



It's time to build on what's been started

Overview by **David Giles**, Chair,
Asphalt Industry Alliance

There's no polite way to put it: the condition of our local roads has become a national disgrace. And, with this year's ALARM survey reporting that the backlog of carriageway repairs in England and Wales has increased to another record high of **£18.62 billion**, it's clear that any noticeable improvements lie a long way off.

Tracking ALARM data over the last decade shows that the amount needed to bring the carriageway up to scratch has increased dramatically, not helped by the inconsistent funding levels that local authorities have reported over this period. Meanwhile, our ageing network has become more fragile and vital resurfacing takes place less frequently – now reportedly only once every 97 years on average.

Ensure best value

The AIA has long advocated a different approach: sustained investment in highways maintenance supported by a long-term funding horizon and greater transparency. This would provide local authority highway engineers with the certainty they need to carry out the most appropriate maintenance interventions at the right time – helping to halt decline, improve conditions and ensure best value for tax payers.

It appears the Government has listened. It's funding announcements for local highway maintenance in England, including £1.6 billion for this (2025/26) financial year – £500 million more than the previous year – plus its subsequent pledge to allocate £7.3 billion over the next four years, represent an important step forward.

This initial uplift, along with additional allocations from local authorities' own sources, has led to significant increases in the average highway maintenance budgets reported in 2025/26. However, these have only resulted in marginal improvements in conditions. So, while local authority highway engineers told us they are cautiously optimistic that the increased funding will help them stem further decline, it

is not the silver bullet that will clear the backlog of repairs any time soon.

This winter was one of the wettest on record and the continuing impact of adverse weather events on a consistently underfunded, and increasingly fragile network are coming home to roost.

Certainly, it will be some time before the impact of increased funding levels, if fully delivered, will be noticed by the public. But the dial could be moved quicker if the Government's commitment to additional funding was frontloaded, rather than ramping up in the years to 2030. This would support a shift away from the seemingly endless cycle of pothole patch and repair – allowing those maintaining our local roads to focus on proactive programmes that prevent potholes forming in the first place and improve the experience of all road users.

Improve local roads

Local authorities told us that if, hypothetically, their backlog of repairs was cleared, the amount they would need to maintain their roads to a steady state each year, would be £1 billion less a year every year going forward. Plus, investing to improve local roads would also deliver significant returns to the economy and help keep communities connected.

Every journey we make relies on local roads; even carrying the utilities to support a thriving, modern society. However, it is evident from media coverage bemoaning the state of our roads that their condition remains a key issue for the public. It's time for the Government to ensure the promised funding is delivered – and fast.

David Giles