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Now in its 25th year, the Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey provides detailed insight into the funding and conditions of our vital local road network and its findings are used by stakeholders across the sector for benchmarking and planning purposes.

This year's ALARM survey is being launched at a time of unprecedented challenges due to the spread of COVID-19, and understandably, the country's resources will need to be prioritised accordingly. Looking ahead, ALARM 2020's findings support the view that a sustainably-funded, well-maintained local road network will need to be part of securing recovery and regrowth.

25 years of ALARM and still no silver lining

The findings of this year's Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey indicate that, while a step in the right direction, the Chancellor's additional £2.5 billion pothole pledge is not enough to plug the gap in local road maintenance budgets, let alone the rising backlog of repairs.

Now in its 25th year, the ALARM survey, published today (March 24, 2020) by the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA), shows that the green shoots of improving conditions reported in 2019 have not been sustained, with local authorities having to cope with an average drop in overall highway maintenance budgets of 16%.

And, with overall local authority spending down, highway teams have been allocated a smaller slice of a smaller cake to maintain the road surface and structure, which has led to a widening funding gap in the amount needed to maintain the carriageway to target conditions.

ALARM 2020 reports that this shortfall is now an average of £4.9 million (£5.4m in England) for local authorities across England, London and Wales, up from £3.9 million last year.

Less funding for the carriageway inevitably means less maintenance, and this is borne out by ALARM 2020's reported reduction in pothole repairs, downward target adjustments and declining structural road conditions.

This year there are 7,240 **fewer** miles of roads reported to be in GOOD structural condition, with 15 years or more of life remaining, and 1,100 **more** miles of roads classed as POOR, with less than 5 years' life remaining, bringing the total in this category to 42,675 miles. And, in the middle, there is a continued increase in the number classed as ADEQUATE, with between 5-15 years' life remaining, suggesting an ongoing slide towards mediocrity.

Rick Green, Chair of the AIA, said: "Highway maintenance budgets have dropped back to where they were two years ago. Over the past 25 years we have repeatedly seen this pattern of short-term cash injections to stem accelerating decline, only to be followed by further years of underfunding. This stop-start approach has been wasteful and does nothing to improve the condition of local road network on which we all rely. In fact, it has just contributed to a rising bill to put things right.

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"The £2.5 billion extra funding over the next five years announced in the Budget will certainly be welcomed by hard-pressed local authority highway teams dealing with increasing demands on smaller budgets, as well as the effects of extreme weather events, such as the recent storms, on an ageing network.

"However, £500 million extra a year divided across English local authorities is a long way off the one-time catch-up cost of £11.14 billion that ALARM 2020 indicates is needed to bring our local roads across England, London and Wales up to a level from which they can be maintained cost effectively going forward.

"What's needed is additional and sustained investment to help underpin the Government's levelling-up strategy and social cohesion goals, as well as complement its ambitions for more sustainable modes of transport.

"Twenty-five years on and we are dealing with new and unprecedented challenges and understandably resources will need to be prioritised accordingly in the short-term. Looking ahead, however, a sustainably-funded, well-maintained local road network will be key to supporting recovery and regrowth."

The full ALARM survey will be available to download from 00.01 hours on **Tuesday 24th March** by visiting **www.asphaltuk.org**

Ends

KEY FACTS:

- Average highway maintenance budgets down **16%** – to £20.7 million per authority (2018/19: £24.5 million).
- Local authorities reported that, on average, **50%** of the annual highway maintenance budget is spent on the carriageway (55% in 2019).
- **Disparity of funding** – ranging from less than £1,300 per mile of local authority road network to more than £51,000 per mile.
- **£826.6 million** – annual carriageway maintenance budget shortfall (£5.4 million per authority in England; £3.6 million in London and £4.2 million in Wales).
- **£11.14 billion** – estimated one-time catch-up cost to get roads back into a reasonable, steady state, up from £9.79 billion reported in 2019 (£85.4 million per authority in England; £24.3 million in London and £32.8 million in Wales).
- **11 years** – estimated time it would take to clear the maintenance backlog if local authorities had the funding and resources available to do the work.
- **66 years** – average time before a road is resurfaced (76 years in England; 36 years in London and 58 years in Wales).
- A pothole is filled every **21 seconds** in England and Wales.
- **£22.8 million** – total cost of dealing with compensation claims, including £8.1 million paid out in compensation.

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Comments on findings from the Asphalt Industry Alliance's Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey 2020

Keir Gallagher, Cycling UK's campaigns manager and head of pothole reporting tool Fill That Hole, said:
"Each successive government the UK has had over the last 12 years has played pass the parcel with Britain's pothole problem and done nothing. This Government talks about levelling up by spending £27bn on new roads, when investing just a third of that could fix the local roads we all use every day."

Nicholas Lyes, Head of Roads Policy, RAC, said:
"The AIA's report yet again highlights how fragile our local roads are. It should be hugely concerning to the Government that, since last year, there are an additional 1,100 miles of local road network with just five years' life remaining. It is also concerning that the one-off cost to fix Britain's local roads has increased again – highlighting the strain many local authorities are under to repair what is a strategic asset. While the Chancellor's recent announcement of £2.5bn over the next five years is welcome, the report suggests this is a drop in the ocean compared to what is needed to bring our roads up to an adequate level."

Cllr David Renard, The Local Government Association's transport spokesman, said:
"Councils share the frustration of motorists about the state of our local roads and, as this survey shows, fixing our roads is a priority for them. Despite the financial pressures councils face, they continue to fix a pothole every 21 seconds.

"Yet despite these efforts, it is clear that our roads are deteriorating at a faster rate than can be repaired by councils, with the cost of clearing our national roads backlog on the rise and now over £10 billion.

"Additional funding announced in the Budget will help councils to do more to maintain our roads this year and tackle our local road repairs backlog, and we look forward to seeing the details of how this money will be allocated between councils.

"To help councils go further to maintain our roads, they need devolved infrastructure and public transport budgets – ensuring a funding allocation in advance for five years, which would enable them to deliver infrastructure improvements that allow people to move around in less carbon intensive and more sustainable ways."

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Edmund King OBE, AA president, said:
"The state of Britain's roads continues to be a talking point for drivers, cyclists and motorcyclists alike as they continue to crumble and break. Local roads need levelling out, not just levelling up!

"In particular, official road maintenance expenditure figures show a very uneven use of emergency pothole funds where main roads received extra spending for two years but residential streets and minor roads received less. Even with boosted maintenance expenditure for these minor roads in 2018-2019, the amount spent annually remained lower than the decade before.

"This has manifested itself in FOI evidence showing fewer claims but sustained levels of compensation, particularly for cyclists.

"Councils across England and Wales are trying their best to fill the holes, but the reality is the £2.5 billion pothole fund allocated in the recent Budget won't do the job. With roads being resurfaced on average once every 76 years, we'd recommend lucky residents celebrate the moment as it truly is a once in a lifetime achievement."

Nick Chamberlin, Policy Manager British Cycling, said:
"We know that potholes and poor road surfaces pose a serious hazard to people riding bikes. For the health of the nation we need to enable more people to choose cycling, not less. A once in a generation investment in our local road network is good for everyone and good for the country. We hope that the Minister pays close attention to the findings of the ALARM survey."

Steve Spender, Chief Executive, Institute of Highway Engineers, said:
"The IHE continues to support the AIA, who through the publication of the ALARM survey over the last 25 years has provided a good annual barometer of the true condition of our local highway networks. Once again, this year's report provides a clear indication that there is a need for an increase in real terms of the funding necessary to bring the network back to a suitable standard.

"With average highway maintenance budgets down by approximately 16%, and the estimated cost for getting our roads back to reasonable state of over £11bn, this can only create a situation where reactive repairs are the chosen option rather than the necessary proactive planned approach. Whist welcoming the recent budget announcement of an additional £2.5bn over the next 5 years this only equates to £500m across the English authorities which falls well short of what in real terms is required to protect our networks for the future. The financial pressure on local authorities continues to be a challenge particularly following the effects of the recent severe weather and damage caused by the extensive flooding which will result in an inevitable increase in the pressure on already stretched highway budgets."

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For more information, or to arrange an interview with an AIA spokesperson, please contact:

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Notes to editors

The Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey is produced by the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA). Now in its 25th year, the report is widely respected throughout industry and local and national government as the most authoritative and comprehensive study into local road maintenance funding and condition.

1. The ALARM survey 2020 was completed by 67% of authorities responsible for roads in England, London and Wales and was carried out between December 2019 and February 2020.

2. The 2020 ALARM survey's findings relate to roads maintained by local authorities only and therefore excludes those forming the Strategic Road Network (SRN), which is managed by Highways England.

3. The ALARM survey is commissioned by the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA), which represents the companies producing the raw materials used in asphalt for roads construction and repair.

4. The survey includes the findings of both quantitative and qualitative research and the results have been collated, analysed and verified by an independent researcher.

5. ALARM survey reports from previous years can be accessed via www.asphaltuk.org and a broad range of road-related statistics are collated on www.roadusers.org.uk

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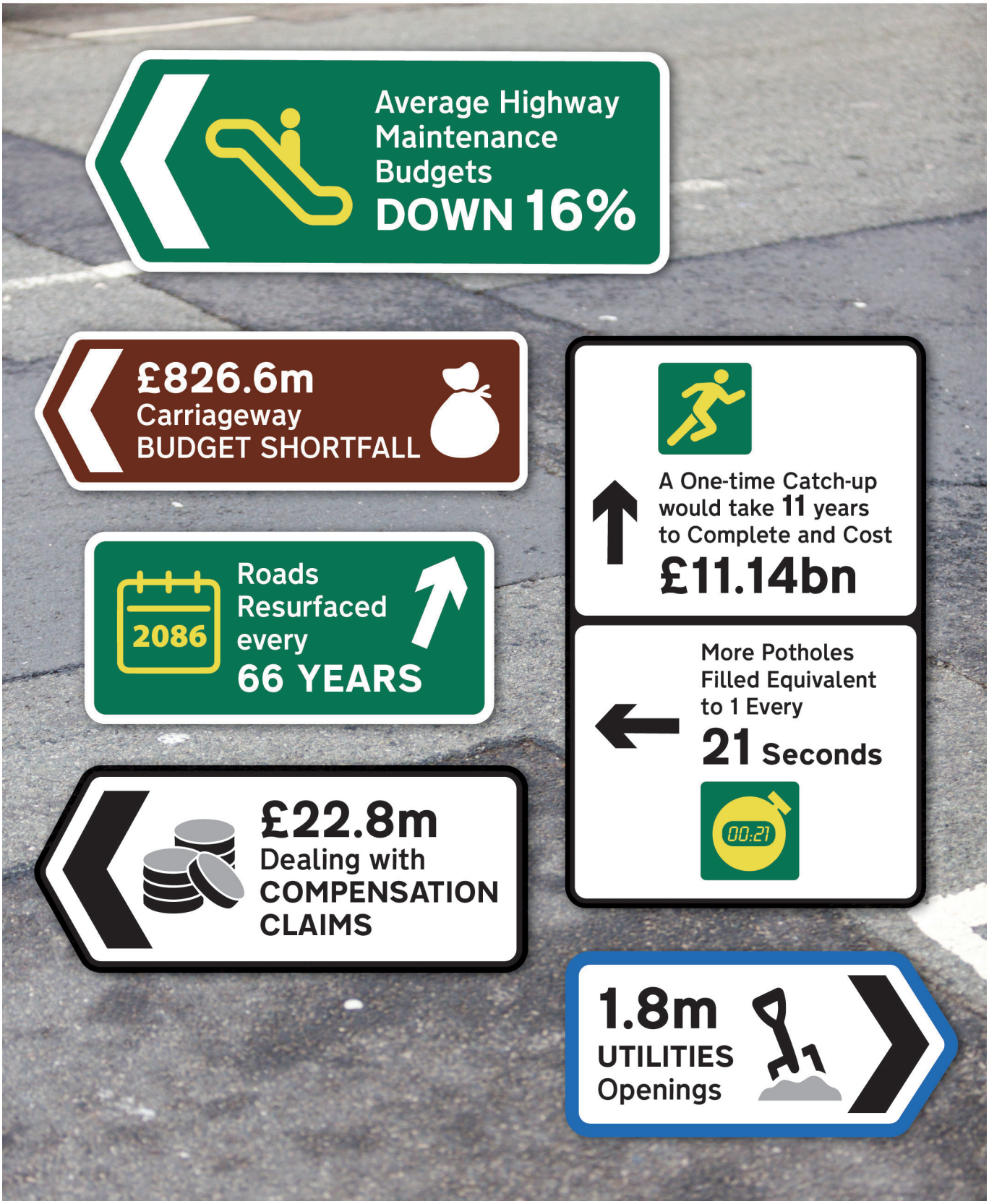
Key facts 2019/20



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ASPHALT INDUSTRY ALLIANCE

Key findings

	TOTAL*	England**	London	Wales
Percentage of authorities responding	↑ **67%**	↑ 78%	↑ 53%	↓ 32%
Highway maintenance budgets				
Average highway maintenance budget per authority	↓ **£20.7m**	↓ £26.8m	↓ £8.4m	↓ £7.7m
Percentage of highway maintenance budget spent on carriageway	↓ **50%**	↓ 52%	↓ 47%	↓ 42%
Average carriageway maintenance budget per authority	↓ **£10.4m**	↓ £13.9m	↓ £4.0m	↓ £3.2m
Shortfall				
Shortfall in annual carriageway maintenance budget	↑ **£826.6m**	↑ £616.0m	↓ £117.0m	↑ £93.6m
Average annual carriageway maintenance budget shortfall per authority	↑ **£4.9m**	↑ £5.4m	↓ £3.6m	↑ £4.2m
Estimated time to clear carriageway maintenance backlog	↑ **11 yrs**	↑ 12 yrs	↓ 8 yrs	↑ 10 yrs
Estimated one-time catch-up cost	↑ **£11.14bn**	↑ £9.64bn	↓ £777.0m	↓ £722.0m
Estimated one-time catch-up cost per authority	↑ **£66.8m**	↑ £85.4m	↓ £24.3m	↓ £32.8m
Road condition				
Frequency of road surfacing (all road classes)	↓ **66 yrs**	↓ 76 yrs	↑ 36 yrs	↓ 58 yrs
Number of potholes filled over past year	↓ **1,481,746**	↓ 1,340,632	↓ 85,696	↓ 55,418
Average number of potholes filled per authority over past year	↓ **8,863**	↓ 11,864	↓ 2,678	↓ 2,519
Average cost to fill one pothole – planned	↑ **£43.10**	↑ £44.00	↑ £47.33	↑ £32.35
Average cost to fill one pothole – reactive	↑ **£70.91**	↑ £73.76	↑ £64.34	↓ £65.83
Total spent filling potholes in past year	↓ **£86.4m**	↓ £78.9m	↑ £4.8m	– £2.7m
Compensation claims				
Amount paid in road user compensation claims	↑ **£8.1m**	↑ £6.6m	↑ £1.2m	↑ £330k
Staff costs spent on claims (per year)	↓ **£14.7m**	↓ £12.7m	↓ £1.5m	↑ £488k

* England, London and Wales

** excludes London

↑ Up from ALARM survey 2019
↓ Down from ALARM survey 2019
– Same as ALARM survey 2019