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Press release

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Councils need to tackle road maintenance backlog

A backlog of road maintenance has been building up in Scotland for around ten years with the result that about 13% of the network (7,000 km) is now in need of repair. Councils and the Scottish Executive estimate that over £1.7 billion needs to be spent to bring our roads up to standard. An Audit Scotland report published today looks at the management of Scotland's 55,000 kilometres of public roads and concludes that greater priority needs to be given to tackling the backlog.

Some classes of road are in a better condition than others. Almost 90% of motorways and dual carriageway trunk roads are in an acceptable condition compared to two-thirds of A roads, 55% of B roads, 63% of C roads and only 49% of unclassified roads.

The report also shows that some council's roads were in better condition than others, in four councils, East Renfrewshire, the City of Edinburgh, Inverclyde and Stirling, more than 20% of roads have deteriorated to a point where repairs are needed to prolong their life.

Councils and the Scottish Executive estimate that the cost of bringing roads up to an acceptable standard is £1.5 billion for council maintained roads and £232 million for motorways and trunk roads which are maintained by BEAR and Amey on behalf of the Scottish Executive.

Scottish Executive spending on trunk roads has increased in line with traffic growth but council spend on maintaining local roads has not. Over the last ten years there has been an 18% increase in the volume of traffic and 27% increase in the number of cars on the road. Despite this, councils currently spend less on maintenance than they did ten years ago and this has resulted in a reduction in structural maintenance and a maintenance backlog. The report says that the process of selecting roads for repair is usually based on those in worst condition being repaired first. There was little evidence of option appraisal or asset management systems being used to prioritise repairs and minimise the cost of structural repairs in the long term.

Accounts Commission Chairman Alastair MacNish says:

"When councils make decisions about road maintenance they have to balance a range of statutory duties and public expectations. Because of a reduction in the amount spent over the last decade councils have focussed on winter maintenance and routine repairs such as fixing potholes and have not spent enough on structural repairs which are needed to extend the life of roads. As a result, there is now a substantial backlog of structural maintenance.

"Councils need to take action to bring their roads up to standard but there are no quick fixes to this problem. They need to develop long term solutions to clear the backlog and continue to invest in structural repairs. This will prevent roads from deteriorating to the point where they are unsafe or need expensive reconstruction and will save money in the long run."

The Commission says that in order for councils to manage their roads properly they need better IT systems and better information on the condition of the assets they are managing, not just the roads but footways, bridges, lighting, safety barriers, drainage and all the other assets associated with the road network.

The report goes on to say that many councils road maintenance operators could improve value for money by working together to make better use of specialist staff and equipment. It recommends that councils consider entering into partnerships, such as Tayside Contracts, to achieve economies of scale. Alastair MacNish says:

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“Greater collaboration is needed between councils to achieve economies of scale and provide better value for money.”

The Scottish Executive is introducing an asset management system for motorways and trunk roads and much of the information required is being collected by the operating companies. Commenting on their performance, Auditor General, Robert Black says:

“Trunk roads and motorways are generally in a reasonable condition and the operating companies have broadly delivered their contractual obligations.”

A recent report by the Performance Audit Group, which monitors the performance of the operating companies Amey Highways Ltd and BEAR Scotland Ltd, noted the good performance of the operating companies while also drawing attention to concerns about the application of some of their management systems.

Key recommendations in the report are:

1. Councils and the Scottish Executive should publicly report the condition of their road network and maintenance backlog on an annual basis.
2. Councils need to develop a long term strategy for maintaining their roads and decide where the money will come from.
3. Councils need better information and better IT systems and should consider working together to achieve economies of scale.
4. Councils should meet the recommendations set out in *Delivering Best Value in Highway Maintenance – A Code of Practice for Maintenance Management*

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Notes to editors

1. The report includes information on the condition of motorways and trunk roads which are the responsibility of the Scottish Executive and other public road which are maintained by councils. Overall, councils and the Executive spent £404 million of revenue on maintenance and additionally councils spend £44 million of capital on structural maintenance in 2002/03.
2. Information on the performance of the trunk road Operating Companies was derived from *the Public Report on the third year of the operating companies*, produced by the Performance Audit Group.
3. Routine maintenance is usually carried out on a cyclical basis and includes pothole repairs, grass cutting to maintain sight lines and maintaining drains to prevent flooding. Structural maintenance is about preventing the need for expensive reconstruction and includes resurfacing and surface dressing.
4. **The Auditor General for Scotland** is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Executive and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Executive or the Scottish Parliament.
5. **The Accounts Commission** is responsible for securing the audit of 32 Scottish councils and 34 joint boards, including police and fire services. The Commission investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Accounts Commission is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Executive or the Scottish Parliament.
6. **Audit Scotland** is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. It provides services to the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland.

7. (Data taken from Exhibit 3.) Road condition in each council in 2003/04

Road class	% Red (repairs should be considered)	% Amber (requiring further investigation)	% Green (road in acceptable condition)
Aberdeen City	13.4%	32.6%	54.0%
Aberdeenshire	6.4%	27.4%	66.2%
Angus	7.5%	27.0%	65.5%
Argyll & Bute	16.1%	33.2%	50.7%
Clackmannanshire	13.1%	45.4%	41.4%
Dumfries & Galloway	15.9%	29.0%	55.1%
Dundee City	16.5%	30.4%	53.0%
East Ayrshire	15.2%	38.6%	46.2%
East Dunbartonshire	17.7%	29.5%	52.8%
East Lothian	12.8%	29.6%	57.6%
East Renfrewshire	20.5%	34.9%	44.6%
Edinburgh, City of	25.8%	36.5%	37.7%
Eilean Siar	6.8%	29.2%	63.9%
Falkirk	11.5%	33.0%	55.5%
Fife	11.1%	34.9%	54.0%
Glasgow City	13.9%	42.8%	43.2%
Highland	13.0%	25.9%	61.1%
Inverclyde	21.3%	34.3%	44.4%
Midlothian	13.3%	25.9%	60.8%
Moray	8.8%	36.6%	54.6%
North Ayrshire	17.1%	33.1%	49.9%
North Lanarkshire	15.3%	37.6%	47.1%
Orkney Islands	7.0%	25.1%	68.0%
Perth & Kinross	9.5%	35.3%	55.3%
Renfrewshire	17.8%	36.2%	45.9%
Scottish Borders	11.6%	36.4%	52.0%
Shetland Islands	12.2%	28.6%	59.3%
South Ayrshire	17.5%	37.9%	44.6%
South Lanarkshire	15.6%	37.9%	46.5%
Stirling	28.2%	31.0%	40.9%
West Dunbartonshire	14.2%	33.0%	52.8%
West Lothian	6.0%	17.0%	77.0%
ALL SCOTLAND	13.0%	31.8%	55.2%

8. (Data from exhibit 2.) The condition of Scotland's roads by road classification in 2003/04

Road class	% Red (repairs should be considered)	% Amber (requiring further investigation)	% Green (road in acceptable condition)
Motorways	1.7%	9.2%	89.1%
Dual Carriageway trunk roads	3.4%	7.0%	89.7%
Single carriageway trunk roads	13.6%	20.3%	66.1%
Local authority A roads	6.7%	26.5%	66.8%
B class roads	11.6%	33.8%	54.6%
C class roads	8.2%	28.4%	63.4%
Unclassified roads	17.2%	34.1%	48.7%
All	12.8%	30.6%	56.7%