

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND

Recent spending decisions have impacted negatively on Scotland's roads. The consequences have been severe deterioration of road surfaces leading to road users facing increasing costs as a result of damage caused to their vehicles. Businesses and Public Services are likewise affected. Delays caused by piecemeal repairs must inevitably lead to damage to the economy.

If spending remains at current levels the damage to the above groups is bound to increase.

It is not clear how the negative effects of reduced road spending can be addressed. It is obvious that reduced spending on roads can only lead to the situation becoming even worse.

In the last few years I have driven many miles in many European countries, and the contrast with our own roads is dramatic and reflects very badly on our road building and maintenance.

The current funding model of funding and delivering roads maintenance is clearly not delivering results compatible with a modern European country. It is hard to know if it is the model, or inadequate funding which is leading to the failure. If more funding is required, I have a suggestion which might be of interest to the committee.

In virtually all our towns and cities, very many of the pot holes have come into being as a result of utility companies digging up the roads and failing to re-instate the road surface properly. In a few months water and frost can cause a previously good surface to become badly pot-holed. I don't believe that local authorities are zealous in ensuring that repairs are done to an adequate standard, but on the rare occasions when the job is done properly, the repair is practically undetectable and will last for many years.

Work done by gas, electric, water and phone companies is the main cause of potholes in towns and cities. If they have failed to reinstate the road surface correctly their profits should be fined or taxed accordingly. This would also have the political attraction of not attacking the pockets of the average citizen (who will have little sympathy for the companies who will, after all, be simply paying for the repairs to the damage they have themselves caused).