

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM AYRSHIRE ROADS ALLIANCE

Introduction

The core function and purpose of the road network is that it is a physical connector for people, businesses and communities. The roads within East Ayrshire and South Ayrshire are strategically significant for the social, economic and environmental wellbeing, not only of our local communities, but of Scotland as a whole.

The evidence from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey indicates that the condition quality of the road network has been generally remained at the same level despite recent reductions in expenditure.

Within the Ayrshire Roads Alliance area, the current spending on roads has reduced by 9% since 2014. It is known that the real terms decrease in funding in roads maintenance budget throughout Scotland since 2014 is at 26%.

Greater certainty on funding levels and periods will allow roads to address the significant backlog in the roads infrastructure.

Q1. How have recent spending decisions on roads maintenance affected the quality of Scotland's roads, road users, businesses, public services, and the economy?

In terms of the local roads network, the ongoing spending reductions within local authorities have directly resulted in:

- the erosion of experienced managers and staff, and general resource resilience challenges across most authorities;
- an aging workforce and lack of adequate succession planning;
- a focus on reactive rather than planned maintenance, and the loss of whole-life decision-making – e.g. a concentration on potholes rather than the underlying causes of surface failure;
- use of short term 'quick fixes' rather than long term interventions, e.g. thin surfacing materials are widely used rather than replacement of worn-out carriageway layers;
- core roads maintenance funding increasingly used to respond to increasing frequencies of severe weather and its effects on road assets;
- the loss of the ability to be innovative, to embrace new technologies and to react to changing needs and opportunities.

An ongoing national focus on building new infrastructure continues to miss the essential need for maintenance of the existing road assets.

In 2018, the Improvement Service reported that overall revenue expenditure on roads had reduced by 32.8% since 2010, while capital expenditure had increased by 12.3% across the same period. The Improvement Service also reported that, in

terms of the underlying condition of carriageways, over 8 years there had been very little change in the A, B and C class road network overall, with around 30% to 35% of carriageways continuing to require maintenance.

It is considered that the use of carriageway condition as the measure for overall condition of the whole roads infrastructure camouflages the reducing condition of other assets including bridges, piers, street lighting, signage, road markings and other ancillary street furniture. It is the view of the Ayrshire Roads Alliance that the holistic condition of the overall road network is deteriorating and that increasing service failure is inevitable in the future.

Q2. If spending on roads maintenance continues at current levels, what could be the likely effects on the above groups?

Projections by the Ayrshire Roads Alliance based on the SCOTS national asset management project, confirms that at the present levels of investment the road assets will continue to deteriorate. The current road resurfacing standstill budgets fall well short of the available spend in this type of work in both Council areas. The East Ayrshire annual standstill budget is £6.19 million and the current annual spend on surfacing is £5 million, whereas the South Ayrshire annual standstill budget is £5.0 million and the current annual spend on surfacing is £2.5 million. Any capital budget provision by both Councils is welcome but they do not generally meet the standstill budget. This type of budget allocation and provision does not help with long term whole-life asset planning. Clearly the Scottish Government expects that the bulk of the budget is allocated to education and social care services and as result there is a disproportionate reduction in roads budget.

In the Ayrshire Roads Alliance area, surface failures continue to be problematic, which will likely result in more potholes. Until there is significant investment made available directly from the Scottish Government to the Councils for roads related matters then the road asset will not improve.

Q3. How could any negative effects of reduced road spending be best addressed?

Roads officers continue to manage the negative effects of reduced funding, through improved practices, collaborations, communication with communities, increased transparency of decision-making, and driving efficiencies throughout their processes and supply chains.

The National Transport Strategy offers the opportunity to address the Transport Governance issue within the management of the Scottish Roads network and it is essential that this matter is dealt with as a matter of priority as part of the Improvement Action Plan developing from the Strategy.

Roads spend continues to reduce in real terms and the marginal roads maintenance issues will continue to reduce. This includes reduced funding for road safety issues including road markings; and the continued need of Local Authorities to clear litter from roads and in particular on trunk roads.

It is essential that the review of roads funding takes cognisance of the current income available through Vehicle Excise Duty and Fuel Duty which are presently not re-directed towards roads funding.

Q4. Is the current model of funding and delivering roads maintenance, which is split between Transport Scotland and local authorities, the most economic and efficient option?

The view of the Ayrshire Roads Alliance is that the current funding model is not sustainable. The Ayrshire Roads Alliance welcomes the review of Governance and the model currently adopted by East Ayrshire and South Ayrshire Councils could be replicated throughout the country. Additional funding for roads would make a significant improvement to network condition and road users' experience of the road network.

It is important that any additional investment must be long term. If Councils are provided with significant long term funding then this will create a robust, cost-efficient asset planning approach which will allow a managed implementation programme.

The Ayrshire Roads Alliance already prioritise on a hierarchical approach which ensures the investment is made on the most necessary and important roads.