

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Local roads funding and governance](#), HC 1486

Wednesday 27 February 2019

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 27 February 2019.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Lilian Greenwood (Chair); Ruth Cadbury; Robert Courts; Steve Double; Huw Merriman; Grahame Morris; Graham Stringer; Daniel Zeichner.

Questions 211 - 293

Witnesses

I: Stephen Hall, Assistant Director, Economy and Environment, Cumbria County Council; Andrew Haysey, Transport Planning Manager, Gateshead Council; Andrew Loosemore, Head of Highways Asset Management, Kent County Council; Lynne Stinson, Team Manager, Assets and Major Programmes Team, Leicestershire County Council; and Lynne Wait CEng MICE, Interim Engineering Manager, Growth and Infrastructure, Borough of Poole, appearing on behalf of the South West Highway Alliance.

II: Danny Rawle, Highway Asset Management Engineer, Coventry City Council; Stephen Skinner CEng MICE, Head of Highway Services, Enfield Council; Patrick Doig, Divisional Finance Director for Surface Transport, Transport for London; and Anne Shaw, Director of Network Resilience, Transport for West Midlands.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Gateshead Council](#)
- [Kent County Council](#)
- [Leicestershire County Council](#)
- [South West Highway Alliance](#)
- [Coventry City Council](#)
- [Transport for London](#)
- [Transport for West Midlands](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Stephen Hall, Andrew Haysey, Andrew Loosemore, Lynne Stinson and Lynne Wait.

Q211 **Chair:** Good morning. Thank you for joining us. For the record of our proceedings today, I would like the panel to introduce themselves.

Lynne Stinson: I am Lynne Stinson from Leicestershire County Council. I am the assets and major programmes team manager. I manage a team that delivers almost all of Leicestershire County Council's capital programme, including all the maintenance.

Stephen Hall: Good morning. I am Stephen Hall from Cumbria County Council. I am the assistant director for economy and environment. Highways and transport sit under that portfolio, along with the rest of our built estate.

Andrew Haysey: I am Andrew Haysey. I am the transport planning manager at Gateshead Council, dealing with the asset management side and the capital programmes relating to maintenance.

Andrew Loosemore: Good morning, everybody. My name is Andrew Loosemore. I am head of highways asset management at Kent County Council.

Lynne Wait: Good morning. My name is Lynne Wait. I work for the Borough of Poole as interim engineering manager, covering asset management, but I am here today representing the South West Highway Alliance.

Q212 **Chair:** We have a real spread across the country, which is great. Before I ask my first question, I just want to say that we will be using the word "roads" a lot today. When we talk about roads, we mean the full extent of the highway, including footways and pavements. If at any point during the questioning there are particular things that you want to say about pavements and footways that differentiate their treatment from that of the road surface, please flag them up—if that makes sense.

First, I want to ask a bit about best practice and how it is shared. To what extent, and how, is best practice shared, whether it is about inspection, data collection or maintenance techniques? How do different local highway authorities in England share best practice? What sort of technology do you use to share best practice? What enables you to do that? What does the DfT do, if anything, to encourage or facilitate you to share best practice?

Lynne Wait: I am representing the highway alliance, which is the way we share best practice in the south-west. There are 15 authorities, there is a governance structure in place and there are quarterly programme board meetings. Sitting beneath that, there are 10 or so groups that cover street lighting, bridges and asset management. They all feed back



to the programme board meetings, and the programme board will direct some of the work. With that set of meetings, there is a fairly substantial network of highways practitioners across the 15 authorities. They range in size from Devon, which is one of the largest, to some of the smallest authorities. We share best practice and our technology. We set up some commonality across borders, to reduce our workloads.

You asked what the DFT does. The incentive fund and its allocation have pushed people towards thinking more about collaborative working. Whenever we are undertaking a procurement, or perhaps if somebody is looking at changing the way they do something, one of their first thoughts will be, "How can I share this with my colleagues? What expertise can I use from any of them?"

Q213 **Chair:** How long have you, as a south-west group of authorities, been doing that joint working?

Lynne Wait: About five years.

Q214 **Chair:** Did it come as a result of encouragement from the DFT, or because there was a lot of pressure and people started looking at joint procurement and things like that?

Lynne Wait: It was more that there was a will to do it at officer level. We already had a set of various working groups set up, so it was just about putting something in place that took that a step further.

Q215 **Chair:** Andrew, tell me how you share best practice in Kent with other local authorities.

Andrew Loosemore: I sit on the ADEPT highways engineering board. We meet regularly, on a quarterly basis, predominantly to discuss best practice. The Department for Transport is also in attendance at those regular meetings. That gives us an opportunity. We have submitted some recent papers, particularly on best practice for pothole repairs, to the DFT. That enables them to be shared right across industry, to understand a particular method of best practice.

For many years—even before I started in Kent, which was five or six years ago—there was the South East Seven. The south-east's major authorities get together to share best practice, whether for highways or for other parts of service delivery. We have certainly seen best practice between the south-east's major authorities in that area. The well-managed highway infrastructure code of practice has enabled us to look at how we manage and maintain our highway infrastructures across borders. The public using the highway network do not see a difference between a road in Kent and a road in East Sussex, West Sussex or any of our other neighbouring authorities, so it is important that we get consistent levels of maintenance.

The South East Seven group was already formed, so we already had connectivity between those authorities. When we were looking at the



well-managed highway infrastructure code of practice, it was a catalyst for moving towards a natural formation of understanding what best practice is across borders.

Q216 Chair: Do the other three members of the panel do anything different in working with other local authorities in the region or joining a national body where you might get together face to face at meetings or board meetings, or share documents, presumably by email? Is there anything different that you can tell us about how best practice is shared for different aspects, whether it is inspection, data collection or techniques for filling potholes? Do you have any reflections on what the Department does to encourage or facilitate that?

Stephen Hall: I don't think we do anything radically different in Cumbria. We are a member of all the sector industry bodies other colleagues have referred to. There are others, based on geography. I do not have anything particular to add to that.

You asked about the Department for Transport's role. There are opportunities to do real innovation testing and research and development, with facilitated mechanisms for that. We have seen that recently through the live labs programme, which is joint with ADEPT. I think that is a role where we could see greater support and opportunities like that, to take us forward from informal, pragmatic sharing of best practice, which tends to be fairly organic and to come from local authorities. We have always found the DFT to be very involved and engaged in that, but transitioning it into tangible research-based projects that lead to the real, hard evidence base that we would all want from our colleagues, to inform practice and perhaps make changes to methodologies, may be an area to look at.

Q217 Chair: Lynne and Andrew, do you have anything to add?

Andrew Haysey: We have a very similar set-up to the south-west, but it is much more informal. I agree with what Stephen said about DFT involvement. There is only one thing I would add. Our joint working arrangements are fairly informal. As pressures on our resources have intensified, it has become harder to keep those joint working arrangements going, because the pressures are to do the day job and to look inward more, to be honest.

Lynne Stinson: We have formal collaborative working arrangements in Leicestershire. The Midland Service Improvement Group has been going for in excess of 17 years. That is how long I have been attending the different groups. The way it is now progressing is through websites and the ability for online training and conversations. When we do not have the time and the resource to get to meetings, particularly in large regional areas, we have the ability to log into a website that has areas that are just for the partnership and not necessarily for the public. You can share and explore best practice there. The use of websites and more remote conversations of that kind is really helping.



Q218 **Chair:** That is helpful. One of the issues, which Andrew started to touch on, is availability of resources. In our previous evidence sessions, we have heard about what is happening to funding. I want to push you on this question. I am sure you all want more money, but if there was no overall increase in funding available from the Government, what one funding reform would benefit you the most? What is the key thing?

Stephen Hall: Longer-term funding certainty. At the moment, we have certainty over an annual period, with indicative funding for two or three years. If the funding quantum stayed the same, having certainty across a five to seven-year period of time would enable us to do better planning. We could do better asset management prioritisation, because we would be able to plan over a longer term and have certainty to design schemes that offered better value. We would be able to have a much more open conversation with delivery chains, whether internal resource or externally contracted supply chains, that would enable us to get better value for money, because we could do much more open and sophisticated resource planning.

If we had that certainty across a duration, we could do much better joint programming across neighbouring highway authorities and have some of the discussions that are really difficult at the moment, about when we are going to draw on surface dressing capability in the marketplace, which we often compete for at the moment. That should drive down unit costs, to the benefit of all parties.

It should also give us much greater clarity that we can communicate to our stakeholders and to communities. One of the challenges we have at the moment is that we often think we are going to do something in a year or two, and we would like to give people confidence that we are going to sort out a problem in their community, but we cannot tell them that we are going to do it. That generates a huge amount of low value-added traffic, with the community complaints that come in to local elected members. If we could give that certainty again, we could spend more of our time with teams being engineers, rather than dealing with some of those complaints.

Q219 **Chair:** On the rail network and in Highways England, they now have five-year planning periods. Is that the sort of period we are talking about?

Stephen Hall: Yes.

Q220 **Chair:** That is the No. 1 funding reform that you think would be most beneficial. Do other members of the panel have a different one?

Lynne Stinson: I am a team manager who deals with improvements as well as maintenance. The shiny new stuff is something we get an awful lot of opportunity to bid for, whether to the housing infrastructure fund, which is current at the moment, or to the Department for Transport large local majors fund. Bidding for maintenance at the same time is not as



easy or as prevalent. There should be more flexibility for authorities to bid for funding for maintenance, as well as improvements. At the moment, it tends to be ring-fenced for improvement schemes. It is not necessarily about making more money available for roads. The ability to choose to maintain, rather than improve, in certain areas would be beneficial.

Q221 **Chair:** There is no pressure for them all to be different, Andrew. That's fine.

Andrew Loosemore: I agree fundamentally with all that is being said. To supplement some of it, a longer-term understanding of what the finance was going to be over, say, a five-year period, even though it may not be the right level of funding that we would expect to maintain our highway asset, would enable us to look at the deterioration model, how our asset is going to perform over a three, five or 10-year period, and what expectation levels we can set for that asset performance. That is what it would give us.

Going back to the type of funding we get—capital and revenue—there is always frustration over what can be spent where, particularly when we come to the end of a financial year. Highways and engineering do not work on a financial-year basis, yet we are always constrained by accountancy terms, which say that we cannot take money over to the next year. It is always about using the right treatment, at the right time, to give us a better outcome and the best value we can get. Planning moneys over a longer period of time, rather than trying to spend them by the end of a financial year, would be of greater benefit to us.

Q222 **Chair:** Longer-term certainty would be your No. 1.

Andrew Loosemore: Absolutely, but without the arbitrary cut-off at the end of the financial year, because we want to plan over those periods of time.

Q223 **Chair:** Yes. We heard that in a previous session about the pothole fund. Andrew, what is yours?

Andrew Haysey: I reinforce Lynne's point. We can all understand why there is a focus on big strategic projects, but a lot of professionals feel that the balance between the money available for doing the basics—basic maintenance—and the money available for big strategic projects is not quite right at the moment. It should perhaps be shifted more towards getting the basics right.

Q224 **Chair:** That is great. Lynne, you have the casting vote. Which would be your top priority?

Lynne Wait: It is all of what has been said. It is about having the long-term view. At the moment, our funding is in lots of different pots, such as the pothole fund and the NPIF. That could be brought together and given out with some long-term vision.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Somebody touched on the capital-revenue split. That causes some of the south-west authorities real problems, because their revenue budgets have been cut to the absolute minimum, to the point where they cannot be cut any more. We are spending time and resource trying to capitalise funding. If there were some sort of ring-fencing of everything all together, you would have greater flexibility in maintaining your drainage, which might prolong the life of your carriageway. Having a bit more flexibility on the capital-revenue split or some further definition of what you can capitalise might help people.

Chair: We will probably want to explore some of the things you said a little further.

Q225 **Daniel Zeichner:** Good morning, everybody. I fear that we are going to stray into the realms of local government finance, rather than roads, fairly quickly. I want to try to dig down into some of this. We have heard what you said this morning and seen your evidence. How would we get that change? That is the first question. Are you talking to the Treasury, or do you do it through your finance departments, which then talk to the Treasury at one remove?

Lynne Wait: Across the south-west, people are dealing with their own finance departments, which then take advice. What one authority might consider a capital spend, another authority won't. Each individual authority has taken advice and has its own interpretation of how to split capital and revenue.

Q226 **Daniel Zeichner:** There seems to be general agreement that a longer-term funding approach would not only be sensible but would probably be cheaper. One would think that any rational person standing back and looking at it would agree that it is a sensible thing to do. What is the obstacle? What is stopping that happening, in people's view?

Lynne Stinson: As has been said, we have annual allocations. That is how the finance works; it is dealt with each year. If there was a possibility to ring-fence funding for the MRN from vehicle excise duty or to have a longer-term allocation—similar to Highways England, which has RIS2 and RIS3 and puts together five-year programmes—we could put together programmes two years in advance and get those approved.

A portion of it might be almost a given, because that is our base level of funding. Above that, in improvement schemes, we have what they call WebTAG, which is an analysis of the benefits. If there were something similar for maintenance, we could have competitive bidding to top up our basic funding on our proposals for maintenance, whether that is long-term resurfacing or drainage projects. If a couple of years beforehand, in the same way as Highways England does, we could get that five-year strategy approved for authorities, or even for the wider region—Leicestershire is part of Midlands Connect and the Midlands Engine, so it might need to be more regional devolved funding—we would welcome the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

chance to explore that. Midlands Connect would welcome those conversations.

Andrew Haysey: Local authorities are still adapting. Traditionally, highway maintenance has always been there. It is what they have done and it is a statutory responsibility. With the cutbacks from 2008 onwards, local authorities are still very much adapting to the new financial landscape. It is about trying to make sure that highway maintenance finds its proper place in that to an extent, because it has all come very suddenly. It is a very complex area.

Andrew Loosemore: I want to go back to the point about the revenue-capital split and accounting rules and regulations. About three or four years ago, some very important guidance came out from CIPFA that gave us the green light, essentially, that potholes that were permanent repairs could be determined as adding value back to the asset and could be capitalised. That kind of guidance enables us as engineers to—dare I say it?—go into battle with our accountant colleagues and say, “No, this is actually allowed now.” It breaks down that barrier. As Lynne said earlier, more guidance around what you can and cannot do would be helpful.

Q227 **Ruth Cadbury:** Rather than being a Government policy issue, the challenge relates to the internal rules and culture within local authority finance.

Andrew Loosemore: It is not so much about culture as about the rules that govern all financial transactions, whether they be capital or revenue, across all authorities or, indeed, accountants across the country.

Q228 **Ruth Cadbury:** The issue is not the interpretation of the rules but the actual rules.

Andrew Loosemore: I suspect that there will be local minor differences of interpretation, but I have worked in a number of authorities and the interpretation has probably been pretty consistent across them.

Q229 **Ruth Cadbury:** On highways issues.

Andrew Loosemore: Yes.

Q230 **Chair:** Thanks for that example.

Stephen Hall: Can I add slightly to that answer? As well as the interpretation and application of rules within local government, there is an issue within the financial services industry, in that accountancy departments in local government are often led by what we believe our external auditors will support. There may be some discrepancies in how different external auditors interpret capital and revenue expenditure, which drive differences in assessment between different local authorities. It is a whole financial industry question.

Q231 **Daniel Zeichner:** I want to follow up on Lynne’s point. We heard some evidence before this, and it seems to me that there is a question as to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

whether there are too many highway authorities and whether this is conducted at the right level. In terms of the financial implications, you could, effectively, be taken out of the local authority difficult decision-making process, where you are losing budgets to support social care, for instance, which some of the evidence is showing. This may be a difficult question for you to answer, but, from a highways point of view, do you think it would resolve some of the financial challenges if this was done at a more sub-regional level, for instance, or at the level of the partnership you are part of?

Lynne Wait: If the funding was given out on a devolved basis?

Q232 **Daniel Zeichner:** Yes. Obviously, the key difference with the major roads network and Highways England is that they are not in that pot, where local decision making has very difficult choices.

Lynne Wait: I am not sure whether that would help.

Stephen Hall: It is a challenging conversation. The benefits of being within a local government environment are that it has the localism element. If I look at our contacts with the public as a county council, more come into the highways service than every other element of the local authority, as a top-tier authority, put together. That tells us that our communities are very interested in their local road network. It drives a good level of oversight and interest by local elected members, which drives us to efficiency. If we are being blunt, the quantum of funding is probably the issue, not whether it is routed through local government or any other mechanism, so I am not sure that that would change things.

There is an issue of scale in the sector. We have local highway authorities of radically different scale. We are the fourth-largest local highway authority in the UK, which means that we can operate at a degree of scale. Some of the partners we work with through some of the sector groups are very small, which affects their ability to have all the technical abilities in technical specialisms, in design and, sometimes, in procurement. There is definitely some space around bulking that up, whether it is through cross-working or through more structured mechanisms for sharing technical resource and capability. That is something to explore. I am not sure that taking it out of local government into another mechanism is a straightforward solution.

Q233 **Daniel Zeichner:** The LGA, which would strongly support the localist argument, tried to solve that conundrum by suggesting ring-fencing a particular income stream, such as part of fuel duty. Personally, I cannot see the Treasury ever going down that road. Is that something people are pursuing? Are they trying to find an income stream that is secure, rather than subject to the vagaries of local choice and the wider political weather?

Lynne Stinson: We definitely want a secure level of funding. Ring-fencing part of vehicle excise duty might be a way of achieving it. Obviously, some of it has been ring-fenced for MRN and the improvement



HOUSE OF COMMONS

side anyway, but again it is a bidding process. We are bidding into Midlands Connect and the Department for Transport, so there is no surety at the moment. Although there is a large pot of funding available, it is that type of bidding and competitive process.

If some of it was not part of a competitive process and there was secure funding for highway authorities, it would be much easier and much less resource intensive than bidding and preparing. Recently, we prepared a business case for the Department for Transport for a new distributor road. We are talking £4 million of input even before we get a spade in the ground. In the bidding process, we were lucky to get Department for Transport support of £1.9 million to put together some of the business case. Without that support, the bidding process is very expensive. It would be much easier if we had a more secure level of funding, rather than an annual process where you have six weeks to put in a bid for £5 million and a year to put in a bid for £60 million, which is really difficult and resource intensive.

Andrew Loosemore: Some hypothecation of funding would feed into giving us a five-year funding stream. You would know that whatever funding stream it was would come in to give longevity of funding over a period of time. It could come from fuel duty, an increase in VAT on tyres, HGVs that come in and out of the country or anything else related to transport. There are all sorts of mechanisms. The danger is that you do not want to create something that is overly complicated to bring in that income. Maybe you could attach it to an already tried and tested stream of taxation.

Q234 **Daniel Zeichner:** You mentioned five years. Obviously, you would like long-term funding. The truth is that it is subject to the political cycle, isn't it? Politics moves pretty quickly these days. What about something like three-year funding? How much difference would it make to go to three years, rather than the annual process you have at the moment? Would it be better, but not good enough?

Lynne Wait: If it is three years, when you come to the end of that period of time, you are back to one year, effectively. If it is three years or five years, it needs to be refreshed well in advance of the end of that period, so that you continually have long-term sight of the money you will have, wherever it comes from, whether from fuel duty or somewhere else. If it is a stable pot and you have continual long-term vision, that is the key.

Andrew Haysey: We would all love to have a stable funding stream. The difficulty is that something has to lose out. Where is it coming from? Things like fuel duty are general taxation, so what loses out as a result? It is about whether people can commit to those choices on a long-term basis, isn't it?

Q235 **Daniel Zeichner:** To go back to the capital-revenue split, what is the obstacle to your having the flexibility you need? Is it a question of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

definitions? What will need to change?

Lynne Wait: Ultimately, you would remove the split, but some authorities can see issues with that. It would have to be ring-fenced, but without the split. Then, as my colleagues have said, you could do the right thing at the right time, rather than be driven by a funding cycle, a deadline to spend a particular pot of money or a definition of what it should be spent on. If you had an asset management process in place and a pot of money to do it, you could probably end up doing more with the same amount, because you could make the right interventions.

Q236 **Chair:** In your written evidence, you talk about the Totex model. Can you explain to us a bit more clearly what it means and, more importantly, what it delivers? I think you were starting to touch on it, and I want to make sure I have heard it right.

Lynne Wait: It is a suggestion from another authority. The general basis is that things like drainage maintenance are revenue funded. Where there have been cuts, people are not necessarily emptying gullies or doing that kind of maintenance. That leads to an increase in defects. Because that is not being funded, you will probably get a network that is deteriorating more quickly, but, because we have the capital money, you can do a resurfacing scheme. That may not be exactly the right thing to do, but it is driven by the funding you have, although we now have the flexibility to do potholes out of capital.

If you had it all in one pot, you could do your drainage maintenance as you would want to. In turn, you would probably prolong the life of your carriageway. You would also be able to do your various carriageway or footway repairs—whatever they were—out of that pot. There are some concerns from other authorities that, if it was not managed and ring-fenced, some of that funding might find its way to other areas that were under more pressure.

Chair: We are pressed for time, so let's try to move things along a bit.

Q237 **Ruth Cadbury:** How well do you think the current local highways maintenance block funding formula works, now that it has been in place for four years? Was it an improvement or not?

Andrew Haysey: You have to have some kind of formula for distributing the money. I think it works reasonably well. The incentive element has been quite useful in giving us a certain focus on things. There is quite a big issue about where it goes next, but the split between the main block and an increase in the incentive fund has been useful in some ways. It has caused us some difficulties as well, but in giving a focus on longer-term asset management it has been quite useful.

Stephen Hall: I very much agree with Andrew. The incentive element has driven good behaviours and has focused our attention on the right areas of improvement, which has been very beneficial. The block as a whole, other than the quantum of it, works pretty well as a methodology.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

On the question of what we do next with the incentive element, perhaps it will be a tool and a lever, through strengthened peer reviews, further to tighten the kind of sector networking we have all referred to and that we are all involved in. Creating benchmarks around that might be helpful and drive tangible sharing of best practice. I guess that is the evolution of it.

Andrew Loosemore: The block funding part is fine. As colleagues have said, the incentive has enabled us to understand how our asset is performing and will perform in the future. The only slight criticism I would make is about the challenge fund part of it. Everything is challenging for all highway authorities. We spent a lot of time putting together a number of bids to that pot, only to be unsuccessful on two occasions. Obviously, other authorities were successful. Maybe the challenge fund bit needs some review in order to understand that, if everything is challenging for all highway authorities, there should be even more funding in that pot, or maybe it should be removed and put back into the incentive fund element so that we can bid for it as part of that once we reach our highest banding level.

Q238 **Ruth Cadbury:** What implications will the major roads network have for how you fund the rest of the network?

Lynne Stinson: The initial guidance that came out of consultation on the MRN suggested we might be able to bid into that funding pot for maintenance, which was great, and we highlighted it and emailed it round. At this point in time, it does not look as if that will be possible; it looks to be around improvement schemes yet again.

The MRN, particularly in Leicestershire, includes our strategic local roads, the ones that meet our motorways. We have the M1, the M69 and the A46. They are the roads we prioritise anyway; they are the ones with the highest usage and are mostly around our more strategic areas and our big areas of economic growth. I do not think the fact that they are on the MRN now necessarily means that as an authority we can and would divert more of our funding towards it, but it would be really helpful if the MRN expands and allows us to apply to that funding pot for money for maintenance, because those roads will, and do, take a big hit, particularly HGV movements on the big strategic roads that link the strategic road network.

Andrew Haysey: I support that. When the bidding criteria came out, there was perhaps a bit of disappointment that they were not more flexible, not just around maintenance but for public transport improvements and things like that along key routes in an area. The other thing is that a particular tranche of money has been allocated to that network as well. One of the questions we raised in our evidence is whether some of that money should not go to more general road maintenance, given that the overall size of the pot is limited.

Chair: We would now like to pick your brains on different road maintenance practices.



Q239 Robert Courts: This is something totally different. I particularly want to ask about innovation. Stephen and Andrew, I think you are in receipt of public money to develop new innovation techniques. Can we start off by you telling us exactly what you have been doing, and what benefits you think we could all see more broadly from what you have been up to?

Stephen Hall: In Cumbria, three projects in our overall innovation strand have received additional funding from the Department for Transport. The first is a piece of bridge survey technology called BridgeCat, which came out of the 2015 floods across the north-west and much of the north of England. That has seen us robotically mount high-definition sonar and high-definition cameras and drones on a robust four-wheel-drive vehicle. The concept arose from asking how you survey a bridge that has been under flood that you think might be at risk of structural collapse when it is too dangerous to put people adjacent to it to survey it. We have been trialling it for two years, and we are getting some good early results. The sonar is giving us great below-water-level intelligence and data. Historically, we would have had to rely on putting a diver into a river, which in flood conditions is not safe, and none of us would ever want to do that.

It grew out of a flood resilience measure, but potentially the biggest benefit is that it could speed up how we survey bridges below water in peacetime, so to speak. Using sonar equipment and high-definition cameras that we can get in all around the bridges, we may be able to inspect them more quickly than we currently do. We can inspect a greater proportion of our bridges for scour damage, which is one of the causes of structural failure, and, effectively, get to a point where we understand a bridge and a structural asset much better than we do currently. That will enable us to make much better long-term decisions on maintenance and, frankly, could well lower inspection costs over time because we are getting faster throughput.

The second piece of work that we have been doing with the Department for Transport, and jointly with Blackpool and Bristol, is about the use of high-performance cameras to make digital visual inspections of road surfaces. It is a potential replacement for what we currently call coarse visual inspection, or detailed visual inspection, on driven routes. A vehicle goes out and is able to drive at a much higher speed; it is driving at normal road speeds rather than 20 mph if one of our inspectors was undertaking a visual inspection. The data goes back to a central location where an experienced member of staff assesses it and identifies the problem locations, and we then dispatch a real person—an inspector—to have a look at them.

That has some opportunities in terms of efficiency, staff time, a lower carbon footprint because we are not driving as many miles, and potential developments in artificial intelligence. Would we get to a point where it is the AI telling the human resource to go and look at X, with potentially much quicker turn-around times, as well as giving us much greater



HOUSE OF COMMONS

information for long-term asset management? We will be able to see visually how roads are degrading over time at a much greater level of detail than we can currently.

The third aspect for us has been the use of recycled plastics in road-surfacing materials, which we started just over two years ago. The reason for starting that is fairly obvious. We have a bit of a plastic epidemic globally. The company that developed it is based in Carlisle, our main city in Cumbria, so there was an opportunity to kick-start it. We have just been in receipt of just over £1.5 million through the DFT ADEPT live labs programme, and that will enable us to expand the trial.

We are not the only highway authority in the UK now using the product; a lot are using it at test level. What we intend to do with that funding is expand the trial, but critically bring academic rigour into testing both the material being used and its end-of-life value chain—its performance in situ, and, critically, what we do after 20 years when it has reached the end of its expected lifespan. How do we recycle and reuse it? We are hopeful that through that piece of work we will be able to build up firm technical academic information that enables us to say that putting recycled plastic into asphalt, as opposed to bitumen, works. If that is the case, we have an opportunity to divert significant amounts of plastic from other uses, both in the UK and globally.

Q240 Robert Courts: What about cost savings? You mentioned efficiency, but how is that shaping up? What could others learn from it?

Stephen Hall: At the moment, because they are all at the trial stage, we are not seeing cost efficiencies from them. The first two pieces, which are about inspection, have potential benefits to give us the ability to do more inspection and survey than we do currently. That is a benefit in terms of lifecycle asset management and brings savings there. It could also lower the unit cost.

At the moment, recycled plastic in roads has a cost base very similar to other products we put in, so we are not seeing any detriment. The manufacturers argue that at the moment they are producing at small scale and, if they were producing at larger scale, they believe they could offer the industry benefits. I cannot comment on that one way or the other, but at the moment it is cost neutral, so there is a piece about scale.

Q241 Robert Courts: But it is something for the future.

Andrew Loosemore: Kent County Council has an extremely long highway network—5,400 miles—and highway maintenance has generally been predicated on demonstrating that we are not negligent as a highway authority, by undertaking constant routine inspections of the highway surface, drainage and street lighting and looking at our policy in terms of gritting the highway during winter months and in extreme weather events, based on forecast weather and road surface temperatures.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

For our future approach, we have been looking at targeting resource to where it is needed to give us a better outcome. For example, we are beginning to take an approach where we pre-inspect highway gullies to understand whether drainage needs to be cleansed or not. We then use the resource on the drainage that needs to be cleansed, not necessarily just chasing the numbers—we have 250,000 highway gullies—and doing all of them every year. Let's look at the ones that are actually blocked and causing flooding or a danger to the highway.

Q242 **Robert Courts:** It is targeted preventive action.

Andrew Loosemore: Absolutely. In line with that, we have been looking at smart technology and how we can collect that data without sending somebody out all the time to drive around and look at it. We are looking at smart sensors in gullies to let us know whether they are a quarter full, half full or choked. The data can be fed back to our highways maintenance hub, and we will be able to target the resource to undertake a cleansing operation, or further investigatory work to understand the root cause of the drainage system failure. It is about using the availability of smart data and feeding it back centrally to a hub without continually chasing numbers of inspections.

Q243 **Robert Courts:** That sounds great, but what is the cost benefit? What is the cost of that technology?

Andrew Loosemore: It is not necessarily looking to save money; it is about using the finite pot that we have for cleansing the drainage system to give us a better outcome. It is the same for smart winter. Currently, we have about 120 road surface sensors on the network as an initial trial to monitor actual road surface temperatures, as opposed to the predicted forecast. We can analyse the data to understand how good the prediction was. Can we expand that trial into having many thousands of sensors on the network to give us much greater understanding of the climatic picture of the network and where we should target gritting during winter months? Are our routes correct? Are our domains correct? Are our runs correct?

Looking at cost efficiencies, can we reduce the number of gritters we have on the road? Currently, we have to run 60. A 10%, 15% or 20% reduction could save hundreds of thousands of pounds and reduce the salt that goes on to the road network, because we are looking at a risk-based approach based on accurate data that we have collected.

Unlike Stephen, we have been successful with the live labs bidding process, so over the next two years we will be looking in much more detail at expanding smart gullies and smart winter, and looking at live asset management and a live hub, involving local SMEs to come forward to produce hardware and software technologies to support the evidence we have established over the trial period.

Q244 **Robert Courts:** What about others? I started off by asking those who



HOUSE OF COMMONS

are in receipt of public money. What about those who are not so fortunate?

Lynne Stinson: In Leicestershire, we look to use innovation where possible. Similarly to gullies, we use smart data for our street lighting to do automated reporting back. We do not necessarily have to go out to inspect or wait for reports to come in; it automatically goes back to the central hub and gets dealt with.

We have just started to use automated gritters. They know the routes and the widths of roads and automatically adjust themselves without the driver having to do it, to help spread the grit. They switch on and off at the right times; they put hazard lights on and off, and make it a much safer and more efficient process.

Q245 **Robert Courts:** It has facilitated deployment of the grit from the vehicle to the right place on the road.

Lynne Stinson: Yes. They understand the roads they are on; they understand the widths and spread that they need to deliver on particular loads, which gives us efficiency savings.

Colleagues have been lucky enough to receive funding for innovation. There is a bidding process for local authorities to go in for that. It can be difficult to look for innovation with limited pots of money. Much as we would like to divert some of that money to look at the latest products and techniques, we have to use it in the right way to limit the risk and manage our networks, so it is difficult.

Q246 **Robert Courts:** How effective are the Government at funding or promoting innovation?

Lynne Stinson: We always welcome opportunities, but you have to be in the right place at the right time. You may not have started to think about it; you may not be ready to go for a particular funding pot at that time. Maybe there could be nationally co-ordinated programmes of innovation, particularly on materials.

When you are looking at 10 or 20 years, you need something a little more co-ordinated across the country. We potentially could not afford to use a material not knowing whether it would last five, 10 or 15 years. If you have HRA down, you do not need to touch it for 20 years. It has been tried and tested over a long time. We tend to be cautious about what we do because we do not want to go back to roads and dig them up to resurface and redo them. Our residents will not look kindly on that anyway. A co-ordinated, centrally funded programme of innovation, particularly around materials testing, would be really valuable.

Chair: This is not a criticism, but we must have shorter answers. We have a lot of questions to get through. I just thought I would butt in at that point. It was not directed at you, Lynne; I am conscious of time ticking on.



Q247 **Robert Courts:** Can I give the other two witnesses a chance to answer those two questions? What do you do for innovation? Do you want to comment on the Government's efficiency in sponsoring innovation?

Lynne Wait: Across the south-west, we have authorities doing pothole spotting trials. People are starting to look at different ways of surveying the network using digital technology rather than visual inspections or the traditional SCANNER inspections. They are using high-resolution camera images to identify defects. We are looking at route-based forecasting for winter maintenance. Everybody is looking at their gully emptying schedules and being generally smarter about that. At the low-tech end, some of the bigger shire authorities are working with parish councils to deliver local services, so it is not a technology thing; it is just using the people you've got.

Andrew Haysey: I do not think there is a lot that others have not touched on. We use drones to inspect certain structures and things like that. That has proven very useful and cost-effective. The one area where I would like additional resource is for analysing the data coming in. A lot of data is coming in and sometimes we are very short of analysis. In the north-east we have been quite successful on road safety, where we jointly employed somebody to look at the data. A similar thing in this kind of area would be quite useful.

Q248 **Robert Courts:** The next topic is the 2016 code of practice risk-based approach. Have you all adopted it? If not, why not? If you have, what are the benefits and difficulties?

Andrew Haysey: We have adopted it. The benefits and drawbacks are probably still to emerge. The benefits are that it is a much more structured approach to identifying problems. A drawback is that potentially it makes the system more complicated. In certain circumstances, authorities might use flexibilities defensively rather than positively, particularly when they are worried about possibly being sued and having to stand up in court to defend their decisions. There is a worry that that could happen.

Lynne Wait: The code of practice has been adopted across the south-west for highways inspections. It reflected the direction of travel for a lot of authorities—where they were starting to move with their inspection policies. Going through that process substantiated what people were starting to do and were doing anyway.

Andrew Loosemore: We have adopted it and developed our approach to asset management. It has enabled us to bring about an understanding of how the highways asset performs, to inform members in greater detail. We have taken quite a number of reports through our executive. It has been an exceptionally beneficial learning curve from that perspective.

I mentioned earlier our approach to managing gullies. A lot of things go hand in glove with the well-managed highway risk-based approach to



innovation. You do not clean every gully every year; you clean the gullies that are dirty when you need to and leave the ones that do not need it. That is an example of a risk-based approach to delivering asset management and is what well-managed highway professes, but it is early days yet.

As mentioned, it always comes back to perhaps defending claims, demonstrating that we are not negligent as a highway authority and putting forward a special defence under section 58 of the Highways Act. Let's move away from that. What we are trying to do is make sure that the highway is safe for road users and use the funding we have to target areas of greater risk to us, and well-managed highway is giving us the tools. I may have been a bit sceptical a couple of years ago when it first came out—we are moving away from our intervention limits of 20 mm or 50 mm and the world is going to collapse. As an engineer, I do not think it is quite as bad as that. We are starting to understand what a risk-based approach really means, but there is still quite a learning curve; it is early days.

Stephen Hall: Yes, it has been adopted. I agree with everything my colleagues have said. I have two things to add. One of its challenges is that because of the risk-based approach the emphasis on skills and the application of those by people making the decisions is greater, so we need an even more skilled—

Q249 **Robert Courts:** I will be asking about that in a second.

Stephen Hall: Another benefit, to build on what Andrew said, is that you put the ability to make risk-based decisions along with a growing set of data and information that technology has enabled us to bring together. If we can crack the interpretation of that, we have the ability to target resource where it is needed and not spend it where it is not. That is an opportunity that could evolve from the code.

Lynne Stinson: Yes, it is adopted in Leicestershire. As colleagues have said, it is about being able to maintain or manage the current intervention reactive service. In Leicestershire, we are looking at a risk-based approach to asset management from cradle to grave. At the beginning, we are looking at developers building new roads, rather than doing it ourselves, right down to decommissioning, using the risk-based approach to look at it all the way through. If it is built right in the first place and we can manage risk, we have a better chance of being able to manage it further down the line.

Q250 **Robert Courts:** The last thing I want to ask you is whether or not you contract out maintenance to third-party contractors and, if you do, whether you have enough people with the right skills to monitor the performance of that. Just address that first. Secondly, could you say whether you use any incentives or penalties in order to make sure they deliver?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Lynne Wait: I am not entirely sure I can answer that. Across the south-west there is a whole range of delivery models from very light-touch clients through to in-house. In Poole, we deliver most of our services in-house. We do not have big contracts in place, except perhaps for some subcontract plant and labour; the core is all in-house.

Andrew Loosemore: Ours is contracted out to third-party highways maintenance contractors. They do all our routine maintenance for us right across the piece, except for street lighting. Do we have enough resources in place? Over many years, resources for highways departments have dwindled. We could always do with more eyes and ears on the ground, but are the data, technology and information coming back to fill that gap at some point in the future? I do not know.

We performance-manage our contractor through a suite of indicators. The current contract has about 35 live performance indicators that we monitor on a monthly basis. There is a financial incentive around those not to fail, and to deliver a good service for us.

Andrew Haysey: We use an in-house contractor, but they subcontract to third parties a lot of work like resurfacing. That is handled on a north-east basis by a procurement organisation called NEPO, the North East Procurement Organisation. This is an area where the incentive fund has caused us to focus on our relationships with our contractors, and we are looking at that at the moment.

Stephen Hall: Cumbria is a mixed model. We have a core in-house service that provides our responsive maintenance—pothole fixing, routine highway maintenance and all the revenue activities; so gully maintenance, winter maintenance and verges are all in-house. Internally, we deliver what I would describe as small-scale civil engineering works, such as minor bridge repairs and gully system repairs. We contract out through a number of framework contracts and term maintenance contracts for things like surfacing and surface dressing. Larger-scale civil engineering projects go out.

We have a mixed economy. Things we do with regularity and predictability through term maintenance contracts for surfacing and surface dressing have four to six years to get the benefit of duration. The stand-alone type projects go through frameworks. Civil engineering work like a new bridge or a significant piece of infrastructure repair is competitively tendered through a framework. Across that whole suite, we have adopted the NEC set of contracts. An important thing when highway authorities and others in the built environment are contracting is legibility of contract documentation, so that when you speak to your supply chain you are always speaking in the same language and a language that they can all understand.

If I could give a personal view, when we contract out it is important that both the client and the contractor are commercially important to each other. There are potential issues of scale discrepancy in the highways



HOUSE OF COMMONS

maintenance industry when a local authority that is not of large scale contracts with a big multinational organisation. The issue of importance to each other commercially drives behaviours that become more important than key performance indicators and penalty clauses, because they say, "We are invested in solving a problem," as opposed to defending a position. In Cumbria, it is a mixed economy.

Lynne Stinson: Leicestershire is very similar to Cumbria. For our small civis and most of our reactive maintenance, we have an in-house service. We have a small number of specialist maintenance contracts. We have KPIs for performance against programme, but we also make sure that we get customer feedback, and residents' complaints. It is very important that, representing the county council, they deliver on those. Those contracts are normally two plus one plus one, so if they do not get decent KPIs we do not look to extend the contract. It is an incentive potentially rather than a penalty.

For our large schemes, similar to what Stephen described, we have the Midlands Highways Alliance. That is a large framework that has four big contractors on it. All our big maintenance or improvement schemes go out through that. It has a full set of KPIs, but it also has community. We have collaboration meetings and board meetings; we have joint working groups with the contractors, so we are building up that relationship. We are developing relationship management plans with most of those contractors as well. It is all about working together to deliver schemes. This board is on our bidding processes with the Department for Transport. They understand that if they help us with the bid and it is a more successful bid they are likely to get more work out of it at the end. We have a lot more clarity of working in our big schemes and big contracts than we might have had before.

Robert Courts: I wish we had more time to go into it, but thank you very much.

Chair: You have been very efficient. Thank you, everybody. Finally, we have a couple of questions about inspection and data gathering.

Q251 **Graham Stringer:** Are the national road condition datasets fit for purpose? Can we rely on those statistics?

Andrew Haysey: They do what they do. One of the big things is that they cover only one element: the condition of the road. There is a lot more to the highway; there is lighting, signs and lines. It is quite a narrow definition. The difficulty is that, if you start to widen it out to other things, you create a more complex system.

Q252 **Graham Stringer:** Should the Government be doing it in a different way and collecting different data?

Lynne Wait: As Andrew said, it is a simple set of data; it is stuff we collect anyway, so it is easy to do. If you try to collect other data, it



HOUSE OF COMMONS

means people have to change inspection regimes or start collecting other stuff just to report it. It is fairly straightforward at the moment.

Q253 **Graham Stringer:** Do you think it could be improved? I am slightly surprised by your response. I was expecting it to be a simple question and a simple answer, but you all look perplexed. Is there something behind the question that is not coming out?

Lynne Stinson: The data collected is simple and straightforward, but it is very narrow; it tends to be around the real problems there at the moment. If you talk about SCANNER data, it is red sections or issue problems with sections of roads. Highway engineers who put schemes together look at longer sections. We really need to be focusing on the ambers, the things that are not a problem yet but could be in two, five or 10 years' time.

In Leicestershire, we did some analysis recently that showed that our ambers—the things that are getting to be a problem—are ramping up. We are starting to see increases in them, but all we report to the Department for Transport are the ones that have already hit the red; they have already got to the point where they need urgent intervention. Preventive treatment of the ambers will stop us getting to the red point where we may have to spend a lot more money. We tend not to be able to report that information; maybe we should have it nationally to understand what we might be able to do about that.

Andrew Loosemore: Is SCANNER fit for purpose in the modern age? We are using kit that is 15 to 20 years old. It has not been modernised. With the technological advances over recent years, should we be looking at a different way of collecting the data? We could put it back to the market to come to us to say, "We have different methodology. We can collect your data in a different way. We can give you more detailed analysis." When we look at the data that comes through, we see bits of red, intertwined with bits of amber and green. As was mentioned earlier, that is not conducive to putting together proper highway maintenance schemes. It always ends up with somebody going out to look at the road surface anyway to understand what type of treatment we should do. SCANNER gives you an indication, but the question for me is whether that indication is fit for purpose, given other available technologies currently. What is the next innovation around road condition data collection?

Q254 **Graham Stringer:** Can you tell the Committee what percentage of the surveys you do use detailed visual inspection or coarse visual inspection and what percentage use SCANNER technology?

Andrew Loosemore: The As and Bs are done every two years, half and half; we do half one year and half the next with SCANNER. We do not make detailed visual inspections; we only do CVIs because they are driven and are more cost-effective.

Q255 **Graham Stringer:** What is the balance of cost between them?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Andrew Loosemore: I am sorry; I do not have that information.

Stephen Hall: On the subject of data, I agree with everything that has been said. Andrew picked it up well in terms of suitability of the current technology and suitability in terms of road type and the way we calibrate what we have. Does it work better on a nice straight road than on one with non-standard topography and geography?

The other dataset I would question is: nationally, do we understand well enough our structural assets? We are making the effort to build a picture of road surface, but in Cumbria alone we have over 1,400 bridges, all of which are massive investment items. What we see increasingly are bridges coming to the end of their engineered lifespan. Do we understand that, or is it a potential financial ticking time bomb that we have not done enough work to understand nationally?

Q256 **Graham Stringer:** Is there likely to be a technological breakthrough in the near future? Are the old traditional ways of doing surveys going to be finished? Is there going to be a change?

Lynne Wait: A number of companies are already doing laser scan surveys of the network. It is mounted on the top of a vehicle. They can drive it around. They have scaled-down versions to do footways. We have been approached by a number of companies that present that as an alternative to SCANNER. They say that by means of that technology they can identify the location of a pothole. You can then send that directly to your highways inspector who goes out and fixes it. Those sorts of things are already there. As Andrew said, it is just finding a way for them to come in and replace the traditional survey methods, and making that more accessible.

Andrew Loosemore: It is important to have consistency of data, if you want to look at England and Wales as a whole, and make sure that whatever methodology comes from the Department for Transport is consistent across all highway authorities. We have 200-plus highway authorities in the country. If everybody does something slightly different with different organisations, maybe at national level you will not get a consistent level of data. That is probably an important point to consider.

What would be the next step? How would that be delivered UK-wide? For example, the street manager system is being introduced by the Department for Transport for street works, and that is bringing about a permit scheme at national level. I suppose there will be an element of control, consistency of reporting and information transfer between utility companies and the Government. It needs to be a system along those lines if you are to keep that level of consistency with national datasets.

Q257 **Chair:** I have one last question that I think Stephen started to touch on. If you look at the reported condition figures in isolation, does that mean that the Government have a distorted view of the state of the road network? Do their data give a more positive view than perhaps the



situation merits?

Stephen Hall: I do not know whether it gives a more or less positive view. What it does not do is pick up issues beyond the road surface in enough detail. Even when we are looking at carriageways, we are not picking up the knowledge that the surface might be fine but the sub-base, the sub-structure, might be falling to pieces, which will lead to quite a quick progression from an okay piece of road to its almost catastrophic failure and a very expensive reconstruction. We are not picking up that data for carriageways.

I do not think we understand the number of our bridges in particular, and other structural assets, that are effectively coming to the end of an engineered lifespan and might have to be taken out of service or replaced for public safety. We were talking about that before we came in. Some of those are enormously expensive assets. A simple masonry arch road bridge 20 metres or 30 metres in length costs £1.5 million to £2 million to replace. If we move into some of the urban flyovers, the big concrete structures that colleagues manage, we are into tens and multiple tens of millions to replace them. I do not think we understand well enough that budget headache that is coming towards us.

Chair: Thank you very much for giving evidence. I am sorry that we had to rush. I am sure we could have heard more if we had had time. That concludes our questions for the first panel.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Danny Rawle, Stephen Skinner, Patrick Doig and Anne Shaw.

Q258 **Chair:** Thank you very much for coming along, and welcome. For the record of our proceedings, please can you introduce yourselves?

Danny Rawle: I am Danny Rawle. I am asset manager with Coventry City Council looking at their highways maintenance policy strategy, condition assessment and capital programme delivery.

Stephen Skinner: I am Stephen Skinner of the London Borough of Enfield. I am head of highway services. We cover highway maintenance and the management of associated assets—trees, watercourses and bridges—and we have an in-house civil engineering capability.

Anne Shaw: I am Anne Shaw, director of network resilience at Transport for West Midlands. We have responsibility for the key route network along with the highway authorities in the west midlands.

Patrick Doig: I am Patrick Doig. I am the director of finance and procurement for surface transport at Transport for London. Surface transport, along with surface-based public transport, includes London's road network as managed by TfL.

Q259 **Chair:** Great stuff. I do not know how we managed to split you up from



HOUSE OF COMMONS

your constituent councils, but we have. Can I start by asking Danny and Anne how road maintenance is managed and funded in the west midlands, and how it has changed over the last five years as a result of the devolution settlement?

Anne Shaw: Road maintenance for the seven west midlands metropolitan authorities comes through the combined authority, and the capital block is handed out to the authorities based on road length. We have just heard about some of the incentive funds and challenge funds that also come via that. The settlement given two or three years ago and how that has been carried forward has given us an indication of what our annual budgets are and how we can progress improvements on the highway network as part of that.

Q260 **Chair:** Danny, how do you feel the relationship is working under the current arrangements? Are there any difficulties? How are you tackling them now that it is part of something wider?

Danny Rawle: It is working very well within the authorities; it is understanding how we deliver our services, how the funding is distributed and how it can best be used across the whole network, looking not just at Coventry in isolation but at the whole of the west midlands. It is looked at in that way, and I think the current model is working well.

Q261 **Chair:** No problems?

Danny Rawle: No, not that I am aware of.

Q262 **Chair:** I don't want problems if they don't exist.

Danny Rawle: We are in regular discussion, so it is working well.

Q263 **Chair:** Patrick and Stephen, can you explain how the governance and funding for road maintenance works in London, and why and how it is different from the rest of England? That is the first thing. Do you think that in any way the arrangements you have in London could be useful elsewhere? Are there lessons to be learned in other places, or would you suggest they have a better deal than you have?

Patrick Doig: Thank you for allowing me to come and talk to you today. Responsibility for managing roads in London is different from the rest of the country. Responsibility in London is split between Highways England, Transport for London, the 32 boroughs and the City of London. Highways England manages the motorways in London, primarily the M25 but also other bits of motorways that cross London's boundary. They are important, but those roads represent less than half a per cent of all roads in London. About 99.5% of all roads in London are local roads, and are incredibly diverse and important and carry the predominant number of passenger journeys in London every day.

As to how it is funded, TfL generates some revenue from the roads, primarily through the congestion charge. That is about £300 million every year, but the cost to TfL of maintaining and operating roads in London is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

about £500 million per annum, so we have a gap, a deficit between the income we generate from roads and our expense in maintaining the roads of about £200 million a year. Our expense includes some money that we pass to London boroughs to maintain and enhance their road network. That is part of Transport for London's expense.

Transport for London acts as the strategic transport authority. We operate and maintain all London's traffic signals to help traffic flows in London. We maintain directly only 5% of the London roads that represent London's red routes, which are the key routes that carry about 30% of our traffic; 95% of roads in London are maintained by the London boroughs. Some of that is based on money we provide. Transport for London's income comes from our own sources, such as the congestion charge. Unlike local authorities outside London, we do not receive specific funding from the Government for highways maintenance.

Q264 Chair: Do you know why London does not get grant funding from the centre?

Patrick Doig: That was part of devolution, when the GLA and Transport for London were set up in 2001. At that point, Transport for London received a large revenue support grant, about £2 billion a year at one point in time, which came together from the funding that went to its predecessor bodies, including the Highways Agency, as it was then. It managed many more of London's roads. That was wrapped up in our revenue support grant.

Over time, that has been reduced. In 2015, the Government announced that it would be withdrawn entirely, and this financial year is the first time we have received no direct money from the Government to maintain and renew our roads. That is creating a real challenge for us and for the boroughs, because the lack of steady and sustained funding is having an impact on the amount of investment that TfL can make in our roads and the investment that we can support the boroughs to make. Recently, we had to take the decision to pause any non-safety-critical renewals on our network and funding the boroughs for their networks. We are undertaking only reactive emergency works to make sure that the network is maintained safely. That is our first duty.

Q265 Chair: You are directly responsible for the red routes, but it is up to the individual boroughs to look after the rest of the roads.

Patrick Doig: With some support from us in terms of funding.

Q266 Chair: Stephen, from your perspective how do those arrangements work? Are they good? Would you recommend them to the west midlands, or are they better off with what they have?

Stephen Skinner: It gives us a major problem as London boroughs, as Patrick would understand. The Mayor sets out his transport strategy with some headline priorities; road maintenance may be one of those, and it is, but there are other priorities, such as building cycle lanes, previously



HOUSE OF COMMONS

bus lanes. Each London borough has to set out a local implementation plan for how it is going to deliver the Mayor's transport strategy.

Our difficulty is that the allocation for road maintenance is set in the priorities as part of the Mayor's transport strategy. As Patrick explained, TfL then allocates some funding for maintenance of the boroughs' assets, but it has already prioritised, so it goes only as far as the principal roads—the A-class roads. In previous years, we have had some money for bridge maintenance, bridge assessment and bridge strengthening, but the boroughs themselves receive no funding from TfL for non-principal road maintenance.

As with all other London boroughs, Enfield has to decide how it is going to fund that. Most boroughs do it through capital borrowing. We are completely different from authorities outside London, and, yes, it is a major headache. Most London boroughs are struggling. I know that all authorities across the country are struggling, but we have no opportunity to tap into DFT funding, apart from special initiatives, such as the recent allocation of £420 million for potholes. All London boroughs received an allocation in their own right based on network length, which meant that London boroughs received funding, which was excellent for us.

Q267 **Chair:** It does not sound as if you are recommending it.

Stephen Skinner: No. All London boroughs have their own priorities and we struggle. Transport for London recognises the main roads as the strategic routes and has priorities around maintaining them, but we all agree that every journey starts somewhere and generally it is a local road, and local road maintenance funding in London is problematic.

Patrick Doig: The critical thing is the lack of the steady and sustained funding we used to receive from the Government, which allowed us to invest in a strategic way and to provide more funding, in a much more assertive way, to the boroughs to allow them to take a longer-term view. Without that, we cannot take that position, which is creating a problem for us and for the boroughs, as you heard.

Q268 **Chair:** Are there any reflections on that from the west midlands perspective? I am sure you have funding challenges as well.

Anne Shaw: We do. We do not have a strategic authority that is able to contribute revenue resources to local authorities, and it is still left to all local authorities responsible for road maintenance outside London to create revenue streams within their own revenue settlement with Government, which we all know is decreasing for local authorities, given the other pressures they have for funding, outside highways maintenance stuff.

The combined authority is responsible at a strategic level, and is looking for capital investment to improve the network, as well as capital investment to maintain the existing network, but it is still left to each of the local authorities to provide revenue resources from their own



HOUSE OF COMMONS

budgets, and to do highways maintenance as part of that. The financial arrangements and the governance are slightly different, but the same issues are felt within each of the local authorities around producing revenue resources to manage their local network.

Where it is felt most is definitely on local urban roads where we have quite a lot of traffic. The composition of the traffic is important in terms of the deterioration. With heavy goods vehicles, buses and so on, there is a higher rate of deterioration of local road networks. We are struggling to maintain them to the same standard as the strategic route network, or some of the key route network.

Chair: I suspect that everybody on the Committee has a postbag full of letters from constituents who are concerned about the state of their local roads. We are going to dive down into some of the detail, starting with road maintenance practices.

Q269 **Steve Double:** Stephen, we are aware that Enfield is one of the areas that has been trialling the use of recycled plastics for road maintenance. Can you tell us a bit more about what you are doing, how it is going and what you see as the potential longer-term and wider benefits?

Stephen Skinner: Like Cumbria, we have done several trials replacing a small percentage of the bitumen in road surfacing with small plastic pellets. We did a trial in 2017 on what is best described as a neighbourhood link road; it was a bus route in a residential urban area. The provider of the plastic pellets had several different types in terms of the specification for strength and flexibility. We have done three different lengths with three different specifications, along with a control length. It is very early days to understand how it is working.

Last year, we did separate trials at some bus stops. You can imagine the very heavy braking forces and the potential for rutting. That is standing up well, but it is early days. We have been discussing that in our London working groups, but for the moment we are putting on the brakes and looking at other innovations. We need time to understand how it is going to perform, which I think reflects what Cumbria was saying.

Danny Rawle: In Coventry, we are doing exactly the same. We are using plastic pellets, and we are also using car tyres—rubber tyres. We picked a particular site where we have a standard specification. We have tyres and plastic all on one site so that we can see a comparison over time. We picked quite a high-profile street last year. It is a case of monitoring it to see how it goes over time.

In the first session, there was a question about what happens at the end of life, how we recycle the recyclables and identify any benefits in terms of the carbon footprint in producing this stuff and recycling it to get it into the road. It is early days, but that is the direction of travel. We are doing it on a couple more sites this year to see the benefits. More authorities are looking at that, because you are looking at one site where you are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

getting all those disposable consumables. We do not want to take them to landfill, so how can we best use them? From the highways point of view, we are going down that road as well.

Q270 Steve Double: That is very helpful. Is the way the Government are funding innovation satisfactory? Does it work? Could it be improved?

Danny Rawle: In the combined authority, we are looking at different innovations and different projects we are tied into. It is getting access to it and understanding where they are. There is an innovation fund, but is it for highways? I think the authorities have taken a lead on this themselves. You heard in the earlier session about Coventry and the west midlands being part of regional groups. Collectively, can we look at things as a group that can benefit the whole, not always looking outside it? Again, there are revenues that the DFT are making available to authorities to get into it, but sometimes we have to be a bit proactive ourselves.

Patrick Doig: In London, the Government effectively are not funding innovation. The single biggest innovative thing the Government could do to help us, with the biggest impact on cost and the most significant impact on service benefits, would be to provide steady and sustained funding that allowed us to take a more planned, proactive approach to asset maintenance and renewal, and to deploy the techniques and methods we all have, but unfortunately are not able to use in that way at the moment. We have to take a much more reactive role, which over the whole life of assets can increase costs. It depends on different types of assets, but it can increase costs by 30%.

There are very few single innovations that can deliver such a high cost-benefit and provide that steady and sustained funding. It can also provide significant user benefits by not having to implement restrictions on assets, be it speed or weight restrictions, such as those on Hammersmith bridge or the Rotherhithe tunnel, which have a real impact on our users—people and businesses—who cannot use those assets as they would like. Our main plea to Government is to support innovation and provide funding to allow us to carry out our asset management practices, and to allow us to invest for the long term, which would itself create a lot more innovation over time.

Stephen Skinner: Interestingly, TfL itself has enabled London boroughs to bid for funding for innovative trials. Our second plastic road trial was funded through Transport for London's lane rental scheme. The income from lane rental was offered in response to bids from London boroughs, so thank you, TfL.

Anne Shaw: There are other sources. Highways England has an innovation fund that we can tap into. That provides a connection between the strategic route network, the key route network and local roads. Government funding for innovation concentrates on what somebody earlier called the shiny new stuff—what we are trying to do in terms of



technology on our highway networks—but not necessarily on the ways we can maintain the existing assets. A proportion of innovation funding is possibly unbalanced around those key aspects.

Q271 Steve Double: That is helpful. Have you all adopted the risk-based approach in the 2016 code of practice, and what do you think of it?

Danny Rawle: It is challenging. Most authorities have had to do a root and branch review of all their processes. Sometimes, we probably miss the fact that the code of practice covers all services. There has been a focus on inspections in response to defects, which can dominate. We need to look at the whole thing.

We have done a review, and, as others have said, there is a certain nervousness around liabilities, insurance and things like that, but we are confident. We are not doing this in isolation. We have spoken to other departments in the organisation and peer groups and authorities. We have not gone in blindly; we have taken the best view on what suits our network, which is a risk-based approach, but it is early days. No two authorities are the same. A neighbouring authority may be different. How that is going to pan out will be interesting, but if you have gone through due process and due diligence, and you have executive sign-off, you show confidence in what you are doing.

Stephen Skinner: It builds on what we are already doing in reality. Most of us have already had inspection frequencies that are tailored according to the priorities of the roads and the usage. It gives us more flexibility in the way we operate. I guess that the challenge will be if we are challenged with insurance claims and how we have evidenced what we do. As a London borough, we have worked with other London boroughs and come up with a common hierarchy framework for roads and pavements, and that has been really useful.

It has promoted a lot of dialogue but, as Danny said, it is not just about inspection frequencies. There are a number of recommendations about engaging with the community, making sure that we are visible, that we have top-level support, that our highway asset management plans are supported and that there is a strategic link with other authorities. There is an awful lot of good stuff in there, such as the management of trees and SuDS—sustainable drainage schemes. It is not just the sort of thing everyone thinks about in terms of inspection frequencies.

Patrick Doig: We have adopted it. TfL, along with many authorities, has been adopting a risk-based approach for some time; it is an evolution of what we are currently doing. I agree with the point about consistency. The code of practice sets up some high-level principles that should be applied, and they can be interpreted in different ways. To some extent, that is perfectly acceptable because risk can be subjective, and you need to apply personal judgment. It can mean that the approaches of different local authorities end up being very different.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

It is important to have collaboration, which is already happening at local level, as you heard. We could do more to harmonise approaches across the country so that we can make sure we have a consistent approach that particularly helps address the risk of liability or claims that could be exploited if different authorities do things in different ways, and enables us to defend that in a robust and consistent manner.

Anne Shaw: Consistency is key. We mentioned earlier some of the local pressures we might come under from local politicians, local community groups or others. Who shouts loudest is necessarily quite difficult to manage from an officer perspective. How do we make sure we are doing the right things and using the maintenance money effectively as well?

Danny Rawle: The new code is quite welcome because for a number of years the old code was not very flexible. It gives us flexibility to manage our network, so it is a good thing.

Q272 **Steve Double:** The final question from me is about contracting maintenance to third parties. Is that something you do? If so, who manages the contract and how is performance monitored?

Stephen Skinner: We have an in-house team of professional technical staff who do the project management and designs for schemes.

Q273 **Steve Double:** You contract that out.

Stephen Skinner: No; that is in-house, but the work is contracted out.

Q274 **Steve Double:** The actual maintenance.

Stephen Skinner: We have an in-house team of inspectors, whereas some authorities contract out the inspection as well. Interestingly, we have been discussing with a number of neighbouring boroughs the benefits of an in-house DLO compared with contracting and the challenges of setting up a DLO if you do not have one. Whereas many London boroughs used to have one, at the moment it is contracted out. It is managed through normal contractual performance techniques at performance management meetings, with a set of PIs that are relevant to the performance in a fairly traditional way.

Danny Rawle: In Coventry, we have our own direct labour organisation. To do our day-to-day maintenance tasks, we have our own inspectorate and teams of inspectors, and project and design engineers all in-house. However, there is a highways maintenance contract that operates, and we can call in specialist treatments and areas of work. They are monitored through contract-specific performance indicators, but we also have performance indicators for our in-house DLO so that we have control of that, or some measure of how they perform against the requirements. If it is a case of responding to repairs in such and such a time and responding to an emergency service, we do that on a monthly basis. Biannually, we do a high-level report as well, so we do it both ways. It seems to work well.



Anne Shaw: Across the wider west midlands there is a variety of layers of that. Some authorities have the capacity, as Danny has just described in Coventry; some have a smaller capacity in putting together programmes and contracting out the delivery of those sorts of things. At the moment, for each authority responsible for that maintenance, there are different levels of capacity that probably need to be looked at to ensure that we get best value across the region and can support each other where we have other organisations that have access to the labour that can do the improvements.

Patrick Doig: We have a similar situation to the one Stephen articulated. We have in-house experts—engineers, asset managers and asset owners—who really understand the assets and check the strategies at the service standards required, but we contract out the work to maintain and upgrade those assets. We have also retained inspection in-house, particularly the safety-critical inspection activities, which we think are very important.

The contract works on the basis that some activities are covered in what we call a lump sum. We give the contractor a fixed amount of money every month for a set of service standards around routine things. It provides a level of risk transfer to the private sector to deliver against those activities and all the maintenance that we call off specifically ourselves.

Similarly, there is a range of performance matrices. With our current set of seven-year contracts we are trying to have a more collaborative alliance approach that is slightly less contractualised and more around working together to a common set of overall outcomes over the life of the contract. It takes a lot of investment in time and energy to build that relationship, but it gives some benefits that allow us, when there is an incident or certain weather, to pick up the flow, and that service is there. It is not about a contractual response: “The contract says that.” We get out there and solve the problems, so it has some benefits from that perspective.

Chair: Thank you. We would like to talk about funding again.

Q275 **Grahame Morris:** I am sure that you heard some of the earlier witnesses, but again, making an assumption that there is no overall increase in the funding available from central Government, what one funding reform would have the biggest benefit? Could I ask each member of the panel to identify one?

Patrick Doig: The ideal funding mechanism would be transparent, evidence and data-based, and steady and sustained over a medium-term or long-term period to give us certainty. We need to be able to get a national picture to bring together the data. Currently, each individual highway authority—there are over 150—is trying to make that case individually. If we could bring that all together and look at what is the right picture from a very technical asset management perspective for the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

country's roads overall, we would be able to take an independent assured approach to give the Government assurance that the funding is well spent and is needed.

Basically, what I am describing is a very similar situation to how Highways England or Network Rail operate. You can take that national picture and have assurance such as the Office of Rail and Road provides to both Highways England and Network Rail. I can see a similar model working for local roads.

Q276 Grahame Morris: Anne, is there anything you would like to add?

Anne Shaw: The key thing that we think would give us most benefit is having longer-term funding periods, because that would allow us to plan work more effectively and get best value out of contracts. At the end of the financial year, when we are trying to spend money quickly, possibly on the wrong things, it would give us flexibility to manage that fund. Particularly for urban networks, we could look not just at the length of road that needs to be repaired and maintained, but at the type of usage that we get, where we have very dense traffic networks and so on, and the composition of traffic as part of that. How are we making sure that we are not just dealing with the length of road that needs to be maintained but with how the road is being used by the composition of traffic as well?

Stephen Skinner: To me, it goes right back to where we started, in having the opportunity to tap into some of the national funding and to have that based on need, based on the local road network, as we talked about, rather than the sort of priorities in concentrating on just the main roads in London. The conversation is not meant to be about this, but given where you started from, Chair, I think we have focused a lot on road as in carriageway, and we should recognise that there are huge lengths of footway out there. As a London borough we are borrowing capital to fund maintenance on pavements, so there should be recognition that it is not just carriageway maintenance that is needed, but funding for pavements and, as others said, bridges and all the associated assets such as lighting and so on.

Q277 Grahame Morris: Danny, do you have any comments?

Danny Rawle: Pretty much as everyone has said—certainty of funding over a period of years.

Q278 Grahame Morris: Certainty long term.

Danny Rawle: But having an amount that is going to make a substantial change to the quality of the asset, because a lot of the time we have a budget and we manage the network in accordance with the budget. But are we improving the quality of the asset? It is having an amount over a fixed period of time to improve the quality of your asset, and that goes boundary to boundary, not just for the carriageway itself but everything else that is included.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q279 Grahame Morris: There is general agreement that long-term secure funding is the way forward. Do you have any thoughts on how that could be achieved? It was suggested, for example, that we could ring-fence fuel duty for local roads maintenance, although apparently the Treasury is not keen on that. Do you have any other thoughts on how it might be achieved?

Patrick Doig: Certainly, there would be a challenge with vehicle excise duty from a Treasury perspective, but over time vehicle excise duty will decrease as our fleet changes, so I am not sure that it would necessarily provide the sustainability and certainty of the funding stream that we are looking for over the medium to long term.

Q280 Grahame Morris: It is clear that there are some problems currently with the way the local highways maintenance block funding formula works. Do you have any specifics or any ideas on how that might be reformed? Danny, do you have any views on that?

Danny Rawle: A bit more clarity is needed around the formula itself and how it works. At the moment, it depends on the extent of the asset and how much you have where. Of course, there is an element of bid fatigue for local authorities in how it is structured.

There is the incentive fund, which everyone thinks is really good in bringing asset management forward, but, again, there is the second and third slice of the challenge fund, which can be resource intensive and cost a lot, engaging consultants and staff time, with generally no benefit if you are not successful. I think local authorities have lost a bit of confidence in the whole system because over the last couple of years the second or third round of challenge fund has not come to fruition.

Where has that additional money gone? How can we get on to it? Would it have been better to feed it back into the formula? With resources being stretched right across the board, is this the right way of going about things? Is there a quicker way? The DfT already has so much data. Can it be used to support that?

Q281 Grahame Morris: I understand that it might not be the right way. Do you have any suggestions as to how the formula might be modified so that it is fairer and can be sustained on a longer-term basis? Anne, do you have any thoughts on that?

Anne Shaw: It goes back to that point again. As Danny said, it is based on extent, but actually it is about use of the networks as well. Are we making sure that, where we have the most heavy-traffic local roads, they receive the kind of treatment they need and it is not all concentrated around some strategic routes? A lot of journeys are made on the local road network, supporting our broader regional economy. How can we do that?

Danny is quite right to say that the challenge funds are challenging in themselves in terms of putting in resource and then not being successful.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Definitely, having a method whereby we can target the right areas, based on all the information available to us all, would be really helpful.

- Q282 **Grahame Morris:** Finally, Patrick, in your written evidence, you said there should be an independent review to identify the optimum level of investment for local roads. Earlier on, you said we needed transparency and evidence-based assessment to identify the right amount of funding. What do you think that would achieve?

Patrick Doig: As I mentioned before, there are two aspects that we need. The first is to bring together a national picture, rather than having each authority making a case on its own, and a complete picture. As we said before, it is not just about the carriageway. It is about all the different assets of the road network and their asset need. It would bring together a richer and more consistent picture and a firmer evidence base.

There is a role to stand back slightly from the local authority perspective, which clearly makes a case for investing in our roads, to a body that can stand back and make the right informed investment decisions in a fair and transparent way across the country. I could be describing a single body doing both of those things or maybe two separate bodies. I am sure there are different ways we could make it work, and we are keen to be involved in any discussions that might take that forward.

- Q283 **Chair:** What do other people think about the idea of having more independent oversight, perhaps a bit like the ORR? Is there an appetite for it?

Danny Rawle: We have had a debate about that. It depends how it would take place, what information would be drawn in, how it would relate to what we already do and how we would collect the data.

- Q284 **Chair:** Would people be worried about ending up losing out, or is there just not an appetite for it?

Danny Rawle: There might be local issues about how you manage your network that might not be taken into account. How that would feed into it would be my concern.

Stephen Skinner: As a London borough, we are not tuned into that process for the moment, but I did a similar exercise a couple of weeks ago when I had to take a paper to our council's cabinet members and present a business case based on the reported condition indicators that we have at the moment, and a calculation of what our current level of funding allows us to do in terms of carriageway resurfacing and footway renewals. I was demonstrating the case that, if we keep going as we are, we are creating an ever-increasing backlog of need. I presented a figure of what we need for steady state maintenance.

There are some very simple analogies that we could each present, but I suppose our concern is that it becomes overly bureaucratic. We have an



HOUSE OF COMMONS

officer in each of our authorities who simply prepares bids, submissions and evidence. That is not best use of the money.

Q285 **Chair:** Anne, you have called for a change in the way the funding is allocated. Do you think an independent review would be a good thing?

Anne Shaw: In the simplest of terms, an evidence-based approach to how we fund highway maintenance is the right thing to do. There needs to be transparency about how the evidence is gathered, and then what it tells us are the priorities about how we manage roads, bearing in mind the pressures that local road funding is under in local authorities compared with some of the more advanced funding mechanisms for strategic route networks. It is how you strike that balance and make sure that funding is not continually being taken away from where there may be more need on local roads, and going into that strategic network.

Chair: We would now like to look at roads inspection and data gathering.

Q286 **Huw Merriman:** We have been learning about some of this as we have been taking evidence. How much of your networks do you survey using the SCANNER technology? How much of it is coarse visual inspection or detailed visual inspection? If I can just shoehorn this bit in, can you give us an element of the cost of the different methods as well?

Danny Rawle: In Coventry, we carry out 100% of our A, B and C road network with SCANNER. We do DVI on our unclassified road network. To put that into perspective, 26% of our network is SCANNER, basically, and 74% is DVI. In terms of cost, our annual cost for DVI is around £26,000. SCANNER, because we have a fairly small network, is about £5,000 per year. When you look at the levels of data on our unclassified road network, that is 74% of our network. SCANNER produces indicators—130 and 132—that tell you that 2% of your network is good. It sounds really good, but, when you are only looking at 26% of the network, it almost implies that 2% is bad and 98% is good, which is not always the case.

Stephen Skinner: The London boroughs club together, and Hammersmith and Fulham actually organised surveys for the classified road network across London, the As, Bs and Cs. They commissioned a consultant to do SCANNER surveys and DVIs, but there is no requirement to have surveys on the local road network, the unclassified. That is down to the individual authorities.

We did a detailed visual inspection, through a consultant, in 2017 on the whole of the borough's network. Before then, it was 2014. There is a business case in terms of the value for money and what you are going to use it for. We use it so that we can prioritise resurfacing schemes, maintenance and reconstructions. I think most authorities would say that you do not need to do it every year, but we have an issue between the results of what SCANNER is producing and what the DVIs are producing. That is a major problem across the industry, of course. They are different techniques so we tend to base our priorities on the DVIs because we can relate to that better.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Huw Merriman: I might come back to that, depending on time.

Anne Shaw: In the west midlands, as Danny explained, the metropolitan authorities come together to do their surveys. The classified roads are done by SCANNER and the unclassified are generally done by either coarse or detailed visual inspections. The contracts that are let through the various authorities cover the whole region. We survey 100% of the network over a four-year period: 25% in one year, and then in the next year and the next year, in order to build up data around condition.

Q287 **Huw Merriman:** Do you have an understanding of the cost differential? Is it similar to what Danny described?

Anne Shaw: It is similar to what Danny described, but Danny is obviously part of the metropolitan authorities as well.

Q288 **Huw Merriman:** That equates all the way across the metropolitan authorities.

Anne Shaw: Yes. By coming together as authorities, they make best use of the money to do those surveys, because they are able to use our buying power to get a better contract to do that.

Patrick Doig: Stephen has described the method. We use SCANNER surveys across London to cover TfL roads. I do not know the precise split between SCANNER and DVI. I am happy to follow up on that afterwards. DVI is the predominant information source that we use for asset management. It gives us a richness of information that really supports a risk-based and more targeted approach. It helps us to collect a broader set of data, not just on carriageways but on footways, verges and vehicle restraint barriers, which are things that are not necessarily covered by a SCANNER survey. That is the tool we use on an annual and regular basis.

On the costs, I will have to find the facts and figures afterwards. We are trialling this year, as I think the first panel said, automated DVI surveys that should help to reduce the cost of those in future. That sounds like a promising way to give us richness of detail at a lower cost.

Q289 **Huw Merriman:** You have touched on the benefits of DVI. Why is SCANNER not quite as effective in the way that you have just sold the two systems, going back to you, Stephen?

Stephen Skinner: It is not my particular area of expertise. The SCANNER information is processed. It is a drive-along survey, and it could pick up undulations such as a manhole cover, for example, which is not a defect. It has greater benefits in repeatability, because it takes out the human element of a visual inspection by a trained accredited surveyor. I understand that exercises have been undertaken in previous surveys by Hammersmith and Fulham to try to moderate and influence the SCANNER results so that they can be aligned. You have two different sets of source information, so it is about processing them so that they align. I do not think the industry is there yet in doing that.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Anne Shaw: On the local road network there are a lot of parked vehicles, and SCANNER does not necessarily pick up what a car is parked over. It is a bit different for things like red routes where there is no parking and so on, but for local roads there is a difference.

Danny Rawle: There are certain parameters around operating SCANNER, about operating speeds and things that are not always achievable in an urban environment, and because of the nature of some roads in local authorities you can get a lot of false positives from SCANNER which probably would not get picked up in a DVI. It originally came from the Highways Agency's TRACS machines for long straight motorways and non-event roads where you could get a broad picture. It is not adaptable to the unclassified nature of local roads.

Q290 **Huw Merriman:** The last question from me is about data. Are the national road condition datasets fit for purpose in your opinion?

Patrick Doig: Given the breadth of data that is required for a true understanding of the asset condition, in inner London we have been working with the boroughs on a state of the city report that gives a more detailed, broader and, hopefully, more representative picture of the state of highways assets in London. We are working with the UK Roads Liaison Group to see if we can do a state of the nation report and expand that more broadly. It helps to highlight where there are gaps in the data the DFT is currently capturing, which is more limited.

Q291 **Huw Merriman:** Is that a fair view for the rest of you?

Anne Shaw: It goes back to the fact that we need a consistent methodology so that it enables us to compare from year to year. At the moment, it does not necessarily pick up some of the other things we probably need to look at—the wider asset management around the network. I think that is what we need to do.

Stephen Skinner: There is a cost to collecting all the information and it should not be forgotten. At the moment we, as an authority, do not report a dataset on the condition of local roads or footways. It is not one that we collect or are asked to provide. It is main roads only.

Danny Rawle: Datasets are provided nationally, and I do not think the information that is given gives a true picture of the highway network. We report that only 2% or 4% is defective, but what is underneath that is a deteriorating network, which we call the amber network and which could be a tidal wave that goes to red. Locally, we are aware of that, but nationally I am not sure that it is picked up. We no longer report on the footway; we used to, but that is not done.

Looked at in isolation, you can get the wrong idea about the condition of the network. There are local groups that would look at that amber section and say okay. We plan our maintenance programmes around that to ask how we can address it so that we can be preventive ahead of time.



Q292 **Ruth Cadbury:** Data is one thing, but how the data is used and the level of weighting that, say, a pothole is given is another. My concern and question is, how do you assess a pothole that may not be dangerous to a motor vehicle but is dangerous to a cyclist, or a dropped kerb that is okay but actually fails the test for a wheelchair user? To what extent is there some common view on those issues?

Danny Rawle: All those issues are talked about when we talk about the code of practice and the risk-based approach. You do almost a risk assessment on site during your inspection. If we get a call through customer services, our inspector goes out and does a dynamic risk assessment. Treatment is based on the defect's location in the carriageway or the highway or on the footway. If we know that it is a well-used cycle track, that would be a high priority.

Q293 **Ruth Cadbury:** Is that a cycle track or a road that is used by a lot of cyclists?

Danny Rawle: Both. If it is in the wheel track, if it is on the highway or carriageway and it is a well-used cycle route, or if it is a defined cycle route and there is a defect, obviously it will get higher priority because of the dynamic risk assessment of the site.

Stephen Skinner: Yes, similar. I think the new code of practice allows us to take that into account, although we probably did before. It gives us the confidence and comfort to take that into account. Most authorities will have investigation levels. We used to call them intervention levels, but now you actually have an inspector on site assessing it on a site risk-based approach. If there is a defect in the carriageway but it is opposite a traffic island where people walk across, the inspector would take that into account. It is things like that. It is common practice in the industry.

Chair: Thank you very much for giving evidence today. That ends our session.