

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM SUSTRANS SCOTLAND

Introduction

Sustrans Scotland submit that the needs of people walking and especially people cycling should receive greater consideration in discussions regarding road maintenance.

Personal injuries caused by poor road surface and reluctance to use surface materials that help to make cyclists safer are both impacted upon by road maintenance in Scotland.

Sustrans Scotland contend that it would be appropriate to pause road building in order to tackle the maintenance backlog and fund other sustainable transport measures.

Poor quality road surfaces present a danger to people cycling and cause councils to incur significant compensation expense.

Though poor quality road surfaces can damage vehicles, where they impact on people on bikes they are more likely to cause injury, potentially serious. Local authorities can face significant expense through compensation claims as a result.

Research, undertaken by Cycling UK, indicates that an incident caused by poor road surface effecting cyclists is more expensive for councils than those involving vehicles. The average cost of compensation per motorist was around £340, whereas councils paid on average £8,800 per cyclist for incidents involving potholes.ⁱ

People on bikes are disproportionately and severely impacted by poor surface quality. With national and local goals to increase cycling, it is a priority that efforts are made to provide safe road surface for people on bikes where there are not segregated facilities.

Maintenance of cycle lanes

Maintenance budget constraints and the actions of utility companies lead to the delivery of lower quality materials for infrastructure.

Sustrans Scotland deliver infrastructure match-funding grants on behalf of the Scottish Government to fund improvements to the walking and cycling environment. Design guidance encourages the use of materials that differentiate cycle routes from the road carriageway or the footway for safety reasons. High-contrasting materials are particularly desirable to indicate the movement of cyclists at junctions (2/3 of collisions involving vehicles and bikes occur at junctions).ⁱⁱ

Sustrans Scotland work with all the local authorities of Scotland. It has been our experience that local authorities can be reluctant to use high-contrasting materials due to costs associated with monitoring and enforcing contractors' use of the correct materials following road works. Laying high-contrast materials is not necessarily more expensive, but a lack of

monitoring or enforcement resource means that infrastructure can be unattractively re-surfaced with a patchwork of surface materials by contractors.

This has led to some local authorities choosing not to pursue high-contrast materials in the first instance, because contractors will not replace material like for like unless it is cheap, easy to lay and easily available.

Best use of existing assets

Road building in Scotland should be paused in order to fund maintenance of existing assets, including pavements and cycle lanes. We acknowledge that this would require changes to the way capital and revenue budgets are administered.

We note the £1.7bn backlog of maintenance required on the local roads of Scotland at a time when local authority revenue budgets are stretched and there have been cuts to road maintenance.ⁱⁱⁱ

Scotland's new National Transport Strategy, at time of writing under consultation, refocuses transport strategy. The stated aim to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2045 (and other aspects of this vision) is incompatible with further road building projects. In addition, the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 plans to prioritise maintenance and better use of existing assets before investment in new facilities.

The motorways and trunk roads budget for Scotland in 2019-20 is £830 million.^{iv} Only £91 million is earmarked for maintenance. A temporary pause on new construction would allow Scotland to focus on maintenance of existing assets to prolong their life and improve their quality. However, it would also allow significant investment in sustainable transport and other priority areas.

ⁱ Cycling UK (2019). *Potholes: the true cost to cyclists*. Available: <https://www.cyclinguk.org/press-release/potholes-true-cost-cyclists>

ⁱⁱ The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (2017). *Road Safety Factsheet*. Available: <https://www.rospa.com/rospaweb/docs/advice-services/road-safety/cyclists/cycling-accidents-factsheet.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ The Scotsman (12 February 2018). *Scottish councils slash road maintenance budgets by 20%*.

^{iv} Scottish Government (2018). *Scottish Budget 2019-2020*. Available: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-budget-2019-20/pages/12/>