



## **CIHT Response to Public Accounts Committee inquiry on Local Roads funding**

**November 2024**

For any inquiries, please email [technical@ciht.org.uk](mailto:technical@ciht.org.uk)

## About CIHT

The Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation (CIHT) is a charity, learned society and membership body with 12 UK regions and a number of international groups.

CIHT represents and qualifies professionals who plan, design, build, manage, maintain and operate transport and infrastructure. CIHT's members are involved with designing, managing, maintaining and upgrading the local road network.

In the CIHT manifesto, [\*A Transport Network Fit for All Our Futures\*](#), we called for six strategic objectives to ensure:

1. Our transport networks are resilient
2. The transport sector decarbonises in line with legally binding obligations
3. Everyone has the opportunity to travel sustainably
4. Everyone has the opportunity to travel safely and feel safe
5. There is a skilled workforce with the capacity and capability to deliver
6. Funding is reprioritised to support timely and effective delivery

All of these objectives are relevant to the Public Accounts Committee on local roads funding.

CIHT understands that the Committee is looking to address aspects such as how the Government allocates funding, evaluation of the impact of spending, and the nature of additional support to manage a local road network in the context of increasingly complex factors such as climate change and autonomous vehicles.

## Government allocation of funding

The inquiry is right to highlight that a piecemeal and stop-go approach to funding from the Government for road maintenance in recent decades was making it difficult for highway authorities to maintain roads cost-effectively.

CIHT recently responded to the Government's budget and welcomed the ongoing commitment to the maintenance of the local road network, as we were pleased that the Budget facilitates an increase in public investment.

CIHT highlighted that to deliver this funding, the government should follow the recommendations in our 'Improving Local Highways'<sup>1</sup> report and commits to:

- Establish an improved system of monitoring that gives clarity on how the Local Highways Network is performing and includes comparisons of efficiency, effectiveness and innovation in delivery
- Commit to establish an inflation- linked local highways fund
- Create a better understanding of the asset through improved data

---

<sup>1</sup> CIHT (2020) 'Improving Local Highways - the Route to a Better Future' Available at: <https://www.ciht.org.uk/knowledge-resource-centre/resources/improving-local-highways/>

- Establish new sources of funding to support the local highways fund for the Local Highway Network (LHN) that will create a vision, funding and focus over the next ten years.

CIHT are pleased that the Government is taking a broad approach, providing £650 million of funding for local transport in towns, villages and rural areas. Ensuring that everyone has access to effective transport networks is key to addressing regional inequalities and supporting economic growth. It is vital that efforts to increase local level autonomy are accompanied by adequate funding provision, so this represents a positive step.

CIHT welcomes investment in active travel infrastructure, and hope that funding is used effectively to deliver holistic active travel networks to maximise the social and economic benefits of walking, wheeling and cycling and promote interconnectivity with other forms of sustainable transport.

CIHT's report 'Improving Local Highways' findings chime with the recommendations of the National Audit Office (NAO) report of 2024<sup>2</sup>. Particularly, the evidence gathered as part of the review led CIHT to consider that funding is a key challenge for local highways. Both capital and revenue funding need to be considered as they are both fundamental to the management of the local highways network (LHN). As with other infrastructure assets and the strategic road network (SRN), longer-term certainty of funding is vital.

CIHT therefore called for the establishment of a 10-year additional funding settlement (that should be additional to the current annual capital and revenue funding that local authorities receive for highway maintenance) – at that time of the report this was identified as an additional £15 billion (this figure would need to be reviewed against inflation from 2020 to today) - of total expenditure (TOTEX) to address the maintenance backlog. Total expenditure includes both capital and revenue funding.

Alongside a longer-term funding settlement leading to improved efficiencies and effectiveness in the management and maintenance of the LHN, CIHT saw the policy lever of including incentivisation to deliver wider outcomes for people and society.

This would be highly relevant when it comes to reducing the burden on the NHS by allowing the fund to invest in new infrastructure for major maintenance schemes to implement protected cycling infrastructure – and maintain current infrastructure - to facilitate active travel, thereby supporting the decarbonisation agenda whilst improving peoples' health.

The report recognised that the funding over 10 years would be more practically delivered through an initial five-year allocation distributed to local authorities on a yearly increasing basis as a new national asset conditions dataset is introduced. The second five-year allocation could then take account of local authority performance, asset conditions, road function and increasing length.

As the local highway network can deliver wider benefits to health, CIHT's report highlighted concern that reductions in revenue funding can disproportionately impact on active travel.

Government should identify and develop alternative and additional sources of revenue to finance the future funding of local highways, including moves to where utilities pay the real cost of reinstatement.

---

<sup>2</sup> NAO (2024) 'The condition and maintenance of local roads in England' National Audit Office. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/the-condition-and-maintenance-of-local-roads-in-england/>

In our report<sup>3</sup> we noted that utility companies currently perform poorly when filling in the holes they have dug in local highways, with over 30% of reinstatements increasing rates of deterioration. They should be required to reinstate to best practice standards or pay the local authority to do the work.

## **Evaluation of the impact of funding**

There is very clearly a need to properly be able to evaluate the impact of spending. The models of delivery for highway services also needs consideration taking account of the benefits of scale. CIHT therefore encouraged, through incentive funding, greater collaboration.

CIHT welcomes progress made by the Department for Transport and the sector on improvements with the monitoring the condition of local roads involving the adoption of new technologies. In the 2020 report CIHT noted that the additional funding that CIHT called for would need to be developed in parallel with an increased understanding of asset conditions through improved data collection and performance monitoring. In this regard the CIHT had three key recommendations:

1. Create an up-to-date database of national condition information for all key highway assets
2. Update techniques for collecting data using the latest technology
3. Develop a standard measure to calculate the required funding based on common standards of serviceability from a customer perspective

CIHT welcomes the new Government's calls for a 10-year infrastructure strategy and sees an opportunity to explore a longer-term funding settlement for local highways.

CIHT also recognises that this will be challenging but if this was to happen there would be a need to create a monitoring function. This would involve working towards a series of outcome measures that act to incentivise the sector (LAs and providers) to deliver efficiencies in a way that provides clarity in how the additional funding is being spent. The new monitoring function would help with the evaluation of the impact of spending. CIHT does not support too many different funding packages as this creates additional pressures on local authorities in competing for limited funding and the resource inefficiencies this incurs.

CIHT also note that the Department for Transport has a challenge in seeking data from local authorities, whilst as the same time, not burdening them in doing so. The NAO report notes this when stating: 'DfT told us that it decided to limit the data it collects from local authorities to minimise administrative burdens, consistent with DLUHC policy'<sup>4</sup>.

CIHT would encourage means by which data can be collected and reported on, in such a way that does not place undue burden on local authorities, but gives confidence that funding is delivering; however this does require cross-governmental agreement.

## **Local road network in the context of increasingly complex factors such as climate change**

---

<sup>3</sup> CIHT (2020) 'Improving Local Highways - the Route to a Better Future' Available at:

<https://www.ciht.org.uk/knowledge-resource-centre/resources/improving-local-highways/>

<sup>4</sup> NAO (2024) 'The condition and maintenance of local roads in England' National Audit Office – summary report' Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/condition-and-maintenance-of-local-roads-in-england-summary.pdf> (see page 7)

As the inquiry notes in the context there is too much reactive work in response to flooding and other events, and not enough focus on preventative work that is less expensive in the long-term. With climate change there is an ever increasing need to ensure that the transport network is resilient. CIHT recently published a report on resilience<sup>5</sup>. In this CIHT highlighted there was an urgency to act now and be prepared.

Both adaptation and resilience must be made an immediate investment and policy priority across all governmental transport strategies. There is a risk of significant and expensive infrastructure failures if resilience measures are not recognised as key strategic objectives now. Extreme weather events are happening with increased frequency and intensity – it is imperative that we act now to mitigate the risk of possible losses.

As the inquiry highlighted that there is ‘not enough focus on preventative work’ – a means to address this is for the right level of funding for maintenance. CIHT calls for investment in maintenance of our existing highways and infrastructure to ensure the continued and efficient use of our transport network. Incrementally adapting infrastructure and proactively maintaining it are crucial for extreme weather resilience and meeting decarbonisation goals.

Clearly there is a need to adapt to climate change but there is also a need to mitigate against the effects of climate change. There is a need to ensure the transport sector decarbonises in line with legally binding obligations

National Highways (NH) is committed to achieving net zero construction and maintenance on the English strategic road network by 2040, while local highways authorities are targeting this outcome at various dates, some as early as 2030 or 2035. Change at this scale and speed means we do not have time to reinvent the wheel in every local highways authority or on every project or initiative. We must share information about what works and find ways to roll out these successful solutions rapidly and in as many places as possible.

When the inquiry is looking at how local roads are maintained, it needs to answer the question: how are they doing so in terms of decarbonisation?

CIHT’s report on decarbonisation<sup>6</sup> shared a range of case studies to show how highway authorities and their supply chain partners have reduced transport related carbon emissions. This could be via a wide range of measures including low carbon materials, logistics planning, electrification of construction plant, transport planning, procurement, innovative design, multi-partner collaboration, and reforms to codes and standards.

### **Local road network in the context of increasingly complex factors such as autonomous vehicles**

The inquiry is right to highlight the context of increasingly complex factors such as climate change and autonomous vehicles.

With local authorities under pressure to just maintain the local road network, it is unlikely that they are preparing fully for complex factors such as autonomous vehicles. If there is not a need for any major changes to the infrastructure, there could, for example, still be a need to

---

<sup>5</sup> CIHT (2024) ‘Delivering a resilient transport network- maintaining and future proofing highway infrastructure from extreme weather events’ Available at: <https://www.ciht.org.uk/news/new-ciht-report-delivering-a-resilient-transport-network/>

<sup>6</sup> CIHT (2023) ‘Reducing emissions by 63% in a decade’ Available at: <https://www.ciht.org.uk/news/reducing-emissions-by-63-in-a-decade/>

ensure that white lines are maintained and this is currently not even happening<sup>7</sup>. Most autonomous cars require clear white lines and road signs to operate safely<sup>8</sup>.

Another complex factor to consider is artificial intelligence (AI). CIHT has called for more support for AI in public services. In our report<sup>9</sup> on this CIHT noted the importance of funding and investment – although some schemes have been set up to encourage AI innovations, more support needs to be offered to the public sector, for whom investing in new technologies can be expensive and risky.

Specifically, CIHT noted that local authorities and national bodies will be key to rolling out AI in public services such as transport, and so should be given appropriate funding, guidance, and procurement frameworks to do this successfully.

Implementing AI projects can be costly, and securing funding for research, development, and implementation can be a challenge, especially for smaller organisations and local authorities.

Local authorities are currently facing significant fiscal constraints: inflation and spiraling energy costs have impacted budgets considerably against remaining pressure to ensure the delivery of statutory services. Thus, many may well not have the financial and staffing resources to invest in the technology necessary to enable AI use within their organisations.

Local authorities will therefore need specific funding to invest in AI technologies, guidance to support the delivery of AI, and procurement advice to contract these technologies effectively.

**Other factors that CIHT would consider worth including are on accessibility and road safety.**

CIHT values continuing professional development and it is essential that those designing and changing the public realm are aware of issues faced to avoid wasting public money on schemes that need to be altered later as they have excluded part of the community. We have previously recommended that anyone who purchases items for use in the public realm or designs schemes should undertake disability equality awareness training.

CIHT therefore encourage the government to allocate some of the funding for active travel to fund disability equality awareness training for all local authority personnel who are designing and changing the public realm, and incentivise disability training by making some of the funding for transport schemes only available to local authorities that have trained staff. CIHT's report<sup>10</sup> on this called for accessibility training to also be provided for housing and retail developers.

Provided the wider funding pressures on local authorities, CIHT would like to conclude with an observation on road safety: there is insufficient funding to take an adequate reactive approach to road risk reduction, let alone progress to proactive risk reduction as demanded by the Safe System. A strategic and committed approach to funding will be needed to support implementation of the Safe System.

---

<sup>7</sup> Construction Index (2023) [Disappearing lines reveal road maintenance crisis](#) Available at:

<sup>8</sup> Car Magazine (2023) The UK's Automated Vehicles Bill: what you need to know. Available at:

<https://www.carmagazine.co.uk/autonomous/are-self-driving-cars-legal-in-the-uk/>

<sup>9</sup> CIHT (2023) 'The role of data and artificial intelligence in achieving transport decarbonisation'

<https://www.ciht.org.uk/knowledge-resource-centre/resources/the-role-of-data-and-artificial-intelligence-in-achieving-transport-decarbonisation/>

<sup>10</sup> CIHT (2024) 'Creating a public realm for all'. Available at: <https://www.ciht.org.uk/knowledge-resource-centre/resources/policy-technical/creating-a-public-realm-for-all/>