



Briefing 13/22

May 2013

# Maintaining Scotland's Roads

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in Scotland

For information only to England, Northern Ireland and Wales

## Key Issues

- The Accounts Commission have published an audit which charts the progress made by Scottish Councils against recommendations made in a 2011 report to improve the management of roads maintenance
- The update, based on reports from Audit Scotland, notes the condition of local roads in an acceptable condition has improved since 2011 despite a fall in roads maintenance spending
- The report strongly recommends councils continue to improve how they manage roads maintenance and value for money, including submitting accurate and complete data to the SCOTS/ APSE benchmarking project

## 1.0 Introduction

On 17 May 2013 the Accounts Commission published its report *Maintaining Scotland's Roads: An audit update on councils' progress*. In 2012, the Accounts Commission asked local auditors to examine how councils had responded to recommendations contained within the February 2011 report *Maintaining Scotland's Roads: A follow-up report*. Both provide progress reports following the original document which was published in November 2004.

The report findings from 2011, together with the constraints on public sector spending, suggested that in order to halt the decline in roads conditions and improve value for money from roads maintenance activity major change was required.

Recommendations from the 2011 report included:-

- The Scottish Government should consider a national review of how the road network is managed and maintained, with a view to developing new ways of providing services and increasing the potential for shared services.

- Transport Scotland and councils should work together to consider all opportunities for achieving more with the resources currently available. This included exploring new ways of working, the pooling and flexible use of resources, such as staff and equipment, and partnerships between councils and with the private sector.
- Councils should:
  - have a roads asset management plan in place no later than the end of 2011.
  - ensure they can demonstrate they are making the best use of resources currently available, through benchmarking and improved management and reporting.
  - adopt the performance indicators being developed by the Society of Chief Officers of Transport in Scotland (SCOTS) and APSE as a first step in allowing the relative performance of councils' roads maintenance activities to be measured consistently.

The 2013 report can be found at [http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/work/all\\_national.php](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/work/all_national.php)

## 2.0 Content of the Report

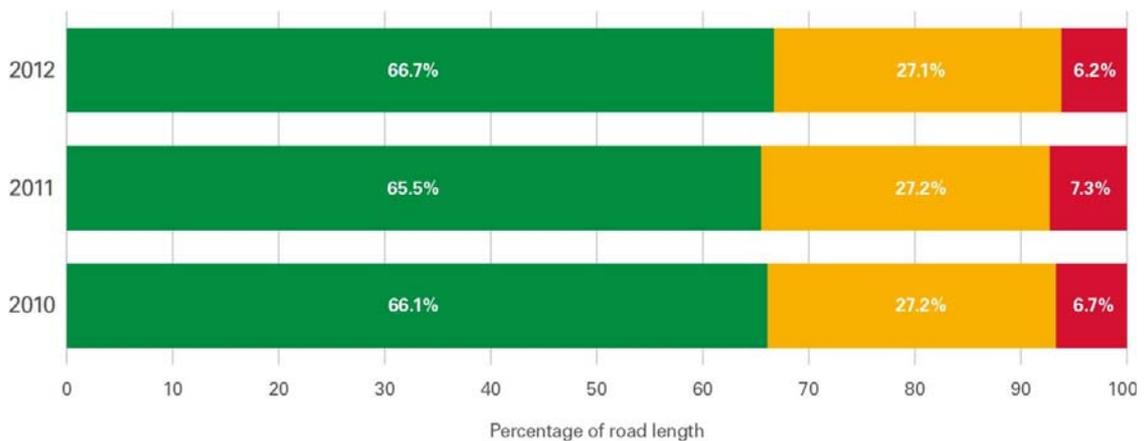
The recent report provides a number of key conclusions and recommendations which are important to roads maintenance council services. This briefing highlights the main findings from the report.

### Condition of local roads

The report highlights that the percentage of local roads in acceptable condition has increased marginally from 66.1 to 66.7 per cent over the last two years. This is despite a noted reduction in council roads maintenance spending, which has decreased from £492 million in 2009/10 to approximately £400 million in 2010/11 (representing a 21 per cent reduction in real terms).

The table below notes the marginal increases from 2010 to 2012 in relation to the condition of local classified roads.

### Condition of local classified roads



■ Acceptable condition   ■ Some deterioration apparent   ■ Repairs required within one year

Source: Scottish Roads Maintenance Condition survey 2012, reported by SCOTS, March 2013

Although there has been a marginal increase the report notes that based on limited road user surveys, the public still have concerns about the condition of Scotland's roads. Therefore this will be an area which Audit Scotland continues to monitor progress.

### **Development of roads asset management plans**

The report highlights that councils need clear roads asset management plans for managing roads to ensure they meet the service standards and achieve good value for the money which they spend on maintaining them. The report outlines that a good quality roads asset management plan should:-

- describe the assets forming the roads network and their condition
- assess the future demand likely to be placed on the network
- clearly describe the levels of service the council will provide to maintain the network
- provide financial information, including long-term prediction of the cost of managing and operating the roads network

From the information gathered from auditors approximately half of councils had published or approved plans, or equivalent documents by the target date of 2011. Most other councils had draft plans which were due to be finalised by 2012 or 2013. It was noted that SCOTS have reported that all councils now have roads asset management plans in place.

The report notes that there is scope to improve the quality of the roads asset management plans and the monitoring of progress against them, emphasising the need for councils to ensure that the plans are of sufficient quality and that they are monitoring them effectively.

The report also highlighted that many councils had developed improvement plans to support their overall roads asset management activities and that these plans can play a useful role in improving how councils manage roads maintenance activities. In order for the improvement plans to fulfil this role it's important that clear systems are in place to help councils monitor how they are delivering these plans.

### **Benchmarking and performance information**

The report welcomes the development and positive step taken by SCOTS and APSE to agree a set of performance indicators covering all aspects of roads maintenance including carriageways, footpaths, lighting, structures and customer service. This development meant all councils submitted data to the joint project in 2012, where the previous year half of the councils were using SCOTS indicators and the other half were using APSE's indicators to assess performance.

The table to follow shows a sample of the indicators all councils are now using to assess performance.

## SCOTS/ APSE performance indicators for carriageways



### Safety

- Percentage of Category 1 defects made safe within response times
- Percentage of safety inspections completed on time
- Percentage of network salted regularly



### Condition/Asset preservation

- Percentage of carriageway length to be considered for maintenance treatment
- Percentage of carriageway length – surface dressed
- Percentage of carriageway length – fully reconstructed



### Financial

- Total maintenance expenditure by carriageway length
- Cost per kilometre of planned/reactive/routine maintenance
- Cost per kilometre of winter maintenance treatment

Source: SCOTS/ APSE PN template 2012

The report notes that to allow for meaningful benchmarking, it is vital that councils generate consistent performance information. Furthermore it was highlighted that additional work was required to improve the quality of financial data to allow councils to calculate unit costs. This additional work is being looked at within the SCOTS/ APSE benchmarking groups.

### National roads maintenance review

A key recommendation to come out of the 2011 report was that Scottish Government should consider a national review of arrangements for managing and maintaining roads, with a view to stimulating new ways of providing services. Ministers accepted this recommendation and Scottish Government along with councils established a steering group in March 2011 to carry out the review.

The 2013 report recommends that as two years have passed since the national roads maintenance review, now would be appropriate time to review the progress and achievements to date. In particular councils, COSLA and SCOTS should:-

- continue to work with Transport Scotland to develop methodologies for evaluating the impact of the national roads maintenance review to date, with a view to further prioritising actions that are likely to have the most impact on improving roads conditions
- continue to work with partners on the Roads Maintenance Strategic Action Group (established as one of the groups to take forward the findings from the National Roads Maintenance Review published in July 2012) to produce a strategy for developing the best service and structural models to deliver roads maintenance

The national roads maintenance review has also led to other initiatives being developed, including the recently formed Shared Capacity and Shared Services Improvement Board by SCOTS and Transport Scotland. These were set up to provide guidance and support to councils who wish to explore shared services options. The report highlights the importance of taking advantage of this support and that offered by other sources.

### **3.0 Comment and Conclusion**

APSE welcomes the report which demonstrates that despite a difficult financial climate for local government, local authorities in Scotland are continuing to deliver efficient and economic roads services and improving road conditions. The report demonstrates the importance of reliable and consistent benchmarks in generating comparative performance information and to allow for the promotion of best practice. This approach is at the core of APSE's benchmarking service performance networks.

APSE regards the partnership with SCOTS as an important initiative in developing an asset management benchmarking model for roads and street lighting. The model benchmarks across a range of assets including carriageways, footways, lighting, bridges/ structures and gullies. We have worked closely with SCOTS in developing a coherent and robust framework for asset management benchmarking across all Scottish local authorities and welcomes the acknowledgement in the report of the progress made to date. APSE will continue to work in partnership with SCOTS to improve the consistency and quality of performance information submitted by local authorities and to ensure its effective use as a tool for service improvement.

APSE is rolling out the approach to roads asset management benchmarking across its wider membership in 2013 to ensure that the benefits of this approach can be shared across the whole local government community. We have already worked closely with the County Surveyors Society (CSS) Wales in developing a similar approach to asset management benchmarking for Wales. For English local authorities, the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme has a workstream focusing on performance management and benchmarking. This template is very helpful in meeting the objectives of HMEP and further work will be undertaken in this area as well.

We will again this year be hosting training sessions during the summer months for the asset management data collection; for more information on this and the benchmarking model itself please contact Andy Williams on [Awilliams@apse.org.uk](mailto:Awilliams@apse.org.uk)

Louise McMillan  
Acting Principal Advisor  
APSE Scotland