

CABINET – 16 SEPTEMBER 2014

Highway Asset Management Plan

Report by Director for Environment and Economy

Introduction

1. In order to clearly demonstrate the County Councils approach to highway maintenance, officers, in liaison with a Transport Advisory Panel working group, have produced an updated Highway Asset Management Plan.
2. The Council is currently managing a highway asset that is in a state of decline. Good practice suggests that carriageways are resurfaced or reconstructed every 30 years. Budgets over the last twenty years have been such that the rate of resurfacing that the service is actually able to undertake across the whole network would be every 255 years.

Background

3. The recent Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey shows that most highway authorities in the country are managing a highway network in decline with 18% of the national road network managed by Local Authorities considered to be in poor condition. A copy of the ALARM survey can be found on the web site as a background document.
4. Authorities are reporting an average of £5 million annual under investment in maintenance to enable them to maintain current condition levels and as such carriageways are deteriorating at a faster rate than can be maintained.
5. This national problem has recently prompted the Government to make an additional £168m available to authorities through a Pot Hole Fund to address this problem. It is however estimated that an average of £90m per authority would be required in a one off investment to bring the pot hole problem under control and as such this additional investment alone will not resolve the problem.
6. Oxfordshire aligns with the national picture with the highway network deteriorating at a faster rate than it is able to maintain. The condition of our network is considerably better than the national average however with only 11% of our network considered to be in poor condition despite a significantly longer length of road in the County than the national average.
7. Public satisfaction with the condition of the highway in Oxfordshire however is below average when compared with similar authorities and the County is placed 14th out of 21 of such authorities. Generally though, there would seem to be recognition that highway condition is a broader issue than just

Oxfordshire as satisfaction with the way the Council undertakes highway maintenance is above average and the Council is placed 9th out of 21 similar authorities [*source. Annex 3 - National Highway & Transport Public Satisfaction Survey 2013*]

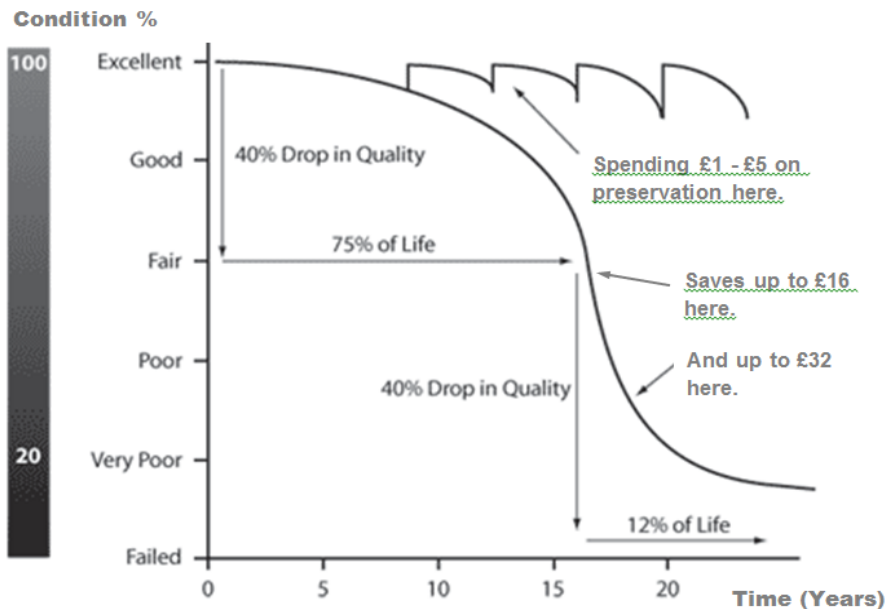
8. Recent severe weather events have exacerbated the local situation and whilst the County have bucked the national trend and maintained, and indeed slightly increased, its budgets for highway maintenance, as a result of increasing materials and disposals costs the length of network able to be maintained each year for those budgets has decreased.
9. It is becoming apparent that future government funding for highway maintenance will be linked to an authorities ability to demonstrate that it is able to make the best use of the budgets that it has available. It is felt that the proposed document will assist the Council in successfully bidding for future monies as is evidenced by the relatively high allocation that the County Council received from the recent DfT Pot Hole Fund based on this proposed approach.
10. Following the implementation of the County's first Highway Asset Management Plan in 2008, Oxfordshire was seen as one of the leaders in good practice and indeed the approach to maintenance it took aligns with good practice currently being promoted by the Department for Transport and the Local Government Association.
11. Notwithstanding this, the document itself is a technical document, some 154 pages long, and whilst available on the public website is primarily written to support officers. It has therefore been difficult at times to clearly communicate to members, the public and the Government the strategy that the service is seeking to implement.
12. As part of the Councils engagement with the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme, a sector-led transformation programme designed to maximise returns from highways investment and deliver efficient and effective services sponsored by the Department for Transport, officers have had the opportunity to identify current good examples of more recently published plans.
13. The Transport Advisory Panel, which was set up by the Cabinet Member for the Environment, formed a cross party Highway Asset Management Plan (HAMP) Working Group to work with officers in the development of new documentation. The role of the Group was to support and critique the work of the officers in the development of the draft Highways Asset Management Plan.

Proposed Approach

14. Highway infrastructure comprises many different types of components which are categorised in over a dozen main asset groups the largest of which are

carriageways, footways, bridges, drainage and street lighting which attract the largest works budgets. The previous Asset Management Plan considered only carriageways and footways.

15. Prior to 2008 the approach to repair and maintenance of the highway infrastructure, and currently with other highway assets, had been to address those assets in the worst condition first and thereby allowing other parts of the highway to deteriorate.
16. A shift to a proactive maintenance approach for carriageways was advocated in the previous Asset Management Plan which promoted a significant proportion of the maintenance budget to be targeted at maintaining roads before they showed signs of deterioration and therefore significantly extending the life of the road at a relatively cheap investment. Works undertaken at this stage often cost in the region of five to thirty five times less than works required once a roads condition has passed this intervention point.



Based on typical treatment costs

Proactive treatments to seal the surface and repair the surface of the road

- Surface Dressing - £25k/ km
- Patching/ overlay - £125k/ km

Reactive treatments to replace the structural layers of the road

- Resurfacing - £425k/ km
- Reconstruction - £875k/ km

17. In practice however there has been an overwhelming public and member pressure to address roads in the poorest condition and as such the authority

has often taken a diluted approach to the strategy. Initially the service was able to undertake this approach and maintain the network condition at a steady state however, the impact of the severe winters in the last few years has resulted in a rapid deterioration of the network and means that this approach will no longer enable the authority to maintain the road even at its current state with the budgets available.

18. The proposed document therefore continues to promote a proactive approach although recognises that it is essential that strategic routes (i.e. bus and cycle routes) which are currently in a poor condition still need to be brought back to a high standard of repair. A scoring system has therefore been developed with the working group to ensure that schemes are prioritised to reflect the value derived from investment and the strategic significance of the route to ensure an effective balance between proactive and reactive schemes is maintained.
19. Notwithstanding this, the approach would still enable members to influence the selection of schemes of similar scoring within their locality to reflect the priorities of the community.
20. The draft document proposes a similar approach to be undertaken with the other highway asset groups (i.e. bridges, drainage, street lighting etc) to enable decisions in those areas to be more objective. Many of the asset groups have a direct impact on other assets and therefore to allow any one group to deteriorate can have a direct impact on other assets.
21. Surveys and works to gather the improved inventory and condition information for these other assets, required for this approach, are on-going and therefore the benefits of this approach are unlikely to be begin to be realised in the next two annual programme cycles.
22. To better explain this approach the working group has developed the new highways asset management plan to be far more accessible to members and the public and the revised document is now formed in three parts namely:
 - i. Highways Asset Management Plan Policy Statement (attached as Annex 1)
 - ii. Highways Asset Management Plan Strategic document (attached as Annex 2)
 - iii. Highways Asset Management Plan technical Annexes (technical documents not included).

The first two of these documents are intended to be public facing and the third document targeted at officers.

23. The Policy Statement and Strategy identify the principles of the approach to be taken. These will be supported by the technical annexes which define how they will be implemented. The existing technical annexes remain relevant and therefore it is not proposed to undertake a wholesale review of these,

however they will continue to be reviewed and updated over the life of the plan to ensure that they reflect contemporary good practice and innovation.

24. The Policy Statement (Attached as Annex 1) has been developed from the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme template and references the corporate priorities. This has been debated, amended and endorsed by the Highways Asset Management Plan working Group and the Transport Advisory Panel.
25. The Highways Asset Management Plan 2014 (Strategy Document) is developed from Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme guidance and is intended to be concise. It sets out the vision and the case for an Asset Management approach, and introduces Service Standards for each Asset group and provides optimum life cycle plans and other asset information. This is attached as Annex 2.

Financial and Staff Implications

26. Significant savings can be realised from a well planned investment programme. In the last four years the service has worked hard to identify a three year rolling programme for capital investment. This has enabled savings by achieving significantly improved resource utilisation, coordination of works maintenance/ improvement schemes and those of third parties and also enabled effective investigatory work to be undertaken in a timely manner to improve confidence in budget and programme management.
27. The level of capital funding on highways assets has a direct correlation on revenue pressures (i.e. the amount needed for pothole repairs and other reactive maintenance). A well planned capital investment strategy, alongside an effective regime of condition monitoring will provide a better understanding of future revenue pressures and enable informed decision to be taken to influence the trend.
28. The asset management approach advocates maintenance intervention prior to road failure which extends the life of the asset, saves on costly construction costs of replacing the asset and minimises reactive spend on potholes over the long term. This is recognised as best practice and offers the best value for money. This approach could double the life expectancy for a road for the same level of investment over its life and is likely to reduce the length of carriageway on the highway network deteriorating into poor condition over the next 10 years by over 350km.
29. The Highways Asset Management Plan does not set the overall budget for highway maintenance but does enable informed decisions about budget to be made. The HAMP sets out the principles on how budgets will be used and creates the most efficient way in which to use it. It also provides a framework for identifying annual programmes of work through an objective scoring system.

30. At present budgets for highway maintenance are predominantly split between the main asset groups to reflect the total asset value. The proposed approach however would look to split the highway maintenance budgets to better reflect the maintenance backlog for each asset to ensure that no one group is allowed to deteriorate at an accelerated rate compared to others. This approach is likely to reflect an increase in budgets to bridges and drainage at the expense of carriageways in the future. Effective coordination and reduced costs would not mean a detrimental impact in carriageway condition however.
31. There are no staffing implications as result of this proposal.

RECOMMENDATION

32. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to approve the Highways Asset Management Policy and Strategy.**

SUE SCANE
Director for Environment and Economy

Background papers:

Background papers: ALARM Survey

Annexes Annex 1 – HAMP Policy
 Annex 2 – HAMP Strategy
 Annex 4 – NHT Public Satisfaction Survey (extract)

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