

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM RAYMOND MONAGHAN

1. Recent spending decisions have had an overall negative impact on the areas of roads, road users, businesses, public services, and the economy. An underfunded and undermaintained road network affects that and more.

2. If current spending levels are held, the road network will continue to deteriorate, and the knock-on negative impacts in the above areas shall gradually increase.

3. & 4. I will group the last two matters together since they are linked. Obviously, spending more money is the best way to help reverse the negative impacts, regardless of that being possible or not, spending what is there more efficiently and intuitively is also extremely important.

I'm not really best place to comment much on the balance between central and local management of road maintenance, there perhaps might be a case for government to ring-fence that budget centrally and take it out what is given to councils. This would prevent councils neglecting roads from cutting maintenance budgets to fund their other departments. Councils can then manage it as they wish on the roads they feel needs it spent on, and with being centrally funded by the government, means it can only be spent on roads. There should also be an effort made to log and account for every stretch of trunk/non-trunk, restricted/unrestricted road in the country. Since it emerged from the evidence sessions on the recently fallen 20mph Bill, some councils don't actually know how many unrestricted roads they have on their books, and that is not an acceptable place to be in with all the technology available to easily record this.

From a 2018 FOI request, it was revealed highway authorities in the UK spent at least £45 million on pothole compensation claims since 2013, with only 156 of 212 highway authorities responding, the actual figure will be higher. In February 2019, it was in the press that over 110,000 potholes were reported to Scottish councils for just 1 year, with the Fife region accounting for nearly 22,000 of those.

This is where the point of intuitiveness comes up, the problem we have with a lot of government budgeting, is that it is done on the basis to make certain figures add up on a spreadsheet, instead of the resulting impacts in the real world. Thinking of that money handed out for compensation, those would have been prevented by spending more on road maintenance.

There is also lack of preventive measures being taken on problem roads from the elements of the weather, such as parts of roads that always accumulate water, and result in large puddles whenever rain fall exceeds a certain point. Water in some cases damage our roads surfaces more than high volumes of traffic, yet councils never seem to do anything to improve water drainage. It's always the same roads at the same points, why don't they do anything about it? If money was spent on water

drainage at points in our roads that tend to accumulate water that puddles, that might cost “more” today on your spreadsheet, but it will cost less overall in a reduced need for maintenance work due to persistent water damage on the road surface.

Finally, there is also the amount of “patch” work against resurfacing, we see all the time a “quick fix” of a little bit of tarmac used on potholes, but these of course don’t last very long. While appreciating this is needed in certain cases, more resurfacing needs done instead of repeated patching works, as having to do so many will quickly reach the same cost as a resurfacing would. Now resurfacing may cost “more” on your budget spreadsheet for this year, but if that work lasts multiple years before needing any future work done again, that makes the money worth spending. A staggered approach should be taken, with a balance between patch work, and resurfacing so to prevent the occurrence of too many roads needing resurfaced in the one financial year.