

POLICY STATEMENT 6

Highway Maintenance

By the year 2020 IHIE wants to see an accountable, sustainable, safe and well maintained transportation network available to all.

To this end the Institute is publishing a series of policy position statements.

The Problems	The Targets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deteriorating road and surfaces • Edge deterioration • Old signalling equipment • Worn out skid-resistant surfaces • Poor footways • Obscured and dirty signs • Damaged signs • Poor road markings • Blocked and damaged drains • Low price bids favoured over quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40% reduction in road deaths and serious injuries. • Modal shift from the car • 8% "maintenance gain" (Highway Agency) • Wiping out the maintenance backlog on local roads • An integrated and sustainable transport system • Best Value • Congestion in 2010 down by 5% • New technology maximised • Reduced money lost through claims • Money raised from road charges to be kept for transport

Fundamental changes in travel behaviour are needed to ensure that the UK achieves a sustainable, integrated transport system for the future. Maintenance of the infrastructure is crucial if we are to get the modal shift to more sustainable travel that all seek. Poor roads and pavements discourage cycling and walking and put people at risk; indeed cyclists and pedestrians need smoother wearing surfaces than cars. Immediate action is required to encourage the efficient use of the existing infrastructure and to fund maintenance of the total network so that it provides fit and safe conditions for all road users. Investment in new initiatives is wasted if there is no financial commitment to maintain the existing network.

The Institute welcomes the Government's new prioritisation of maintenance and recognises that this gives the profession fresh opportunities and challenges.

Where we are now

The National Road Maintenance Condition Survey (NRMCS) has over many years shown a significant deterioration in the condition of all trunk and principal roads. It also records a significant fall in local authority highway maintenance expenditure from 1993 to 1999.

Taking as a starting point the 1994 survey, this showed that one third of the motorway network and one quarter of the trunk and principal road network (13,400 kilometres) needed major repair/reconstruction within the next four years.

The latest survey demonstrates that keeping maintenance expenditure at the levels of the last few years will not be sufficient to alleviate or to arrest the deterioration of the road network. The British Road Federation estimates a maintenance backlog of £5bn. In other words, little has changed since 1996 when IHIE, along with many other major institution and authorities, submitted evidence to the House of Commons' Transport Committee on the UK Road and Bridge Maintenance programme.

In the DETR's Transport Report 1997/98 to 1999/00 maintenance expenditure on national roads is shown as £439m in 1991 rising to a high of £555m in 1994 but then dramatically falling to £365m in 1997. Only in 1999 was it back to anywhere near the 1994 level at £535m, but this takes no account of inflation over the intervening six years.

Chapter 8 of the same report reveals a similar picture regarding DETR support for Local Authority spending on transport. From a high of £154m for bridge/carriageway maintenance in 1993, spending fell to a low of £81m in 1998. The allocation for 1999 climbed to £112m but this still represents a 27% reduction on the 1993 allocation.

Government does not see any crisis: "(it) accepts that local road maintenance has suffered in the past from underfunding, though it does not accept particular figures for the "backlog" of work needed on local roads which suggest that large parts of the local network require imminent heavy maintenance".

The latest annual local authority road maintenance (ALARM) survey showed Councils needing £1bn of extra spending on local roads just to clear the backlog in structural maintenance. Overstretched maintenance revenue budgets are strained further by the need to maintain new traffic management, cycling and walking infrastructure and the new landfill and aggregate taxes will put more pressure on budgets.

Because of underfunding, more than a third of authorities' spending is having to go on costly reactive maintenance instead of planned preventative work. Even worse, £50m was lost last year in payments to meet claims for accidents or vehicle - damage, half as much again as in the previous year. ICE's study, also published in April 2000, found that maintenance had sunk very low in local priorities. Non principal roads can suffer disproportionately. In one authority, the funding for

these roads is 40% below SSA in real terms, whereas social services is well above SSA because of local choices.

A better future?

The tide may be turning. Significant increases in maintenance funding for both national and local roads in 2000/01 are promised and the main barrier to maintaining the network to the standards expected to meet community and economic need, is lack of money. Only a small portion of motorist taxes from road fund licences, fuel tax, car sales and VAT is used on road construction and maintenance under central government's remit.

Funding for structural maintenance of principal roads is through Local Authorities' Local Transport Plans which bear fruit in autumn 2000. However, the money is not ring fenced and all general maintenance revenue funding is too often diverted by local social priorities. This could well worsen when the single capital pot is brought in. On the other hand, Best Value is the best opportunity the industry has had for some time. If engineers can prove the case for maintenance with consistent national performance indicators the public and members will have to listen. Enhanced political awareness is required of the profession to show how maintenance adds value to other local services, is sustainable and reduces social exclusion. Maintenance engineers will need to show in the next ten years how well they have used resources to improve the residual life of the network.

The Government's ten year national infrastructure plan carries firm expenditure commitments to maintenance. The spending commitment should be needs-based and not rely on hypothecation and congestion charging to fund basic maintenance.

Only firm budgets will enable the engineering industry, client, consultant and contractor alike, to in turn plan, recruit, train and employ staff to deliver **Best Value**. Stability coupled with partnering, will make a real difference to our roads. The Highways Agency policy "Paving the way" sets a new standard with seven year contracts, tendering on quality (80%) and openness in consulting the industry.

The profession has to be seen i to put customer convenience first e.g. (cone free roads, mobility friendly streetworks)i to innovate to improve services andi to be delivering environment -friendly maintenance. Engineers need to embrace the new procurement methods. What is to be done

- Embrace Best Value.
- Embrace partnering to deliver optimum solutions - Everyone wins.
- Develop explicit service-level agreements setting out performance indicators and resources.
- Engage the community in identifying transport and maintenance priorities. Define the road hierarchy more clearly by listening to the public and local industry and then invest in their priorities.
- Demonstrate that maintenance spending promotes social inclusion, can improve the environment and enables modal shifts. Tackle the political agenda.

- Put the customer first - minimise disruption; use the internet.
- Build a watertight case - use UKPMS etc to provide the technical and financial justification for planned maintenance.
- Embrace innovative solutions - "think outside the box."
- Shift the emphasis from inspection to end specification and audit.
- Recycle and re-use materials and tell the public.
- Make the political and economic case for maintenance in the new political climate.
- Use the internet - to expand public consultation - for car sharing schemes - to warn of existing and planned roadworks - to help with route planning - to allow the partners in maintenance to work better together.

IHIE will

- Continue to lobby and comment at the highest levels within the industry, to ensure that the maintenance debate remains high on the agenda and that actions happen.
- Provide training and up to date symposia for practitioners on the important initiatives.
- Promote new materials and methods jointly with IAT wherever possible.
- Help members to broaden their skills, to allow them to harness public opinion and increase public participation in deciding priorities and in the ownership of decisions.
- Urge local authority engineers to set targets comparable to the Highways Agency's 8% maintenance gain.
- Set new standards by assisting in developing NVQ/SVQ accredited highway inspectors to implement the LGA Code of Practice from 2001.