Agenda Item	19
Report No	ECI/54/2021

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: **Economy and Infrastructure**

Date: **2 December 2021**

Report Title: **Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey Results 2020-21**

Report By: **Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy**

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update to Members on the results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey for 2020-21.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are invited to: -

- note the results of the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey for 2020-21 and that our relative ranking is 26th position amongst Scottish Local Authorities with a road condition index of 39.1, representing the percentage of the road network is considered in need of maintenance treatment; and

- note that without further and sustained funding the condition of the road network will continue to deteriorate and as such our ranking amongst the other Scottish Local Authorities may drop further.

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, minor rural roads and residential streets may become subject to increased amounts of defects as precedence is given to maintaining the strategic road network.

3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** – maintaining the road network in a reasonable condition will contribute to the reduction of CO2 emissions from vehicles, noting that all such maintenance works have a carbon load.

3.5 **Risk** – The Council may be at a greater risk from claims if the road network is not kept in a reasonable condition.

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) which 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 provides 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. Although it should also be noted that cul-de-sacs less than 150m long in urban areas and cul-de-sacs in rural areas less than 500m long are not surveyed.

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 & 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 & 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 by a 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 2020-21 survey

6.1 The overall results show that there is a wide variation in road condition across Scotland's Local Authorities:-

- The best Local Authority SPI in this survey period is 23.7%.
- The average SPI for all Scottish Local Authorities was 35.5%.
- Highland Council's SPI was 39.1%.
- The highest local authority SPI is 54.2%.

6.2 Highland Council Ranking:-

Our current ranking compared to other named Authorities has yet to be announced so direct comparison with our neighbours and family group is not possible yet, but the following has been provided.

Authority	2020/21 SPI	National Ranking out of 32 Councils (best to worst)
Scottish Average	*35.5%*	-
Highland	**39.1%**	**26**

6.3 Rural and Urban Comparison – SPI

The table below shows the SPI relating to our urban and rural networks.

	Red	**Amber**	**SPI**	**Equivalent Road Length(km)**
Urban	3.80%	24.36	29.27%	326.48
Rural	9.80%	31.51%	41.31%	2329.43

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.

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

Highland Council's SPI has dropped significantly; in 2011/12 it sat at 29.3%, with the 2020/21 figure of 39.1% being in stark contrast. Nationally, out of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities, this increase in deterioration has resulted in Highland Council being subject to a significant fall in standing from 11th in 2011/12 to a current position of 26th in 2020/21.

6.5 The following facts must also be taken into consideration when reviewing our position:-

- The overall (average) SPI for Scotland has improved from 35.8% to 35.5%; and
- We have been fortunate to have experience 4 relatively mild winters which has undoubtedly prevented an accelerated deterioration of the network.

7 Road Maintenance Funding

7.1 For 2021/22 the Roads revenue budget at £14.3m, of which some £5m is allocated to providing the winter service, with cyclic maintenance at c£9.3m

7.2 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. The revenue budget is used to undertake maintenance on all roads assets including the carriageway, footway, structures (bridges, walls, culverts, cattle grids), vehicle restraint systems (safety fences), signs, drainage, street furniture, watercourse maintenance, etc. These works focus on maintaining roads and not improving them.

7.3 The Highland Council provides set format data to the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) such that direct comparisons can be made with each authority in Scotland. APSE identify £2,244 spent per kilometre of our revenue road maintenance. In comparison the Scottish average as provided by APSE is £6,953 per kilometre (Highland Councils spend in comparison is 32% of this figure). Another comparison can be drawn against the local authorities identified in our family group (i.e., similar); the average revenue spend per road kilometre of this group is £3,783 per kilometre (Highland Councils spend in comparison is 60% of this figure).

7.4 To maintain our roads in a steady state (with no overall improvement in our SPI) it is estimated that we would require capital funding of £26m per year. The estimated figure to bring our whole road network up to an acceptable standard is £195m. These figures are estimates at this moment in time and will no doubt increase as the various costs associated with road maintenance continue to increase.

7.4 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). An additional £20m capital allocation was awarded for road maintenance early 2020 with the requirement that it be spent over two years. Due to the Covid crisis this additional capital spending has been spread over the 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years and projects funded from this budget are ongoing with some works having been completed already. However, this funding, although very welcome, still falls short of the estimated figure of £26m to maintain a steady state of road condition.

7.5 Additional capital is very welcome and improvements across Highland have been evident from the additional capital invested. Many aspects of the road condition however are related to cyclical revenue functions, and existing revenue budgets make both programmed and reactionary work difficult to address.

7.6 As Members will recall capital investment in specialist plant has allowed the purchase of 5 Pothole Pro machines. Three of these machines have been delivered with two awaited. As these are specialist machines, operatives will require extensive training supplied by JCB, to ensure both competence and efficiencies – it is hoped that these machines will become operational in December – and priority will be given to ensure both use and effective productivity of these machines – noting we are entering the very busy winter service provision, with the inevitable strain on resources – such works are also weather dependent. Each Roads Operational Manager shall be provided with a machine.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

Date: 25 October 2021

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