

## **RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE**

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

#### **SUBMISSION FROM SHETLAND ISLANDS COUNCIL ROADS SERVICE**

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

The reduction in funding has required Scotland's road authorities to make efficiencies in their road maintenance operations. Whether that is as a result of new working practices, new technologies or the use of new materials. This has led to the current position where the national Road Condition Indicator (RCI) has stabilised. However, there is a concern that these efficiencies may not follow asset management principles, may not be the best strategy in the long term and may not take account of "whole life" costing. Therefore, the road lengths that are easy or less costly to repair may have been addressed first with other roads that require more extensive repair, such as reconstruction, being postponed for a later date. Low cost treatments such as surface dressing that address surface texture and minor cracking of the carriageway can lead to an improvement in the RCI but this can mask underlying structural issues that will eventually require repair at significant expense. Indeed delaying these repairs will only increase their eventual cost due to the continuing deterioration of the defects. Therefore, concentrating solely on reducing the RCI may not be the best strategy as it is not a good indication of the structural issues that may affect a road's integrity. The current impact on road users, businesses etc., for Scotland as a whole, should be negligible if you consider that the RCI is stable. However, as stated above there is a concern that in the medium to long term the increased deterioration of the more "difficult" roads, where repairs are postponed due to cost, will be detrimental to the RCI and in turn to road users and the economy. There will also be road users, businesses etc. in localised areas that are currently affected by the roads that are in very poor condition and not being repaired due to the expense.

##### **If spending on roads maintenance continues at current levels, what could be the likely effects on the above groups? (Scotland's roads, road users, businesses, public services, and the economy)**

Scotland's roads will eventually deteriorate as the lengths that require less costly repairs are addressed and the roads requiring the more expensive structural repairs are all that remain. Road users will be inconvenienced as the reliability of the road network is compromised, road capacity is reduced and journey times increase. The health of the economy relies on the efficient transport of goods and services so businesses, public services and the economy will suffer as a result of delays and increased journey times resulting from the poorer condition of the road network. This issue is particularly significant for islands and rural areas where communities are often served by only one road with no alternative route available. The remoteness of the islands and the additional costs incurred such as ferry fares, accommodation for contractors or consultants and expensive fuel mean that the negative effects of reduced spending are further exacerbated.

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

Further efficiencies in road maintenance operations but the majority of local road authorities will have already implemented asset management practices and other procedures to achieve

best value. Should take a long-term approach to investment in roads and recognise that investment in planned maintenance now rather than continued spending on reactive maintenance will achieve better results while reducing “whole life” costs.

**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?**

We consider that local authorities are best placed to manage and maintain local road networks. There is no doubt that local knowledge plays an important part in the management of local roads including the most appropriate maintenance methods and strategy. Local knowledge will play an important part in the determination of efficiencies that can be made. This knowledge may be lost or subsumed into a collective approach if the management of roads is controlled from a regional or national level. This concern is especially applicable for island authorities as there is a significant difference in the topography, geology etc. between each island group. There is an even greater difference between the islands and their nearest “regional” area on the mainland. A collaborative approach with other roads authorities would be beneficial between mainland authorities with shared borders but, largely for geographical reasons, there is little benefit in the “shared service” approach for island authorities. However, island authorities should seek to enter into “memoranda of agreement” with other Councils or public bodies for specific collaborations where efficiencies can be achieved.