

Executive summary

The 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. The findings are based on information provided directly by those responsible for their upkeep.

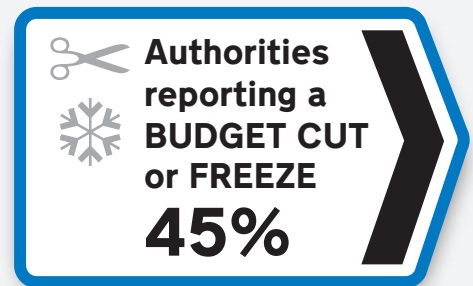
More than 70% of local authorities responded to this year's survey, providing robust data for analysis and underscoring the value that those working in the sector place on its annual findings. It is used by local authorities for benchmarking and by stakeholders across the sector as a valuable tool for tracking local road conditions and funding.

Key facts 2023/24

Funding:

- Local authorities in England and Wales effectively experienced a **real-terms cut** due to the impact of rising costs due to inflation, despite average highway maintenance budgets increasing by 2.3% to £26.4 million per authority.
- **45% of authorities reported a cut or freeze in their highway maintenance budget**, even before inflation is taken into account.
- Against this challenging backdrop, the average percentage of highway maintenance **budget spent on the carriageway increased slightly to 52%**. Average carriageway maintenance budgets also increased by **8.5% to £14.1 million** from £13.0 million last year.
- The additional amount local authorities across England and Wales would have needed to maintain their network to their own targets was **£1.22 billion**. This means that the average shortfall in the 2023/24 carriageway budget was **£7.2 million per authority**.
- The **one-time catch-up cost has increased by 16% to a new record high of £16.3 billion** and the work to address it would still take a decade to complete. This is the amount needed, as a one-off (at today's prices), to bring the network up to a condition that would allow it to be managed cost-effectively as part of a proactive asset management approach.

We have seen a small increase in our highway maintenance budget, but this has been wiped out by the effects of rising inflation. In fact, if anything, we've been able to do less with the money than we did a year ago.



Conditions:

- ➔ Road Condition Index (RCI) data reports the general condition of the surface of the carriageway, not necessarily the structure of the road. It shows there has been another **drop in the length of roads classed as GREEN** (in a good state of repair) and a corresponding increase in those classed as AMBER (showing some deterioration).

- ➔ Roads classed as RED (poor overall condition) have again remained stable but still **one in every 10 miles** (11%) of the local road network in England and Wales is likely to require maintenance in the next 12 months. This equates to around 22,300 miles.

- ➔ **2 million potholes were filled** over the last year – up more than 40% from 1.4 million last year – equivalent to one every 16 seconds.

- ➔ The average frequency of resurfacing for all classes of roads is **once every 80 years**.

- ➔ Structural conditions continue to decline and now less than half (only 47%) of local road miles in England and Wales are classed as being in 'good' structural condition, down from 51% last year. The remaining 53% – **more than 107,000 miles – now have less than 15 years' structural life remaining**. Structural maintenance is needed when surface maintenance alone won't suffice, and this data helps provide a more complete assessment of the overall carriageway asset.

107k miles

of local roads with less than 15 years' structural life left

47%

of local roads in good structural condition

We have spent the last year firefighting and trying to manage expectations of what can be achieved with the budget we have and a deteriorating network.

Recommendations

Only 6% of ALARM respondents in England and Wales reported that the structural condition of their local road network improved over the last year. The continued decline of our local roads, on which we all rely, is borne out by the fact that the cost of tackling the backlog of carriageway repairs has jumped by more than £2 billion, standing at a new record high of £16.3 billion.

Surface conditions are also reported to be worse – demonstrated by a 40% increase in the number of potholes filled over the last 12 months adding to the existing patchwork of previous repairs. This indicates that local authorities, who have a statutory responsibility to keep local roads safe, don't have the funds to do so in a cost-effective, proactive way, which would allow them to carry out the appropriate maintenance interventions at the right time.

We recognise that there continue to be many pressures on the public purse, but local roads are one of the country's biggest assets, so we call on the Government to:

- ➔ **Fulfil its promise** to deliver £8.3 billion in **additional** Network North funding over the next 11 years.

- ➔ **Sustain** current levels of funding through the Highway Maintenance Block and Pothole Fund allocations and extend their timeframe to match the additional funding to drive more effective asset management.

- ➔ **Increase** the level of all these sources of funding at least in line with inflation to ensure a real-terms increase in highway maintenance budgets.

In addition, the Welsh Government should also honour its commitments to prioritising highway maintenance. Combined these measures would allow local authority highway engineers in England and Wales to proactively plan and deliver improved conditions and create a safe, resilient and sustainable network for the future.