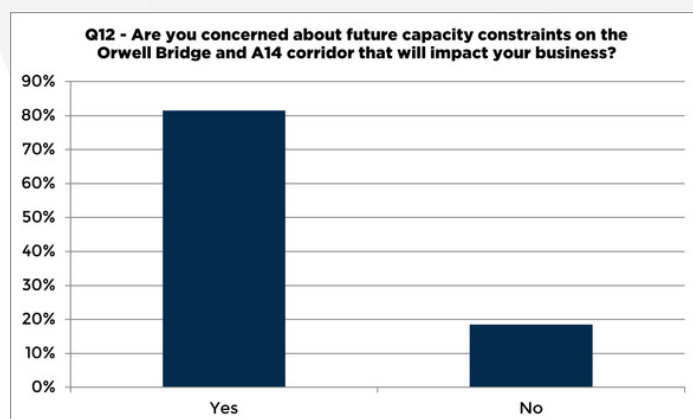
**Figure A6**



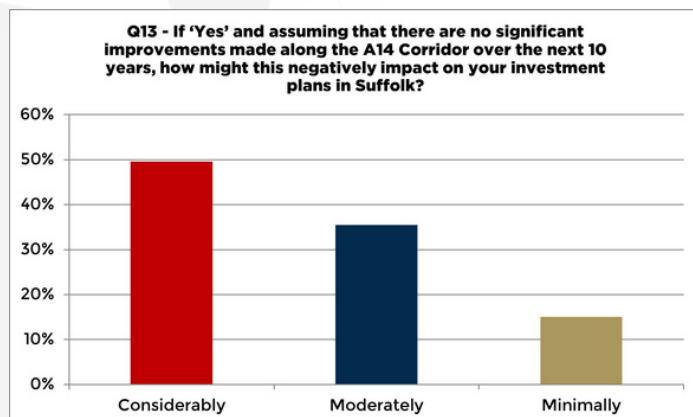
**Figure A7**



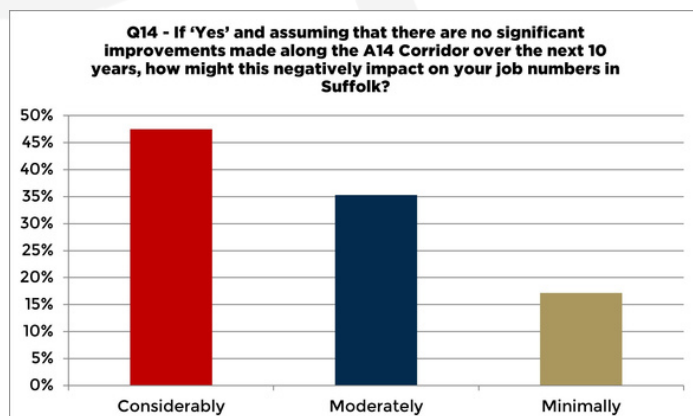
**Figure A8**



**Figure A9**



**Figure A10**



## Appendix B - Survey Qualitative Data

Figure B1

### Question 5 - Can you quantify the cost of disruption?

Below is a selection of responses from businesses that demonstrates the cost of disruption to businesses. Of those who responded to this question (342 total), only 13% indicated they could quantify disruption caused by A14 disruption.

Responses varied between factual figures and more qualitative answers. As a result of this, a sample of responses has been included below to give a varied indication of the financial cost of disruption from a number of different respondents.

“  
£50k per annum  
”

“  
Loss of earnings in  
excess of 25k  
”

“  
Approximately £80k in  
cancelled orders, overtime  
and ancillary costs  
”

“  
£10,000 in the week alone  
when one carriageway  
was closed  
”

“  
People's time  
”

“  
Likely to be in the 10's  
of £1000's  
”

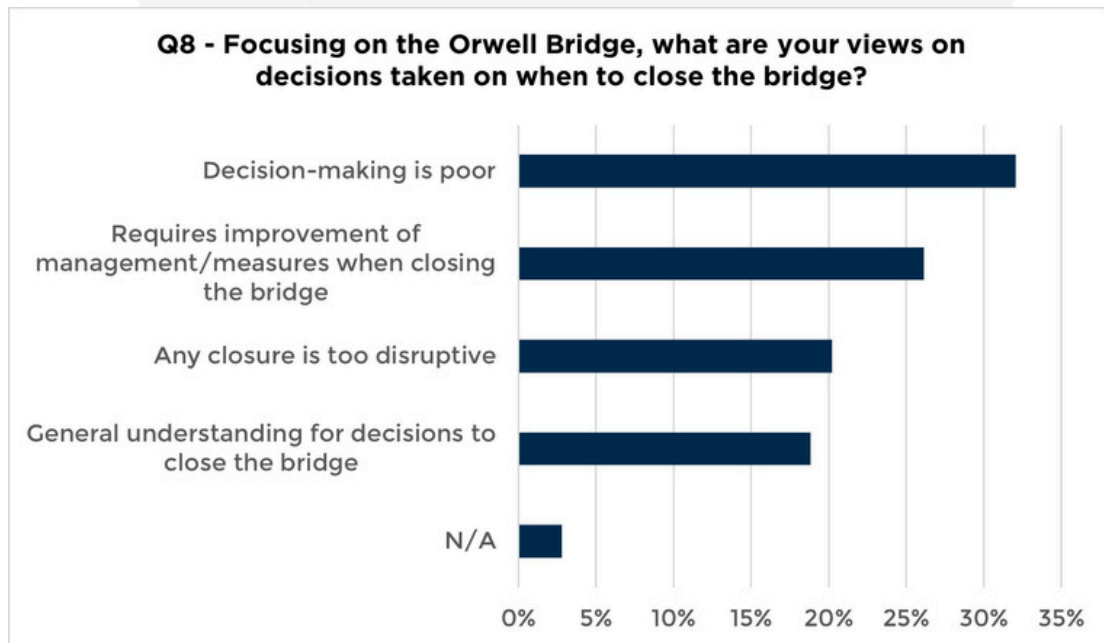
“  
£500 per month  
”

“  
Significant portion  
of overtime costs  
”

**Figure B2**

**Question 8 - Focusing on the Orwell Bridge, what are your views on decisions taken on when to close the bridge?**

The data shown in Figure B2 (Q8) below was taken following analysis of 287 qualitative responses. The quotes shown underneath the chart are a sample of responses from businesses to this question.



**“It’s probably necessary and safety must be first; but the main problem is there is no viable alternative route for the volumes of traffic needing to travel.”**

**“Risk averse and ridiculous”**

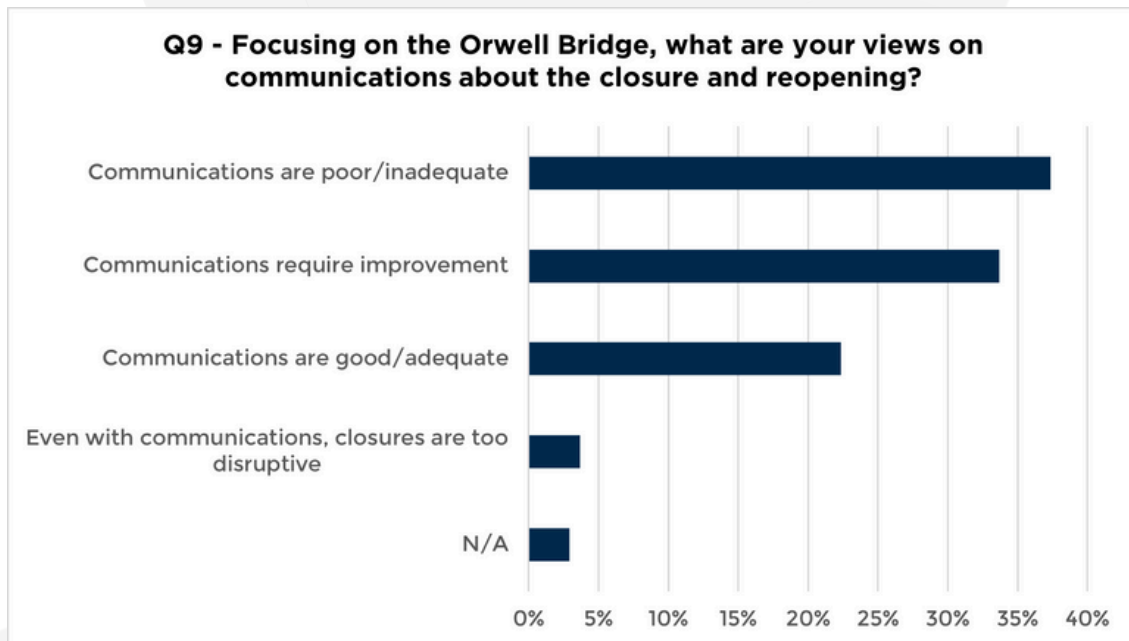
**“Solve this! So that it never needs to close. Any closure is damaging to businesses and residents.”**

**“It is a complete bottleneck that when closed, or disrupted, just destroys traffic through the town. People who live there are completely disrupted with traffic, fumes and air pollution from vehicles make health a massive concern!”**

**Figure B3**

**Question 9 – Focusing on the Orwell Bridge, what are your views on communications about the closure and reopening?**

The data shown in Figure B3 (Q9) below was taken following analysis of 273 qualitative responses. The quotes shown underneath the chart are a sample of responses from businesses to this question.



**“Poor - you have to actively search for this on Highways - should be able to have WhatsApp message alerts ASAP.”**

**“Highways could have alerts by email to register of companies”**

**“Some are good, but others for reasons outside of planned closures are very difficult.”**

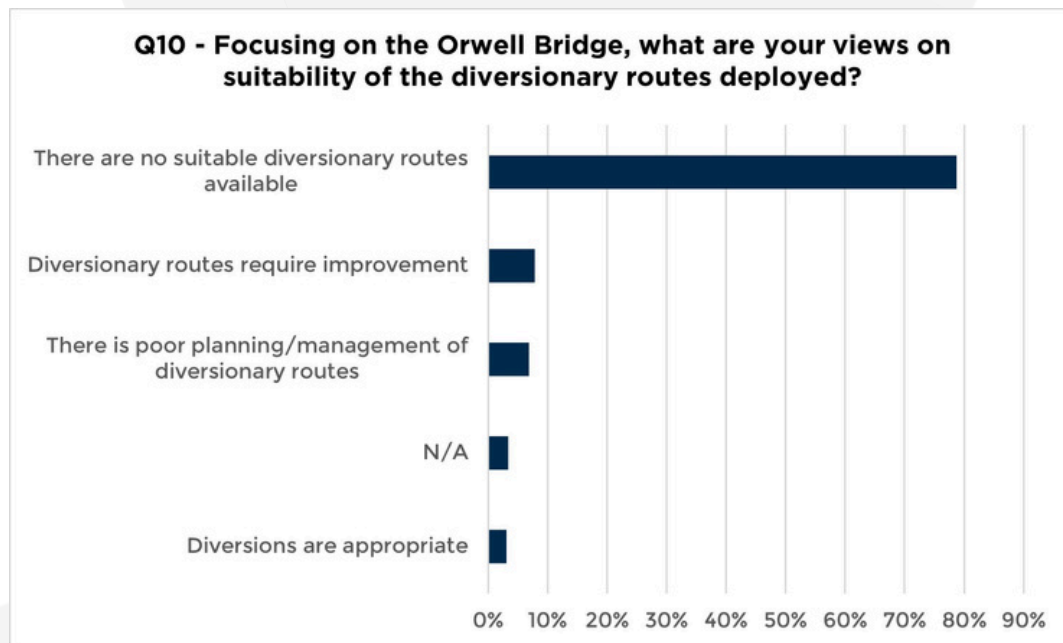
**“Nothing wrong here, more or less would make no difference because there is no viable solution in place for when this bridge closes.”**

**“Information about closures often arrives through word of mouth from our hauliers or couriers, like DPD, rather than from an official source. This leaves us scrambling to adjust plans on the fly, with no clear communication from the bridge’s management. Real-time, direct updates would go a long way in minimizing the chaos these closures cause.”**

**Figure B4**

**Question 10 – Focusing on the Orwell Bridge, what are your views on suitability of the diversionary routes deployed?**

The data shown in Figure B4 (Q10) below was taken following analysis of 292 qualitative responses. The quotes shown underneath the chart are a sample of responses from businesses to this question.



**“These seem logical but get very constricted very quickly.”**

**“All diversionary routes are not appropriate for the many HGVs and volume of traffic using the Orwell Crossing.”**

**“There should be an alternative route made from the northern side of Ipswich which will definitely ease the congestion.”**

**“Terrible. The only options place Ipswich and all surrounding roads become gridlocked for many hours outside of the actual closure.”**

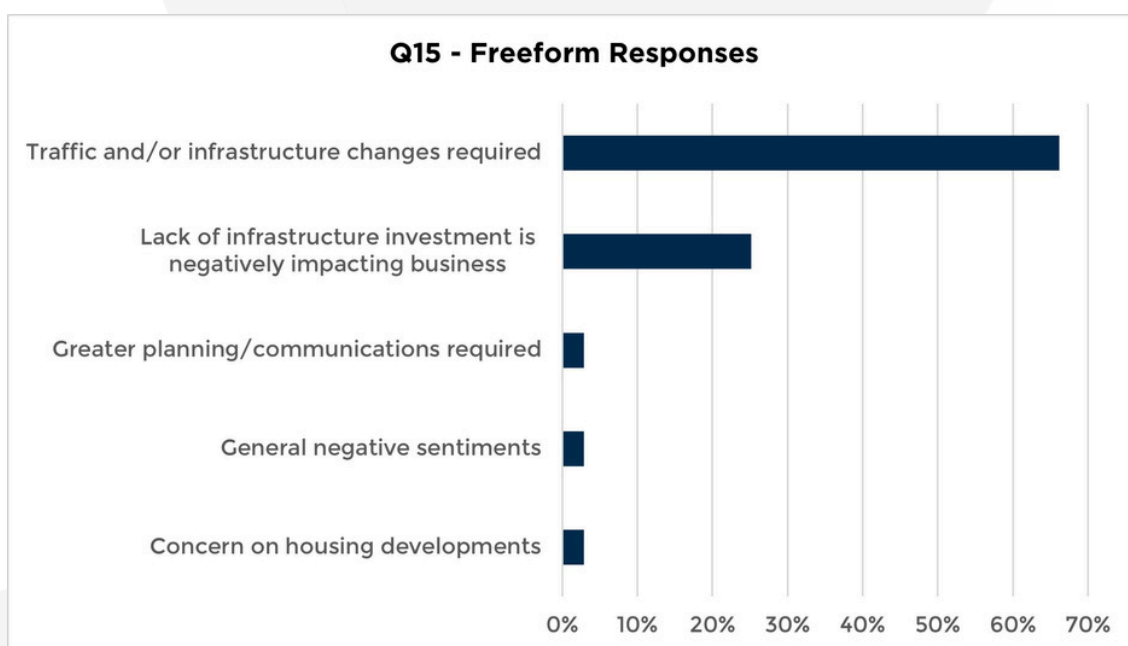
**“Lacklustre as previously mentioned. Large lorries having to go through small country and town roads with on-road parking. Throw in the traffic from the development of the new nuclear power station and Town is locked for hours. Several times during 2024 it took over an hour to get from on side of town to the other.”**



**Figure B5**

**Question 15 - Please use the freeform below to add any additional observations, including your thoughts on the attached A14 thought paper.**


The data shown in Figure B5 (Q15) below was taken following analysis of 139 qualitative responses to a freeform question which invited additional observations from respondents. The quotes shown underneath the chart are a sample of responses from businesses to this question.



**"The A14 is one of the few bonuses that Felixstowe has over London Gateway. If we lose that as a selling point then we are likely to see more lines follow Maersk and Hapag to London Gateway."**

**"The A14 needs to be considered as part of a connected transport policy along with improvements to Haughley / Ely rail junctions. Making rail a viable alternative to sending freight to the Midlands and beyond is essential, otherwise the A14 will be unable to cope and/or Felixstowe will lose its position as primary port accompanied with the associated negative impact on the local economies."**

**"Both A14 and A12 need serious improvements if Felixstowe port and local economy is to prosper long term."**



**“Bridge closures severely impact our business. We expect to be moving premises in the next few years and there is no way I would consider a site that needs to use the bridge to access routes to London and the rest of the country.”**

**“Whilst the A14 is rightly a focus, there is wider concern across Suffolk and East Anglia that the scale of development is completely outpacing the scale of transport infrastructure and we can all feel significantly more ‘friction’ in moving around the region, compared with 10 or 20 years ago. This is ultimately making our businesses less effective, as every meeting or physical transaction is costing more to execute.”**



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