

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on PE1936: Remove Potholes from Scotland's Roads, submitted by Lesley Roberts

Background

Roads authorities, that is the local authority for local public roads and Transport Scotland for trunk roads, have a duty to maintain public roads under Section 1 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. While there is no statutory maintenance standard, roads authorities generally follow the risk-based approach to roads maintenance set out in "[Well-managed highway infrastructure – A code of practice](#)", published by the UK Roads Liaison Group.

The Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland (SCOTS) has produced [practical guidance for local roads authorities](#) on the development of risk-based asset management, road asset safety inspection strategies and road inspections. The aim being to support the development of a consistent approach to road maintenance across the country.

Previous investigations into Scottish road maintenance issues

Audit Scotland has investigated both local and trunk road maintenance matters on several occasions, as briefly summarised below:

[Maintaining Scotland's Roads](#) (Audit Scotland 2004): The first investigation into the condition of Scotland's roads conducted by Audit Scotland. Key findings were that 13% of Scotland's roads should be considered for repair now and 31% require further investigation. There was a maintenance backlog worth £1.7bn on local roads and £232m on trunk roads

[Maintaining Scotland's Roads: A follow-up report](#) (Audit Scotland 2011): The condition of Scotland's roads continued to deteriorate following the first audit, with the percentage of all local roads in an acceptable condition falling from 70% in 2005 to 66% in 2010 and trunk roads in an acceptable condition falling from 84% to 78% over the same period. This obviously meant that the size of the maintenance backlog had increased

[Maintaining Scotland's Roads](#) (2013) A brief update report on the implementation of previous Audit Scotland recommendations and the National

Roads Maintenance review by local authorities. This found there had been a marginal improvement in the condition of local roads since 2010, despite falling investment. However, many of the recommended actions were yet to be implemented by some authorities.

[Maintaining Scotland's Roads: A follow-up report](#) (Audit Scotland 2016): This found that the condition of local roads had remained broadly stable since the last audit, with a slight fall in the proportion of trunk roads in an acceptable condition (90% to 87%) – all within the context of declining road maintenance budgets.

Scottish Government Action

In response to the findings of the 2011 Audit Scotland report, Transport Scotland, working with local authority partners, undertook a review of road maintenance in Scotland. The Scottish National Roads Maintenance Review (2012) ([Summary](#)) report set out 30 options for consideration and implementation by roads authorities, with a strong emphasis on the development of shared road maintenance functions amongst local authorities.

The office of the [Scottish Road Works Commissioner](#) was established through the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005, with the aim of improving the planning, co-ordination and quality of road works throughout Scotland. The powers of the Commissioner were extended by the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, to allow the Commissioner to carry out independent inspections to establish whether an offence or breach of road works related duties has been committed and to undertake limited enforcement action where such breaches are found.

Scottish Parliament Action

Road maintenance was the focus of the Session 5 Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee's [pre-budget scrutiny](#) in 2019. The Committee made several recommendations to the Scottish Government about the funding and delivery of local and trunk road maintenance.

Alan Rehfisch
Senior Researcher
31 May 2022

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP