Highway maintenance and cycling

Cycling UK campaigns and policy briefing

we are cycling UK

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About this briefing

This briefing sets out Cycling UK's formal policy on highway maintenance, and looks at why people who cycle (or want to cycle) need highway authorities to maintain smooth and defect-free roads. It also explains what kind of defects are most likely to cause problems, and how maintenance regimes and practices should cater for cycling.

Cycling UK's formal view

- All road users suffer from poorly maintained roads, but cyclists are disproportionately affected.
- Local authorities need sufficient funding so that they can maintain roads well.
- The business case for highway maintenance investment should reflect the environmental and health benefits of reduced fuel consumption, and the deterrent effect of poor surfaces on cycling and walking (due to the greater risks and effort involved), as well as the reduced costs of highway repairs, delays, and damages to both people and vehicles.
- National guidance, and the policies and standards adopted by individual highway authorities for inspecting and prioritising repairs should take account of cyclists' comfort and safety. These should then be used to assess whether highways/roads authorities are liable when cyclists suffer injury or other damages due to highway defects.
- For cyclists, the location and shape of a surface defect, not just the depth, are important. All guidance should therefore emphasise that special consideration must be given to defects that:
    - Are within the 2m nearest to the effective edge of the road (allowing for any regular car parking)
    - Are at or near junctions
    - Are on downhill sections of roads
    - Present a sharp upstand on the far side of the defect
    - Run along rather than across the path that cyclists will be taking, i.e. those which are more likely to trap a cyclist's wheel.
- Local authorities should devote more of their resources to road surface renewal or resurfacing programmes, rather than short-term, emergency patching.

Cycling UK formal view (continued):

- Minor roads and off-road cycle facilities, where most cycling occurs, should be given greater priority in highway maintenance policies and procedures (including winter maintenance), while the whole-life upkeep of off-road cycle routes should be planned and costed-in from the outset.
- Highway authorities should be encouraged to use cycles with sensors to monitor road and cycle track surface quality, and to use specialised narrower vehicles to keep cycle tracks free of debris and vegetation, or from snow and ice.
- Safe and convenient cycle access should be retained at the site of road/street works, wherever possible.
- Utility companies must ensure that reinstatements are safe, and remain safe, for cycling; and that cycle signing, coloured surfacing and other features are retained or enhanced. Where utility companies perform to a poor standard, local authorities must oblige them to reinstate to a proper condition.
- Authorities should respond quickly to any reports made by cyclists alerting them to road defects. Online reporting tools (e.g. Cycling UK's Fill that Hole) are an effective channel for this.
- The providers of defect management systems for highway authorities should integrate their products with Fill that Hole and similar public defect-reporting websites, to facilitate two-way communication between site-users and highway authorities.
- When resurfacing, local authorities should take the opportunity to systematically consider improving cycling conditions as part of the project. This approach requires coordination between maintenance planning, highways engineers and those promoting sustainable travel. It also helps maximise the synergies between cycling and maintenance budgets and enhances their value.

1. Why highway maintenance matters to people who cycle

Poor road conditions and lack of maintenance of local roads is a top concern for Britain's drivers[1], but people who cycle suffer disproportionately because they are not protected in the same way as motor vehicle occupants.

a. Casualties

Pothole, ruts, loose gravel, ice[2] and diesel/oil spills can cause cyclists serious, sometimes fatal injuries.

In total, between 2012-2021 (GB), 23 cyclists died in crashes in which the police thought a 'poor or defective road surface' was a contributory factor. [3]

Over the same time period, also according to police at the scene, on average a year[4]:

- Over a fifth (22%) of the killed or seriously injured (KSI) casualties where a 'poor or defective road surface' was probably a contributory factor were cyclists, even though cycling accounted for only about 1.2% of all road traffic
- A 'poor or defective road surface' contributed to over fifty cyclist KSI casualties
- A 'slippery road (due to weather)' contributed to just under 100 cyclist KSIs
- A 'deposit on the road (eg. oil, mud chippings)' contributed to about 25 KSIs.

It is likely that most, if not all, fatal crashes are reported to and by the police, but that a good proportion of non-fatal crashes are not. While the kind of injuries involved in these cases may be slight, not all of them will be and some may need hospital treatment. This means that injury incidents due to road defects are almost certainly underreported.

b. Discomfort

Cycling on poorly maintained roads is not only hazardous, but also uncomfortable and hard work.[5] As one study put it, "Comfortable cycling requires smooth rolling at lowest possible energy input."[6]

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[1] See RAC's annual reports on motoring.
[2] See Sustrans blog on cyclists' casualties associated with falling on ice (2018)
[3] Contributory factors are assigned by police officers at the scene of a crash. They are not the result of a forensic investigation or the findings of any court case.
[4] Figures from the Department for Transport's Road Casualties, Great Britain (Table RAS0701) and Road Traffic Estimates (Tables TRA0401 and 0101).
[5] Taylor, Mark (et al). Cyclist exposure to hand-arm vibration and pavement surface improvement in the City of Edinburgh. Scottish Transport Applications Research (STAR 2017).
[6] Holzel, C. (et al). Cycling comfort on different road surfaces. 2012.

2. What defects do cyclists need councils to prioritise for repair?

Potentially, any deviation in a road surface can present a hazard. Even if a cyclist is aware of a pothole coming up, motor traffic passing by can force them to alter their path and ride over or into it. Worse, in the dark and/or if filled with rainwater, defects are especially hard to see, assess and avoid in time.

Each highway authority sets its own criteria for prioritising repairs, and most use a guideline depth of 40mm to define a pothole[7]. Some also factor other considerations into their criteria – the location and the nature of passing traffic, for example.

Certainly, the depth of a defect is by no means the only critical factor when considering the comfort and safety of cyclists. Its shape and/or where it lies could be the main problem, regardless of how deep it is:

Defects that cause particular problems for cyclists, and should be given special consideration in national and local maintenance standards, and all relevant policies and regimes

- Defects **towards the side of the road**, where most people ride – i.e. the two metres nearest to the kerb or any regular car parking space. Defects here can force cyclists to swerve out into the carriageway and, potentially, into the path of motor vehicles.
- Defects **at or near junctions**, where cyclists are likely to be looking at other traffic rather than the road surface. Their balance may also be affected when cornering.
- Defects **on downhill sections** of roads where cyclists will probably be travelling faster, making it more likely that a jolt will cause serious injury or damage.
- Defects **presenting a sharp upstand on the far side**, i.e. where a bike wheel hits a steep or sharp-edged 'wall' as it tries to leave the depression.
- Defects **running along rather than across the path that cyclists will be taking**, i.e. those which are more likely to trap a cyclist's wheel, like a tramline. Slots in drainage covers aligned with the direction of the road can do this too, so covers should be installed with the slots at right angles to the kerb.

There are, of course, other surface hazards, such as oil spills, ice, snow (see 4b below), gravel patches, broken glass, sunken drain covers and slippery ironwork or road markings etc. Authorities need to tackle these too, e.g. through robust winter maintenance and sweeping procedures, and regular inspections.

[7] Asphalt Industry Alliance. Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey.

3. Catering for cyclists: best practice

In all respects, road conditions should be welcoming for cycling, a mode of travel that offers so many health and the environment benefits. The business case for highway maintenance investment should reflect this, ensuring that people aren't deterred from cycling because of substandard road surfaces and the discomfort and hazards they pose.

In 2019, Cycling UK gave both written and oral evidence to the Parliamentary Transport Select Committee's inquiry into local roads funding and governance. The Committee concluded:

"This plague of potholes is a major headache for everyone. The consequences of a deteriorating local road network are significant. It undermines local economic performance and results in direct costs to taxpayers—either through rising costs of deferred work or through a mend and make do approach that does not represent good value for money in the long-term. It also affects motorists—damaging vehicles—and causes injuries to passengers, particularly those with existing medical conditions.

"The safety of other road users, especially cyclists, is seriously compromised. Pedestrians, particularly those who are older or vulnerable, can be left feeling anxious and isolated, afraid to leave their own homes."

The following looks at the best ways of catering for cycling through road maintenance:

a. Give greater priority to minor roads

Minor roads carry only about 36% of car mileage, compared to over 84% of cycle mileage, but major roads are usually deemed the maintenance priority because they carry most motor traffic overall (c.64%).[8]

In contrast, in the Netherlands and Denmark where cycle use is high, cycle paths and roads used for cycling enjoy more attention than the road network. Cycling UK believes that this should become the practice in the UK, with these routes being inspected and swept regularly, and subject to effective winter maintenance.

b. Think long-term, rather than short-term

Surface defects are often patched up reactively on a short-term, individual basis, and millions are fixed each year.[9] As mentioned below (section 8), though, it is more expensive to fill a pothole reactively than as part of a planned maintenance programme.

[8] DfT. Road Traffic Estimates in Great Britain. Tables TRA 0204, 0402 and 0102
[9] Asphalt Industry Alliance. Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey.

Many of these defects, however, result from an underlying structural problem, or because the road has been allowed to reach the end of its usable life. This situation may well lead to mounting costs for emergency repairs and compensation claims (see section 5 below).

A superior option is either to seal the surface before the road reaches the end of its lifespan, or to reconstruct it completely to its full depth. Disruption will be inevitable, especially on a busy road, but the treatment will prevent potholes from forming so frequently, and ample evidence suggests that this is better value for money.[10]

The problems of surface dressing

Surface dressing is commonly used on minor roads as a cheap alternative to full resurfacing. It is designed to seal the surface and prevent moisture penetration. If well-laid in good conditions and on smooth roads, this treatment can preserve a deteriorating surface for longer, extending the road's life and preventing potholes.

On the other hand, if applied to an already deformed or damaged surface, surface dressing merely blankets it. The surface remains bumpy and difficult to negotiate on a cycle.

Also, although the standard approach is to make at least two sweeps afterwards, this may be done inefficiently or not at all. As a result, the road may be covered for some time by loose chippings, a hazard that can make cyclists skid.

Poor workmanship or bad weather, moreover, can lead to premature failure, especially if the dressing has been laid under trees where conditions are cooler and damper. Irregular adhesion creates an extremely rough surface and undermines the treatment's purpose.

Where resources and conditions permit, resurfacing will give a far better, long-lasting surface comfortable for cyclists and other road users.

Which vehicles do the most damage?

The stress on a road surface increases in proportion to the fourth power of the axle load of the vehicle travelling along the road (the fourth power law/rule). This means that cars and particularly HGVs do far, far more damage than anyone can possibly do on a cycle.

c. Budget for whole-life maintenance

When planning an off-road cycling facility, local authorities need to ensure that they budget for ongoing maintenance. Routes that fall into disrepair, remain unswept or are encroached by vegetation that is rarely, if ever, cut back, will naturally fail to attract users and result in yet further neglect.

It makes sense, therefore, to invest in equipment to help make the process as efficient as possible from the start. For instance: in the Netherlands and other countries,

[10] DfT/Highways Agency. Maintaining strategic infrastructure: roads. June 2014.

instrumented cycles are used for assessing the smoothness and comfort of cycling conditions, (i.e. with sensors which can detect unevenness);[11] and a range of equipment is available for carrying out cycle path maintenance (e.g. small, narrow sweepers).

How road defects form

Road surfaces tend to deteriorate gradually from natural weathering and ageing.

Asphalt, the most common material used to bind aggregate into a road surface, normally lasts for 15-20 years before it becomes oxidized by sunlight and heat. This makes it increasingly brittle and susceptible to cracking, while the constant passage of vehicles exacerbates the damage.

Cracks allow water to infiltrate the surface and, as they expand and let in more water during repeated freezes and thaws, bigger holes form. Motor tyres widen and deepen the defects and can push loose foundation material out of them.

How to prevent them

- **Inspect surfaces regularly**: a good programme of inspection, backed by reporting tools for the public can help councils identify priorities for repair.
- **Keep roads well-drained**: ditches, culverts and drains need to be cleared regularly and roads engineered so that they don't collect standing water.
- **Ensure surfaces are watertight**: if done properly, surface dressing (a thin layer of asphalt and chippings) can help make the surface watertight, but care is needed to avoid leaving loose chippings and other hazards behind.
- **Minimise utility works and check quality of repair**: opening the road surface for street works (i.e. work carried out by utility companies) weakens the structure and the carriageway may not be reinstated well.
- **Cut back overhanging vegetation regularly**: overhanging vegetation (mainly trees) can prevent or reduce the amount of direct sunlight falling on the road surface and drip rainwater onto it. This means that the carriageway underneath takes longer to dry out and is more susceptible to water penetration and the freeze-thaw effect.
- **Regularly resurface**: all roads eventually fail. There comes a point when it is more cost-effective to resurface a road completely, than to keep patching it.
- **Reduce traffic**: as large vehicles cause most damage, restricting their access to certain roads can help prolong the life-span of the surface.

[11] Bíl, Michal (et al). How comfortable are your cycling tracks? A new method for objective bicycle vibration measurement. 2015.

d. Improve cycling conditions in planned maintenance programmes

Planned maintenance programmes for roads, streets or junctions – which may have been designed according to long-superseded guidance – are cost-effective opportunities to implement new approaches and layouts to benefit existing cycle users and encourage others to take up cycling.

It is thus important not to isolate highway maintenance from other processes, especially traffic management and 'placemaking' (looking at the role of the street as a place, not simply as a route for through-traffic).

Road surfaces have a 10-20-year lifespan, and local authorities typically schedule streets for total reconstruction and renewal several years in advance. This gives them an ideal opportunity to plan improvements for cycling well ahead, and coordinate their cycling and planned road maintenance programmes to maximise the synergies between budgets.

The best way of facilitating this is through partnership working between highways engineers, sustainable travel officers, planners and other stakeholders. Even developers, who can be asked to contribute to the improvements via planning conditions, should be involved where relevant.

Well-managed highway infrastructure, the UK's code of practice (see below) says: "When schemes are planned and programmed there may be an opportunity to incorporate added value to the safety, priority, integrity or quality of footways and crossing facilities (particularly for vulnerable users), cycle routes and crossing facilities [etc]."

There are, of course, many other ways of improving conditions for active travel: lower speed limits, traffic calming, protected cycleways and cycle-friendly junctions, to name but a few.

e. Check lighting, markings and signage

Inspection regimes should include checks on lighting and all signage relevant to cyclists. Ill-lit cycle paths may be hazardous and make users feel personally insecure, putting them off using routes in the dark, especially if the surface is heavily rutted. Worn markings or damaged signage are another problem because they make it difficult to identify a cycle facility.

f. Keep a close eye on utility companies / road work contractors

Utility companies have the statutory right to dig up the road surface. Their operations often take place at the side of the road and involve trenches, drainage gullies and ironwork. As this is the part of the carriageway where most cycling occurs, it is particularly important for companies to reinstate the road properly. Local authorities, who have control over the work of utilities, need to insist that this is done and force action if it is not.

Equal vigilance should be applied to contractors who undertake road works.

Catering for cyclists during street works or road works

Safe and convenient cycle access should be retained at road/street works wherever possible. This means:

- **Not unnecessarily diverting cyclists**, and especially not onto busier or narrower carriageways.
- **Not endangering cyclists with grit, debris, temporary metal plates or any slip hazard.** The area round construction sites needs to be kept clean.
- **Making sure temporary, one-way shuttle-working traffic lights to control narrowed sections of road give cyclists enough time to pass through safely** before traffic starts coming towards them.
- **Reducing speeds and/or installing warning signs to advise drivers not to overtake cyclists.** These are far preferable to 'Cyclists dismount' signs (unless the entire carriageway is closed to all traffic and cyclists have to be diverted onto the footway).
- **Arranging two-way cycling wherever possible** even when one-way diversions are in place for motor traffic.

Code of practice

The DfT publishes a code of practice for anyone responsible for street and road works on all highways and roads (except motorways and dual carriageways with a speed limit of 50mph+).

This has a section on catering for cyclists, advising practitioners that they "must ensure suitable provisions are made for the safety of cyclists passing or crossing the works."

The Code stresses many of the practices recommended by Cycling UK above, **and is a useful document to cite to a local council if street or road works are causing problems.**

See also www.gov.uk/government/publications/street-works-faq

g. Further reading on highway maintenance for cycling

- Cycle Infrastructure Design, LTN1/20, Chapter 15 (DfT, 2020)
- Active Travel Act Guidance, Chapter 15 (Welsh Government, 2021)
- Cycling by Design, section 3.13 (Transport Scotland, 2021 update)

4. Duties and liability

Strategic roads (i.e. most motorways and trunk roads) are maintained by the relevant national authority (e.g. National Highways in England, Transport Scotland and the Welsh Government. In Northern Ireland, the Department for Infrastructure is the sole roads authority for both national and local roads). Most other roads, which carry most cycle traffic are the responsibility of local highways authorities.

a. Local authorities

Highways Authorities (or 'Roads Authorities' in Scotland) have several statutory duties and powers relating to the maintenance (interpreted as 'repairing') of the public highway/roads, principally under the:

- Highways Act 1980 (s41(1)) (HA1980), England and Wales;
- Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 (ss 1&2); and
- Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, Article 8.

The 'highway' includes footways and cycleways.

The Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 states: "The Welsh Ministers and each local authority must, in the exercise of their functions under Parts 3, 4, 5, 9 and 12 of the Highways Act 1980 (creation, maintenance and improvement of highways, interference with highways and acquisition etc. of land), in so far as it is practicable to do so, take reasonable steps to enhance the provision made for walkers and cyclists." [12]

b. Snow, ice, gravel and oil

Section 41 of HA1980 (as modified by section 111 of the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003), imposed a duty on highway authorities to "ensure, so as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow and ice".

Section 34 of the Roads Scotland Act says: "A roads authority shall take such steps as they consider reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads."

The duty under Section 41 HA1980 does not extend to gravel or oil on the surface of the road, a common source of danger to cyclists. However, this does not remove the possibility of a highway authority being found negligent if it fails to remove gravel, oil or other debris which subsequently results in injury/damage to a road user.[13]

Forcing a highway authority to repair a road (UK)

1: Raise concerns directly with local authority
2: If no action results, resort to legal action under Section 56 of the *Highways Act 1980* (s56 applies to the UK). This involves obtaining an order from the Magistrates' Court, which should force them to fix the defect(s).

[12] www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2013/7/pdfs/anaw_20130007_en.pdf
[13] Grierson I and Huxford R, Highway Risk and Liability Claims. UK Roads Board/ICE. 2009.

c. Utility companies / road works contractors

The New Road and Street Works Act 1991 (UK-wide) applies to the conduct of gas, water, electricity and telecommunications companies who have a statutory right dig up the highway if they need to – i.e. Section 81 (England and Wales), for instance, requires such 'statutory undertakers' to satisfy the highway authority that their apparatus doesn't cause danger to road users. The highway authority can also order the utility company to make good any defects associated with their operations.

d. Vegetation

For the ins and outs of vegetation clearance (e.g. if hedge cuttings are causing a nuisance on the carriageway), see our separate briefing.

5. Compensation claims

Poor road conditions can generate road user compensation claims for personal injury or vehicular damage.

Freedom of Information requests from Cycling UK, answered by 156 councils in Britain, found that from 2013/14 to 2017/18 (five years) local authorities paid out 25 times as much per cyclist than for motorists.[14]

Compensation claims and Section 58

An authority that fails to discharge its maintenance duties puts itself at risk of compensation claims from road users who suffer damage or personal injury as a result of a road, footway or cycleway surface defect.

Such cases, however, are often disputed by a council's legal advisers, and liability may be difficult to substantiate. Moreover, the law provides authorities with a 'statutory defence' against claims if they can prove that they operate a reasonable and adequate system for highway repair and maintenance.

For England & Wales, this defence is set out in Section 58 of the Highways Act 1980: "it is a defence … to prove that the authority had taken such care as in all the circumstances was reasonably required to secure that the part of the highway to which the action relates was not dangerous for traffic."

This, and following clauses, explains that, to mount such a defence, the authority must maintain those roads according to a hierarchy and which types of traffic are likely to use them. They must also carry out inspections to detect errors when they occur, and, if the road condition is below standard, repair it, or erect notices alerting users to the problem.

Section 1 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 and the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, Article 8 make similar provisions.

Yet there is no definition of 'reasonable', often making it hard for injured parties to establish whether the council has failed in its duty, and easy for councils to defend themselves. This is why Cycling UK believes that national guidance, and the policies/standards of individual highway authorities should cover cyclists' comfort and safety, and that these standards should then be used to assess liability in the event of damage and/or injury.

Despite the challenges involved in seeking compensation following a highway maintenance-related injury, however, it is entirely possible for claims to succeed. Cycle-SOS, Cycling UK's official partner law firm, have successfully represented thousands of cyclists who have suffered damage and/or injury caused by road defects.

[14] Cycling UK. Pothole compensation claims cost councils 25 times more per cyclist than for motorists. 3 March 2019.

6. The national code of practice on well-managed highway infrastructure

Local highway authorities must refer to the national code of practice, Well-managed Highway Infrastructure which, although not statutory, is backed by central and local government in all the nations of the UK.[15]

The Code's latest revision in 2016 focusses on 'asset management', which is welcome shift from reactive maintenance to more planned maintenance.

Conversely, the Code also focusses on 'risk-based' assessment. This is double-edged because, instead of recommending standards (e.g. the need to fill an 40mm+ deep pothole urgently), it advises authorities to minimise the risks of harm (including disruption as well as injuries). With the freedom to come up with their own criteria on repair, inspection frequency, vegetation clearance and winter maintenance regimes etc, cash-strapped councils may therefore be tempted to revise their standards downwards.

While the Code includes advice on maintaining/managing cycle routes specifically, and on the need to keep them in mind more generally (see extracts below), Cycling UK was dismayed that it failed to mention the defects that put cyclists most at risk (see section 2 above).

We therefore believe that the Code should include, or be supplemented by, recommended good practice standards that address this shortcoming. These would also provide a default benchmark for settling liability claims, while still leaving local authorities latitude to adopt reasoned departures, in accordance with local circumstances and priorities.

See next page for extracts from *Well-managed Highway Infrastructure*.

[15] UK Roads Board. Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: a code of practice. October 2016.

Extracts from Well-managed Highway Infrastructure

"Network hierarchy should take into account the desirability of continuity and of a consistent approach for walking and cycling."

"... traffic composition might indicate unusually high proportions of particular users, for example motorcyclists or cyclists for whom surface condition is of particular importance."

"Securing continuous improvement in the safety and serviceability of cycle routes, in particular network integrity, will be a necessary component for encouraging cycling as an alternative to the car. It will be important for maintenance strategy positively to address this."

"Network integrity is a particularly important consideration where cycle routes are segregated for part of their length, but intermittently rejoin the carriageway. In these circumstances a reasonably consistent level of maintenance should be provided, and attention paid to carriageway edge condition in the un-segregated sections."

"It would seem logical for cycle routes to be inspected by cycle, although inspection of parts of some shared routes may be possible by walking or by vehicle as appropriate."

"Where footways or cycle routes remote from carriageways form part of an integrated route or network intended to encourage walking and cycle use, or are promoted by the authority, consideration should be given to adopting a consistent safety inspection frequency for the route or network as a whole."

"The [safety inspection] regime should be developed based on a risk assessment and provide a practical and reasonable approach to the risks and potential consequences identified. It should take account of potential risks to all users, and in particular those most vulnerable."

"Issues for consideration in developing [a winter service] policy should include [...] treatment of facilities for walking and cycling; [...] extent of priority for vulnerable users."

"It is also important to consider equipment requirements for dealing with footways and cycle routes. Specialist equipment, such as footway ploughs and footway salt spreaders, may be necessary for this purpose."

7. Reporting systems

Cycling UK's Fill That Hole site, set up in 2007, allows any road user to report road defects online. This automatically relays the information to the relevant highways/roads authority so that they can fix the problem. Most local authorities offer their own online reporting facilities too.

Online reporting systems are a valuable complement to routine inspections because they help alert the authority to a problem that they may not otherwise find out about until the next inspection, which might be months away.

To optimise their benefits (and the statistics they collect), all reporting systems need to facilitate efficient two-way communication between site-users and councils. For example, councils need to acknowledge receipt of a report and feedback on whether the defect has been repaired. This is something that *Well-managed Highway Infrastructure* advises (see section 6 above).

8. Funding, costs and road conditions

Structural road maintenance is funded by both local and central governments and, in London, by Transport for London. The amount changes from year to year, and is sometimes boosted by one-off repair funds allocated centrally.

According to the annual ALARM survey, the money councils have available for maintenance regularly falls short of what's needed, and between them they pay out £millions in road user compensation claims and the administration/staff needed to deal with them.

The ALARM survey also shows that it is more expensive to fill a pothole reactively than part of a planned programme: the report published in 2023, says that local authorities reported that it costs, on average per pothole, £70 - £121 for a reactive filling, but only just over £52 for a planned repair.

See the DfT's road condition statistics, Tables RDC 0121, 0131 and 0310 for the latest data on:

- the conditions of roads in England and the proportion of roads where maintenance should be considered, and
- how much is spent on maintenance in England by road class (i.e. the split between major and minor roads).

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