

Agenda Item	7
Report No	ERA-09-20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Easter Ross Area Committee

Date: 20 August 2020

Report Title: Road Maintenance Up-Date - April to July 2020

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an up-date on road maintenance operations within the Easter Ross Area during the first Quarter of 2020 and advises of the impact of COVID-19.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the report's contents.

3 Implications

- 3.1 Resource – No implications.
- 3.2 Legal - No implications.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – No implications.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – No implications.
- 3.5 Risk – No implications.
- 3.6 Gaelic - No implications.

4 Essential Works

4.1 On 6 April 2020 The Scottish Government stated that only essential construction work should be undertaken. This included 'the repair and maintenance of critical Infrastructure' such as roads.

4.2 Following a review of its operations by the Roads and Transport Service, the following duties were deemed to be eligible in order to comply with the above. These works included:-

- Emergency Out of Hours response;
- Winter maintenance (ending 14 April 2020);
- Road Safety Inspections with priority given to H1 and H2a network;
- Structures Inspections;
- Road Safety Defect Repairs:-
 - Treat CAT 1 and 2H defects with priority to the H1 Strategic and H2a Regional networks:-
 - Pothole repairs using spray injection vehicle on rural roads and;
 - Hot tar repairs using a hot box where hot tar is available from quarries
- Gully emptying in response to flooding or history of flooding;
- Ditching and drainage works only where there is a risk of flooding or it has occurred;
- Vehicle Restraint Systems (safety fences):-
 - Defer replacements; and
 - Only respond to road traffic accidents:-
 - Make safe and defer repairs
- Structures
 - Only respond to emergencies and bridge strikes; and
 - Defer all other works
- Signs
 - Make safe; and
 - Remove signs if required

4.3 All tar plants, except for our own Sconser Quarry on Skye, ceased production with staff being furloughed. Sconser Quarry continued producing cold tar but due to operational issues, hot tar production was limited.

5 Health, Safety and Wellbeing

5.1 The Covid 19 pandemic has seen unprecedented restrictions placed upon both individuals and organisations.

These restrictions have significantly impacted on the operations we can undertake and how these are carried out.

5.2 Early in the emergency it was recognised that having a robust Risk Assessment plan would be give confidence to our operatives that every reasonable measure had been undertaken to protect them.

5.3 Initially there were limited supplies for alcohol hand gel. antiseptic wipes and face masks. Road Officers played a critical role in sourcing sufficient supplies at the outset. The supply chain has now improved significantly and PPE such as gel and wipes are no longer in short supply.

5.4 To avoid the possibility of transmission within vehicles our operatives were each issued with their own dedicated vehicle which are not shared unless they have been 'deep cleaned'.

5.5 No operatives have reported sick in the Easter Ross Area for Covid 19.

From the Tain Depot, two operatives have been 'shielding' since the start of lockdown. One has since returned to work on 6 Jul 2020.

5.6 During this time there was one vacancy in Alness Depot.

5.7 Combining operatives shielding from Covid 19 and the vacancy, the Tain and Alness squads were operating at 66% capacity from April to start July.

6 Essential Works Undertaken from April to Jul 2020

6.1 The weekly programme was suspended after only 'essential works were permitted.

6.2 The majority of all work undertaken in Easter Ross Area from April to Jul 2020 was cold tar patching.

There were no H1 Strategic Roads in the Easter Ross Area and only the B817 Shore Road at Invergordon and B9176 Struie Road were classed as H2a Regional Roads. Category 1 and 2h potholes were patched on these roads first.

The road network considered to fall within 'essential works was later widened out to include all roads. Patching was prioritised as per the winter maintenance hierarchy. Primary and Secondary routes have been patched but Other routes remain to be completed.

Minimal patching was undertaken in urban areas due to the risk of transmitting the virus and maintaining social distancing with the public.

Notable works include:-

- Repairs to subsidence at Castle Avenue, Invergordon;
- Glenglass Road patching prior to any capital overlay subject to funding; and
- Defect repairs using spray injection vehicle on rural roads

6.3 Gully Cleaning

Some gullies have been manually cleaned as the gully sucker is deployed in Ward 5. On it's return additional gullies will be cleaned.

6.4 Following the relaxations of the restrictions imposed on the construction industry, repairs to the parapets on Clyne Bridge has started and has now been completed.

6.5 Nigg culvert replacement is currently being planned. Part of the culvert collapsed some years ago and an adjacent building is at risk of flooding.

7 Covid 19 Financial Implications and Future Works

7.1 Due to the loss of income and additional expenditure arising from Covid 19 there is a significant budget gap across The Highland Council. On 29 May 2020 the 2020/21 budget approved by Council earlier in the year was suspended. This means that no expenditure is permitted except for that related to Covid 19 or the running of essential services.

In addition, all expenditure must be approved by Head of Roads and Transport.

7.2 In view of this, much of the Area Maintenance Programme has been suspended except those works which are contractually committed, or which have secured match-funding in place.

Due the surface dressing being weather and temperature dependent this element of the capital programme has unfortunately had to be cancelled. The following schemes will now be considered for surface dressing in 2021/22:-

- U1991 Glen Glass Road;
- U1976 Darroch Brae; and
- U4181 Seabanks Road

No decision has yet been taken on whether the remaining overlay or inlay capital schemes can be undertaken pending decisions on the availability of resources. These schemes include:-

- U1991 Glen Glass Road, (two sections of overlay);
- U3963 St Duthus Place, Tain, (inlay);
- C1004 Woody Braes eastwards (inlay edge strengthening);
- B9165 and B9166 Fearn Junction (overlay); and
- B9174 Morangie Road, Tain (inlay)

7.3 Whilst spending restrictions remain in force, the following measures have been introduced:

- Switching to low material cost operations such as:-
 - Drainage works
 - Minor bridge works
 - Signage
 - Grass cutting
- Limiting operations requiring expensive materials:-
 - Patching restricted to 1 week every month
 - Concentration on repairing Category 1 & 2 Road defects.

8 Town Centre Infrastructure Fund – King Street Car Park

8.1 A feasibility design has been prepared by the Project Design Unit. This was subsequently complimented with a topographic survey to establish levels.

8.2 Prior to the Covid 19 pandemic The Scottish Government extended the deadline to the end of this financial year.

8.3 At the Easter Ross Area Committee on 20 February 2020 Members expressed their concern about the road conditions across the area and asked that priority be given to patching excluding all other work except for winter operations and where specialist plant had been timetabled for the area.

In considering Members' concerns and the extension of the project deadline, construction of the King Street Car Park will be awarded by tender to a contractor. The Project Design Unit will complete the design, prepare and then issue the tender documentation and supervise the works. The Roads Operations Manager will retain the Project Manager role.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 7 August 2020

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