



Highways and Winter Maintenance Trend Analysis 2017/18

This briefing provides details on the performance information available from APSE's performance networks service looking at performance indicators and current policy issues for councils who deliver Highways services.

Key issues

- The condition of principal and non-principal roads in England & Wales has further improved to the best ever. Scotland remains broadly static.
- The number of Cat 1 defects per Km of maintained highway is the lowest ever at 0.29.
- Third party claims continue to fall due to a more robust defence regime.
- Winter maintenance spending saw a significant spike in 2017-18 of 61% on the year before, highlighting the danger of complacency after several years of mild winters

Overview

The APSE performance networks performance indicators for highways and winter maintenance cover the cost, productivity and quality elements of the services. This analysis aims to provide participating authorities with an overview of service trends, what this infers and what further activity and analysis individual authorities and the APSE highways, winter maintenance and street lighting benchmarking group could consider. The analysis in this summary is based on averages across all family groups for the last 5 years.

This executive summary aims to provide participating authorities with a picture of what the service trends are, what this infers and what further activity and analysis individual authorities and their benchmarking groups could consider. In this respect, it serves as a 'high level' guide only to highlight key challenges facing the service and may provide a strategic overview for those wishing to 'drill down' into the drivers, policies and processes which affect their group or individual service and financial outcomes.

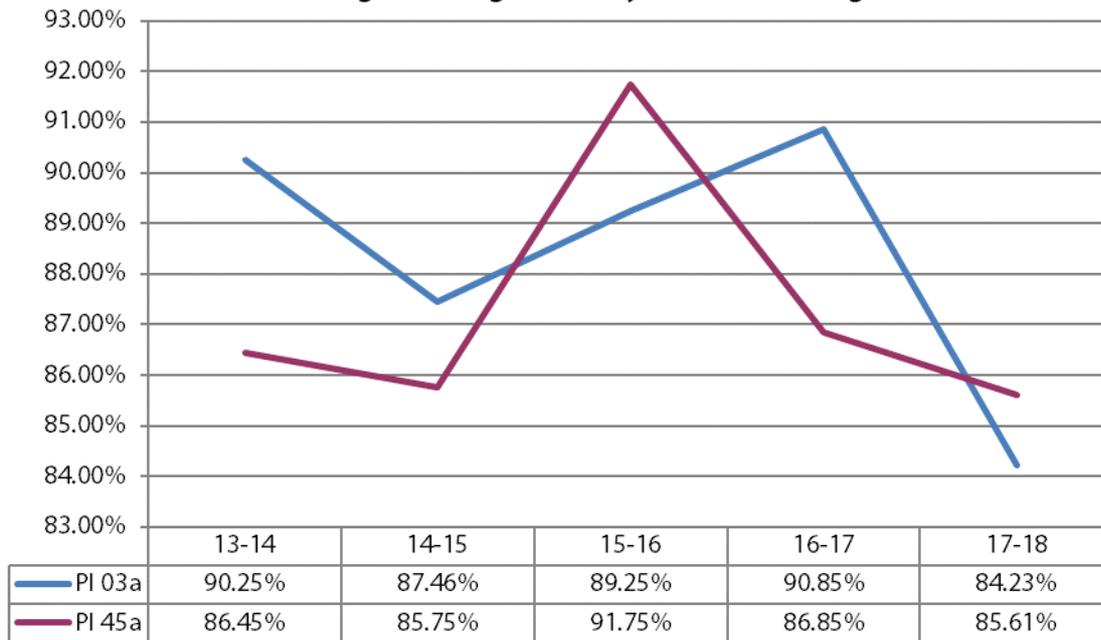
Trend analysis

Particular points of interest are as follows:

Carriageways and footways

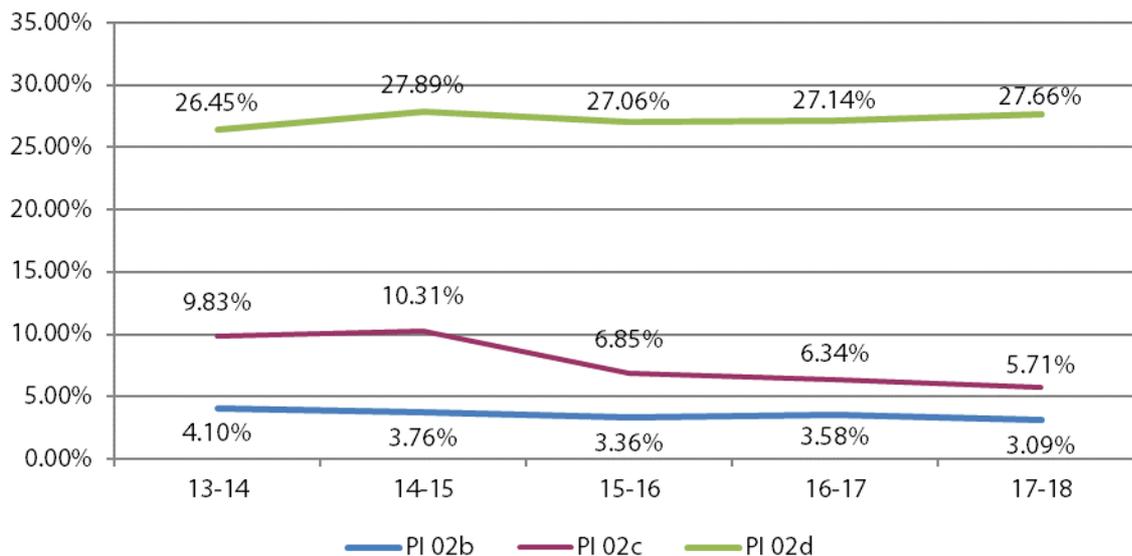
PI 03a and PI 45a show the percentage of damaged carriageways and footways made safe within their respective target times. Both have fluctuated around 88% for the past 5 years although 2017/18 has slightly dipped to 84.23% and 85.61%.

PI 03a Percentage of damaged roads made safe in target times
PI 45a Percentage of damaged footways made safe in target times



The performance indicators for the condition of roads in England and Wales are PI 02b (principal roads via TRACS) and PI 02c (non principal roads). In this case the lower the percentage needing attention the better. PI 02b, covering the condition of principal roads, continues to show an improvement since 2011/12 and has been steady over the past 7 years currently at 3.09% of the principal road network.

Condition of roads
PI 02b principal- England/Wales
PI 02c non principal- England/Wales
PI 02d principal - Scotland

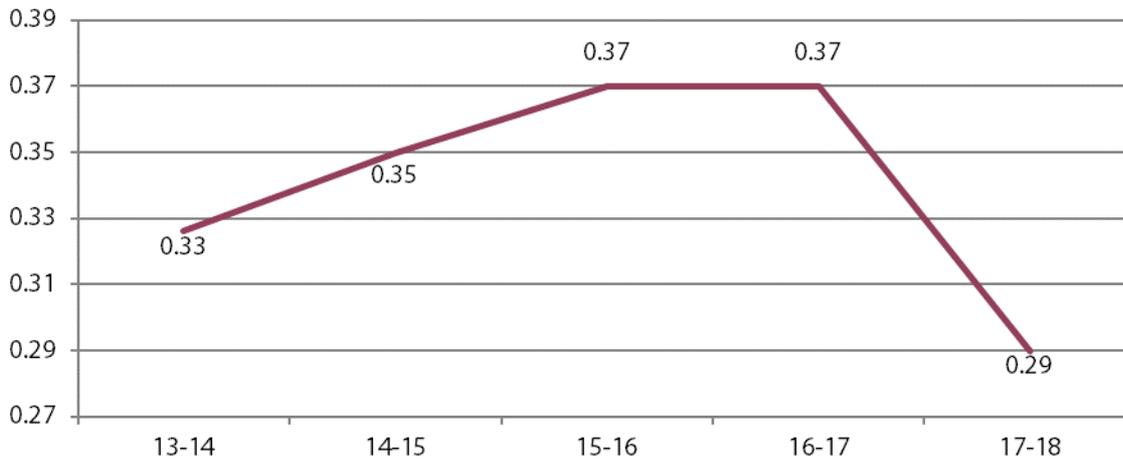


The non-principal road condition (PI 02c) covering Wales and England has improved significantly to 5.71%, more than 50% better than 2012/13 and the lowest on record.

In Scotland PI 02d (principal roads via SMRCS) has remained stable, averaging 27.66% in 2017/18.

There are a number of factors influencing the condition of roads and although the weather is one, historical investment will have a greater effect. The increase in capital funding in England allied to the asset management approach taken across the UK should lead to a focus on principal roads in terms of planned work and a resultant improvement in condition. Clearly local authorities will have to keep a lid on reactive works although revenue spend continues to be an area of concern.

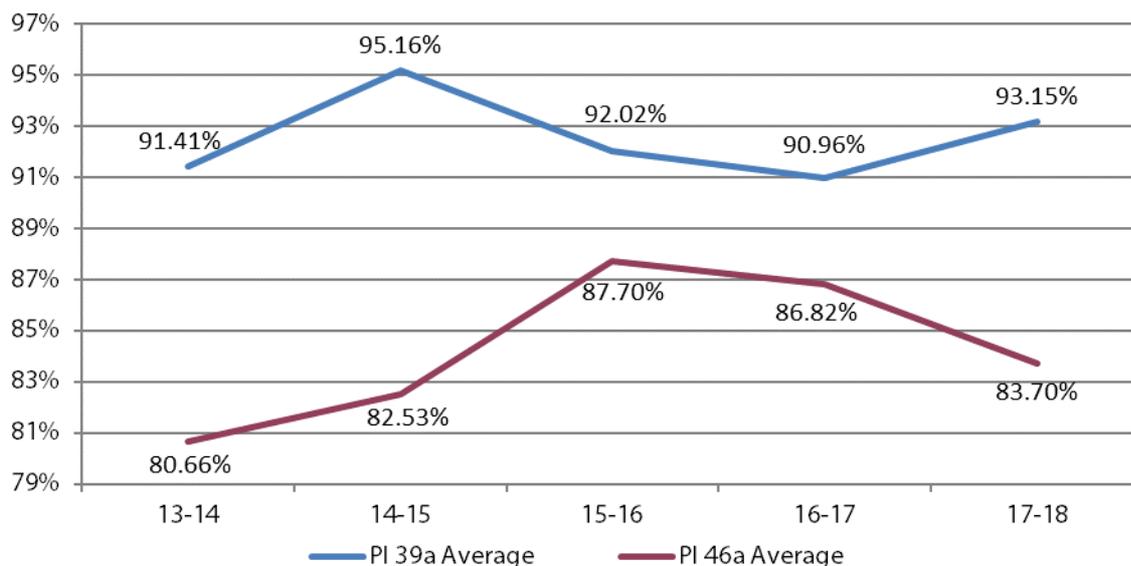
PI 28 Number of Cat 1 defects per Km of maintained road



PI 28 above shows the number of category 1 defects per kilometre of maintained road. This shows a decline over the past 5 years and is currently at 0.29, the lowest ever. This may be down to a more stringent classification and reporting systems.

Category 1 defects remain the highest priority for highways managers and it would appear that reductions since a high of 2012/13 reflect a focus on this issue. Maintaining these figures will have a big impact across the network and this can be seen as a success story for the sector.

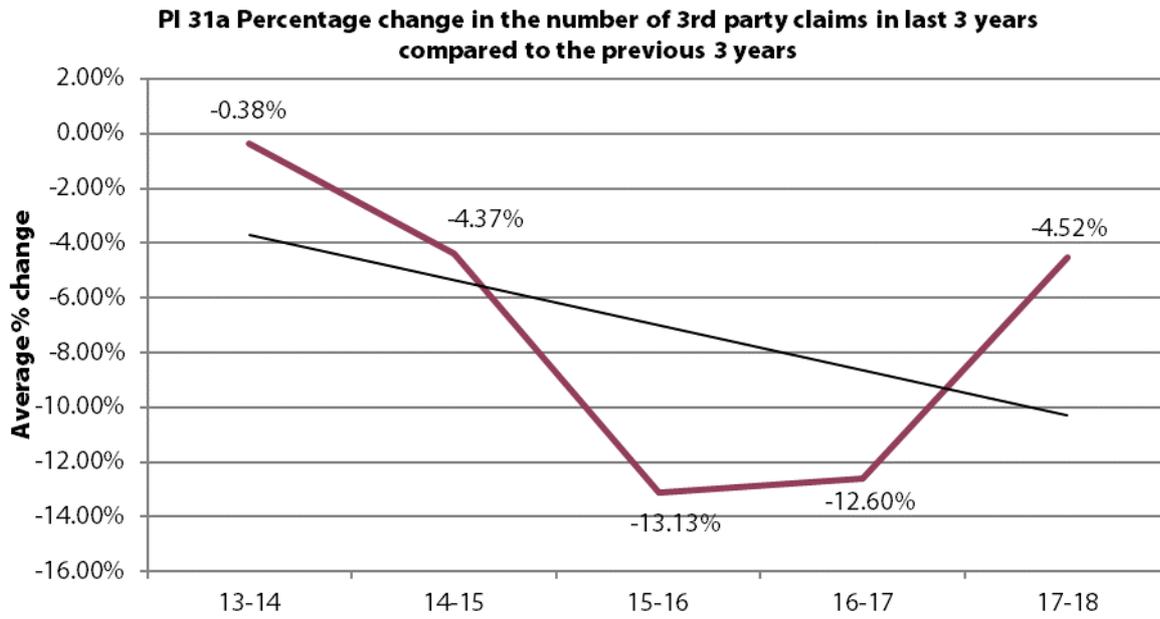
PI 39a Percentage of safety inspections completed on time (carriageways)
PI 46a Percentage of safety inspections completed on time (footways)



The percentage of carriageway safety inspections carried out on time (PI 39a) has improved from an average of 87.84% in 2012/13 to 93.15% this year. This has been a slight improvement on the previous year and the percentage has remained over 90% for the past 5 years.

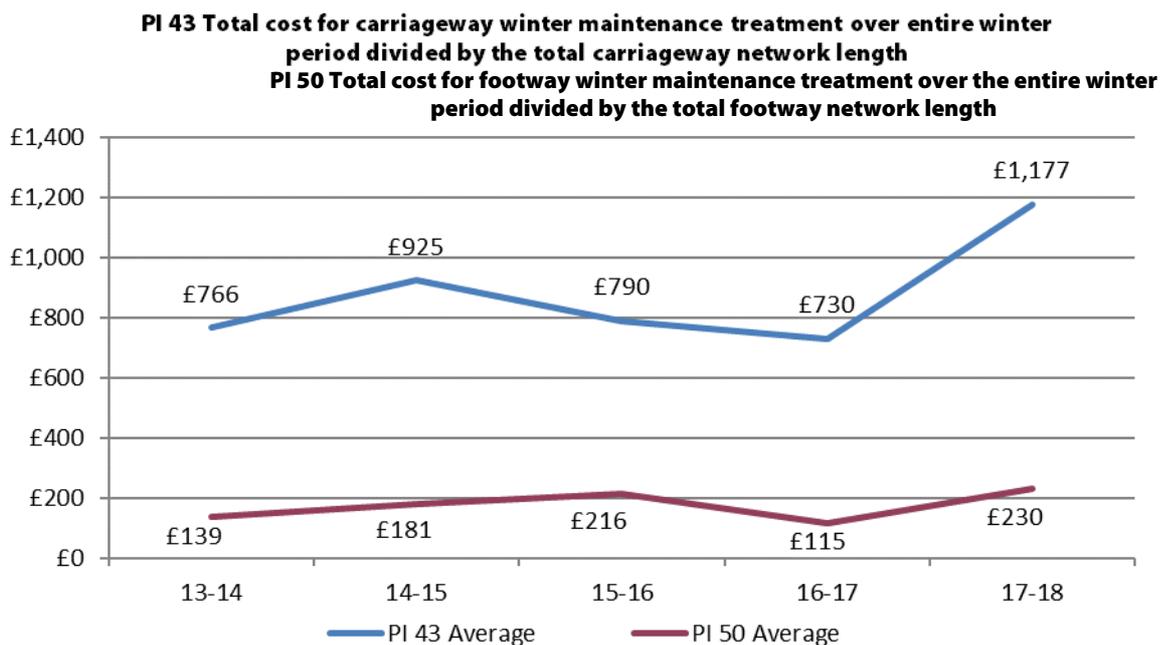
For footways (PI 46a) it is back to levels seen in 2014/15, now standing at 83.70% in 2017/18. Although the figures continue to show a higher focus on the highway rather than the footway, we can see from the figures above that there has been no marked deterioration in either over the past 5 years.

The area that has seen the most dramatic 5 year change is that of 3rd party claims (PI 31). In 2017/18 the fall was 4.52% representing a continued downward trend, although probably difficult to match the falls of 13.13% and 12.60% in the two preceding years. This is undoubtedly due to a more robust approach to defending spurious claims combined with the continued improvement in response times.



Winter maintenance

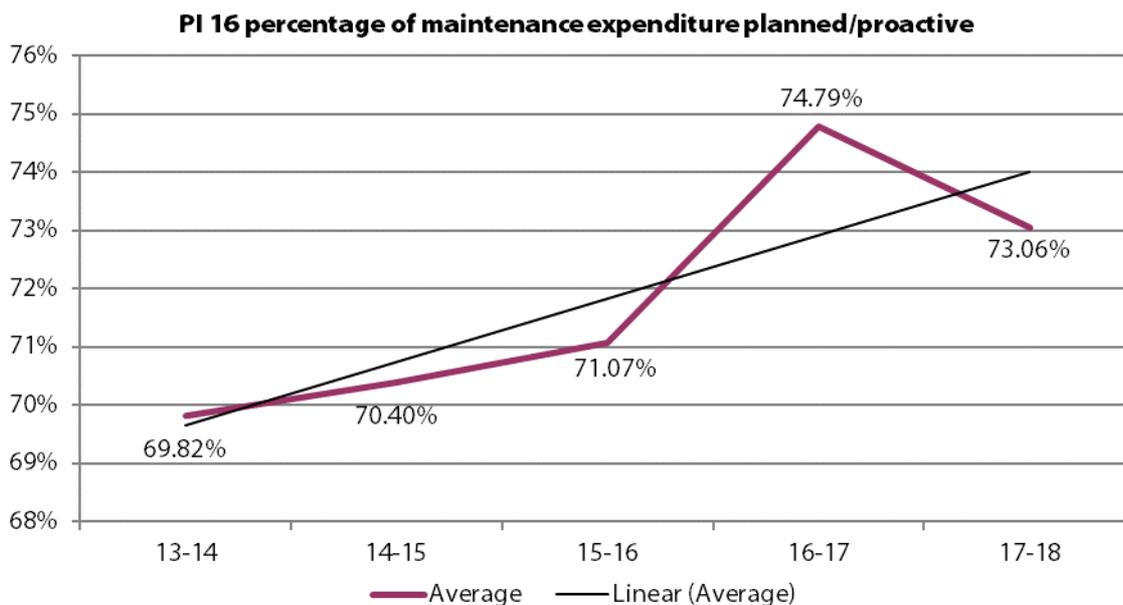
There are 2 PIs which reflect the total cost for carriageway (PI 43) and footway (PI 50) winter maintenance treatment over the entire winter period divided by the total carriageway/footway network length.



PI 43 covering carriageways stands at £1,177, a significant increase on 2016/17 of 61%. The cost of footways has similarly increased from £115 in 2016/17 to £230 in 2017/18; a 100% increase. These substantial increases were undoubtedly due to a harsher winter in 2017/18, but definitively shows the danger of complacency and the temptation to winter cut budgets after several years of mild winters.

Combined asset types

The average percentage of actual maintenance expenditure which was planned or proactive (PI 16) in 2016-17 stands at 73.06%. This shows a slight decrease on 2016/17 but the 5 year trend remains upwards and improving.



As noted above, recent guidance points to long term asset management as the method most likely to lead to a well maintained network. The push towards more planned work has been a focus within the sector for the last few years.

Traffic management systems

The percentage of traffic management system faults rectified within target times (PI 55) has remained above 92% since 2013-14, with the current figure being 93.55%. The percentage rectified on first visit (PI 56) has been above 88% in the same period currently at 89.43%. Both have shown minimal deterioration over the past year.

Bridges and structures

PI 300 and PI 301 look at the percentage of principal and general inspections carried out on time and the average figures for 2017-18 are 82.29% and 86.88%. PI 300 shows a significant improvement on the 2016-17 figure of 76.23%

The average percentage of council owned bridges failing European standards (PI 304) is 3.00%, which is a significant improvement from 4.44% in 2013-14 and in line with the previous year (2.80%).

Staff absence

Front line and all staff absences has remained relatively unchanged over the last year at 4.02%. This mirrors similar falls across other service areas. Longer term trends in sickness absence have improved but reduced staff numbers and loss of experience and expertise in many services will inevitably lead to increased pressure on remaining staff to continue to provide services.

Interpretation of data

Highways services remain one of the most visible and influential of all local authority delivered services. The asset is the most valuable councils own, there is an impact on both the day to day activity of nearly everybody as well as the economic performance of the UK.

2017/18 marks the last year before local authorities are obliged to conform to the new Code of Practice; Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: It will be interesting to see what effect the new risk based approach will have on future performance.

Highways investment announcements by Westminster and the devolved governments has been increased significantly over the past 2 years. This has been coupled with a promised £1.2 billion local roads funding to local government in England to improve roads, cut congestion and improve journey times. What cannot be argued is that highways is higher up the political agenda than for some time and improved maintenance regimes are bearing fruit on non-principal roads

Overall the network remains in a relatively healthy state bearing in mind the existing condition and previous levels of under investment. Around 55% of English and Welsh Highways have a residual life of over 15 years and further 28% between 15 and 5 years (Alarm survey 2018)

Heavy rain, flooding and high winds in addition to snow on the highway network continues to impact on Highway services, having profound effects on local areas and requiring the full co-operation of all partners to minimise disruption to local communities. These severe weather events have a long term impact on the condition of the network and it appears that although specific elements of the network might be improved, overall investment has not improved the condition of the entire network.

Overall priorities such as investment, skills and capacity as well as innovation and technology will continue to play a major role in the highways network.

Rob Bailey

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