

## RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

### PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND

#### SUBMISSION FROM FIFE COUNCIL

At the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee of the Scottish Parliament on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019 the Committee sought views from a wide range of road users on the effectiveness of the current approach to road maintenance in Scotland and whether current funding levels were sufficient.

This call for views is focused on the following areas:

- How have recent spending decisions on roads maintenance affected the quality of Scotland's roads, road users, businesses, public services, and the economy?
- If spending on roads maintenance continues at current levels, what could be the likely effects on the above groups?
- How could any negative effects of reduced road spending best be addressed?
- 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?

Whilst Fife Council fully supports the response to this consultation provided by The Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland (SCOTS), Fife Council wishes to provide their own response.

The following represents the views of Fife Council developed by the Economy, Tourism, Strategic Planning & Transportation Committee, chaired by Cllr Altany Craik, at their 15<sup>th</sup> August 2019 meeting.

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

Spending on carriageway maintenance in Fife (excluding street lighting & winter) over the past 5 financial years has averaged at £10.5M annually (excluding £5.5M for planned patching and other reactive repairs and maintenance). Over that period there has been a generally improving trend in the overall road condition index (RCI) for Fife and a reduction in the number of reactive pothole repairs.

Due to the reducing Council capital finances over the coming years, available funding for carriageway maintenance will reduce by around 27%, which will result in the road network condition deteriorating in the medium to long term.

For the road condition to remain in its current condition would require a budget above £12M (SCOTS backlog prediction) together with a minimum Revenue budget of £3M for planned patching and £4.5M for other general reactive repairs and maintenance. Maintaining spending on roads maintenance at the current level would only result in a small improvement in condition (2% by year 5, 3% by year 10).

A future with reduced road maintenance expenditure will have a clear impact on policies dictating the frequency and standard of repairs and replacement cycles. The backlog of roads maintenance in Fife is currently £77.63M and the backlog for the whole of Scotland is £1887.63M (SCOTS 2019 Backlog Report).

Even short-term reductions in patching and resurfacing budgets will have medium term consequences and a long-term increase in the maintenance backlog.

This financial model is not sustainable and additional resources over a period of 10-15 years is required to prevent further decline and to preserve road network assets for future generations.

Using the Road Condition Index (RCI) as an indicator of all road condition is false and masks the savings in the maintenance of road signs, road markings, drainage, verges, safety barriers and lighting etc. which all need to be addressed. Capital resources tend to be prioritised to carriageway repairs due to the high profile of RCI figures.

For road users, businesses and public services, a well-maintained sustainable road network is vital to support the economy and to attract investment.

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

Local authority budgets are set to fall over the next three years and due to the 'gearing effect' to protect Education and Social Services, the largest portion of budget cuts will again fall to the environment related services and roads in particular.

This unsustainable situation will lead to deteriorating road condition with an increased road safety risk to all user groups.

The amenity and environmental appearance of Scotland's public road network (apart from the trunk road network with its high budget provision) will become a cause for concern and will impact on all groups and the Scottish economy.

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

As stated previously, reduced spending on road maintenance would result in a road network with deteriorating condition which would not be welcomed by road users, businesses and public services. Some of the negative effects of reduced spending might be addressed by a reduced quality of road treatment but this would be false economy and would inevitably mean more expensive remedial treatments in the medium to long term. From an asset preservation perspective, using the correct long-life treatment now is always better than any short-term fix.

**Question** *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?*

Fife is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest local authority in Scotland.

Transport Scotland manage and maintain the 125km of trunk roads in Fife (M90, A92, A985, A977) through their maintenance contracts with both BEAR Scotland and AMEY being involved. Fife Council has the 6<sup>th</sup> largest local road network in Scotland having a network length of 2459km.

The current model for road maintenance is now well established, however the public do remain confused about the role of trunk road contractors or even what is and what is not a trunk road.

The delivery of roads maintenance, split between Transport Scotland and Local Authorities, remains inequitable. Fife Council is unable to influence key improvements to the trunk road system, such as the A92 north of Glenrothes which is seen as a local priority for Fife.

The loss of experienced road managers and greatly reduced capacity at local authority level would make it very difficult for Fife to manage the trunk road network in Fife on an agency basis or otherwise as used to be the case. However, if adequate resources were available this would provide a more joined up service than the current situation.

An alternative arrangement whereby all roads maintenance is funded and managed at a national level has been suggested by Scottish Government Transport chiefs. The cost and time to set-up the support arrangements for this would be significant and the local accountability would be lost.

There is a suggestion that the strategic A class routes could be incorporated into the current trunk road management model with the other local roads remaining with Councils. This is a model which would be strongly resisted from Fife Council. There was a situation around in the 1960's whereby the Scottish Office, who administered the budgetary functions of the trunk network, made a percentage grant to local roads authorities towards the maintenance and improvement of A class roads, as an incentive to prioritise works on these routes. This may be a consideration, provided that, there were no consequential dis-benefits to other roads maintenance funding or the overall Council Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE).

The establishment of a new collaboration group of Councils for roads maintenance has also been considered. Benchmarking work through the Edinburgh Lothians Borders & Fife Forum (ELBF) did not demonstrate any benefits for Fife from any shared road maintenance operations with those other councils. The operation of the group has been impacted by limited capacity and the loss of key managerial experience with little genuine political buy-in from the councils.

The expansion of Fife's road maintenance operations to encompass additional areas in adjacent council areas and vice versa does not appear financially efficient due to the geography of Fife as a peninsula between the rivers Forth and Tay.

The Strategic Action Group in 2018 commented that '... a model for roads maintenance in Scotland based on 33 roads authorities is likely to be unsustainable'.

If this point is to be addressed then the reduction in authorities needs to focus on the smaller and medium sized authorities.

None of the alternative delivery arrangements suggested so far would appear to be beneficial to Fife and therefore would not be supported by Fife Council.

Fife is supportive of collaboration where it delivers tangible benefits. Examples of this are the SCOTS Asset Management Project and the Family Benchmarking Groups which Fife actively supports and participates in. Fife continues to be involved in SCOTS groups which are valuable for sharing knowledge and good practice.

A review of funding arrangements would be welcomed. The 2016 Audit Scotland report 'Maintaining Scotland's Roads – A follow-up Report' published in 2016 indicated that the spend per network kilometre on trunk roads was around nine times that for local roads. It has generally been accepted that because trunk roads carry the majority of traffic, particularly HGVs, they need a greater level of maintenance and hence a greater budget. Given that at some point the traffic using the trunk network must leave to use local roads, there may be a case for adjusting the funding balance more towards local roads.

As the vast majority of trips are local and less than 5 miles, the local road network is vital to the mobility of both socially and geographically disadvantaged groups.

Changing the delivery mechanism and providing more direct control of projects to Local Authorities could provide a leaner delivery mechanism and by co-ordinating locally supported projects into Council roads maintenance schemes and priorities, would benefit both funding streams.

An example of an existing funding arrangement controlled by a centrally managed organisation is that of the funding provided to Sustrans Scotland. The Scottish Government provides an £80m budget annually to them for active travel initiatives. Of this figure, just under £50m is for new infrastructure Scotland wide. An organisation that only a few years ago numbered around 20 is now apparently in excess of 140 and is an overly bureaucratic regime. The issue of schemes funded through Sustrans which become the responsibility of local authorities without any obvious funding stream for their continued maintenance needs to be addressed.

Fife has demonstrated that following two relatively recent Scottish Local government re-organisations Acts in 1973 and 1994 that it's mass and boundary is an efficient and manageable size. As mentioned above, this is borne out by the ELBF work.

There is no identifiable long-term benefit to any changed delivery model for roads maintenance unless **additional long-term budget is provided**.