

Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA) Scotland submission of 16 January 2023

PE1936/F: Remove Potholes from Scotland's Roads

We welcome the opportunity to respond to Scottish Parliament's Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee to comment on petition PE1936: Remove Potholes from Scotland's Roads.

The Civil Engineering Contractors Association Scotland (CECA Scotland) is the representative body for companies who work day-to-day to deliver, upgrade, and maintain Scotland's transport and utility networks. With 100 members in Scotland, we represent companies who together carry out up to 80 per cent of all civil engineering activity in Scotland.

Our members include some of the largest construction firms working on large scale infrastructure projects as well as a range of small specialist and regional contractors delivering projects in their local communities. Across Scotland, we estimate our industry supports the employment of over 30,000 people with annual activity worth around £3 billion.

Response to Petitioner's Questions

a) Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to improve road surfaces by:

Creating an action plan to remove potholes from trunk roads across Scotland

The benefits of long-term investment in physical infrastructure are clear. Not only is there a strong economic outcome – CECA research has found that every £1 billion of infrastructure construction increases overall economic activity by £2.842 billion – but there are significant social and community benefits in transforming how we all live and work and in regenerating communities in all corners of Scotland.

Whilst the petitioner's question only refers to Trunk Roads, it is CECA's contention that the much larger issue is with the potholing of local roads under the control of Local Authorities.

Transport Scotland is responsible for the improvement and maintenance of the existing Trunk Road Network. This is achieved through their Trunk Roads Network Management Contracts with their two framework contractors, BEAR & AMEY.

Transport Scotland's Network Management Contracts run for 8 years with an option to extend for a period of up to 4 years. This allows for a strong relationship to be developed between contractor and client where a visible and guaranteed pipeline of work provides certainty for contractors, better value for clients and the development of appropriate skills within the current and future workforce here in Scotland.

The maintenance of Scotland's Trunk Road network is managed by a series of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) that are written into the terms & conditions of the Network Management Contracts with Transport Scotland's chosen contractors and are subject to regular review and performance criteria by the client.

There is systematic surveillance of the condition of Scotland's trunk road network and whilst potholes may appear on the network they are quickly and efficiently repaired once identified. In the main, Scotland's trunk roads are well maintained because of long-term funding being in place that ensures the resilience of the network.

However, it is disappointing that the Scottish Government has reduced the budget for Motorways and Trunk Roads in its 2023-24 budget by over £75m.

	2021-22 Budget	2022-23 Budget	2023-24 Budget
	£m	£m	£m
Motorways and Trunk Roads	830.2	876.4	801.2

At a time when construction materials inflation is running at circa 20% this reduction in spending will impact upon the future condition of the network.

b) Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to improve road surfaces by:

Providing ring-fenced funding to local councils to tackle potholes.

Local Authorities are responsible for the maintenance and improvement of the Local Road Network. Local Authorities in Scotland are funded from four sources: Scottish Government grant, service income, Non-domestic Rates, and Council Tax.

The Local Authority Road Network condition is assessed via the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey, which is organised by the Society of Chief Officers. The percentage of roads needing repairs (red and amber classification) in Scotland in 2020 was 35.5%. This is an average across all Local Authorities.

There is no common strategic approach by Local Authorities to maintaining and developing their respective local roads. Many Authorities use a “risk based” approach to identifying what potholes should be repaired and when. There is an argument that states that all potholes pose a “risk” and can just as easily cause an accident, damage, or a fatality on a “quiet road” than on a “busy” road.

The evidence is clear that Scotland’s local road network is in a very bad condition and is deteriorating rapidly due to the dual impact of climate change and continuous real value cuts to road maintenance budgets.

Ensuring that Scotland’s infrastructure - whether existing, through repair and maintenance, or new build - is climate ready must be our top priority. However, given that so much of Scotland’s infrastructure needs urgent investment, prioritising investment decisions by Local Authorities and others will be extremely challenging.

More emphasis needs to be placed on building resilience into the local road network, particularly in respect of flood prevention and in responding to other impacts of climate change. Water and frost cause significant damage to our roads and poor drainage around our roads only add to potholing issues.

Substandard reinstatement work carried out on the road network by utility companies must be tackled and the guilty parties must be forced to make good in a timely manner.

All Local Authorities are facing financial challenges in the coming years. There has been under investment in the Local Road Network in Scotland

for decades and we are rapidly approaching a tipping point for some Local Authorities whereby they will never catch up on the structural repairs on their network if they do not change their funding model or actively look to collaborate with neighbouring authorities on mutual road management programmes.