

Lilian Greenwood MP
Minister for the Future of Roads

Councillor Hannah Bithell
Chair, Scrutiny Board (Infrastructure, Investment
& Inclusive Growth)

Darren Jones MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury

Cllr Jonathan Pryor
Executive Member for Economy, Transport and
Sustainable Development

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Dear Lilian and Darren

Leeds City Council's Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth Scrutiny Board has recently considered the complex challenge of maintaining the city's local road network. Scrutiny members produced a series of recommendations, which included matters linked to the nature of national funding – hence our jointly writing to you to highlight these matters.

Local roads remain a vital part of our city's transport infrastructure. However, like many other authorities across the country, if current conditions continue Leeds City Council faces the prospect of maintaining an asset in declining condition while the backlog of maintenance required to return the local road network to a good state of repair is increasing. The backlog in Leeds is currently estimated at £288m.

As you will no doubt be aware, the complexity and cost of maintaining the network is becoming increasingly difficult. This is due to a range of factors including more frequent extreme weather events brought about by climate change, inflationary cost pressures exacerbated by external events and the degradation of materials in an aging road network.

To illustrate the increase in construction costs, applying the relevant industry construction cost indices to total funding of £23.8m in 2010/11 would result in a requirement of approximately £34.8m of funding to undertake the same amount of work at current rates.

Furthermore, the increasing cost of maintenance is unavoidably set within the context of significant and sustained financial pressure across all areas of local government.

Leeds City Council has provided significant capital investment in highways maintenance over many years to support national funding – almost £200m since 2010. The current year's planned capital maintenance programme of £28,961,043 is funded from the 2024/25 City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (£14,506,243), Network North Funding (£1,454,800) and Leeds City Council Capital Resources (£13,000,000).

In addition, the Highways Maintenance revenue budget will total £4,991,000 in 2024/25.

Council officers demonstrate an innovative approach to highways maintenance in Leeds and have proved open to exploring emerging solutions including the use of artificial intelligence. They have also repeatedly demonstrated their agility in planning and preparing for additional funding that may become available to the authority at relatively short notice – such as the most recent Network North allocations.

However, scrutiny members concluded that the nature of national funding – often relatively short term and secured via multiple routes - is limiting the extent to which organisations like our own can plan and implement a long-term highways maintenance strategy.

We are confident that providing greater long-term certainty around national funding would enable local authorities to deliver a proactive maintenance strategy based on preventative works that deliver better value for money.

We ask that you consider how a collaborative approach from the Department for Transport and HM Treasury could identify ways in which to provide longer term funding certainty to local authorities to support a strategic, preventative approach to the maintenance of the local road network.

We also urge you to consider introducing a more streamlined approach to funding. By simplifying the financing process, we believe the Government could maximise the impact of the resources provided to local authorities and enable a more strategic approach to improving road infrastructure. This offers the potential to deliver safer, more efficient road networks for those living and working in cities like Leeds.

Finally, in the context of providing certainty over funding, we would welcome clarification as soon as possible about the future of previously announced Network North funding for highways maintenance.

My colleagues and I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H Bithell', with a stylized, cursive script.

Councillor Hannah Bithell
Chair, Scrutiny Board (Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth)

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Jonathan Pryor', in a cursive script.

Cllr Jonathan Pryor
Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Sustainable Development