

Agenda Item	15
Report No	ECI/36/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Economy and Infrastructure

Date: 4 November 2020

Report Title: Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey Results 2019-20

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update to Members on the results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey for 2019.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are invited to:

- i. note the results of the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey for 2019 and that our relative ranking has fallen from 25 to 26 position amongst Scottish Councils; and
- ii. consider the report as a useful source of evidence for capital programming.

3 Implications

3.1 Resource – as detailed in this report.

3.2 Legal – under the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 the Council, as Roads Authority, has a duty of care to manage and maintain the adopted road network.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – there is a risk that, should road conditions continue to deteriorate, access to minor rural roads and residential streets may become more restrictive as precedence is given to maintaining the strategic road network.

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – maintaining the road network in a condition that permits smooth travel on even road surfaces free from defects contributes to the reduction of CO2 emissions from the road transport sector and will be of help in the fight against global climate change.

3.5 Risk – Where a Roads Authority is unable to demonstrate that it has made adequate provision for the upkeep and safety of its adopted road network, as can be

reasonably expected, it may lead to a greater risk of it being unable to defend claims made against it.

3.6 Gaelic – no known implications.

4 Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey

4.1 The Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey (SRMCS) is an annual survey which assesses the condition of the Scottish adopted road network. This includes both Council and Trunk Roads. It is used to calculate a Road Condition Indicator (RCI) that is used by Audit Scotland as a Statutory Performance Indicator (SPI) for reporting road condition.

4.2 The survey is undertaken by an independent contractor, accredited by the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL). This ensures an unbiased survey which allows a direct comparison across Council Road Networks.

4.3 Within Highland the total length of Council road network surveyed each year is approximately 2,970km (44% of the road network) and samples:

- 100% of 'A' class roads with the direction of travel changed on alternate years;
- 50% of 'B' and 'C' class roads with the remaining 50% surveyed the second year; and
- 10% of 'U' class roads (different sample each year).

With respect to the U class network the survey samples both Urban Streets and Rural Roads to give a fair representation across all parts of the road network.

4.4 To minimise the effect of differing sample sections on the results, the RCI is derived from the survey data collected over the previous two years for A, B and C class roads, and over 4 years for U class roads. This means that the overall survey result is based on a 100% sample of A, B and C class roads and a 40% sample of the U class road network.

4.5 The survey results are banded into 3 categories dependant on the severity of the defects present at the time of the survey. This is represented a by Red, Amber and Green convention as follows:

Red - The road has deteriorated to a point where repairs are very likely to be required to preserve serviceability and to prolong its future.

Amber - Further investigation is required as defects are likely to be in existence.

Green - Minor defects may be present, but the road is considered to be in an acceptable condition.

5 Statutory Performance Indicator

5.1 The Statutory Performance Indicator (SPI) for the condition of roads is defined as “the percentage of the road network which should be considered for maintenance treatment”.

5.2 The SPI is derived by adding the lengths of road categorised as 'Red' and 'Amber' together and expressed as a percentage of the overall network. The higher the SPI,

the worse the overall road condition. A year on year increase in the SPI would indicate deterioration, whilst a decrease would indicate an improvement.

6 SRMCS Results from 2019 survey

6.1 Overall Results

There is a wide variation in road condition across Scotland's Local Authorities:

- Orkney has the lowest (best) SPI at 21.2%;
- The average SPI for all Scottish Local Authorities was 35.8%;
- Highland Council's SPI was 37.8%; and
- Argyll & Bute has the highest SPI at 54.2%.

6.2 Highland Council Ranking

Our current ranking compared to other 'rural' authorities is shown in the table below:

Authority	SPI	National Ranking out of 32 Councils (best to worst)
Aberdeenshire	26.2%	3
Moray	30.6%	8
Angus	33.2%	13
<i>Scottish Average</i>	<i>35.8%</i>	-
Perth & Kinross	37.0%	22
Highland	37.8%	26
Borders	45.2%	30
Dumfries & Galloway	47.9%	31
Argyll & Bute	54.2%	32

6.3 Rural and Urban Comparison – SPI

6.3.1 The table below shows the SPI relating to our Urban and Rural networks.

	Red	Amber	SPI	Equivalent Road Length(km)
Urban	4.06%	25.21%	29.27%	325
Rural	9.11%	30.39%	39.50%	2,227

6.3.2 Although the results show the rural network as being in greater distress it must be recognised that treatment costs are higher in an Urban environment than those in a rural one.

6.3.3 Resurfacing in an urban environment usually requires removal of part of the old surface to ensure the upstand provided by the kerbs is maintained. Additionally, there will be works required to level ironwork (manhole covers) and gullies along with, on the busier roads, significant traffic management.

6.4 Long Term Trend

The SPI in Highland has remained largely static over the last 4 years. There has been a slight improvement in the overall road condition between 2018 and 2019.

6.5 Highland Council SPI

6.5.1

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019
SPI	38.7%	38.8%	38.7%	37.8%

6.5.2 Whereas the survey results indicate a stabilisation in the deterioration of our road network this must be considered alongside the following facts:-

- Our ranking overall has dropped from 25th place in 2018 to 26th in 2019 (out of 32 Scottish councils);
- Our ranking has dropped from 22nd in 2016 to 26th in 2019;
- The overall (average) SPI for Scotland improved from 36.3% to 35.8%;
- We have been fortunate to have experience 3 relatively mild winters which has undoubtedly reduced the deterioration of the network; and
- Whereas Highland's SPI has remained relatively stable other Councils have shown a slight improvement, hence the reason our ranking has dropped.

7 Road Maintenance Funding

7.1

For 2020/21 the Council has agreed a further increase in the revenue budget by £1.0 million per annum to £14.328 million. The revenue budget provides for the winter service, cyclic maintenance and statutory functions such bridge and road safety inspections. The cyclic maintenance function includes for activities such as gully emptying, grass cutting (verges), drainage, pothole repairs and minor patching works. All these repairs are important to our communities and the additional funding supports the road maintenance programme. These works focus on maintaining roads and not improving them.

7.2

The 5-year capital programme agreed in March 2018 was: £8.2m (18/19); £6.2m (19/20); £7.2m (20/21); £7.2m (21/22); £7.2m (22/23). A very welcome, and without doubt essential, additional £20m capital allocation was awarded for road maintenance early 2020 with the requirement that it be spent over two years.

7.3

Initial budget planning had allocated £5m out of the £20m to the 2020/21 budget with the remaining £15m added to the 2021/22 budget. This would have resulted a total of £12.5m being available for road maintenance in 2020/21 and £22.2m in 2021/22.

7.4

Due to current circumstances (Covid-19), social distancing measures meant that certain site works were restricted during the early phases of lockdown. This impacted on seasonal surface treatments, such as Surface Dressing, which would have been undertaken over the summer months. This may influence the condition of the road network in future years.

7.5

At a special meeting on 1 October the Council reinstated the capital budget for road maintenance. In view of the timing of this decision and the difficulty of carrying out certain seasonal works this late in the year the ability to spend the remaining capital allocation for 2020/21 will be very challenging. Realistically, given the uncertainty of Covid-19 both presently and next year, it is inevitable that some adjustment to the spend profile for years 2021/22 and 2022/23 will be required. Members will be advised of changes to programmes through their Area committees in due course. On a positive note, with this level of investment confirmed over the next 2 years, a commitment to some sizeable maintenance schemes can be given which in turn will lead to a betterment of the Council's SPI over the next 3 years.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 7 October 2020

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