

## Executive summary

**T**he aim of the Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey is to highlight the connection between local road maintenance funding and conditions in England (including London) and Wales, based on information provided directly by those responsible for its maintenance. A record number of local authorities took

part in this year's survey, providing robust data for analysis and underscoring the value that those working in the sector place on its annual findings. It is used by local authorities for benchmarking and by stakeholders across the sector as a valuable tool for tracking local road conditions and funding.

## 2021/22 at a glance

### Funding:

- Average highway maintenance budgets across England and Wales have **increased by 4% to £24.7 million per authority** but this does not account for the impacts of increased costs from rising inflation and the ongoing impacts of COVID restrictions and related changes to working practices.

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- Not all local authority highway teams saw an increase in funding: **56% of authorities actually reported a cut or freeze in their highway maintenance budget**, even before inflation is taken into account.

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- The percentage of highway maintenance **budget allocated to the carriageway dropped slightly to 51%**, reflecting growing pressures to maintain other parts of the highway asset, such as structures, signage and drainage.

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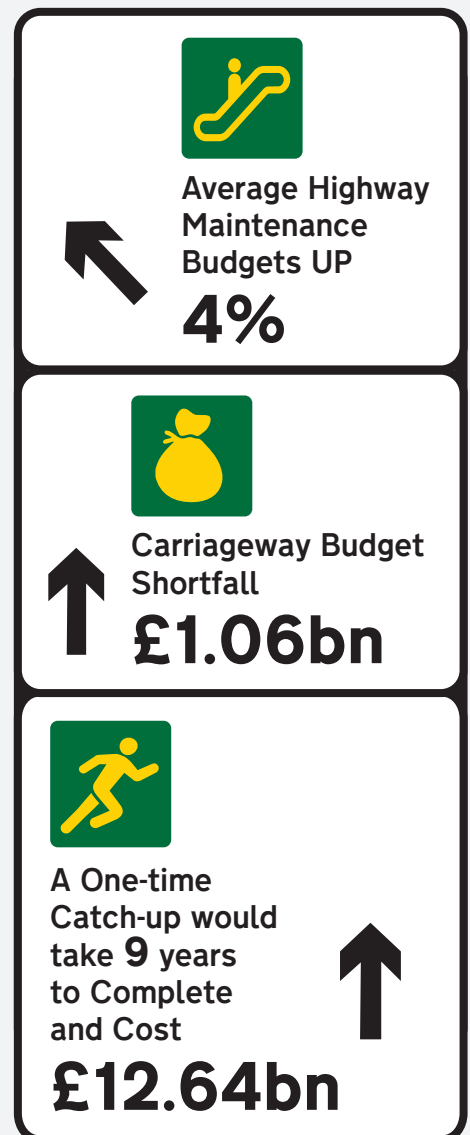
- However, increased average highway maintenance budgets still resulted in the average carriageway maintenance budget showing a marginal increase of 1.5% on last year to £13.2 million, which represents **a cut in real terms** against general measures of inflation.

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- The average shortfall in the 2021/22 carriageway budget has **leapt nearly 50% to £6.4 million per authority**, with the total shortfall in the year exceeding £1 billion.

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- As a result, the **one-time catch-up cost has increased by 23%** on last year's reported figure to £12.64 billion and would take nearly a decade to complete. This is the amount needed as a one-off – to bring the network up to condition that would allow it to be managed cost effectively going forward as part of a proactive asset management approach.



## Conditions:

- ➔ Road Condition Index (RCI) data reports the condition of the surface of the carriageway, not necessarily the structure of the road. While **no category of road achieves the ideal profile**, there have been slight improvements on last year, with an additional 2% of the road network classified as GREEN (being in a good state of repair).

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- ➔ Roads classed as **RED (poor overall condition)** also saw a 2% increase, bringing the total likely to require maintenance in the next 12 months to 11% – around 22,000 miles or the equivalent of travelling between London and Birmingham 175 times.

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- ➔ The need to prioritise work means that an unclassified road is **at least three times** more likely to be classified as RED than either a principal or non-principal road.

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- ➔ Feedback suggests that highway engineers focused on managing those roads classed as AMBER (where some deterioration is apparent) on their network, with many taking steps to return borderline AMBER roads to GREEN, if only temporarily.

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- ➔ Over the last year **1.7 million potholes were filled** – the same as last year – equivalent to one every 19 seconds. Overall, £107.4m was spent filling potholes in 2021/22 and the total spent over the last 10 years is more than £1.04 billion.

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- ➔ The average frequency for all classes of road resurfacing now stands at once every 70 years, with a road being resurfaced today not likely to be so again until 2092.

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- ➔ Structural conditions data provides a more holistic assessment of the carriageway asset and **18% of the network (36,918 miles) is now defined as being structurally poor**, with less than five years' life remaining – an increase of more than 2,000 miles on last year's figures. Structural maintenance is needed when surface maintenance alone won't suffice.

## Recommendations

The link between continued underinvestment and the ongoing structural decline of our local roads is clear. The country's ambitions to encourage active travel and cut waste and carbon emissions will not be achieved with a short-term approach that can't deliver a first-rate local road network.

Recent government announcements regarding three-year spending on maintenance (for England) are a step in the right direction but don't go far enough.

To ensure we have a safe, resilient, sustainable network on which we can all rely, a longer-term approach and significant investment is still needed across the country. The longer it takes for the funding to be put in place to tackle the backlog of repairs,

the more it is going to cost to put it right in the future. Four years ago, the AIA calculated that an additional £1.5 billion per year was needed for 10 years to bring local roads up to scratch.

In the meantime, the network has continued to decline and ALARM 2022 indicates this figure has now reached more than £2 billion a year over the next decade.

This would allow local authority highway teams to bring the network up to a point from which it could be maintained cost-effectively going forward.

As a result, we would have the local road network we need in order to achieve the government's cohesion, economic recovery and levelling up goals.



Road Network  
classified as

**RED**

Principal: 4%

Non-principal: 5%

Unclassified: 15%



A pothole filled  
every 19 seconds  
at a cost of

**£107.4m**



Roads  
resurfaced every

**70 years**

Detailed key findings can be found on page 20.