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ALARM

ANNUAL LOCAL AUTHORITY ROAD MAINTENANCE (ALARM) SURVEY 2012

Publication embargo: 15 March 2012





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The Asphalt Industry Alliance is grateful for the support of the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) for their assistance in compiling the ALARM questionnaire.

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Chairman's Introduction



The 17th Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) Survey, while revealing some small improvements on last year's exceptional results, still reports few reasons to be cheerful. There is no doubt that the issue of highway maintenance funding remains in urgent need of resolving.

A look back over the years to 2000 illustrates a fairly consistent picture of significant funding shortfall to the tune of around £1 billion a year, or thereabouts. This year the total projected shortfall across England and Wales amounts to just under £800 million, less than it has ever been, so a move in the right direction. However, it still equates to each local authority highways department being short of £5.3 million over the last year of the funds needed to keep their roads in reasonable condition.

It is decades of such underfunding that has led to the focus on reactive maintenance – a patch and mend approach – rather than on planned preventative maintenance. Three successive harsh winters have proven the point that allowing roads to deteriorate while the sun shines might be a short term solution to cash flow but in terms of value for money it gives the worst return. Planned preventative maintenance – resurfacing worn roads before they get to the state in which potholes start to appear – is at least 20 times less expensive than patching and mending. And a new surface will, at worst, last 10 times longer than a filled pothole.

This year's ALARM Survey, completed by 70 per cent of local authorities responsible for roads, revealed the true cost of the harsh weather in winter 2010/11: approaching £600 million. Even allowing for the most welcome £200 million of emergency

funding from central government, that still takes the year's funding shortfall well over a billion pounds.

The survey also revealed that much repair work remains to be done. Less than a third of authorities were able to make good the additional damage to their roads last year and the 69 per cent unable to do so reported over 40 per cent of the work still to be done. With 1.7 million potholes filled over the last year we have to be grateful for the recent milder winter weather.

Annually set budgets create a major barrier to the implementation of planned preventative maintenance programmes so it is not surprising that most respondents called for longer term funding of a minimum of five years.

One effect of last year's rash of potholes and the outcry it stimulated was a very welcome recognition of the need for action from central government. Transport Minister Norman Baker MP announced that £6 million was being invested in a Highway Maintenance Efficiency Programme (HMEP) to help support local authorities. An initiative within the programme was the Pothole Review, to be published imminently, which brought together experts to look at how and why potholes occur and how best to deal with them. The Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA) was pleased to respond positively to the invitation to participate in this and our belief is that HMEP will do much to facilitate the sharing of best practice and accelerate the introduction of more efficiencies. We remain convinced, however, that real efficiency would materialise from less focus on potholes and more on longer term planning and planned maintenance programmes to prevent them appearing in the first place.

Alan Mackenzie
Chairman, Asphalt Industry Alliance



Key Findings – ALARM Survey 2012

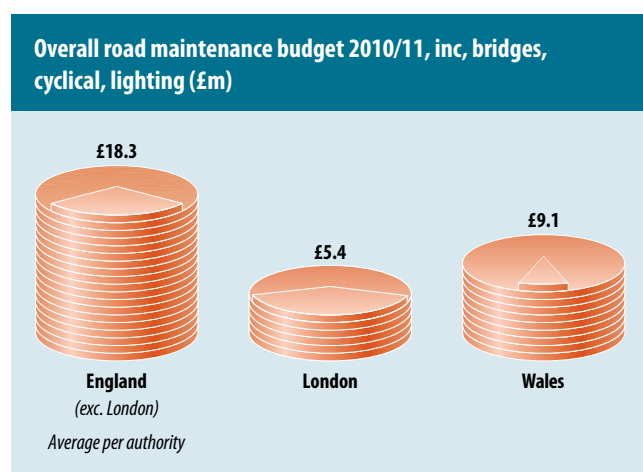
	England (exc. London)	London	Wales
Shortfall in road structural budget	£627m	£89m	£72m
Average shortfall per authority	£5.3m	£2.7m	£3.3m
Percentage of required budget received	62%	51%	53%
Percentage of budget used on reactive maintenance	23%	30%	34%
Estimated time to clear carriageway maintenance backlog ¹	11 years	9 years	17 years
Estimated one-time catch-up cost per authority	£73m	£20m	£23m
Frequency of road surfacing (all road classes)	58 years	32 years	72 years
Number of potholes filled over past year	1,475,000	102,000	107,000
Average number filled per authority	12,392	3,083	4,880
Average cost to fill one pothole	£55	£55	£35
Total spent filling potholes in past year	£80.6m	£5.6m	£3.7m
Percentage of authorities who believe there is a threat to road users' safety from road maintenance under-funding	92%	84%	100%
Amount paid in road user compensation claims	£16.7m	£3.2m	£1.4m
Staff time working on compensation claims (per year)	37,300 days	7,100 days	4,700 days
Average number of utility trenches over past year per authority	13,408	9,947	5,318
Cost of additional damage from severe winter weather 2010/11 (average per authority)	£4,354,625	£1,075,929	£1,369,500
Total cost of damage due to severe winter weather 2010/11 (based on average per authority)	£518m	£36m	£30m

¹ based on current budgets

Data in the ALARM Survey is based on information supplied by 70% of authorities in England (exc. London), 73% in London, and 64% in Wales: 70% of authorities in all. Responses were received during January and February 2012.



Road Maintenance Budgets



The total road maintenance budget covers works such as bridge maintenance including structural work; cyclical maintenance such as sweeping, grass cutting, checking traffic signals and replacing street furniture; and maintenance of street lighting.

The budget allocated for maintenance of the carriageway itself and its structure is just one part of this total road maintenance budget. It is funded from both central and local government and the funds allocated for this purpose are not ring-fenced and can be re-allocated to other local services at a council's discretion.

The average overall road maintenance budget in England reduced by 11 per cent on last year, which followed a 9 per cent fall over the previous year. Budgets in London fell by 22 per cent and in Wales by three per cent. Across England and Wales the total overall budget allocated to road maintenance fell by 13 per cent compared with the previous year, to around £2.5 billion.

Local authority highway engineers said about their individual situations:

“funding has decreased over the last three years”

“we need an additional £1.2m each year to account for depreciation”

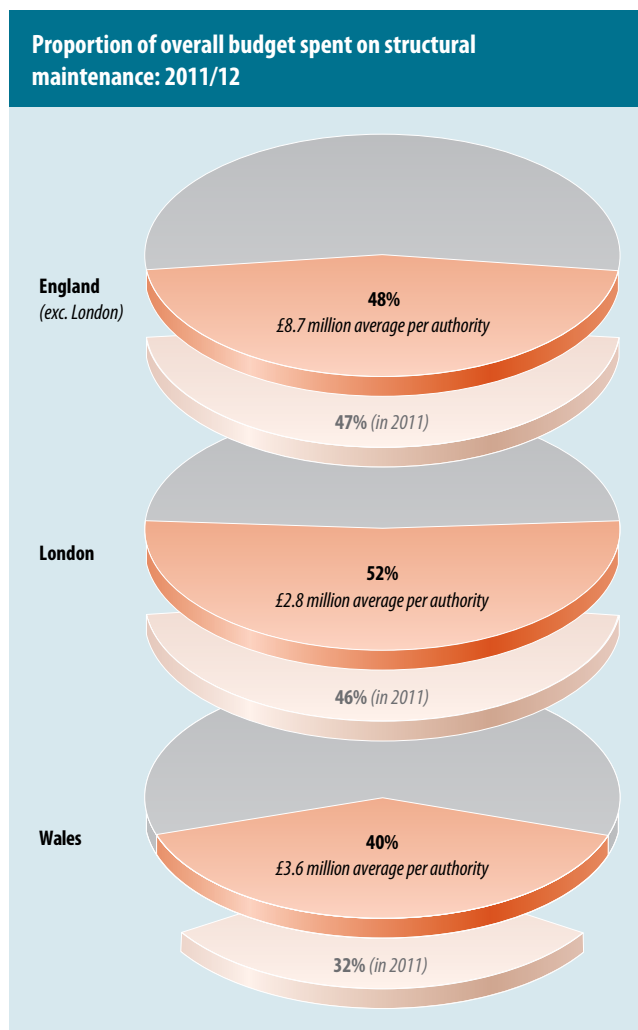
“revenue is being decreased and reduction will increase for three years”

“we’d need an additional £6.5m each year for 10 years...to keep control (of the network)”





Structural Maintenance Budget

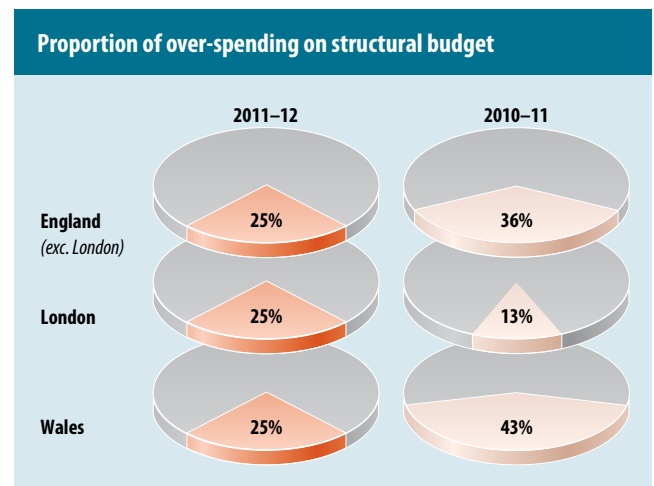
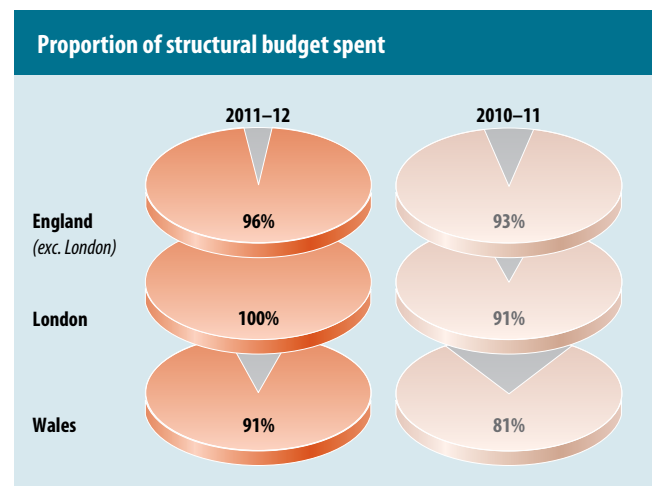


This indicates a reported expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway itself of around £1.21 billion, a decrease of about £118 million compared with the previous year.

The percentage of the overall road budget spent on carriageway maintenance has increased by one percentage point, six percentage points in London, and by eight percentage points in Wales.

The 11 per cent decrease in overall road budgets is partially offset by the increase in the proportion spent on carriageway repairs. A larger share of a smaller pot has resulted in the average carriageway repair budget for each authority in England and Wales decreasing by just under £0.5m.

Level of Spending

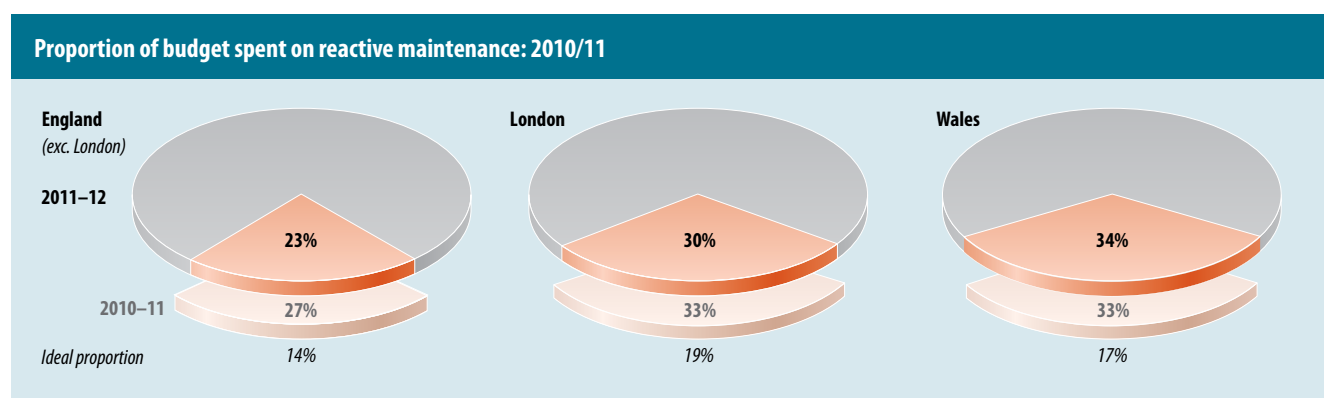


Some highways departments are able to roll-over their maintenance budgets into the following year. However, the proportion that had spent all their budget in 2010/11 has increased in England and London (with authorities in both reporting that they had spent all of their budget) and also in Wales.

The proportion of authorities over-spending their maintenance budget has increased significantly in London, and decreased significantly in the rest of England and in Wales, a reversal of the scenario reported in ALARM Survey 2011.



Reactive Maintenance



“Reactive maintenance” is described as maintenance which has not been planned for at the beginning of the year, and includes such work as repairing potholes, whether reported by the public or identified by the highways authority’s own inspection team. It also includes any remedial work required beyond the two-year guaranteed period on the reinstatement of trenches dug for utility works. The level of reactive maintenance is a good indicator of the overall state of the roads.

This year’s survey reveals variations in what each local authority describes as being the ideal proportion of their budget that should be factored in for reactive repairs, although the average is around 16 per cent.

The proportion of budget spent on reactive maintenance by authorities in England is less than last year although significantly more than the ideal. This is also the case in London although authorities in Wales are reporting more spent on reactive work.

Local authority highway engineers said about their individual situations:

“continuing to react...perpetuating the downward spiral”

“we’re just treading water and not going to clear the backlog”

“maintenance should be permanent so it doesn’t have to be done again and again”

“we need to be proactive...or backlogs will increase”

“our funding doesn’t allow us to have a long term view”

“making the surface look good to stop complaints”

“like slapping a coat of paint on a rotten window frame”



Severe Winter Weather 2010/11

Almost all authorities reported that the fabric of their road network had been badly affected by the extreme winter weather experienced in 2010/11. This resulted in damage estimated at an average cost of £4.4 million per authority in England (excluding London), just over £1 million for each London authority and £1.4 million average for each authority in Wales. Authorities in England and London had to deal with significantly more costly damage than that incurred by the snow in early 2010, while for authorities in Wales the cost was similar to that of the previous year, with an increase of around three per cent.

The total estimated additional cost of damage caused by three successive periods of severe winter weather is estimated at £1.3 billion across England and Wales.

Cost of Winter Weather Damage

	ENGLAND (exc. London)	London	Wales
<i>Estimated average per authority</i>			
Winter 2009/10	£2,640,597	£488,000	£1,327,500
Winter 2010/11	£4,354,625	£1,075,929	£1,369,500
Total 2010/11	£518,200,375	£35,505,657	£30,129,000

Emergency Funding

Just over two-thirds of authorities reported that they had been unable to make good all the additional damage caused, although London authorities were less badly affected than in other areas of the country with 43 per cent of authorities managing to complete most of the additional repair work required. The authorities unable to repair all of the additional damage reported that they still had to complete around half the work needed.

Local authority highway engineers said about their individual situations:

“we’ve just temporarily sorted the problem”

“didn’t make any difference, we got £127,000”

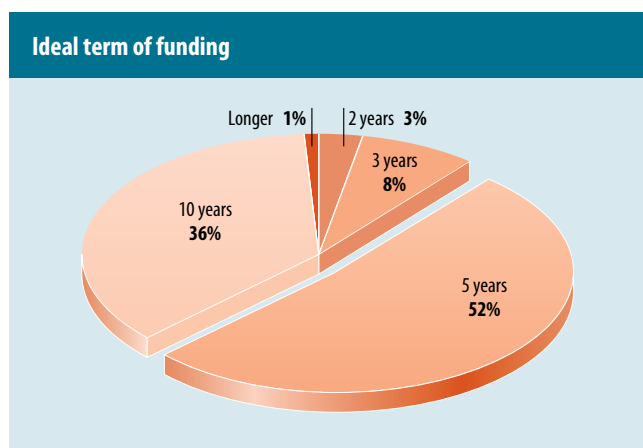
“we got £2.7m...but it wasn’t enough... we probably spent another £1.7m”

“managed to repair 40% of what needed to be done”





Longer Term Funding



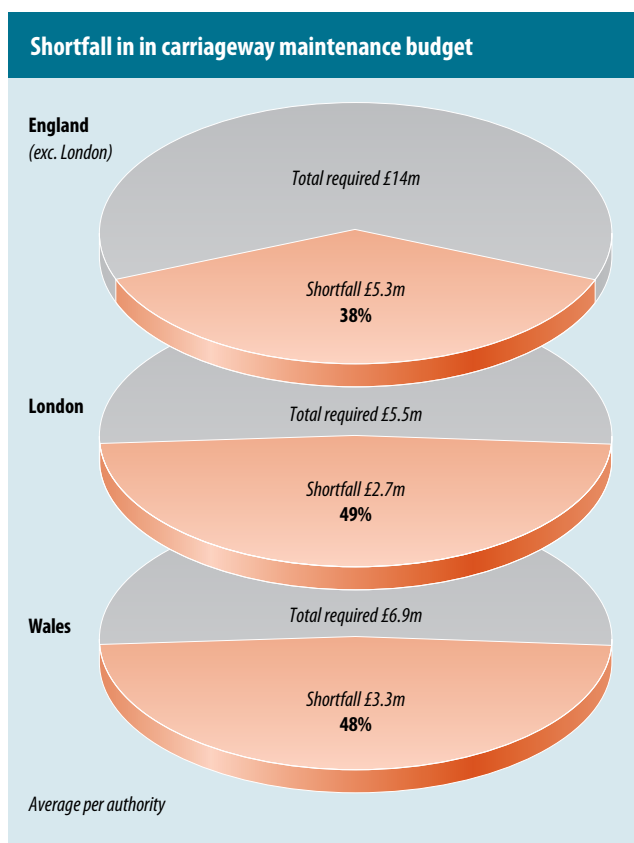
Most local authority highway maintenance programmes are managed against budget figures set annually. It has long been recognised that this hinders efficient planning of maintenance work, in particular, planned preventative maintenance which is at least 20 times less expensive than reactive work, such as patching and mending potholes. Nearly all authorities stated in this year's survey that they believed longer term funding would help efficiency and provide a more durable road network.

When asked what they believed to be the optimum term that funding should be set for, to aid forward planning, the majority of ALARM Survey respondents, 52 per cent, stated it should be five years. A significant percentage, 36 per cent, said that funding should be set for 10 years or more.

94% of English authorities foresee having to make cuts to their highway maintenance service

Over 90% of authorities in London and Wales foresee staff cuts and reduced service delivery

Budget Shortfall



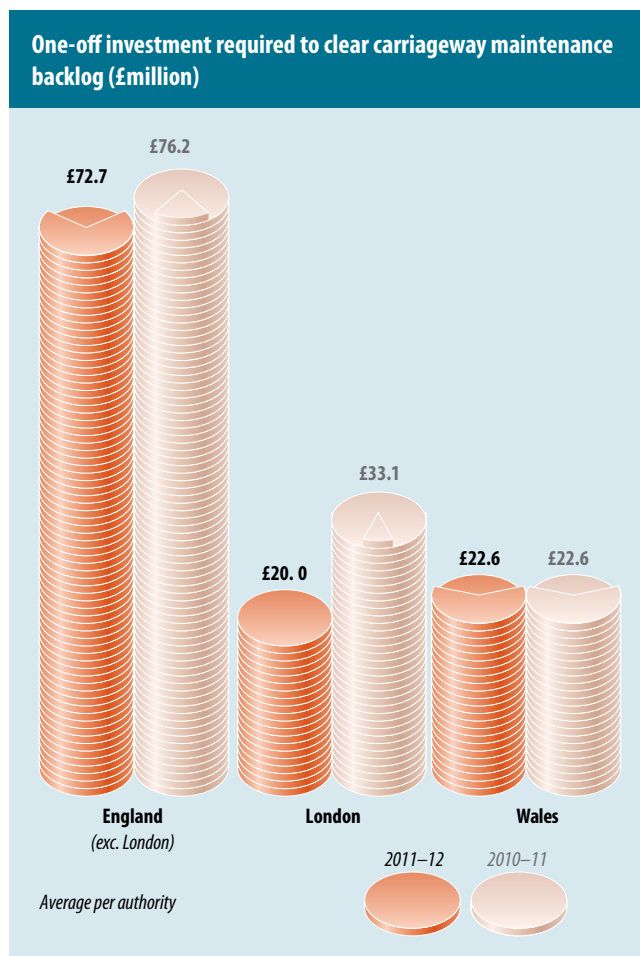
There continues to be a significant shortfall reported between the funds made available to highways departments and the amounts they state they require to maintain adequately the condition of their roads. The average shortfall per authority in England and London has fallen slightly, by one per cent, from that of last year, although it has fallen more significantly in Wales from 63 per cent to 48 per cent.

Safety

Overall, 91 per cent of authorities responding say they believe that the under-funding of the highway maintenance programme creates a threat to road users' safety: nearly a third feel it is a major threat. Half of the authorities responding believe that the threat to road users' safety has not been alleviated since the previous year, while 42 per cent believe that the threat has increased.



Addressing the Shortfall



Highways departments were asked to estimate the sum necessary to pay for bringing their road networks up to scratch (if they had the resources in place to make it practical to do so as a one-off project).

In Spring 2011 central government made two successive payments of additional emergency funding to cope with the immediate damage caused by severe winter weather, amounting to £200 million.

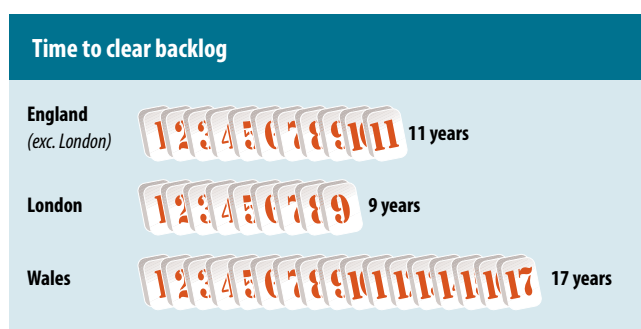
There has been a decrease in the amount authorities in England (excluding London) estimate would be necessary, with the overall cost across England and Wales amounting to £9.8 billion. This is a fall from the £10.5 billion estimated the previous year but still represents an increase of 15 per cent on the amount estimated in 2009 when this question was first asked.





Road Condition

Maintenance Backlog



Many local authority highway departments are having to cope with significantly reduced numbers of staff this year. Even if adequate funding and resources were in place to clear the current backlog of maintenance work, highways departments reported that the estimated amount of time required to catch up would be 11 years. The timespan is estimated to be less in London (nine years) and more in Wales (17 years). This compares very similarly to recent years, showing no improvement in the situation.

Local authority highway engineers said about their individual situations:

“we’re not receiving the funds to keep roads at existing levels”

“point is to stop the deterioration, it’s a case of getting that through to politicians”

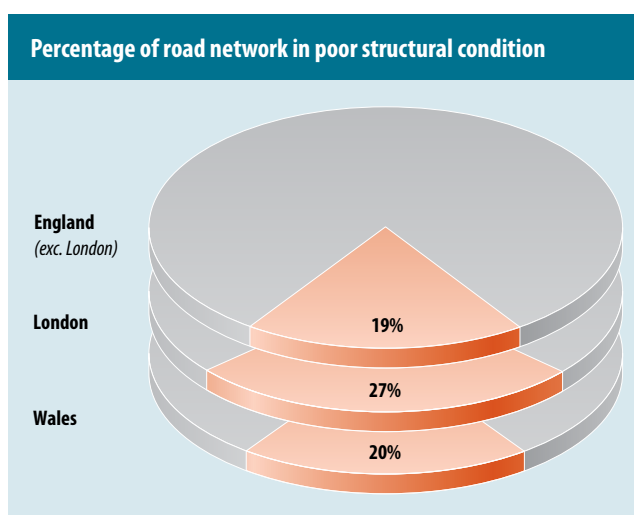
“with current resources it would take 20 years to cover the backlog”

“not addressing the underlying structure”

“some roads are beyond repair”

“we haven’t performed a survey in five years... if you can’t do anything about it, why measure?”

Current Structural Road Condition



While their presence may not make a significant impact on road users’ comfort of travel, cracks in the road surface often indicate that there are problems with the underlying layers of the road. The structural integrity of the local road network is becoming an increasing concern.

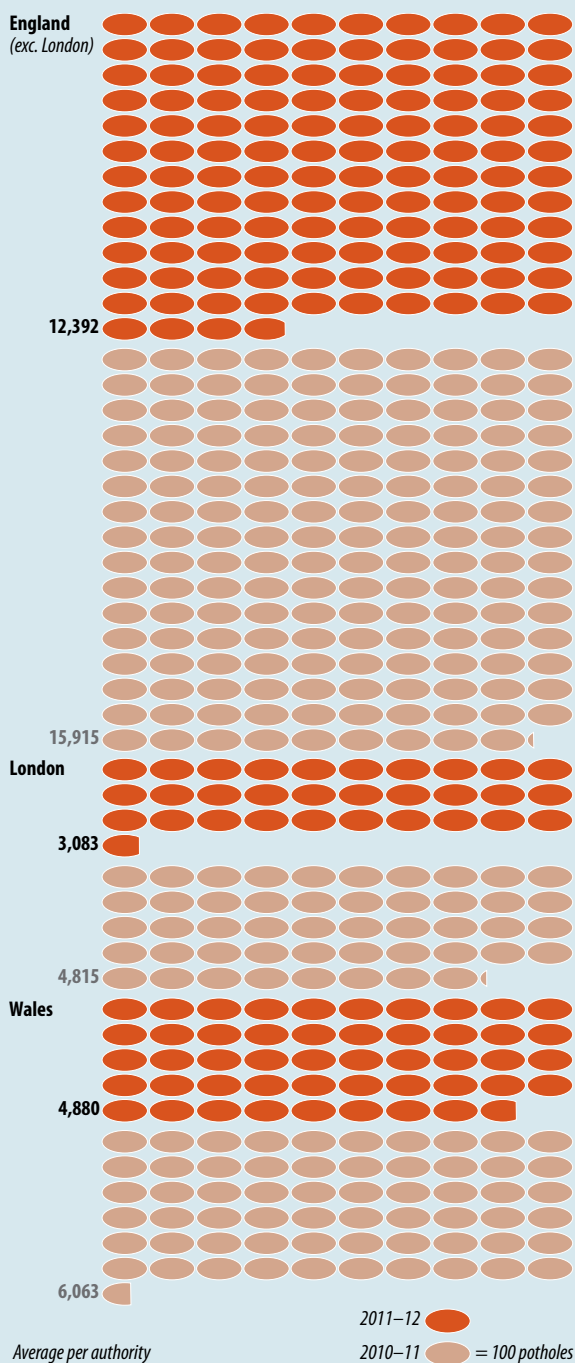
On average across all areas at least one in five roads is considered by highways engineers responding to the survey as being in poor condition. This means that they have less than five years of residual life. In London 27 per cent of roads were considered to be in poor condition.





Potholes

Potholes filled per year



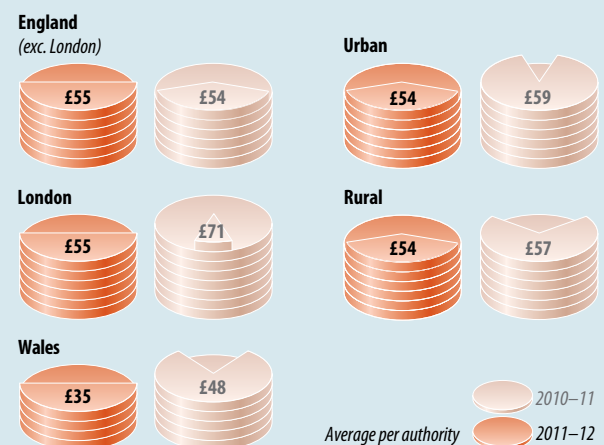
The guideline depth for definition of a pothole is 40mm and the majority of authorities responding to the survey use this to identify potholes on their network, although some use shallower or deeper measurements. The question relating to pothole depth was asked for the first time this year; focus groups identified no significant intentions to increase the definition depth on participants' networks.

In 2011 the ALARM Survey reported an exceptional increase in the number of potholes filled: a leap in number from 1.4 million in the previous year to 2.2 million.

The average number of potholes filled by authorities in England and Wales, reported over the past year in the 2012 survey, represents a 21 per cent decrease on the previous year. The average number of potholes filled by authorities in England, however, is still 27 per cent more than the number two years previously. This is despite two successive years of additional central government funding, totally £300 million, to cope with additional reactive maintenance caused by winter damage.

The average cost of filling a pothole has fallen from that reported last year, most significantly in London and Wales, although it has remained much the same in English authorities. The cost of filling potholes across England and Wales remains high, at over £90 million.

Cost of filling one pothole





Public Reporting

Nearly all (92 per cent) of the local authorities responding to the ALARM Survey now have an electronic or web-based system for the public to report potholes and highway faults.

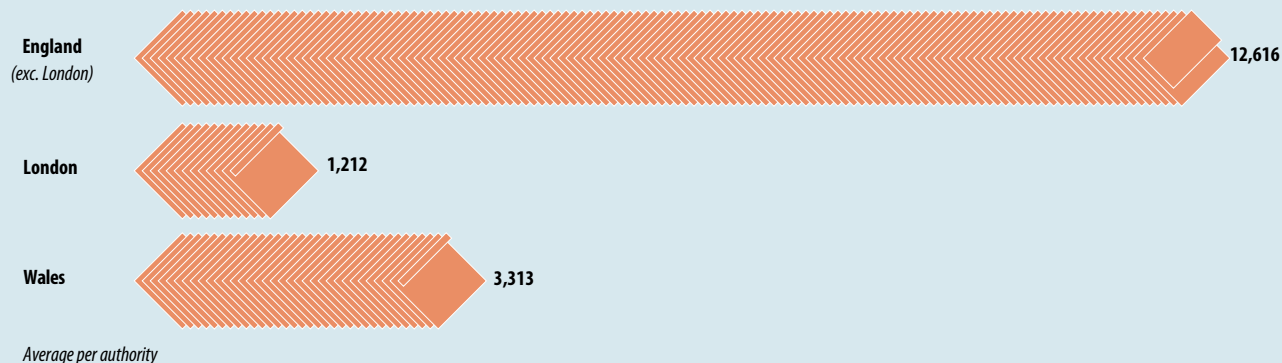
The average numbers of these reports received from the public by each local authority in England (excluding London) over the past year is over 12,000. This is up by around 1,000, or nearly 10 per cent, on the year before although there were fewer reported in London and Wales than the previous year. The total of reports from the general public projected across England and Wales was 1.6 million, compared to 1.5 million last year.

Road Surfacing Frequency

Taking into account the kind of surfacing materials, the type of road, and the level and nature of its traffic, the ideal frequency of road resurfacing is between 10 and 20 years. This maintains an appropriate level of grip, which is vital for road safety, and guards against freeze-thaw effects by maintaining a weatherproof seal on the road surface.

This ideal length of time between resurfacing is only achieved on principal roads in London where the average time before resurfacing is reported as 21 years. The average length of time between resurfacing for all road types has decreased slightly, ie improved, since last year with the exception of Wales, where resurfacing of all classified roads has become less frequent.

Number of public complaints/reports in past year

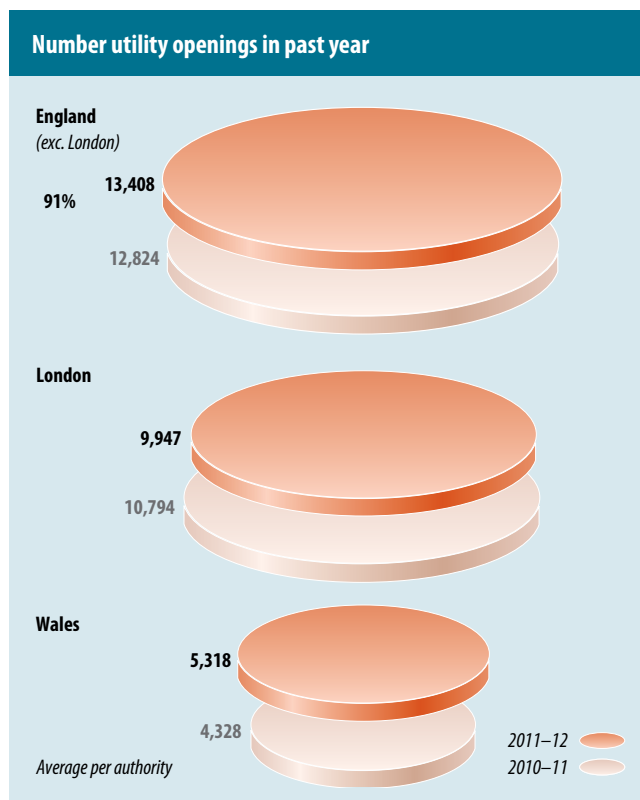


Average length of time before roads are resurfaced

Type of road	England	London	Wales	Urban	Rural
Principal roads	31 yrs	21 yrs	48 yrs	24 yrs	20 yrs
Non-principal roads	59 yrs	28 yrs	97 yrs	34 yrs	31 yrs
Unclassified roads	97 yrs	43 yrs	82 yrs	58 yrs	94 yrs
All road classes	58 yrs	32 yrs	72 yrs	40 yrs	45 yrs



Utility Company Road Openings



Following an increase in the average number of utility openings last year by 27%, the number in England (excluding London) has again increased this year, by just under five per cent. In London, the number has reduced, while in Wales, it has increased significantly, by over 23 per cent.

Across the board, authorities report that 83 per cent of road openings for utility works are reinstated in accordance with specifications.

Authorities estimate that nearly 18 per cent of their maintenance budgets are spent on premature maintenance due to utility openings. Nearly 60 per cent of authorities believe that deep trenching for this type of work reduces road life by 30 per cent or more. 84 per cent think that a standardised means of costing the long term damage caused by this kind of work would help them manage their highway maintenance budgets.

The vast majority, 96 per cent, are in favour of implementing legislation to charge utility companies for the additional premature maintenance costs caused by road openings.

Local authority highway engineers said about their individual situations:

“don’t have the manpower to inspect most”

“we’re toothless as an authority”

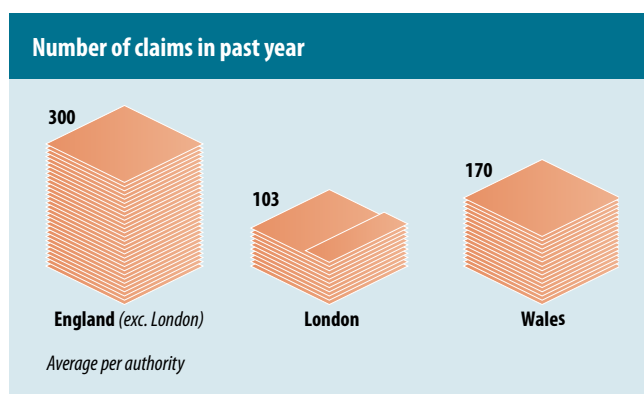
“we need to be there when the work is being done”

“we had 30,000 notices and reduced staff... it’s a manpower issue”





Road User Compensation Claims

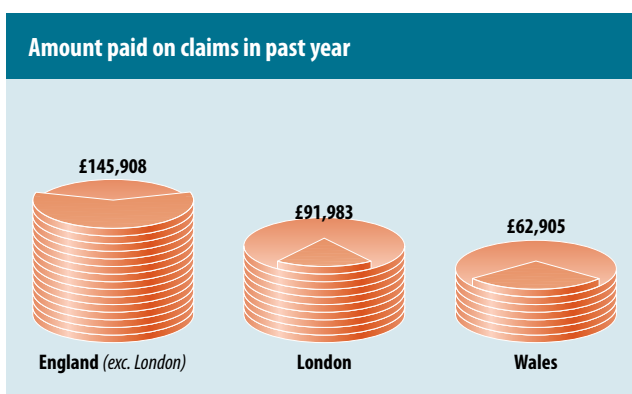


The number of claims for compensation received by local authorities has decreased substantially in the past year, from an average of 336 per authority to 251 reported this year. The average in Wales has increased from 114 claims per authority last year to 170 this year. Authorities outside London and Wales still receive a much higher number of claims: an average of 300 per authority over the past 12 months.

There are differences in the average amounts paid on each claim by each authority, with the lowest amounts being paid in Wales, where the average per claim is just under £370, compared with £893 in London and £486 in the rest of England. However, by their very nature, claims for compensation can vary dramatically, and larger claims tend to take longer to resolve, making year-on-year comparisons unrealistic in terms of mapping trends.

To gauge the trend authorities were asked by how much the number of claims by motorists had increased or decreased in the past 10 years. Of those answering the question, 45 per cent said that the numbers had decreased (by an average of 39 per cent overall) and 55 per cent said that the numbers had increased over the past 10 years (by an average of 97 per cent overall).

The total cost of claims over the last year, taking the cost of compensation paid and the cost of staff time spent on dealing with such claims, amounts to £35 million.



Staff time spent on claims – per month

	England	London	Wales
Average number of hours per month (per authority)			
2012	183	125	99
2011	172	131	93

Staff costs spent on claims – per year

	England	London	Wales
Annual amount spent (average per authority)			
2012	£87,000	£53,000	£38,000
2011	£105,000	£68,000	£55,000



The Way Ahead

Last year's exceptional circumstances marked the way ahead very clearly and the results of this year's ALARM Survey underline the route to better roads.

There are high hopes for the Department for Transport's (DfT) Highway Maintenance Efficiency Programme (HMEP) but the fact that it was extended from two to seven years after only a few months of its introduction is recognition of the huge task ahead. The Asphalt Industry Alliance is keen to lend the collective experience of its specialists to help the programme in any way it can.

With more local authorities having their highway asset management plans in place, the case for spending sooner to prevent longer term and more costly damage is clearer for them to present. There are now examples of authorities in this position who have convinced their council members to support increased highway maintenance expenditure to protect their most valuable asset: their road network.

Our concern is that while the way ahead is becoming clearer, the journey needs to be faster. Filling 1.7 million potholes – an expensive and short term remedy – is a ridiculous waste of public resource. The number of compensation claims to local authorities for accidents or damage to vehicles as a result of poorly maintained roads is not reducing, and this year's survey gives evidence that even more staff hours are spent on dealing with them.

Getting our local road network into reasonable condition is vital to keeping the country moving, allowing local services to function efficiently, and helping local economies flourish. With nearly £10 billion needed to bring local road condition to a "steady

state", from which planned preventative maintenance programmes could be implemented and wasteful reactive patching made a redundant activity, there would surely be widespread support for government investment to resolve the issue.

Local authorities are working hard to squeeze better value from shrinking funds, which is recognised and supported by asphalt industry suppliers, as well as using their highway asset management plans to help achieve improved funding from their own local government. As local roads account for 95 per cent of the country's road network, it makes sense for improved funding to come from central government as well.

Most of the work carried out on local roads is now on the surface layer only, while – as the figures in this survey show – there is a significant amount of structural work required to prevent the 20 per cent of local roads with only five years of life remaining from failing completely. Plastering over the cracks is simply building an ever increasing bill for the country as a whole. Significant additional funding, even spread over a period of years, would generate significantly better roads and tangible benefits to local communities, economies and road users around the country. Most local authorities wanted at least a five-year plan. Now there's a thought.

That is not to ignore all the good work being done by local authorities and within HMEP but sharing best practice is not a solution in its own right. Some impetus is needed and, echoing the words of last year's AIA Chairman, Colin Loveday: "the sooner we start, the less painful it will be in the long term".





About the ALARM Survey

Each year the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA) commissions a survey of highways departments in all local authorities in England and Wales. The aim of the survey is to build a picture of the general condition of local roads and the levels of maintenance activity as well as the levels of funding required to ensure that they are in reasonable condition.

This is the 17th such annual survey and this report summarises the main findings.

It was carried out during January and February 2012. Unless otherwise stated, the findings are based on the financial year 2011/12, ending 31 March 2012. References to “last year” relate to 2010/11.

The survey questionnaire relates solely to the maintenance of the carriageway itself, that is the road surface and structure, and only that part of the total highway maintenance budget that covers the carriageway specifically. Participants are asked to exclude work such as structural work to bridges, street lighting and cyclical maintenance such as grass-cutting, checking of traffic signals and replacement of street furniture, all of which and more are included within the total highway maintenance budget.

Of all the local authorities in England and Wales responsible for roads, 70 per cent returned questionnaires for the 2012 survey. This was a higher response rate than last year’s 66 per cent, although the figure was lower for authorities in Wales, with 64 per cent of authorities responding. Of English authorities (excluding those in London) 70 per cent responded, and 73 per cent of those in London.

The responding sample is representative of the national population of local authorities from which it is reasonable to project levels reported by respondents up to national levels.

Local Roads

The majority of Britain’s roads (95 per cent) are the responsibility of local authorities, the remainder being motorways and major roads looked after by the Highways Agency. The survey does not gather data nor examine the situation on the roads which are the responsibility of the Highways Agency.

In London, Transport for London (TfL) is responsible for red routes, a network of roads that comprises five per cent of the capital’s roads and carries a third of its traffic. This network consists mainly of major routes into and around London. They are heavily trafficked roads that require more frequent maintenance than local authority roads and funding for this is separate to that for local authority roads. TfL roads are therefore not included in this survey.

Scotland

The ALARM Survey is conducted among local authorities in England and Wales. Audit Scotland published a report in February 2011 that highlighted a worsening in condition of Scotland’s roads over the previous six years. Only 63 per cent of roads were reported to be in an acceptable condition in 2010, with the cost of the maintenance backlog having increased to £2.25 billion.

Transport Scotland, which has responsibility for trunk roads and motorways, estimated that an additional £275 million was needed to get their roads into a “steady state”.

Information Gathering and Comment

By collating and publishing this information from local authorities the AIA seeks to give voice to the views of those responsible for maintaining the vast majority of the road network.

The information published is gathered from local authority highways departments and does not reflect the views of opinions of the AIA or its members. The responses provided by local authority officers are confidentially and independently analysed in accordance with the code of conduct of the Market Research Society.

During February 2012 focus groups were conducted to review and discuss the findings of the survey. Participants were drawn from a sample of those responsible for highway maintenance in local authorities from across the areas surveyed.

Comments quoted in this report reflect views expressed during these focus group discussions and are not attributable to any individual or local authority.

About the AIA



Asphalt Industry Alliance

The Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA) is an alliance of the two principal bodies which represent the suppliers of raw materials used to produce asphalt, as well as asphalt producers and laying contractors. The Mineral Products Association (MPA) and the Refined Bitumen Association (RBA) draw on the knowledge and resources of each association and its members.

The AIA was established in 2000 to increase awareness of the asphalt industry and its activities, and the uses and benefits of asphalt.

Asphalt is the generic term used to refer to the range of asphalts and coated macadam available in the UK that are used in road construction and surfacing. Asphalt also has other, non-road applications such as for airport runways, sports arenas, and parking areas, among others.

Mineral Products Association

MPA Asphalt is part of the Mineral Products Association (MPA), the trade association for the aggregates, asphalt, cement, concrete, lime, mortar and silica sand industries.

MPA Asphalt funds research into asphalt and its uses and operates the Asphalt Information Service which provides general guidance and information on the use of asphalts in the wide range of their applications. It also represents the interests of its asphalt producer and contractor members through liaison with national and European clients, specifiers, regulators, researchers and standards bodies as well as with trade associations from other countries and related industry sectors.

MPA represents and promotes the mineral products industry in order to:

- Secure and maintain the licence to operate for the sustainable supply of essential mineral products;
- Continue to innovate and deliver sustainable solutions;
- Maintain existing and develop new markets.

Refined Bitumen Association

Founded in 1968, the RBA is the trade association of the largest UK bitumen suppliers who between them produce nearly all the UK's bitumen. Over 95 per cent of this is used in the construction and maintenance of bituminous, or asphalt roads – these account for 95 per cent of all UK roads.

The RBA is a consultative body formed to promote the technical benefits of bitumen to the construction industry, to provide the industry with information and advice, and to fund research into bituminous products. It also works with contractors and authorities on issues relating to the use and recycling of bituminous materials.

The Association is involved in the development of industry policy on quality assurance and standards relating to issues such as safety, storage and the handling of bitumen and is involved in the development of specifications and test methods for bitumen.



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