

## **No quick fix for local roads, reports ALARM survey**

**Road users should not expect a quick fix to the condition of local roads, despite a reported increase in funding, says this year's Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey report.**

Additional investment in highway maintenance, from both central government<sup>1</sup> and local authority sources, has yet to deliver noticeable improvements and local authorities in England and Wales now face a record **£18.62 billion backlog of carriageway repairs.**

Only half (51%) of the local road network is reported to be in good structural condition. However, almost one in six (16%) local roads - equivalent to over 32,500 miles - is reported to have less than five years' structural life remaining.

"I think all road users would agree that the condition of our local roads has become a national disgrace," said David Giles, Chair of the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA), which commissions the ALARM survey.

"Tracking ALARM data over the last decade shows the amount needed to bring local roads up to scratch has increased dramatically, and the impact of frequent adverse weather events on a consistently underfunded - and increasingly fragile - network are coming home to roost."

Highway maintenance budgets in England and Wales for 2025-26 are reported to have increased by 17% to an average £30.5 million per authority, with over half of that (54%) spent on the surface and structure of the road.

However, the additional amount local authorities reported they would have needed to maintain the network to their target conditions has continued to rise to £1.37 billion (up 10% on last year), likely to be compounded by the impacts of one of the wettest winters on record.



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[1] The Government announced £1.6 billion in England for the 2025/26 financial year - £500 million more than the previous year - in the Autumn 2024 Budget. It subsequently pledged to allocated £7.3 billion between 2026/27 and 2029/30 in November 2025.

**Findings of ALARM 2026, which relate to the 2025/26 financial year, show that in England and Wales:**

- Local authorities would have needed, on average, an extra £8.1 million each last year to maintain their network to their own target conditions and prevent further decline.
- £18.62 billion is now reported to be required, as a one-off, for local authorities to bring the network up to their 'ideal' conditions.
- If this backlog of repairs was cleared, the amount local authorities would need to maintain their roads in a steady state would be £1 billion less a year every year going forward. Funds that could usefully be redeployed elsewhere.
- Just over 100,000 miles (49%) of the local road network is now reported to have less than 15 years' structural life remaining.
- Roads are only resurfaced, on average, once every 97 years.
- 1.9 million potholes were filled over the last year - the equivalent of more than 5,200 every day of the year.

Commenting on the ALARM report, AA President Edmund King OBE said: "The ALARM 2026 report starkly warns us how much more needs to be done to eradicate this plague of potholes. We have been seeing with our own eyes, and feeling with our wheels, how record wet weather linked to substandard roads has led to many local roads becoming patchwork obstacle courses."

AIA Chair David Giles added: "Local authority highway engineers have told us they are cautiously optimistic that the increased funding announced by the Government, supplemented by their own coffers, should help them stem further decline, but it is not the silver bullet that will enable them to clear the backlog of repairs any time soon."

"It will be some time before the impact of increased funding levels, if fully delivered, will be noticed by the public. However, 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 and allow local authority highway teams to sooner deliver necessary resurfacing and proactive programmes that prevent potholes forming in the first place to improve the experience of all road users."

The ALARM survey reports local road funding and conditions in England and Wales based on information provided directly by those responsible for the maintenance of the network. This year's survey, the 31<sup>st</sup>, received responses from 79% of local authorities.

The full ALARM survey report will be available to download from 00:01 hours on Tuesday 17 March 2026 at: [www.asphaltuk.org](http://www.asphaltuk.org)

## Comments on findings from the Asphalt Industry Alliance's ALARM survey 2026



### **AA President, Edmund King OBE:**

“The ALARM 2026 report starkly warns us how much more needs to be done to eradicate this plague of potholes. We have been seeing with our own eyes, and feeling with our wheels, how record wet weather linked to substandard roads has led to many local roads becoming patchwork obstacle courses.

“The AA has been called out to 137,000 pothole-related incidents in the UK in January and February this year - 25,000 up on last year. Extra funding needs to be maintained and spent on more permanent repairs to prevent extensive vehicle damage and potentially fatal injuries to those on two wheels.”



### **Local Government Association Chair of the Inclusive Growth Committee, Cllr Tom Hunt:**

“More funding being directed towards fixing roads, alongside some longer-term certainty is positive. However, the fact that councils still face an £18.62 billion backlog of local road repairs, shows more action is needed for councils to bring roads up to scratch.

“Local authorities work hard to fix potholes swiftly to prevent people’s journey from being impeded. The scale of the backlog and the many factors that affect repair rates, from the type of road and traffic levels, to changing weather patterns, means local government is having to do more with less, and find innovative new ways to respond to the issue.”



### **RAC Head of Policy, Simon Williams:**

“As drivers testify, decades of underinvestment have left many roads in a woeful state of disrepair – something that’s been even more noticeable since the beginning of the year with our teams receiving hundreds of breakdown reports every day mentioning potholes.

“We hope new record levels of funding from central Government and a commitment to longer

term investment that allow councils to plan highways maintenance will mean we start to turn a corner – although it will be some time before drivers notice a real difference.

"The path to better roads isn't complicated: ensure water always drains off the roads, fix potholes as permanently as possible, seal roads against water ingress through preventative maintenance, and resurface those that have gone beyond the point of no return."



**Motorcycle Action Group Director of Campaigns and Political Engagement, Colin Brown:**

"Local authorities are telling us something important: if the repair backlog was cleared, it would actually cost £1 billion less per year to maintain the network properly. That's the case for frontloading investment in a single sentence.

"For MAG, though, the argument goes well beyond balance sheets. Government data consistently shows that road surface conditions contribute to twice the proportion of motorcycle killed or seriously injured (KSI) casualties compared to both car occupants and cyclists – 4% versus 2%, every single year for a decade. Riders aren't complaining about cracked roads because of the damage to their tyres – it's the added risk of dying on them. The Government needs to frontload this funding."



**IAM RoadSmart Director of Policy and Standards, Nicholas Lyes:**

"The embarrassing state of our local road network is fast becoming a national scandal. Around one in six local roads are effectively on life support with less than five years of structural integrity remaining. What was once deemed an irritant with expensive consequences, poorly maintained local roads now represent a real road safety hazard. Our research suggests drivers are taking risky actions to avoid hitting potholes, while for those on two wheels, they can cause serious injury or worse. We need a long-term approach that invests in proper surface maintenance, rather than the all too often 'patch and dash' repairs that crumble at the first sign of bad weather."

**For more information, or to arrange an interview with an AIA spokesperson, please contact:**

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## **Notes to editors**

- The Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey report is produced by the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA). Now in its 31st year, it is widely respected throughout industry and local and national government as the most authoritative and comprehensive study into local road maintenance funding and conditions in England and Wales.
- The ALARM survey 2026 was completed by 79% of authorities responsible for roads in England, London and Wales and was carried out between December 2025 and February 2026.
- The 2026 ALARM survey's findings relate to roads maintained by local authorities only and therefore excludes those forming the Strategic Road Network (SRN), which is managed by National Highways.
- The ALARM survey is commissioned by the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA), on behalf of the producers of the raw materials and products used for roads construction, maintenance and repair.
- The survey includes the findings of both quantitative and qualitative research and the results have been independently analysed by a registered member of the Royal Statistical Society.
- ALARM survey reports from previous years can be accessed via [www.asphaltuk.org](http://www.asphaltuk.org) and a broad range of road-related statistics are collated on [www.roadusers.org.uk](http://www.roadusers.org.uk)
- Submissions into the ALARM survey are made confidentially. As such, we are unable to share data from individual local authorities, but regional releases are available on request for: London, Wales, North East, North West, Yorkshire & Humberside, East Midlands, West Midlands, East, South East and South West.