

# Highways Transport & Infrastructure 2025 Mid Year Update

## Design & Consultancy

### Permanent

The first half of 2025 has seen increased confidence among candidates exploring new opportunities. Unlike in previous years, concerns around redundancies appear to have lessened, with more professionals willing to consider a move. However, this sentiment is not entirely matched by hiring activity. There is noticeably more caution from employers, with most only recruiting where strictly necessary, rather than as part of broader growth plans. This hesitancy appears to stem from rising employment-related costs.

While there hasn't been a major shift in investment, organisations remain busy, though the volume of new projects and overall workload hasn't changed significantly. There has been a continued push for mid-level professionals, particularly at the senior and principal levels across infrastructure and transport planning, and we've observed modest salary uplifts in these areas. Opportunities for graduates and junior staff remain limited as employers focus on securing senior talent first. Similarly, demand for associate and management-level roles has remained subdued.

The highways sector has experienced a quieter period due to planning delays, paused projects, and tightening budgets, with several National Highways schemes delayed or cancelled. In contrast, the transport planning market is performing well, with ongoing strong demand across various regions.

### Contract

Much of the above also reflects the contract market. That said, the past six months have been notably more positive compared to the latter part of 2024. Typically, contract demand rises in line with permanent hiring trends, and while constraints on major highways budgets and project timelines persist, development infrastructure and transport planning are showing more signs of activity.

Several organisations have announced budget allocations for the second half of the year, with many suggesting that the second half of the year will be significantly busier than the first. At present, there hasn't been any material change in contract rates, and overall demand for contractors remains modest. However, the outlook for the remainder of the year appears more promising, with expectations of a busier period ahead.

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## Project Delivery

As we anticipated in the 2025 outlook, the highways project delivery sector has seen limited movement in the first half of the year. A growing number of contractors are actively seeking new roles, driven by a slowdown in work and the conclusion of existing contracts.

However, we are beginning to see signs of increased momentum, particularly in the design phase, with companies starting to drive recruitment efforts across the UK. This is expected to lead to a surge in demand where candidates will be in a stronger position to negotiate salaries. While current conditions remain much the same as at the start of the year, the market appears poised for significant change, with a sharp uplift in activity and salary levels likely in the near future.

## Public Sector

The first half of 2025 was predictably slow across the public sector highways market, influenced largely by the change in government and the cautious approach taken during the transition. As the new financial year commenced, we have seen an increase in demand for contract staff across both the regions and London. However, financial pressures within local authorities continue to cause delays, with clients needing to carefully justify resource requirements before progressing with recruitment. Despite this, funding remains available for targeted programmes such as pothole repairs and CRSTS schemes.

Looking ahead, early indications from the latest spending review suggest a positive outlook for infrastructure investment, and we remain hopeful this will translate into increased activity and more consistent demand in the second half of the year.

