

Public Accounts Committee

Condition and maintenance of Local Roads in England

Second Report of Session 2024–25

HC 349

Public Accounts Committee

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Publication

This Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report, was Ordered by the House of Commons, on 13 January 2025, to be printed. It was published on 17 January 2025 by authority of the House of Commons. © Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2025.

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Summary

Whether travelling by car, public transport or bike, nearly everyone relies on local roads to go about their daily lives. Yet local road conditions in England are getting worse, with people increasingly unhappy with the state of disrepair and with increasing damage to vehicles from potholes. The Department for Transport (the Department) must lead efforts to avoid further deterioration of our local roads and tackle the backlog, which industry estimates as costing over £15 billion to fix.

The Department has overall policy responsibility for local roads but has shown too little interest in what difference its funding of local roads maintenance has made, and has not taken responsibility for its role in how they have deteriorated. The Department provides over £1 billion to local authorities each year for local road maintenance, but has not set out what outcomes it expects from this funding nor sought to evaluate its impact. The Chancellor in the 2024 Autumn Budget announced an additional £500 million for roads maintenance aiming to fix a further one million potholes across England.

The Department does not have a good grasp of the condition that local roads in England are really in, with too many gaps in the data it collects. The Department's data shows that the condition of local roads has remained broadly stable over time, but this picture does not reflect what people, businesses and local authorities are experiencing. The Department has recently put in place new standards with local authorities to improve data quality but that will still exclude bridges, pavements and cycleways; elements that are critical to the accessibility and safety of other road users including pedestrians.

The Department's annual funding arrangements to local authorities are not based on need and are likely to be pushing local authorities to focus spending on short-term reactive work, rather than more cost-effective preventative maintenance. The Department's funding to local authorities is provided on an annual basis and based on road length and number of bridges, totalling £1.1 billion in 2022–23. Funding is also fragmented, with around 12 funding pots available over the last decade, and increasingly focused on pothole repairs rather than preventative maintenance.

The Department has not done enough to support local authorities in managing the challenges of maintaining local roads. It has failed to update its guidance to them for several years to reflect technical advancements

or to share best practice. The Department is looking to update its Code of Practice for local authorities, but it is not clear whether that will help local authorities improve the safety of all road users and how the Department will also respond to future challenges, such as autonomous vehicles and heavier electric heavy goods vehicles.

Previous Public Accounts Committees have regularly drawn attention to failures across government to consider long-term value for money when making decisions on maintenance funding, planning and prioritisation. Local roads are a key national asset and failure to maintain them well now will have long-lasting impacts on the economy and the social wellbeing of communities.

Introduction

The local road network in England consists of 183,000 miles of road and represents 98% of the total road network. As well as the road surface, the local road network includes pavements, embankments, bridges and drainage systems that need to be kept in good condition. Almost all journeys start and end on the local road network.

The Department for Transport (the Department) is responsible for providing policy, guidance and funding to local authorities in England to help them run and maintain their road networks. It considers that well-maintained local roads are vital for the economy and the social wellbeing of communities. Well maintained roads and infrastructure are also necessary for the Department's objective to improve transport for the user, as well as specific policy areas, such as increasing active travel and supporting autonomous vehicles. The Department provides over £1 billion in capital funding to local authorities each year for local road maintenance.

Local authorities are responsible for the management of the local road network under their control and have a statutory duty to maintain their roads. While central government provides funding towards the maintenance of the road network, it is for individual local authorities to decide on how best to maintain their roads based on local needs, priorities and funding.

Conclusions and recommendations

- 1. The Department has not taken its overall responsibility for policy and use of taxpayer funds sufficiently seriously when looking at local roads.** The Department acknowledges that local road conditions are getting worse and that there is a growing backlog of repair work. It last estimated, in 2019, that it would cost between £7.6 billion and £11.7 billion, but more recent industry estimates, in 2023–24, suggest that this could have grown to over £15 billion. The Department provides over £1 billion annually to local authorities as part of its funding for managing and maintaining local roads. However, it does not know what that funding is achieving, lacking both a clear oversight over how it is being used and a clear understanding of what outcomes it wants to achieve. Identifying who is accountable for local roads across England is difficult, as it is shared between local and national government, but we consider that the Department has not taken enough responsibility given the declining conditions of local roads across England.

RECOMMENDATION

In addition to addressing the recommendations below, the Department should clearly set out its roles and responsibilities and that of local authorities in ensuring that local roads are maintained to a good standard throughout England as part of government’s work on local devolution.

- 2. The Department has insufficient knowledge of the condition of local roads.** Industry estimates show that the condition of local roads across England is getting worse, which is also reflected in falling public satisfaction and higher levels of pothole related incidents. However, while the Department’s own data shows the condition of local roads has remained relatively stable, it accepts that this may not reflect people’s experiences. DfT acknowledges that its data in some areas is poor and that it does not fully understand the condition of local roads in England. It is therefore implementing new data standards — PAS 2161 — with the aim of improving the quality and granularity of the data that it gathers from local authorities, although this will not be mandatory until April 2026. In addition, the Department will still not collect information on the condition of other parts of the road, including walkways, cycle paths and bridges from local authorities. The Department says that it does not ask local authorities for

further information as it is trying to strike the balance between asking for enough information and not creating a large burden of work for each local authority. We are unconvinced that DfT has fully considered what additional burdens would be created in practice, as much of this data may already be collected by local authorities.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department should make the case, with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for obtaining the data it needs to gain a greater understanding of the condition of the local road network.

- 3. The Department's approach to funding is short-term and fragmented, hindering local authorities from planning more cost-effective work.** In the last decade funding for local roads has become more complex, with the Department providing funding to local authorities via 12 different funding pots, each with differing eligibility criteria. It has largely provided funding to local authorities on an annual basis. This differs from how the Department supports the maintenance of other transport routes, such as the strategic road networks where funds are allocated on a five-year basis to enable long-term planning. The Department acknowledges that longer-term funding enables better value for money but has not taken steps to change the way it funds local roads. In addition, some of the funds have focused on specific issues, for example on repairing potholes, which are the result of poor maintenance. This short-term approach is likely to have pushed local authorities to focus more on reactive action rather than the preventative work that would offer greater value for money.

RECOMMENDATION

- a.** As part of the next phase of the spending review the Department should simplify its funding to local authorities and provide more long-term certainty around the amount and duration of funding.
- b.** The Department should make clear how it will effectively influence and monitor local road maintenance when the funding to local authorities is coming from different government departments and local authorities have more flexibility within the overall pool of money on how to prioritise spending.

- 4. The Department does not allocate funding to local authorities for the maintenance of local roads according to where it is most needed.** The Department provides most of its funding to local authorities based on road length, number of bridges, and number of lighting columns in a local authority. It does not, however, take into account traffic volumes or underlying road condition. Nor does it include other factors such as local

environmental conditions, for example whether a road is prone to flooding, and the additional wear and tear that would arise. The Department has also not explored with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government whether local authorities that charge a Community Infrastructure Levy money on new developments, may be permitted to spend this money on local road maintenance.

RECOMMENDATION

- a. As part of the next phase of the Spending Review the Department should revise the way it allocates funding to local authorities ensuring that funding also reflects the expected wear and tear of local roads due to the level of usage and local environmental conditions.
- b. The Department should also work with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to explore the scope for local authorities to use surplus Community Infrastructure Levy funding on local road maintenance.

5. **The Department has not evaluated its approaches to funding local roads to know whether they are delivering value for money.** Despite providing over £1 billion of funding each year to local authorities for the maintenance of local roads, the Department has not evaluated the totality of funding it has made available and what it has achieved from this. It has evaluated one of the 12 funding pots it has used over the last decade. In particular, it has not evaluated its fund which used incentives to improve local authorities' asset management practices, despite issues identified in the NAO report and its plans to use such an approach going forward. The Department has also not evaluated the effectiveness of funding of local road maintenance through Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs).

RECOMMENDATION

The Department should evaluate approaches to funding local roads to determine what has been effective to help inform future approaches. This should include conducting interim evaluations on local authority PFI schemes.

6. **The Department has not provided enough support and guidance to local authorities to deal with current and future challenges in maintaining local roads.** The Department is responsible for providing local authorities with guidance on the management and maintenance of local roads. However, it has not updated its guidance for several years, including on best practice, that could have helped local authorities in completing their work more effectively. The Department is looking to update its Code of

Practice for managing highway infrastructure for local authorities, but we are not clear whether this will be comprehensive in its consideration of road usage. For example, there are issues around safety, such as accessibility and visibility of walkways and cycle paths, which as technological and environmental requirements have developed may not have been considered. Future challenges also exist which the Department will have to consider, including how local roads will be fit for the introduction of autonomous vehicles and heavier electric heavy goods vehicles.

RECOMMENDATION

- a.** As part of revising its Code of Practice, the Department should look to set out updated practices local authorities are expected to adopt and consider if following this best practice should be attached to funding. This should include guidance around supporting safety and accessibility for all road users, consideration of technology advances such as autonomous vehicles and consideration of the effect of maintenance on roads and bridges of heavier electric heavy goods vehicles, particularly if the 44 Gross Vehicle Weight were to be increased.
- b.** The Department should regularly revise the Code of Practice as the road environment and the demands placed upon it continue to change. The Department should set out how it plans to do this in its response to the Committee's report.

1 The Department for Transport's oversight

Introduction

1. On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, we took evidence from the Department for Transport (the Department) on the condition and maintenance of local roads in England.¹
2. We also considered written evidence from submissions by national transport associations, local transport bodies, private companies and individuals.² These submissions raised with us a variety of concerns including:
 - the need for ring-fenced long-term funding to enable local authorities to plan their road maintenance more effectively and efficiently;
 - the importance of maintaining all aspects of the local road network, including cycleways and pavements, as that would encourage greater cycling and walking and improve accessibility for those with disabilities, and also drainage systems, where issues can lead to greater damage to road surfaces; and
 - the need for potholes to be properly fixed, using latest advances in technology so that repaired road surfaces would be longer-lasting and more cost-effective.
3. The local road network in England is an essential part of day-to-day life, with almost all journeys starting and ending on local roads. The network in England is 183,000 miles long and represents around 98% of the total road network.³ As well as the road surface, the local road network includes pavements, embankments, bridges and the drainage system that need to be kept in good condition.⁴

1 C&AG's Report, [The condition and maintenance of local roads in England](#), Session 2024–25, HC 117, 7 June 2024

2 [Local roads in England - Written evidence - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

3 The rest of the road network, known as the Strategic Road Network, comprises motorways and some A roads and is managed by National Highways, a government-owned company of DfT.

4 C&AG's Report, para 1 and 1.2

4. The Department for Transport is responsible for providing policy, guidance and funding to local authorities in England to help them run and maintain their road networks. Local authorities are responsible for the management of the local road network under their control, and it is for individual local authorities to decide on how best to maintain its roads based on local needs, priorities and funding.⁵
5. In 2022–2023, DfT provided local authorities with £1.1 billion of capital funding for planned maintenance of local roads, such as resurfacing roads and repairing bridges.⁶ Over the past decade its funding to local authorities has varied between £1.1 billion and £1.6 billion, after adjusting for inflation, and is expected to be £1.2 billion in 2024–25.⁷ Local authorities will also draw on capital funding from other government funds and locally derived sources to fund local road maintenance. In 2022–23 local authorities spent around £2.7 billion of capital funding in total that year. In addition, the NAO estimated that local authorities spent around £0.58 billion of revenue funding on the maintenance of road structures, including minor repairs, which is drawn from funds that local authorities use to provide a wide range of services.⁸
6. The Department considers that well-maintained roads are vital for the economy and broader factors such as the social wellbeing of communities. Well-maintained roads and infrastructure are also key for DfT’s objective to improve transport for users, as well as specific policy areas such as increasing active travel and supporting autonomous vehicles.⁹

The Department’s responsibility for local roads

7. We asked the Department what outcomes it was looking to achieve from the funding it provides to local authorities, which is over £1 billion each year. The Department told us that this was a live discussion with Ministers as part of the spending review and it would be looking to determine what metrics should be used to measure those outcomes.¹⁰ The Department also confirmed that it does not know exactly how local authorities spend its funding as it is not ring-fenced, and that it does not seek reporting from

5 C&AG’s Report, para 3

6 C&AG’s Report, para 3

7 C&AG’s Report, para 2.4 and Figure 7

8 C&AG’s Report, para 3

9 C&AG’s Report, para 2

10 Q 36

local authorities on this. However, it told us that it is confident that its funding is being used on local road maintenance, given local authorities spend additional money in this area.¹¹

8. The Department acknowledged that setting out clearly who is accountable for local roads is very difficult, as it is a ‘mixed market’ of central and local government accountabilities. The Department told us that local authorities have the statutory responsibility to maintain local roads and that it only funds a part of what they spend on local road maintenance. It recognised that national government also has a responsibility for the overall state of local roads, but the Department saw this to be around allocating national funding, for ensuring it has appropriate data and ‘knowing what’s going on’.¹² The Department also told us that it is working closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on the future accountability framework between central and local government in the context of integrated funding settlements for local government.¹³

The Department’s knowledge of the condition of local roads

9. The Department’s own data suggests that the condition of local roads has remained broadly stable. It reported that over the period 2015–16 to 2022–23, the percentage of local roads rated ‘red’, which are roads that should be considered for maintenance, has been at 3 or 4% for A roads and 6% for B and C roads.¹⁴
10. However, the Department also acknowledged that there has been a deterioration in the condition of local roads over recent years, based on independent reports and people’s perceptions in using the roads.¹⁵ The Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA) estimated that in 2023–24, less than half of roads (48%) were in a ‘good’ structural condition, the lowest proportion since this measurement was first included in the survey in 2015–16.¹⁶ The AA also reported that in 2023 its patrols attended more than 631,000 pothole related breakdowns, a five-year high, and that the scale of damage to vehicles by potholes has grown.¹⁷ As a reflection of this deterioration in

11 Qq 42-43

12 Qq 27-30

13 Q 46

14 Q 6; C&AG’s Report, Figure 5

15 Qq 6, 22

16 C&AG’s Report, Figure 6; [LRE0009, written evidence submitted by the Asphalt Industry Alliance \(AIA\)](#)

17 C&AG’s Report, Figure 6; [LRE0004, written evidence submitted by The AA](#)

road conditions, an annual survey of road users by the National Highways & Transport Network, covering around 75% of local authorities, reported in 2023 that public satisfaction with road conditions was declining.¹⁸

11. The Department also expects the cost of dealing with the backlog in road maintenance to have increased since its last estimate in 2019 of between £7.6 billion and £11.7 billion. The Department told us that all the evidence suggested that the backlog would have become worse, given the severe weather conditions and very wet winters in the years since its estimate, as well as accounting for inflation.¹⁹ The Asphalt Industry Alliance estimated the cost of the backlog in 2023–24 as over £15.6 billion, based on a survey of local authorities.²⁰
12. We asked the Department why its data presented a different picture of local road conditions compared to the worsening conditions that independent analysis and user experience were showing. The Department acknowledged that its data is not good enough. For example, on unclassified roads or C roads, which account for 62% by mileage of all local roads, it collects information on their condition from local authorities on a voluntary basis and over a four-year rolling average period rather than over two years for A, B and C roads, making it less robust and not up to date.²¹ The Department also presented other possible reasons to us, including that local authorities may be doing just enough maintenance work to keep more roads from being rated ‘red’ but that it does not have the granularity of data to know²²
13. The Department told us that it is looking to improve the quality of its data through the introduction of a new data standard — PAS 2161 — for local authorities to use in reporting the condition of local roads. The Department considers that the new standard will improve the granularity and robustness of data collected, with five categories now used to rate the condition of local roads rather than three, and the option for local authorities to use a wider variety of new technologies to gather consistent data. The Department currently requires local authorities to collect data using just one method, based on technology from the 1980s.²³
14. The Department confirmed that it had recently released the standard in September 2024 so that local authorities can use it from 2025–26 on a voluntary basis. The Department told us that it will not make its usage mandatory until the following year, 2026–27. This additional time is to allow

18 C&AG’s Report, para 8 and Figure 6

19 Qq 10, 22, 24, 59

20 Q 59; C&AG’s Report, Figure 10

21 Qq 6, 11- 13

22 Qq 6, 18

23 Qq 6, 11-14

local authorities to prepare for the new standard as well as enable the Department to conduct data comparisons as it pilots different technologies for recording road conditions.²⁴

15. The Department told us that it will not be asking local authorities to provide a wider range of information as part of the new standard to avoid increasing the administrative burden on local authorities.²⁵ The Department confirmed that it will continue to collect information only on the condition of the road surface, not on the condition of associated parts of the network such as cycleways, walkways and bridges. It will also not require local authorities to increase the proportion of the local road network they monitor each year.²⁶
16. The Department told us that it has to strike the balance between asking for more information and the increased burden of work for each local authority to provide that information, and that there are limits placed by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. It acknowledged, however, that many local authorities already collect more data than required by the Department, which they use for their own operational purposes.²⁷ In addition, the Department noted that when evaluating one of its funding pots, local authorities had expressed a willingness to provide more data.²⁸ The Department told us that the increase in reporting the proportion of the road network that falls into the five new categories is broadly supported by local authorities, but will be subject to formal approval by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The Department also confirmed that it is currently reviewing the broader requirements for local authority data collection on highway maintenance.²⁹

24 Qq 6-8; Written evidence submitted by the Department for Transport dated 5 December 2024 [‘Local roads in England – PAS2161 Road Condition Monitoring Data Standard’](#)

25 Q 20

26 Qq 21, 26, 31

27 Qq 14, 18, 20-21, 23, 26, 31

28 Q 34

29 Written evidence submitted by the Department for Transport dated 05 December [‘Local roads in England – PAS2161 Road Condition Monitoring Data Standard’](#)

2 The Department's funding to local authorities

Complexity and short-term nature of funding arrangements

17. During the past decade, funding for local roads has become more complex, with the Department providing 12 different funding pots for road maintenance. Each type of funding has different eligibility criteria; eight of the 12 are based on road network length; three require local authorities to bid for money; and one is an incentive fund.³⁰ The Local Councils Roads Innovation Group told us that there is a gap between those councils with the ability to apply for one-off funding pots and those without.³¹
18. We questioned the Department on the complexity of its current funding arrangements and how well they are currently working. The Department agreed that funding is not streamlined and acknowledged arguments for simplification, recognising that consolidating funding might allow local authorities to spend money more effectively.³²
19. The Department has largely provided its funding to most local authorities on an annual basis, instead of via longer-term settlements as in other areas of transport.³³ For example, the strategic road network (motorways and some major A roads) is funded through one dedicated fund in five-year periods. Spending review settlements do include multi-year annual totals for local road maintenance, but the Department provides total funding to most local authorities on an annual basis.³⁴ The Department acknowledges that giving certainty on funding has driven significant efficiencies and improvements to the way strategic roads have been managed.³⁵ The Chartered Institution of

30 C&AG's Report, para 2.4

31 [LRE0014, Written submission, Local Councils Roads Innovation Group](#)

32 Qq 41-42

33 C&AG's Report, para 2.5

34 C&AG's Report, para 10

35 Q 52

Highways & Transportation also told us that longer-term funding settlement would improve effectiveness in the management and maintenance of local roads.³⁶

20. We asked the Department when it will provide certainty over the number of years and amount of funding local authorities will receive. The Department told us that it would be a decision for HM Treasury and the Government during the next phase of the spending review to decide what time period funding would cover, and not the Department's decision.³⁷
21. Since 2020–21, the Department has provided local authorities with funding from the Potholes fund which, by the end of 2024–25, is expected to total £2.2 billion.³⁸ Along with a further one off top up in 2023–24, specific pothole funding from the Department represented 40% of its capital funding to local authorities in that year.³⁹ In the Autumn Budget 2024 the Chancellor announced a further £500 million for road maintenance, aiming to fix a further one million potholes across England each year.⁴⁰
22. However, potholes are just a symptom of poor road conditions and, as we heard, they are not necessarily being fixed properly or efficiently so money is just being wasted.⁴¹ For example, the AA told us that in its view too much is being spent on short-term reactive maintenance, including only temporarily repairing potholes, relative to more proactive, permanent repairs which provide better value for money.⁴² The Road Haulage Association told us that planned works cost an average of 35% less than reactive repairs in England.⁴³
23. The Department acknowledged that the succession of short-term funding allocations may have driven local authorities to be more reactive.⁴⁴ However, the Department believes that local authorities treat the funding from the Department as a single source and are not concerned about the specific funding pot the money came from.⁴⁵ The Department also told us that it is in the process of considering what future funding arrangements may look like as part of the spending review, in the context of integrated settlements for local authorities.⁴⁶

36 [LRE0002, Written submission by the Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation](#)

37 Q 71

38 C&AG's Report, Figure 7

39 Q 62; C&AG's Report Figure 7

40 Autumn Budget 2024, para 3.19

41 Q 62

42 [LRE0004, Written evidence submitted by the AA](#)

43 [LRE0007, Written evidence submitted by The Road Haulage Association](#)

44 Q 61

45 Qq 14, 41, 72

46 Qq 34-35

Basis for allocation of funds

- 24.** Most of the Department’s funding to local authorities over the last decade has been through the eight funding pots that use road network length as the main basis for allocations. The mechanism for these pots uses simple data sets to allocate funding, weighted between road length (82.4%), the number of bridges (15.4%) and the number of lighting columns (2.2%) in each local authority.⁴⁷ The Department explained that the allocation based on road length is then split equally into three parts, a third for A roads, a third on B roads and a third on C roads.⁴⁸
- 25.** The Department does not base funding allocation on other information, such as the condition of roads nor on factors that could have led to a deterioration in the condition of roads such as traffic volume, type of traffic or environmental factors.⁴⁹ The Department told us that the current formula has the benefits of being simple, objective and based on stable data as road lengths do not change very much over time.⁵⁰ It also uses road type as a proxy for traffic, directing more money to the roads which are used more heavily (A roads) than others.⁵¹
- 26.** We asked the Department whether it considers where investment could have the greatest impact and why a factor such as traffic volume has not been included.⁵² The Department said that arguments for including other factors are often made, and that its last consultation on this subject was some time ago, but that this decision is one for Ministers. Reassessing funding allocation to include traffic volumes would be a large exercise which would benefit some local authorities, but reduce the funding of others, for example in rural areas.⁵³ On taking flood risk into account, officials acknowledged they would consider whether differential impacts across the country from this risk should be reflected in any future revisions to funding allocation.⁵⁴
- 27.** Just over half of local planning authorities in England charge a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to fund local infrastructure for new developments.⁵⁵ This levy can be used to increase the capacity of or to repair existing infrastructure, including transport, flood defences, schools, hospitals and

47 C&AG’s Report, paras 2.7-2.8 and Figure 9

48 Q 53

49 C&AG’s Report, para 2.8

50 Q 54

51 Q 53

52 Q 53

53 Q 53

54 Q 84

55 Written evidence submitted by Department for Transport 5 December 2024, [‘Local roads in England – Community Infrastructure Levy’](#)

other facilities, but the funds must be used for the purpose of supporting development rather than preserving the status quo.⁵⁶ We asked the Department whether it had done any work understanding the level of unspent CIL funds across the country and whether this money could be spent on local roads.⁵⁷ In its follow-up written submission, the Department acknowledged that some local authorities do have significant levels of unspent CIL funds; this may be because they have yet to allocate the money to a specific project, or because the local authority is building up funds for a major project. The Department undertook to engage closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and local authorities on how CIL funds could be used to support transport investment.⁵⁸

Evaluation

- 28.** The Department has evaluated only one of the 12 funding pots it has made available for local road maintenance over the last decade. The Department has also not evaluated the totality of the funding it has made available to local authorities for road maintenance, to assess whether it has led to an improvement in road conditions, or whether its assumptions about the benefits of local road maintenance have been borne out in practice.⁵⁹ The Department told us that it was confident from its analysis that its local roads funding was good value for money, with its 2020 estimate suggesting £7 in economic benefits for every £1 spent, and potentially even higher at £9 from its more recent but less robust economic appraisal.⁶⁰ However, the NAO report also states that this is the Department's estimate of the benefits the funding could deliver, but it has not conducted any assessment of whether the benefits were actually delivered.⁶¹
- 29.** We asked the Department how it would know which funding mechanism was most effective without evaluation. The Department told us that it does not evaluate everything that it allocates to local authorities because it relies on them to exercise their statutory duties for local roads, and that local authorities do not necessarily ringfence their funding from the Department. The Department also told us that it has identified lessons from its recent evaluation of the pothole fund, such as around long-term funding and consistent data collection. Overall, the Department believes that spending

56 Written evidence submitted by Department for Transport 5 December 2024, '[Local roads in England – Community Infrastructure Levy](#)'

57 Q 63

58 Written evidence submitted by the Department for Transport dated 5 December 2024, '[Local roads in England – Follow up on Community Infrastructure Levy](#)'

59 C&AG's Report, para 1.11

60 Q 37; C&AG's Report, para 1.12

61 C&AG's Report, 1.12

on local roads is good value for money, and so is not an area that it is particularly concerned about. The Department acknowledged, however that it should look to do more evaluation, with the work on a revised Code of Practice to local authorities providing an opportunity to do so.⁶²

- 30.** The Department also told us that, as part of developing a new incentive funding scheme for local authorities on local road maintenance, it will be looking at learning from the previous scheme.⁶³ In that scheme, the Department had made more money available to those local authorities that self-assessed that they had implemented good asset management practices.⁶⁴ The NAO report found that the Department did not carry out any checks on authority assessments to confirm whether the grades that authorities awarded themselves were reasonable, and the Department's use of funding incentives no longer works as intended. The Department had also not evaluated this incentive funding scheme or assessed the impact it has had on local authorities' approach to asset management.⁶⁵ In its consideration of the new scheme, the Department told us that it will particularly reflect on its lack of auditing, with local authorities 'marking their own homework'.⁶⁶
- 31.** We asked the Department whether it had completed any evaluations on the benefits that come from long-term funding arrangements such as Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes.⁶⁷ The Department responded that the general view on transport funding was that longer-term funding of assets and infrastructure provided greater certainty and allowed delivery partners to plan, resource and execute work efficiently. However, the Department confirmed that it had not undertaken any evaluations itself, although it does collect data on PFI schemes as part of HM Treasury reporting requirements.⁶⁸ The Department informed us that as the schemes were ongoing, evaluations had not been conducted despite these contracts not expected to end until 2034.⁶⁹ It is imperative that whoever is managing the PFI project, normally the Local Authority or Highways England, regularly inspects these roads to ensure the maintenance is up to date and that they will be returned in the condition specified in the contract.

62 Q 67

63 Q 56

64 C&AG's Report, para 2.10

65 C&AG's Report, paras 12, 2.11

66 Q 56

67 Q 48

68 Q 49; Written evidence submitted by the Department for Transport dated 5 December 2024, '[Local roads in England – Follow up on Private Finance Initiatives](#)'

69 Qq 50-51; C&AG's Report, Figure 3 Note 4

3 Support for local authorities

Updating guidance

- 32.** The Department is responsible for providing guidance to local authorities in England to help them run and maintain their road networks, but has not updated its guidance for several years.⁷⁰ Such guidance has included good practice proactive maintenance to reduce the number of potholes, a Code of Practice on managing highway infrastructure, and road repair guides. For example, the Department has not reviewed or updated the highways maintenance appraisal tool, which is based on assumptions that are almost 10 years old.⁷¹
- 33.** The Department told us that Ministers are considering a review of the Code of Practice as it considers there to be value in doing so, even though it will be major task to update the more than 260-page document. The Department acknowledged that there are gaps in the current Code of Practice that would need to be addressed, including in areas such as new technologies for assessing conditions and repairing potholes and climate adaptation.⁷² For example, the Road Surface Treatments Association set out to us the importance of road drainage systems to reduce road deterioration, given the increased rainfall from climate change.⁷³ However, the Department also highlighted to us the work local authorities already do to share best practice between them as well as the work the Department is doing to support local authorities on responding to climate change.⁷⁴
- 34.** We questioned the Department on other challenges that local authorities are facing where updated guidance from the Department would be helpful. On active travel the Government has set a target of 50% of all short journeys being made by walking or cycling by 2030. The Department acknowledged that poor-quality infrastructure is a key barrier to achieve this and would be looking to update its Code of Practice with a greater

70 C&AG's Report, para 3 and 15

71 C&AG's Report, 3.2

72 Qq 56-58

73 [LRE0011, Written evidence submitted by The Road Surface Treatments Association \(RSTA\) Ltd](#)

74 Qq 58, 84

emphasis on footway maintenance.⁷⁵ The Department also told us that all aspects of road safety will be considered as part of its development of a road safety strategy, recognising our example of the use of LED street lighting for energy efficiency but which can make pedestrians and cyclists feel less safe using the roads.⁷⁶

Future challenges

- 35.** We asked the Department about the impact of heavier electric vehicles on road infrastructure. The Department told us that main roads are built to withstand a maximum vehicle weight (gross vehicle weight) of 44 tonnes, and although unclassified roads are built to a wide range of differing standards, the impact will not be significant with the weight of an electric car still less than a lorry. However, it has recognised that the risks are more related to electric buses and heavy good vehicles (HGVs). Given the maximum weight roads and bridges can take, and the heavier weight of electric-powered HGVs, this may reduce the payload HGVs can take and the sector is campaigning to allow heavier vehicles on the road to compensate. The Department told us that no decisions have been made about whether to increase the maximum weight that road infrastructure is expected to support and, if it does increase, how much that could cost to implement particularly in relation to bridges.⁷⁷
- 36.** We also asked the Department about the condition local roads would need to be in to support the introduction of autonomous vehicles from 2026. The Department recognised that there will be challenges. For example, one of the semi-autonomous technologies, already licensed for use on the strategic road network, require road line markings to be of a sufficient standard so that they can be detected by its autonomous vehicles. The Department told us that National Highways is currently exploring the impacts of autonomous vehicles on road layout, lane markings and roadwork designs and maintenance across the strategic road network.⁷⁸
- 37.** However, the Department also set out that autonomous vehicle technology would need to be capable of safely operating using existing highway infrastructure and so does not expect to make any immediate changes to road maintenance practices. The Department told us that government

75 Qq 21, 27, 93; C&AG's Report, Figure 12

76 Q 94

77 Qq 84, 88

78 Qq 86 - 89; Written evidence, submitted by the Department for Transport dated 5 December 2024, [‘Local roads – Autonomous Vehicles’](#)

expects to set out statutory guidance on autonomous vehicles in the second half of 2027, as part of laying secondary legislation covering the main autonomous vehicle regulations.⁷⁹

79 Qq 86–89; Written evidence, submitted by the Department for Transport dated 5 December 2024, [‘Local roads – Autonomous Vehicles’](#)

Formal minutes

Monday 13 January 2025

Members present

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, in the Chair

Mr Clive Betts

Mr Luke Charters

Anna Dixon

Rachel Gilmour

Sarah Green

Sarah Hall

Lloyd Hatton

Chris Kane

Rebecca Paul

Declaration of interests

The following declarations of interest relating to the inquiry were made:

21 November 2024

Mr Clive Betts declared the following interest: Vice President of the Local Government Association.

Rebecca Paul declared the following interest: Surrey County Councillor

Michael Payne declared the following interests: Nottinghamshire County Councillor and Vice President of the Local Government Association.

Condition and maintenance of Local Roads in England

Draft Report (*Condition and maintenance of Local Roads in England*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 37 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Introduction agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Second Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned till Thursday 16 October at 9.30 a.m.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Thursday 21 November 2024

Dame Bernadette Kelly DCB, Permanent Secretary, Department for Transport;
Dave Buttery, Director of Roads Strategy, Department for Transport;
Rupert Furness, Deputy Director, Local Highways and Active Travel,
Department for Transport

[Q1-94](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

LRE numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	Amey	LRE0013
2	Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA)	LRE0009
3	Association of Directors of Environment Economy Planning & Transport (ADEPT)	LRE0008
4	Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation	LRE0002
5	Civil Engineering Contractors Association	LRE0005
6	JCB	LRE0012
7	Lindsay, Lauren	LRE0001
8	Local Council Roads Innovation Group (LCRIG)	LRE0014
9	National Motorcyclists Council	LRE0010
10	Road Haulage Association	LRE0007
11	Sustrans	LRE0003
12	The AA	LRE0004
13	The Road Surface Treatments Association (RSTA) Ltd	LRE0011
14	Transport for London	LRE0006