



Briefing 11/74 December 2011

Potholes Review Progress Report

To: All contacts in England

For information: all contacts in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Key issues

Progress report from Potholes Group as part of the Highways maintenance Efficiency Programme

10 issues identified and gaps highlighted

Series of next steps noted

1. Introduction

In April a review of potholes was announced by Norman Baker under the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme. The final report is due next year, but a progress report has been published. It identifies the key principles and strategies regarding potholes, and a number of areas for further work. These include providing improved guidance to local authorities on prioritising key roads, adopting a whole-life approach to road maintenance and using the right technology and materials

The introduction to the report notes the media attention attracted by the issue and the importance of good customer service. It goes on to talk about the damage caused over recent years by severe weather and the government's response.

The report can be found here <http://www.dft.gov.uk/publications/potholes-review-progress-report>

2. Initial findings

The report notes 10 issues and then comments on the work needed to fill that gap and whether there has been progress with it.

2.1 Resilience of Road Network to Severe Weather

Issue to consider: Improving the resilience of the local road network must be a priority in order to provide efficient and effective service to all road users that meets their requirements. Provision of guidance on the maintenance of local roads that will enable greater resilience should be considered. improve its resilience. Such guidance is not currently under development.

Gap: Guidance in *Well-maintained Highways* for maintaining the local road network to improve its resilience. Such guidance is not currently under development.

2.2 Purpose and Use of the Network

Issue to consider: Consideration should be given to how local highway authorities develop maintenance hierarchies for all road users based on the function and use of the route. Guidance should be further developed to support such an approach, which would be beneficial in ensuring that maintenance focuses on the needs of all road users.

Gap: *Well-maintained Highways* introduces the concept of hierarchy for carriageway, footways and cycleways but the guidance does not necessarily reflect the current use of the local road network and is not inclusive of all road users. Guidance to update this approach is needed and is currently being proposed as part of a revision of *Well-maintained Highways*.

2.3 Economic Benefits of Highway Maintenance

Issue to consider: Consideration should be given to developing a consistent approach for determining economic costs and benefits of highway maintenance. This will allow local highway authorities to robustly define the need for investment in road maintenance and prioritise against other expenditure.

Gap: There is no central guidance for determining economic benefits of highway maintenance. The Department for Transport and the sector could consider building on some initial work that has been carried out in this area.

2.4 National Policy

Issue to consider: Consideration needs to be given to a more appropriate measure to report road condition that will encourage a more effective and efficient approach to road maintenance. Such a measure could take into consideration the road users' perception of road condition. A more effective and efficient approach to road maintenance will be achieved by adopting a whole life approach measuring performance over the long term. This should also enable funding priorities between the non-principal and principal roads to be determined at a local level.

Gap: The abolition of all National Indicators was announced in October 2010 as an unnecessary burden on local highway authorities. There is still a requirement on local highway authorities to collect road condition data and this is published annually. However, a single indicator of condition does not encourage the adoption of an asset management approach.

2.5 Local Decision Making and Preventative Maintenance

Issue to consider: Local highway authorities will benefit from moving towards a whole life approach to funding of highway maintenance. This will ensure that maintenance treatments are prioritised using the principles of asset management.

- The adoption of a preventative approach to maintenance over the whole life of the road will provide a more efficient approach to preventing the formation of potholes.
- Best practice should be established for the use of thin surface course systems and other materials to mitigate the risk of pothole formation in the future. Industry's role in providing such guidance should be considered.

Gap: Current guidance on asset management does not reflect the latest developments in the field. Comprehensive guidance and examples of current best practice are being developed under the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme.

2.6 National Standard – Defining Potholes

Issue to consider: Consideration should be given to developing a national definition for potholes. However, this should be part of a risk based assessment of defects as recommended by *Well-maintained Highways*. Examples of good practice, including testing by the Courts, should be explored. There is a diverse range of views regarding this matter.

Gap: *Well-maintained Highways* provides limited guidance on potholes and best practice in their identification, assessment and reporting. This Review will address this issue.

Effectiveness of Pothole Operations

2.7 Issue to consider: Consideration should be given to establishing best practice on the benefits of both investing in and using technology for safety inspections. A review should be undertaken of current training and qualifications available. Work with training organisations to provide training on more efficient and effective pothole repair.

Gap: There is no current guidance on efficient and effective pothole operations. Identifying best practice and developing appropriate guidance should be included in the next phase of this Review. This should include items such as training, qualifications and use of technology.

2.8 Right First Time

Issue to consider: Local highway authorities would benefit from more detailed guidance, including specifications, on the repair of potholes in order to ensure efficient and effective repairs. The objective will be to ensure a balance between safety and a right first time approach, ensuring a more efficient and effective approach to the repair of potholes.

Gap: ADEPT has published a report titled "*Pothole repair techniques for local highways*" which is a starting point on guidance. Industry, including both local highway authorities and service providers, has a role in developing this best practice for the repair and specification of potholes. This should be included in the next phase of this Review.

2.9 Utilities

Issue to consider: Local highway authorities must undertake appropriate quality control and compliance checking measures through trained personnel. Utilities must undertake reinstatements of the highway to the required standard. Both parties should work together through joint working bodies to continually review specifications and innovative ways to minimise disruption and ensure resilience of the network.

Gap: Industry, including local highways authorities, utilities, suppliers and industry regulators must be encouraged to develop guidance as to how reinstatements can be made more resilient to weather damage. This should be included in the next phase of this Review.

2.10 Stakeholders, Communications and User Perceptions

Issue to consider: Consideration should be given to how a communications strategy can be developed for all stakeholders involved in highway maintenance to ensure the issues are fully understood. Local highway authorities and stakeholder groups must actively work together to promote common interests in determining priorities and demonstrating the importance of a sustainable approach to maintenance.

Gap: Some local highway authorities have produced information on this subject for both members and the public. Such information should be considered in the next phase of this Review, with a view to producing a framework document for use by all. This will be supported by reviewing how local highway authorities have spent the March 2011 Department for Transport pothole funding.

3. Comment

APSE welcomes the work of the group as a specific response to a significant problem as well as the fact that it is part of the wider Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme. The background to the report notes that funding for highways repairs is and will remain a problem. It goes on to note the wider additional cost of road damage to the economy and the sustainability of current approaches and whether asset management principles are widely adopted. Clearly this is a serious issue for all sectors of society and resources are a fundamental consideration when looking to address it. There has been a recent announcement about funding for 21 highways projects but the concentration on capital funding has drawn criticism from some who understand the importance of revenue budget availability to fix potholes. There are factors which can improve performance and this paper refers to many of them how, however funding remains an issue which cannot be ignored and without significant resources the condition of the road network will continue to be an area of major concern for many years to come.

The paper highlights the fact that over the past two years there has been greater pressure on local authorities to reduce their maintenance standards to meet funding constraints. This again reflects the impact that funding limitations are having and will continue to have on the network.

The paper notes that 'Asset management, however, has not been embraced consistently across all local authorities' and it goes on to say that prevention may reduce the occurrence of potholes. There is room for interpretation with an approach such as asset management and the report must be clear to identify not so much what it means by asset management but what it expects as an outcome from whichever approach is taken. All local authorities will claim they are managing their assets. The paper notes that current guidance on asset management does not reflect the latest developments in the field and that it is being developed

as part of the HMEP. Providing guidance support and evidence backing up particular approaches and operations is a fundamental outcome for HMEP.

The last part of the report refers to next steps and highlights how the gaps noted above are being addressed and how the final report will consider them. There is a role for local authorities, the DfT, representative bodies , private contractors and materials suppliers in providing solutions and all must be willing not only to challenge existing thinking and be innovative but to publicise what they are doing across the sector.

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