

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY COUNCIL

Dumfries and Galloway Context

Dumfries and Galloway Council's Roads Asset Management Plan states that "The real value of Dumfries and Galloway Council's road network and associated infrastructure lies in its delivery of the essential services that provide the foundation upon which economically healthy, prosperous and safe communities are built. Road maintenance impacts on the whole community and all of the services that the Council delivers."

With respect to local roads maintenance Dumfries and Galloway Council has a Roads Condition Indicator (RCI) figure for the local road network of 47.8% based on the 2018 Scottish Roads Maintenance Condition Survey (SRMCS) data i.e. 47.8% (1,992km) of the local road network (total length of 4,167km) should be considered for maintenance treatment. In addition, the SRMCS survey data has been used to evaluate the maintenance backlog value at £217m for the local road network, i.e. the cost to treat the significant defects on the elements of the roads network that are in an amber or red condition within the SRMCS survey data. This figure identifies the challenge that Dumfries and Galloway Council has in investing to address the poor condition of the local road network which is the 3rd largest in Scotland.

Table 1 identifies that the local road network condition in Dumfries and Galloway is 11.5% worse than the Scottish Local Authority average condition and that over the previous 2 years/3 surveys that the carriageway condition the for the whole road network has deteriorated by a further 1.3% meaning that an additional 54kms of carriageway has moved into the category of requiring to be considered for maintenance treatment.

Road Class	DGC 2016-17	DGC 2017-18	DGC 2018-19	DGC Variance 2016-19	Scottish Local Authority Average 2018-19	DGC/National Variance 2018-19
A class roads	33.9%	34.9%	33.5%	0.4% improvement	30.0%	3.5% worse
B class roads	34.5%	36.0%	36.3%	1.8% deterioration	35.7%	0.6% worse
C class roads	43.8%	46.3%	46.7%	2.9% deterioration	36.3%	10.4% worse
Unclassified roads	56.8%	56.2%	57.4%	0.6% deterioration	38.2%	19.2% worse
All road classes	46.5%	47.3%	47.8%	1.3% deterioration	36.3%	11.5% worse

Table 1 - Percentage of Dumfries and Galloway Council's Road Network that should be considered for Maintenance Treatment

The carriageway asset for the local road network in Dumfries and Galloway as a whole has been valued with a gross replacement cost of £3.3 billion i.e. the sum that would be required to replace the carriageway asset in its entirety with an equivalent new asset. The level of capital investment per annum of typically £6.5m (averaged over the last 5 financial years – refer to Table 2) is only 0.2% of the carriageway asset valuation.

	Capital Budget Allocations 2015/16	Capital Budget Allocations 2016/17	Capital Budget Allocations 2017/18	Capital Budget Allocations 2018/19	Capital Budget Allocations 2019/20
Total	£5.873M	£6.065M	£6.045M	£7.742M	£6.850M

Table 2 - Carriageway Asset Capital Investment

The steady state figure for the carriageway asset, that is the level of investment required on a per annum basis to keep the carriageway asset in the same condition over the next 10 years, for the Dumfries and Galloway local roads network has been calculated at an investment of £21.7m per annum which is over 3 times the current level of capital investment in the carriageway asset that is being achieved.

It should be noted that the Council's overall projected funding gap was calculated at £14.8m in 2019/20, increasing to £30.9m in 2020/21 and to £47.6m in 2021/22 as a result of the impact of the last Local Government Finance Settlement. The Council is in the process of delivering savings in the 2019/20 budget and developing propositions for the reduction in Council budgets in future financial years to match these funding gaps. As a consequence, all Council budgets are under extreme pressure to facilitate the high level of savings required. In past years the Roads Maintenance revenue budget, which is typically targeted at cyclical maintenance and reactive defect repairs, has been reduced on a number of occasions to contribute to the necessary level of Council savings required and is likely to continue to bear reductions in order to make a contribution to the significant reductions required in order to balance Council finances.

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

The continued reduction in local government funding, over a number of years, has led to a continued deterioration in the condition of the roads, as evidenced by the increase in the numbers of defects being recorded and in complaints and claims made by the public as a result of damage to vehicles. The problem with a lack of maintenance is that the speed of deterioration is increasing. Revenue funding has decreased due to the necessity for the Council to seek savings in non-protected budget areas as resources have been directed to other services e.g. social work and education. The consequences of this is that asset preservation processes such as emptying gullies and cutting off-lets to allow the water away from the road surface and prevent ponding are not undertaken. Water ingress into the road surface causes significant deterioration. The reduction in spend has also led to a reduced service in activities such as the clearing of vegetation, maintenance of street furniture and road markings, which only serve to add to the maintenance issues. There are potential

safety issues for all road users, increased inconvenience, potential for accidents, delays in addition to the potential for damage. There is a desire to increase active travel but the condition of the roads and lack of maintenance on dedicated cycle routes does not encourage more people to cycle.

As revenue budgets have been reduced, the capital budget, which to date has been slightly more protected, has been used to attempt to address some of this maintenance deficiency. This has seen what were traditionally revenue works e.g. surface dressing, becoming a main element of the capital programme. The problem with that is that surface dressing only seals the surface and provides additional texture. It does not contribute to road strength or ride quality. It is effectively papering over the cracks, but per square metre it is much lower cost than inlay/overlay or reconstruction. It might not be the best value for money in the long term, but it does offer the opportunity to hold together much of the road network for another year. This is only delaying the inevitable widespread and significant failure of the carriageway asset. Poor quality road infrastructure impacts upon all road users through damaged vehicles and through unpleasant, and potentially dangerous, conditions to walk and cycle.

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

Table 3 indicates that recent customer satisfaction surveys have identified that just over a half of the residents of Dumfries and Galloway are satisfied with the condition of the footways and the cycle routes within the region but that only a quarter are satisfied with the condition of the carriageways.

Question	2015	2016	2017
Condition of pavements (footways)	57%	57%	54%
Condition of cycle routes	58%	59%	56%
Condition of road surfaces	25%	26%	25%

Table 3 – Dumfries and Galloway National Highways and Transportation survey data indicating customer satisfaction as a percentage

It does seem that for the Roads Service in a Local Authority that we are fast approaching a point where certain roads can no longer be patched-up. Sections of road will be shut for periods of time until capital funding can be found for full reconstruction as patching and surface dressing is no longer enough. A continued frustration in the quality of the road network provided will be the simple impact upon road users as clearly road safety, damage to vehicles, less use of active travel options and impacts upon the mobility impaired are the likely consequences when the surface condition of roads and footways are poor.

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

There is little doubt that the road network requires a significant increase in funding. Various means of more efficient working practices have been tried and tested in the past, but the deterioration continues. The lack of available funding reduces the potential for a proactive approach to addressing the carriageway asset condition.

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 current funding model is not sustainable and additional funding for roads maintenance would make a significant improvement to the carriageway asset condition and the road user's experience of the road network.

The local road network in Dumfries and Galloway is critical to the economic growth and wellbeing of our communities. The timber industry is a key economic sector for the region, the most afforested in Scotland, with 30% of our land mass covered in trees and the Scottish Government encouraging increased planting. The beauty and attraction of our environment and landscape is a key foundation to building tourism and improving our economy and our local roads should not be a barrier to entrepreneurial investment and development. Significant investment is required to deliver regional equity for the sustainable economic growth of Dumfries and Galloway.

There is a need to consider the benefits in maintaining local roads infrastructure in rural Scotland to address rural effects like resilience, geographic scale, deficiencies in transport infrastructure, low populations, migration of young people, weak economic growth and low wage economies. There is a need to ensure that an equitable share of infrastructure investment is realised in rural areas.

A more regional or national approach to roads network management needs to be considered with trunk roads also being managed by Local Authorities, on a regional basis, excluding motorways. Roads maintenance has the potential to be delivered more efficiently, especially in the more remote areas of Scotland.

There is a need to balance the nation's investment in new transport infrastructure with the need to ensure adequate funding of existing transport infrastructure, particularly with respect to the trunk and local road networks, to ensure that the asset base that currently exists receives the level of investment required to maintain it effectively and efficiently so that it will be fit for purpose now and in the future.