PRESS RELEASE

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Working for better roads: A call for the re-instatement of effective ring-fencing for local road maintenance

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Better Roads has issued a report calling for central government to re-instate effective ring-fencing and multi-year settlements for local road maintenance. The report draws on a review of the Pothole Action Fund (2015/16-2020/21) demonstrating that it was a successful policy which contributed to marked improvements in the overall structural conditions on the local road network – but since its replacement gains made have been lost.

The Pothole Action Fund formed part of a six -year commitment specifically allocated to English local authorities. Highway teams were able to use the secure funding for preventative maintenance and resurfacing works as well as pothole repairs. Analysis for the APPG for Better Roads indicates that this ring-fencing led to a marked improvement in the proportion of the local network classed as being in a 'good condition' with 12,377 miles, or 7% of the English local road network, moving into this category during the life of the Fund.

In contrast, since 2021 when the Pothole Action Fund was incorporated into councils' general block highway funding from the Department for Transport (DfT), the number of roads classed as 'good' has gone into reverse. The APPG report points to data that shows there are now 5% fewer – 8,811 miles of English local roads – in this category than 2020/21, the last year of the Fund (see chart below).

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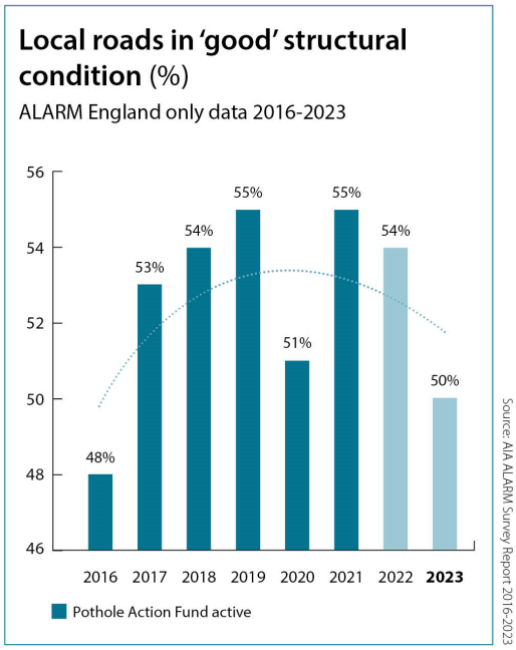

The APPG for Better Roads' report is informed by the Asphalt Industry Alliance's Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey reports. Reviewing ALARM data, the APPG report also highlights that shortfalls in local authority annual highways maintenance funding have been rising steeply – up 82% – since the Pothole Action Fund ceased to be ring-fenced.[1]

Sir Christopher Chope OBE MP, Chairman, APPG for Better Roads, said: "Both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have pledged to tackle the 'plague of potholes' on our local roads. But, as this report shows, funding for local road maintenance is falling and the Government's assumption that hard pressed local authorities will spend allocations on roads is not enough.

"The roll out of autonomous vehicles and decarbonising transport will place even greater funding pressure on our local road network in the years ahead. That's why we are calling for a Better Roads Fund to be created with longer term funding commitments, budget ring-fencing and full transparency on allocation.

"This Better Roads Fund would help deliver a sustained improvement in road conditions and enhanced network resilience. It would also save money over the long term and ensure our local roads are able to support the challenges ahead."

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[1] The shortfall in annual highway maintenance carriageway budgets is calculated as the difference between the amount local authorities received in any financial year and the amount they reported they needed to keep their networks in reasonable order and prevent any further deterioration in conditions.

The full report *'Working for better roads: A call for the re-instatement of effective ring-fencing for local road maintenance'* is available to download from the APPG for Better Roads website: www.appg-betterroads.org/

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Rick Green, Chair of the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA), said:

"It's not surprising that the APPG for Better Roads report highlights that targeted Government action delivers better local road conditions and that a longer-term approach to investment with budget ring-fencing is what's needed to make sure improvements are sustained. Local highway maintenance budget shortfalls only lead to declining road conditions and a rising bill to put it right. With the AIA's ALARM 2023 reporting that the backlog of repairs on English local roads is now more than £12 billion, a longer-term approach is needed. That's why we back this call for a ring-fenced Better Roads fund, which would help fix our roads and better support a lower carbon whole-life approach to road maintenance."

Steve Spender, Institute of Highway Engineers (IHE) Chief Executive, said:

"As can be clearly seen by the content of the APPG for Better Roads report, the previous ring-fencing of funds between 2015 – 2021 had a positive effect on the overall condition of the local road network and helped reduced the number of potholes repairs. Unfortunately, since the removal of ring-fencing we have experienced a notable decline in road condition with 8,800 fewer miles classified as good. The IHE supports the call for a ringfenced 'Better Roads fund' which would once again aid a longer-term approach local highway maintenance and improve the overall condition of the network."

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Notes to editors:

- APPGs are informal groups of Members of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, with a common interest in particular issues.
- The APPG for Better roads is supported by the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA) and Institute for Highway Engineers.
- The AIA is a partnership between the Mineral Products Association (MPA) and Eurobitume UK and was established in 2000 to increase awareness of the asphalt industry and its activities, and the uses and benefits of asphalt.
- The IHE provides professional leadership and support for highway engineers working to improve the transport environment. Its mission is to provide professional development opportunities, support and leadership for individuals to achieve and maintain professional recognition. The IHE is run by, and for, engineers, technicians and allied professionals in highways and transportation.

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