

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE**PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND****SUBMISSION FROM EAST LOTHIAN COUNCIL****How have recent spending decisions on roads maintenance affected the quality of Scotland's roads, road users, businesses, public services, and the economy?**

To reflect continuing budgetary pressures, the RECC should consider the impact of the lack of capital and revenue investment in the maintenance of roads and their composite assets. An assessment of the impact as a result of the lack of appropriate funding could impact on the whole of society

Carriageways – road safety personal injury, increased road traffic accidents, loss of life, emergency treatments through A&E, journey time delays, increase in call out of emergency services, more roadworks – perpetual repairs, accident damage to equipment and street furniture, increased number of insurance claims due to damage to vehicles, de-value land and limit development opportunities as the cost of repairs will affect project viability, discourage cycling and walking by creating barriers.

Monitoring and co-ordination of public utilities operatives are reduced. The monitoring of construction and quality control is diminished with sub-standard construction / repairs being carried out.

Drainage systems – the lack of maintenance increases the likelihood of property being flooded, increases claims, accelerates the deterioration of carriageways through vehicle water action, inconveniences pedestrians, threatens environments and local habitats.

Footpaths and cycleways– increases the potential for trips and falls and subsequent emergency treatments through A&E, high quality public realm is not maintained, the loss of place and purpose of civic areas, vulnerable residents are unfairly disadvantaged, disabled users mobility is impaired, cyclists and scooter users choice not to travel sustainable, people's health and wellbeing in lessened, the accessibility to places will be limited, potential to encourage parking of vehicles on footpaths

Street lighting – road safety incidents may increase, people's safety and security will be affected, walking and cycling will reduce, the accessibility to places will be limited, the maintenance of ad-hoc reactive repairs will increase. Significant health and safety risks to the public present themselves through electricity and falling objects, ineffective equipment and use of electricity

Structures – scheduled and graded structures are under threat, significant impairment costs due to structural failure, loss of life, flooding of properties, connections to communities are compromised, all modes of transport can be affected, and local habitats could be compromised

Traffic management systems – significant delays to transport systems, increase in vehicle / vehicle and vehicle / pedestrian incidents, increased reactive maintain because of aging / outdated equipment. Ineffective equipment and use of electricity

Street furniture - high quality public realm is not maintained, increases the potential for trips and falls, high cost to replace neglected equipment,

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

East Lothian Council capital investment in the maintenance and renewals of public roads increased by 40% in 2019/20 due to the recognition that previous year's investment showed a long term continual depression in value of asset and condition. Over the past 5 years of monitoring the carriageway long term condition trends, the investment made was calculated to be equal to the preservation of a 'steady state' condition. However, this is accepted by Councillors to be insufficient and that additional investment was needed. This is welcomed but within the difficult financial climate, where competing social and education priorities take precedence, it is understood this to be a short term arrangement. Subsequently, looking at the longer term current levels will be inadequate to protect users to access the local road network without the risk of injury or delay.

The cost of Planned Maintenance – corrective treatments in particular carriageway reconstruction costs are prohibitive. A preventative treatment approach should mitigate the need to invest significantly, if interventions are timed appropriately. Short term under-investment could result in major long-term expenditure necessary to rectify major defects which could have been addressed earlier in the life cycle of the asset.

This was borne out by the fact that previous investment in the asset was decreasing, however, through prudent management of resources and an adoption of a preventative maintenance strategy, this was slowed to a manageable level of deterioration. Regardless though, with an ever decreasing resource and reduced investment, the philosophy of early interventions became difficult to administer because of road safety interventions.

An example of this is that in 2017/18 the annualised depreciation of the asset is calculated to be £10,102,436. At that time investment was £3,200,000 a shortfall of 315%. With prudent interventions and management techniques a lower financial commitment was providing for a managed deterioration. Effectively, the Councils investment is achieving a higher return than anticipated. However, this remains a worsening position.

This forces a more reactive approach to maintenance than budgets allow, where funding is used to treat roads more frequently because the correct treatment reduced because of limited resources. This translates to more frequent roadworks, less effective treatments, increased 3rd party liabilities, and reduced investment in projects that can create wealth through efficient vibrant communities. Journey times increase through more delay, public transport bus operators routes are disrupted, and people's safety is compromised because of the lack of investment.

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

Asset management strategies and the application of appropriate treatments are essential to reduce costs. Understanding the performance of the corresponding asset and interventions necessary before or just in time is essential to maintaining serviceable asset condition. Before you can apply this philosophy, there needs to be a sustained 10 year programme of investment to bring the assets up to a reasonably practicable condition.

The depletion of experience, knowledge, and skilled personnel within local government is stark. Recruitment is challenging and the skill set has diminished over 25 years to unacceptable levels. Costs associated with using external consultants impacts on the overall cost of projects but also impairs the ability of the organisation to increase the capability and capacity of the authority as Authorities are too small to fund the level of expertise needed. The economy of scale argument applies to professional technical staff to make these competitive with other organisations. The scope and size of local authorities' teams needs to be appropriate to the tasks and that central specialist resources maybe appropriate through a lead authority of transport partnership.

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?

Efficiencies come from scale and having recognised monitoring and evaluation procedures, through appropriate governance arrangements to test and scrutinise delivery. The use of benchmarking between partner organisations, to test and reset strategies is essential to maximise efficiencies. Providing regional Partnership and working collaborative are potential mechanisms to improve efficiencies, however, local needs must also be considered, therefore a regional / sub-regional model or local place model is necessary. Legislative restrictions around procuring local services or setting up LLC must be reduced to set up competitive companies to compete in the marketplace.

To maintain and deliver improved performance on the road network, local authorities must work more closely together removing boundary constraints. A national asset management system must be implemented applying comparable standards to maximise efficiencies. A series of framework agreements should be set up with joint partnership (local authority consortiums or private / public consortiums) to drive down costs and make opportunities