

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM IAM ROADSMART

IAM RoadSmart (previously IAM – the Institute of Advanced Motorists) is the UK's largest independent road safety charity, dedicated to improving standards and safety in driving and motorcycling. Best known for the advanced test IAM RoadSmart has more than 92,000 members and is supported by a local volunteer network of 200 groups in the UK and Ireland. Our response below contains the results of a poll of our members last run on the IAM RoadSmart website in July and August of 2018.

The Committees Key Questions

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

Our main evidence of the daily experiences of road users comes from a survey conducted in July and August of last year which found that our members are increasingly disillusioned with the state of the roads in the UK – and feel that authorities are not doing nearly enough to tackle the problem.

More than 7,000 UK IAM RoadSmart members responded on line with a clear majority thinking that our roads have become much worse in recent years, that there are many more potholes than ever before, and that they have to swerve to avoid potholes on every journey.

Some 47% - over 3,400 respondents – say they have experienced damage to their car, commercial vehicle, motorbike or bicycle or personal injury as a result of hitting a pothole.

Around 90% have spotted a deterioration of some level in the roads they use with just over 50% rating the state of their roads as 'much worse' in the past three years and 38% rating them 'worse.'

Some 81% - close to 6,000 people – say they have noticed 'many more' potholes in the past three years, adding in the 13% who have seen 'a few more,' that gives a total of 94% who report more potholes.

Over 56% say they have to take avoiding action on every journey to dodge potholes, while 27% say they have to steer around a pothole every day.

This latter point is a truly shocking indictment of the state of our nation's most vital and valuable asset – its roads.

Research on the economic and social costs of poor roads is sadly lacking in the view of IAM RoadSmart. Anecdotal evidence suggests that areas with worn out roads are less attractive to inward investors or tourists but compelling evidence is often hard to

find. Costs of repair and damage to individual and companies are also difficult to obtain in order to help inform the debate.

This is even more important when investigating the road safety implications of poor road surface condition. In 2017 six deaths in the UK were recoded with a contributory factor of "Poor or defective road surface" (down from 12 in 2016). This represents only 1% of all deaths on our roads. However IAM RoadSmart believe this is a very under reported issue. If the social and personal costs of trips and falls caused by poor roads and pavements are also taken into account we believe a substantial problem is going unnoticed. The Committee should call for a step change in research into the impact of potholes on individuals, companies and the NHS.

Information on road condition is collected scientifically by highway authorities and transport Scotland but is often poorly presented and out of date when it reaches the public. Localised consumer satisfaction information is also collated but again often hard to find as it is often only reported in Council minutes and suchlike.

Organisations seeking information often have to use data from bodies such as the Asphalt Industry Association in order to find data that allows a degree of comparison across authorities. It is also not easy to find a clear definition of 'what good looks like' when it comes to an individual councils' performance.

- **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?**
- **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?**

IAM RoadSmart hoped that the HMEP (Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme) would deliver a step change on road maintenance performance. However, it is not clear to us what impact it has had. If it is working then its core activities of knowledge sharing and sharing of resources should be embedded in any future approach to road maintenance

The fact that many councils have become too small to sustain a proper roads department is clear evidence that 'one size fits all' local government structures are not working to protect our road assets. Sharing staff, equipment and raw materials across traditional boundaries appear to be delivering economies of scale and enhanced buying power in several areas. IAM RoadSmart support this approach which has worked well in areas such as Ayrshire.

Local roads are often the most valuable asset in any given local authority's portfolio. Yet they do not receive the attention or care that they require. In our view this is due to short term political needs and budget cycles that do not deliver sustainable funding. Given the long term nature of the problem and the asset it is essential that new ways of funding can be found that exempt roads from traditional budget cycles

and guarantee income over a long time period. Ring fencing of funding should be available at a local and national level. It is important that the impact for Scotland is understood of the Westminster government proposals that from 2020 all funds raised from Vehicle Excise Duty will be spent on road maintenance.

IAM RoadSmart believe that road users in Scotland are already heavily taxed and charged for their car ownership and use. The fundamental principle for any new form of charging must be that it does not add to the existing financial burden for drivers and riders. Having said that we are open to alternative funding mechanisms if charges are fair and transparent and clearly ring fenced for the benefit of those paying them. While a third of IAM RoadSmart members are willing to consider new funding ideas to help improve our roads, half were against a 2p increase in fuel duty and most of those were strongly opposed. In our view funding formulas should be related to the state of the roads rather than population or traffic levels. Those authorities with the longest backlogs and with roads in the poorest condition should be eligible for extra assistance.

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