

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM PATRICIA KHATIB

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

Obviously budget restrictions have definitely affected the quality of road maintenance, but what money is available is not used wisely. Most of the repairs in Renfrewshire are carried out by a couple of men with shovels; cold bitumen is used & there is no sealing of the edges, which are usually tamped down by foot. Consequently they open up again within weeks or sometimes days. This is a complete waste of the public's money, as the same potholes are being repaired again and again. It would be much more sensible to effect a proper repair, which might cost more initially, but long term would be more cost effective. The problem is thus not simply one of available funds, but more sensible use of them.

As to road users, they are very badly served; and in particular cyclists, as the numerous potholes, which are mostly close to the kerb, can be quite dangerous. But also motorists suffer, as suspensions are tested to their limit. I personally have had to replace the suspension joints on my car because of the stress caused by potholes. Again, since the potholes open up again very quickly, businesses are negatively affected, as road repairs can cause considerable delay.

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

As has been said above, it is not just a question of budget – though this is obviously a contributory factor – but of funds being wisely used as well. However, there does need to be a considerable increase in the funds available, so that councils do not feel the need to cut corners or use cheap temporary measures because of budget restrictions. Also the extra funding would need to be ring-fenced exclusively for road repairs. There should be proper quality control to ensure the repairs are professionally done; **thus a national road repair standard should be established, with legal status, so that if the repairs are not properly effected, the funding could be withdrawn from the council and given to a professional body to do the job.**

If the standard of road repairs is not improved drastically, then the negative effects cited above will necessarily increase.

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

There needs to be accountability and quality control, so that those repairs that are done, are of sufficient standard that they will last. This will ultimately reduce the size of the budget needed, or at least remove the requirement to increase it.

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?

No. It would be much more cost effective & efficient if there were one central body for the whole country, **legally accountable** in respect of standards & responsibilities, subject to quality control inspection. At the moment there seems to be no accountability, so that the quality of repairs varies greatly from county to county, depending on the other demands on their budget. For instance, those councils with a high social care demand may find most of their funds need to be allocated to this, because of the legal requirement laid upon them.

Additional comments

There is one further aspect not touched upon in your questions, and that is the maintenance of the road verges. All over Renfrewshire, for example, there are vast numbers of weeds growing at the kerbside of the roads. These weeds ultimately break up the road surface, leading inevitably to potholes. There are occasional chemical sprays carried out, but not nearly sufficient to keep the weeds down. Apart from the fact that the whole of the county looks neglected and unsightly, this negligence leads to a much greater incidence of road damage, so that once again cost cutting in the short term leads to much higher costs eventually.