



Still a mountain to climb

Overview by **Rick Green**, Chair,
Asphalt Industry Alliance

Poor road conditions impact on our everyday lives, from the cost and inconvenience of damage to vehicles, to potentially causing accidents and injury to vulnerable road users such as cyclists, some which might prove fatal. Poor roads are also less energy-efficient to drive on, resulting in increased carbon emissions from vehicle exhausts.

Last autumn the Government acted on repeated calls – including ours – for longer-term, sustained investment with its promise of £8.3 billion additional funding for local roads in England, including London, over the next 11 years. But, with the latest findings of this year's ALARM survey reporting only 47% of local roads across both England and Wales as being in 'good' structural condition, the scale of the challenge is clear.

Continued decline

Almost 95% of ALARM respondents in England and Wales stated that the structural condition of their network has actually declined or, at best, remained in a steady state over the last 12 months. This was mirrored by data highlighting that more than 107,000 miles – equivalent to 53 per cent of the network – has been classified as having less than 15 years' structural life remaining.

The continued decline in structural conditions is also reflected by the cost of tackling the backlog of carriageway repairs which has increased to a new record high of £16.3 billion.

Unfortunately, highway teams have also been hit by the impact of rising costs due to inflation, which has meant that they have been able to do less – even though average carriageway maintenance budgets increased.

As a result, local authorities, who have a statutory responsibility to keep local roads safe, just don't have the funds to allow them to carry out the appropriate maintenance interventions, at the right time. In the meantime, the frequency of extreme weather events is increasing, accelerating the rate at which the network is travelling towards breaking point.

Longer-term approach

By taking a longer-term approach in its funding announcement the Government has recognised that fixing our roads is about more than filling in potholes. But while the Transport Secretary stated that the additional Network North money was enough "to resurface 5,000 miles of local roads" over the next 11 years, this only equates to just 2.5% of the local road network – or less than 0.25% per year. It also assumes that all existing highway maintenance funding allocations are maintained and not eaten up by inflation in the years to come.

That said, English local authorities and London boroughs would be in an even worse position without this additional funding, so we sincerely hope that this promise is delivered on and that the Welsh Government also honours its commitments to prioritising highway maintenance.

We need to reach the point where local authority highway engineers are able to plan and proactively carry out maintenance work in the most timely and efficient way to the greatest benefit of all road users – rather than just having enough money to address immediate and urgent repairs.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rick Green'.