

Agenda Item	17
Report No	ECI/31/2023

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Economy and Infrastructure

Date: 4 May 2023

Report Title: Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey 2022/23

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an update on the annual results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey for 2022/23.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-
- i. **Note** the results of the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey for 2022/23 and that our relative ranking has improved from 26th to 25th position amongst Scottish Local Authorities, with a road condition index (RCI) of 36.5% which represents the percentage of the road network which is considered to be in need of maintenance treatment;
 - ii. **Agree** that the overall Road Condition Indicator result for Highland can be published on the Council's website before a paper is presented to committee, due to the increasing number of requests for information that have been received from Members, the public and the press; and
 - iii. **Agree** to utilise the report as a useful source of information while determining the future capital allocation programme, noting that without sustained funding, the condition of the road network will deteriorate and, as such, our ranking amongst the other Scottish Local Authorities may drop.

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, Rural and Island)** – There is a risk that as road conditions deteriorate access to low trafficked roads in rural areas may become more restrictive 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 also have a carbon load.
- 3.5 **Risk** – Managed under Section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. The Council may be at a greater risk from compensation claims if road network assets are not kept in a reasonable condition.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** – None arising from this report.

4 Background

- 4.1 The Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey (SRMCS) is an annual survey which assesses the condition of the Scottish adopted road network. It is used to calculate a Road Condition Indicator (RCI) that 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), and covers all Scottish Council Road Networks as well as the Trunk Road Network. This ensures an unbiased survey which allows a direct comparison across adopted road networks.

5 Survey Details

- 5.1 The length of road network surveyed annually is substantial and includes:-
- 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 2nd year, so covering all of these roads on a 2-year cycle. For consistency, the direction of survey is also alternated over a 4-year period; and
 - 10% of “U” class roads are surveyed in one direction each year.
- 5.2 In a Highland Council context, the annual survey sample equates to approximately 2,910km of road or just under 43% of the total network.
- 5.3 The survey machine takes a measurement every 100mm along the road. These results are then averaged over 10m lengths.

The main parameters collected by the survey vehicle include:-

- Texture (roughness of the road);
- Rutting (wheel tracking);
- Longitudinal profile (smoothness of ride); and
- Surface cracking

6 Statutory Performance Indicator

- 6.1 The Statutory Performance Indicator for the condition of the Scottish Local Authority Road network is defined as “the percentage of the road network which should be considered for maintenance treatment.”
- 6.2 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 and 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.
- 6.3 The overall results from the SRMCS are presented on a colour coding convention as set out below:-
- Green:** Minor defects may be present, but the road is considered to be in an acceptable condition.
- Amber:** Further investigation is required.
- Red:** The road has deteriorated to a point where repairs are very likely to be required to preserve serviceability and to prolong its future.
- 6.4 The RCI 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 RCI, the worse the road condition. A year-on-year increase in the RCI would indicate deterioration, whilst a decrease indicates improvement.

7 Results from the 2022/23 Survey

- 7.1 At the time of writing this report, the results for other Local Authorities had not been fully published, therefore a direct comparison was not available. However, unattributed results are available and provides the basic comparison shown below:-
- the lowest (best) RCI was 21.9%
 - the highest (worst) RCI was 49.8%
 - the Scottish Local Authority average was 33.6%
 - Highland Council’s RCI was 36.5%
 - Highland Council’s ranking is 25th (out of 32 Councils)
- 7.2 Officers have received numerous requests from Members, the public and the press to release the results for 2022/23. However, it has been normal practice in previous years to wait until all of the Local Authority results were available to compare Highland’s ranking against other rural authorities, thereby providing Members and the public with more information. Due to the demand, Members are requested to approve the publication of the overall RCI result on the Council website before a report is taken to committee, with that report not expected until later in the calendar year, when all of the Local Authority results are available for publication (August committee or later).

8 Long Term Trend

- 8.1 Comparing our results over the last 11 years shows a significant deterioration in our RCI, but there has been an improvement from the 2021 result. In 2011 we had an RCI of 29.3% and were ranked 9th best Council. In 2022 our RCI was 36.5% and our ranking is 25th, (noting an improvement from 26th in 2021). During this period, the overall Scottish RCI has improved from 36.1% to 33.6%.

Year	2011	2020	2021	2022
RCI	29.3%	39.1%	36.7%	36.5%

Table 1: Highland RCI Results

9 Backlog and Steady State

- 9.1 The Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland (SCOTS) commissioned the current SRMCS contractor to run a financial model quantifying the backlog of road maintenance on the Scottish Local Authority network.
- 9.2 The headline backlog budget is defined as the carriageway maintenance funding required to treat all the red and amber sections of road within one year. This can be thought of, in general terms, as achieving a network free from carriageway defects. In reality, to treat all the red and amber sections in one year is both impractical and unattainable but the figure does allow a comparative budgetary valuation to be calculated which can be monitored on an on-going basis.
- 9.3 The 'steady state' figure is the annual budget required to maintain the road network in its current state i.e. no improvement, no deterioration.
- 9.4 The backlog figure calculated in 2019 for Highland was £194.83m. The steady state figure was £25.1m. SCOTS have commissioned the contractor to update the figures this financial year (2023/24).
- 9.5 Members should note that the financial model only relates to carriageways and does not include calculations for bridges, lighting, footways, drainage or other assets.

10 Road Maintenance Funding

- 10.1 The Council approved the capital budget for 2023/24 on 2 March 2022. More detail on this will be presented to Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 4 May in the Roads Strategic Capital Allocation paper. For clarity, the capital budget split is again replicated below:-

Description	Budget	Comment
Roads Base Capital	£7,200,000	Budget covers all assets such as carriageways, footways, structures, drainage, etc.
Roads Base Capital 'Top up'	£5,100,000	Distributed using same principals used for £7.2m budget (stated in HC/01/23 report).
Strategic Allocation	£7,700,000	To be allocated on a strategic basis.
Strategic Timber Transport Schemes	£500,000	Match funding which secures significant additional contributions.
Total	£20,500,000	

Table 2: £20.5m Roads Capital Budget Breakdown

- 10.2 The capital allocation for roads has been significantly increased for 2023/24 which is a welcome enhancement. The future capital programme has yet to be decided by the Council and will be deliberated later in 2023/24. A permanent increase in the roads base capital budget would allow for the Service to continue the investment in the road network (including for all asset types). The Roads Service relies on capital funding for all asset types to improve the road network. Members are asked to consider the difference between the steady state spend required and potential future capital allocations going forward after 2023/24.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment

Date: 14 April 2023

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Background Papers: [ECI/54/2021 Item 19 SRMCS Results 2020/21](#)
[ECI/36/20 Item 15 SRMCS Results 2019/20](#)
[EDI/58/19 Item 23 SRMCS Results 2018/19](#)