

Is it appropriate in transport scheme appraisal to have a central projection (or ‘most likely’) forecast of road traffic?

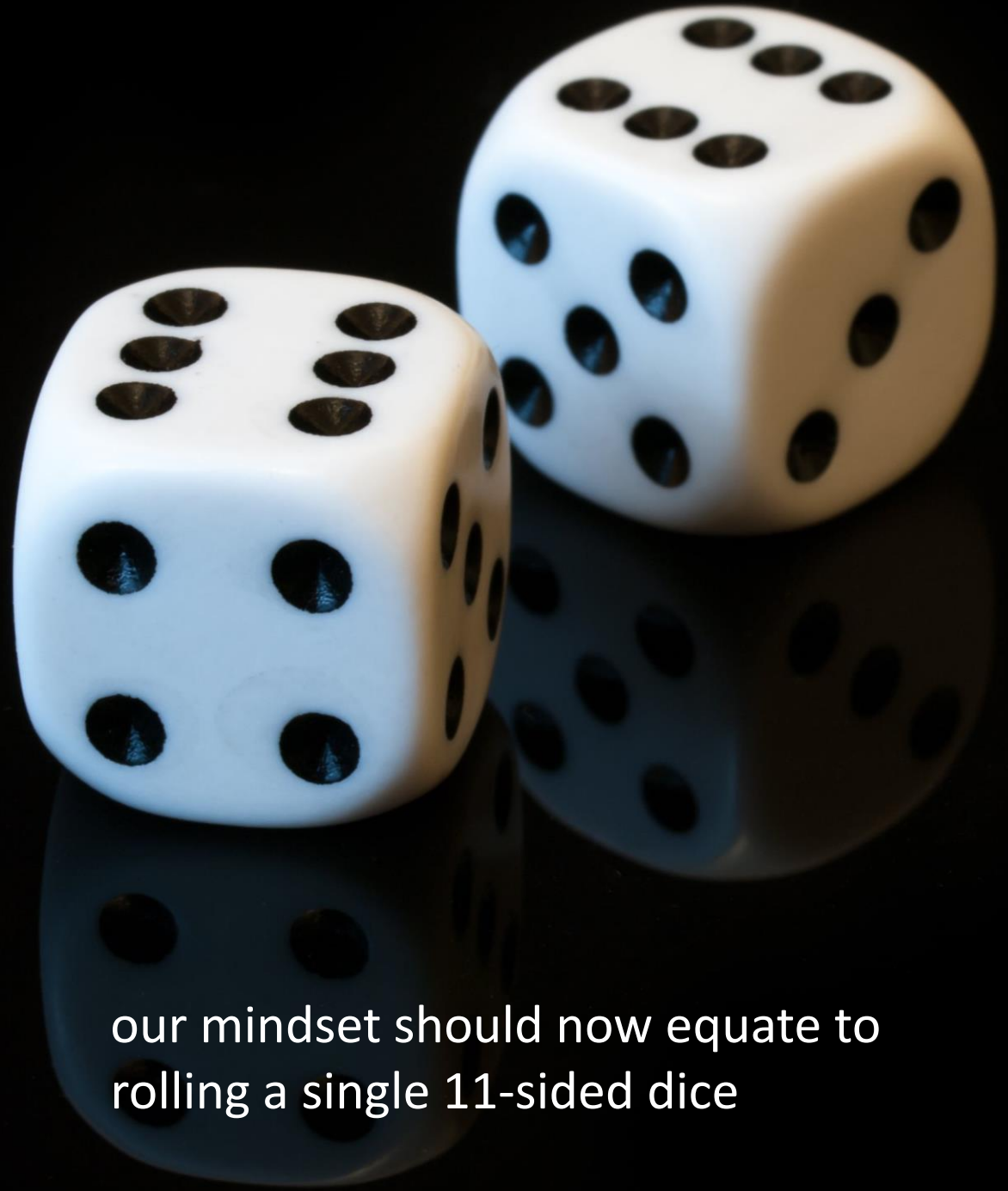
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# 1

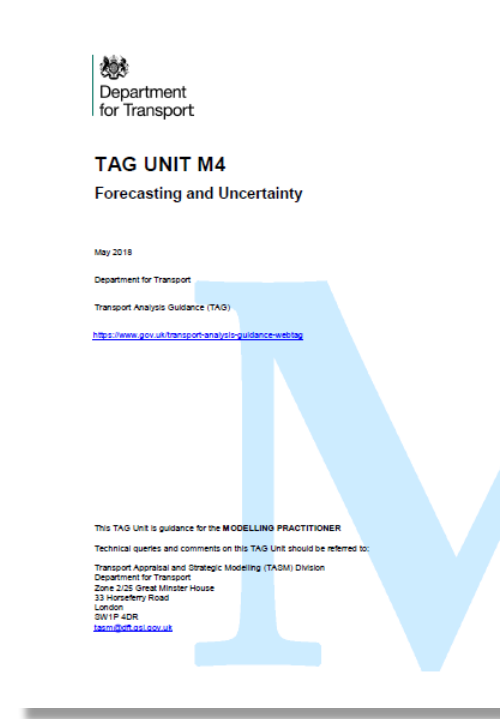
*Unless uncertainty is not particularly deep and the rear-view mirror is a strong guide to the future then to suggest a most likely future exists is **wrong**.*



our mindset should now equate to rolling a single 11-sided dice

# 2

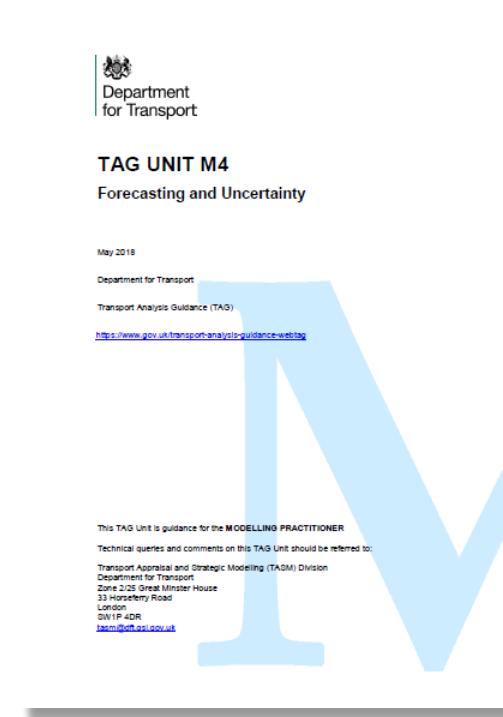
Its *framing* risks,  
creating misplaced  
confidence by  
concealing  
uncertainty...



“The **core scenario** will form the basis for the analysis reported in the Appraisal Summary Table (AST) and, as such, **should represent the best basis for decision-making given current evidence**”

# 3

...even though scheme appraisal guidance addresses uncertainty its provision is arguably *ambiguous*.



“The uncertainty log should highlight **all** sources of uncertainty that are likely to affect the traffic/patronage, revenues and delivery of scheme benefits”

“Sources that have an individually minor effect **may** need to be included”

# 4

Which *is* the core scenario given that the central estimates of traffic levels have in practice never been closest to the outturn levels?



“While uncertainty in road traffic demand has always existed, it is perhaps now more uncertain than ever”

# 5

With a most likely central projection now abandoned in national road traffic forecasting, it is *internally inconsistent* to retain it in scheme appraisal

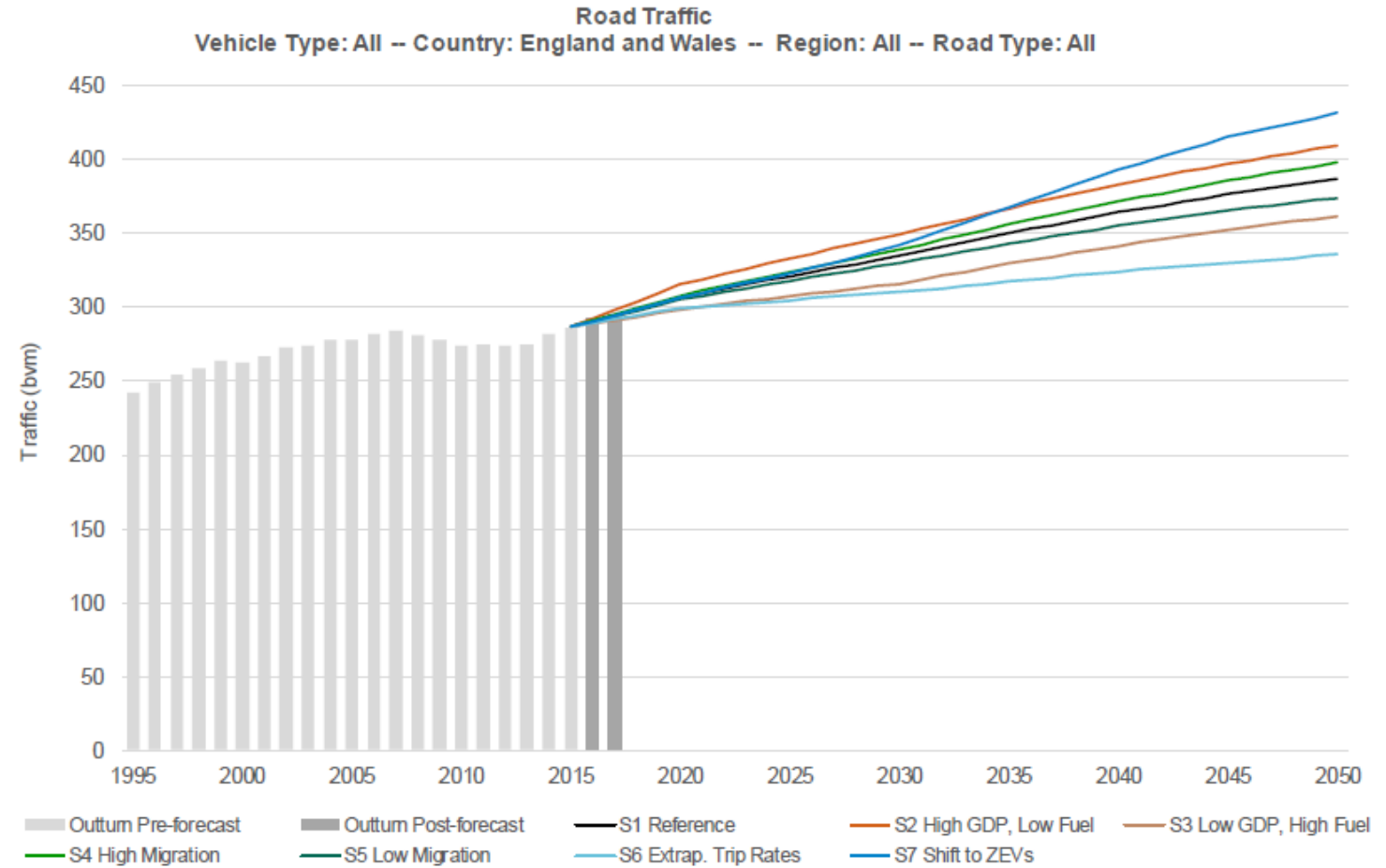
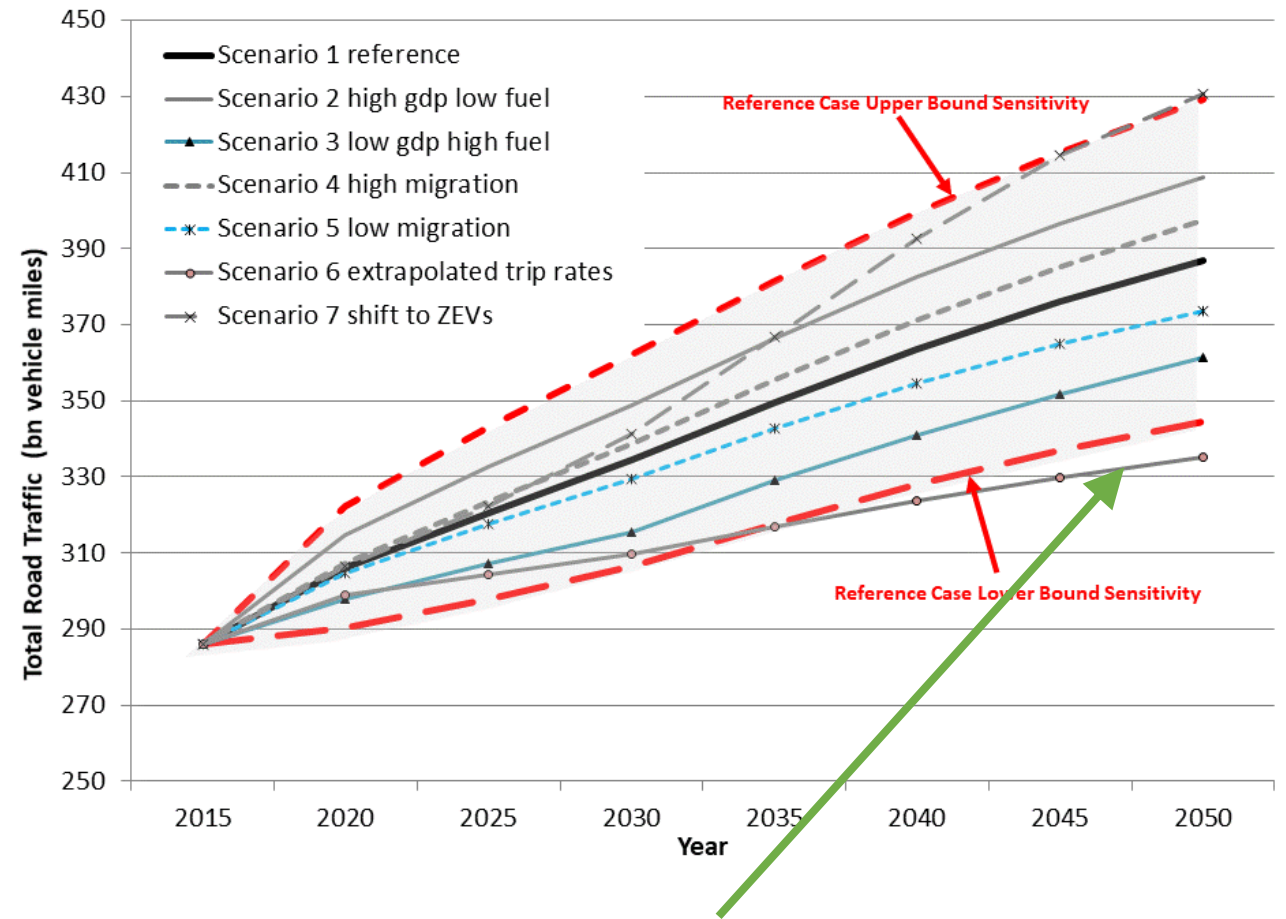


Figure 25: Vehicle miles forecasts for England & Wales

‘plausible scenarios’

# 6

Current scheme appraisal guidance on national uncertainty pushes one or more plausible scenarios *out of scope*



Scenario 6 (continued decline in trip rate) is considered plausible by DfT but is outside the scheme appraisal guidance for upper and lower bounds of uncertainty

# 7

While it may create a common reference point, it has a knock on effect that could adversely affect robust decision making



one bad apple spoils the barrel



# 8

It fuels a culture of *false precision*, reinforcing the concealment of uncertainty

30 year appraisal period – benefit-cost ratio: 2.35

‘about 2’?

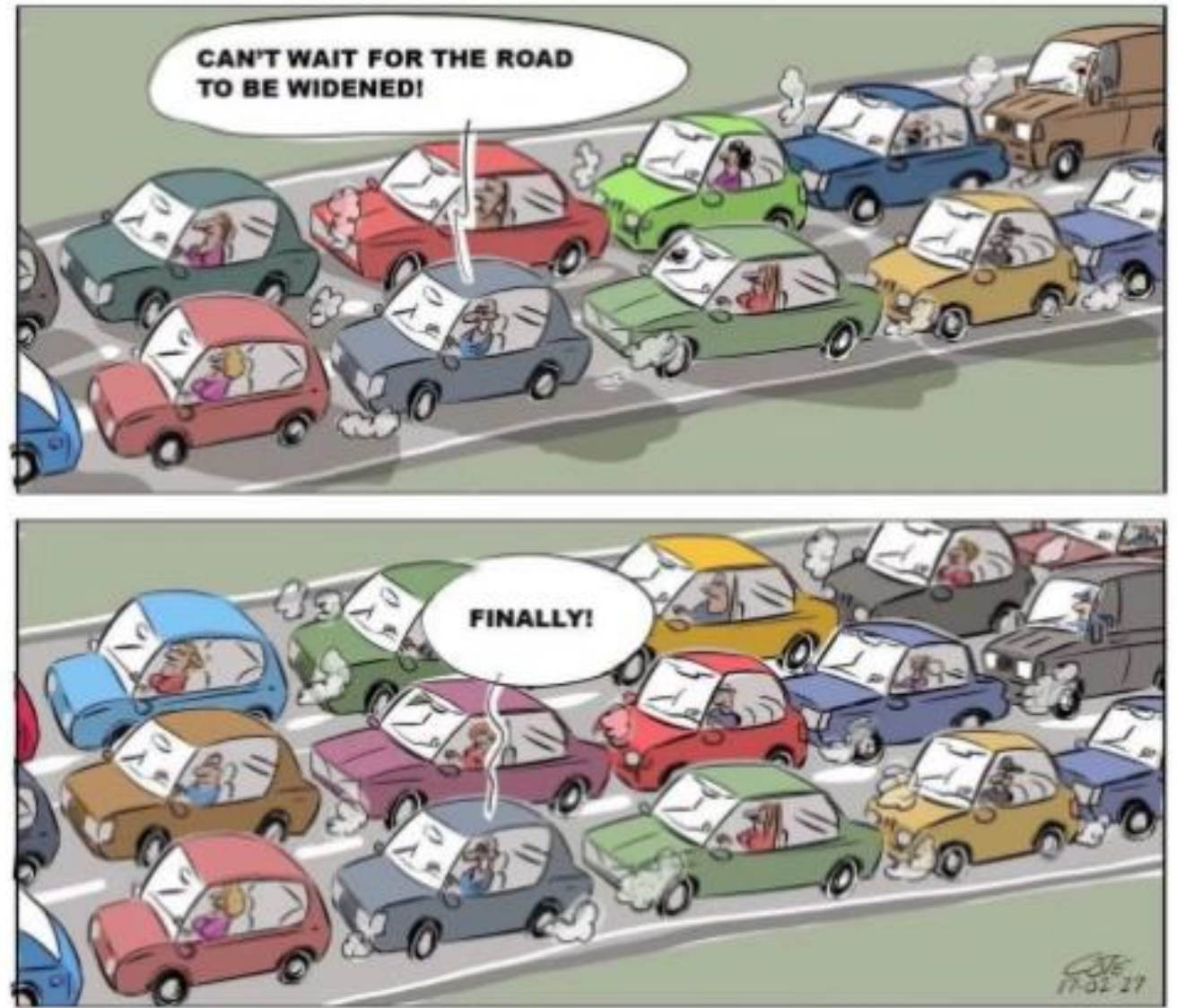
60 year appraisal period – benefit-cost ratio: 1.19

‘about 1’?

(real examples, sources not disclosed)

# 9

It risks perpetuating path-dependency because demand-led supply creates supply-led demand



How road widening works. Cartoon via @BrentToderian Twitter

# 10

It may encourage  
strategic ignorance

“Uncertainty is an uncomfortable position.  
But certainty is an absurd one.”

Voltaire, 1694-1778

