



Department for

Infrastructure

An Roinn

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Department for

Infrastructure

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Road Maintenance Strategy 'Better Roads'

July 2026





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Our roads underpin every aspect of our daily lives. They create jobs and drive economic growth by making business possible and, most importantly of all, they connect communities.

Ministerial Foreword

Our road network may be the most valuable infrastructure asset in monetary terms, but its overall value to society is immeasurable. Our roads underpin every aspect of our daily lives. They create jobs and drive economic growth by making business possible and, most importantly of all, they connect communities. For those reasons, we all want our roads to be better.

To make that possible, we must be ambitious and innovative in equal measure, using the resources we have in a more targeted and effective way. The new Road Maintenance Strategy sets out how we will do this.

We are moving in a new direction, one that will lead to a better quality of maintenance and longer lasting repairs. We will harness the latest technology to target resources where they are needed most, which will in turn ensure we are delivering the best possible value for public money. The journey to better roads will be marked by a new approach to maintenance which will have three fundamental principles at its heart:

Higher Quality Maintenance

We are committed to raising the standard of maintenance across the network, ensuring that interventions are timely, durable, and delivered to consistently high quality. This will reduce costs in the long run and people will see a marked improvement.

Targeted Maintenance

Resources will be directed where they are needed most. We will use new technology to collect more data on the condition of the network for more informed risk assessments and decision making. This approach will ensure maintenance is prioritised effectively, delivering best value and reducing disruption.

Sustainable Maintenance

We will embed environmental sustainability into our practices, using low-carbon materials where appropriate, and designing interventions that are resilient to climate change. This supports our broader commitments to net zero and environmental stewardship.

Equally, it is about financial sustainability and ensuring that we invest in our infrastructure assets for the wider benefit of all.

At around 26,000km, if you put all our roads end-to-end, they would take you almost two-thirds of the way around the planet. It will come as no surprise then, that there is no quick fix which will address every defect on every road - but we can do more, and we can do better.

That is why my Department will take forward a new approach to road maintenance. This Road Maintenance Strategy sets out a clear vision and actions for how we will manage and maintain our roads over the coming years. It outlines the principles that will guide our decision-making, prioritisation, and investment, ensuring that resources are used effectively to deliver maximum public value.

LIZ KIMMINS
Minister for Infrastructure

The Importance of a Well-Maintained Road Network

The road network is a critical element of infrastructure that underpins, supports and facilitates the societal and economic well-being of the region. It is used either directly or indirectly by almost everyone daily. Roads enable the movement of people and goods as well as connecting communities and services. The road network is the largest public asset that we have and so maintaining it to a good standard makes sense for all of us.

This strategy seeks to deliver a structured approach to road maintenance through high-quality interventions that are focused, targeted and based on reliable and timely analytics. It is a step change in the preservation and improvement of this strategic asset with the aim of ensuring the network remains safe, reliable and efficient while minimising costs and environmental impacts.

64.4 million

bus passenger journeys
made in 2023-24 on
1,392 vehicles.



On average,
**we repair over
85,000 road defects** and
resurface approximately
**330km lanes of road
each year,**
along with delivering a variety of other
routine maintenance functions such as
gully emptying and grass cutting.





The Road Network
consists of approximately
**26,000km of
Public Roads**

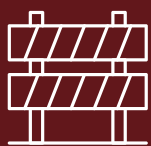
There is over
9,700km of footways,
5,800 bridges and approximately
290,000 streetlights
and is an asset of approximately
£36Bn.



The road network has an extensive
network of signage, traffic signals,
controlled pedestrian crossings, and
other traffic monitoring and
management infrastructure.



The Challenge

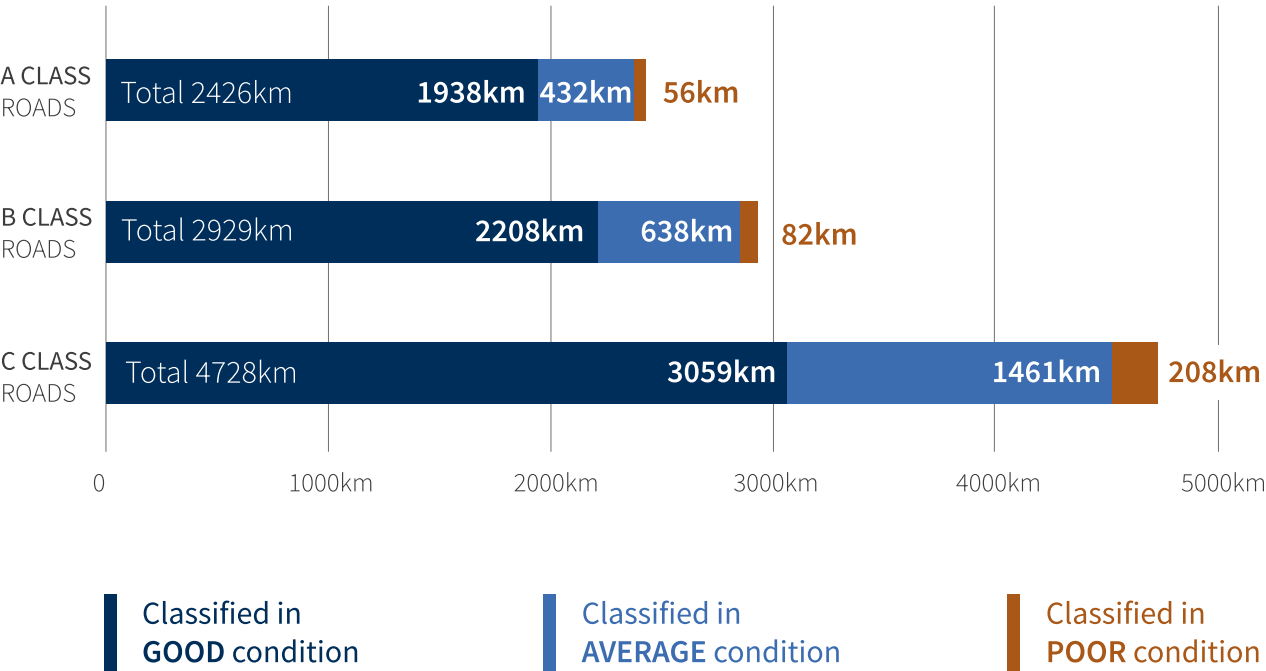


1. Every year, the Department receives money to manage and maintain the road network in Northern Ireland. The total amount received has varied greatly over time, with little certainty at the beginning of the year of how much the final allocation will ultimately be. The difference between the funding received over many years and what it costs to do the work means we have not been able to carry out a lot of non-urgent maintenance which includes routine maintenance that contributes to asset preservation. This has led to a significant backlog in the type of ongoing work needed to keep our road network in a satisfactory steady state.
2. In practical terms, this has happened because the on-going financial and resource pressures mean we have been operating a Limited Maintenance service since 2015. This means that only the highest priority road defects are repaired and, even then, we will only do the minimum work necessary to remove any immediate safety risk.
3. Equally, the money we receive for our Structural Maintenance programme (ongoing work needed to maintain the long-term structural integrity of the road network) falls significantly below the amount recommended.
4. It has been independently determined that the Department needs an annual structural maintenance budget of approximately £190m each year. On top of that, it is estimated that approximately £60m is needed for essential routine maintenance activities. Current allocations fall well short of these requirements, and it is unlikely that significant additional funding will be available in the short to medium term, given the current economic environment.

5.

Using the latest road survey information, approximately 1% of the road network (made up of short individual lengths of road aggregated to provide an overall figure) is currently categorised as ‘poor’, although this varies between the different categories of road
- classification. Since the introduction of Limited Service, the number of road defects has increased. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of road condition by classification as measured in 2024.

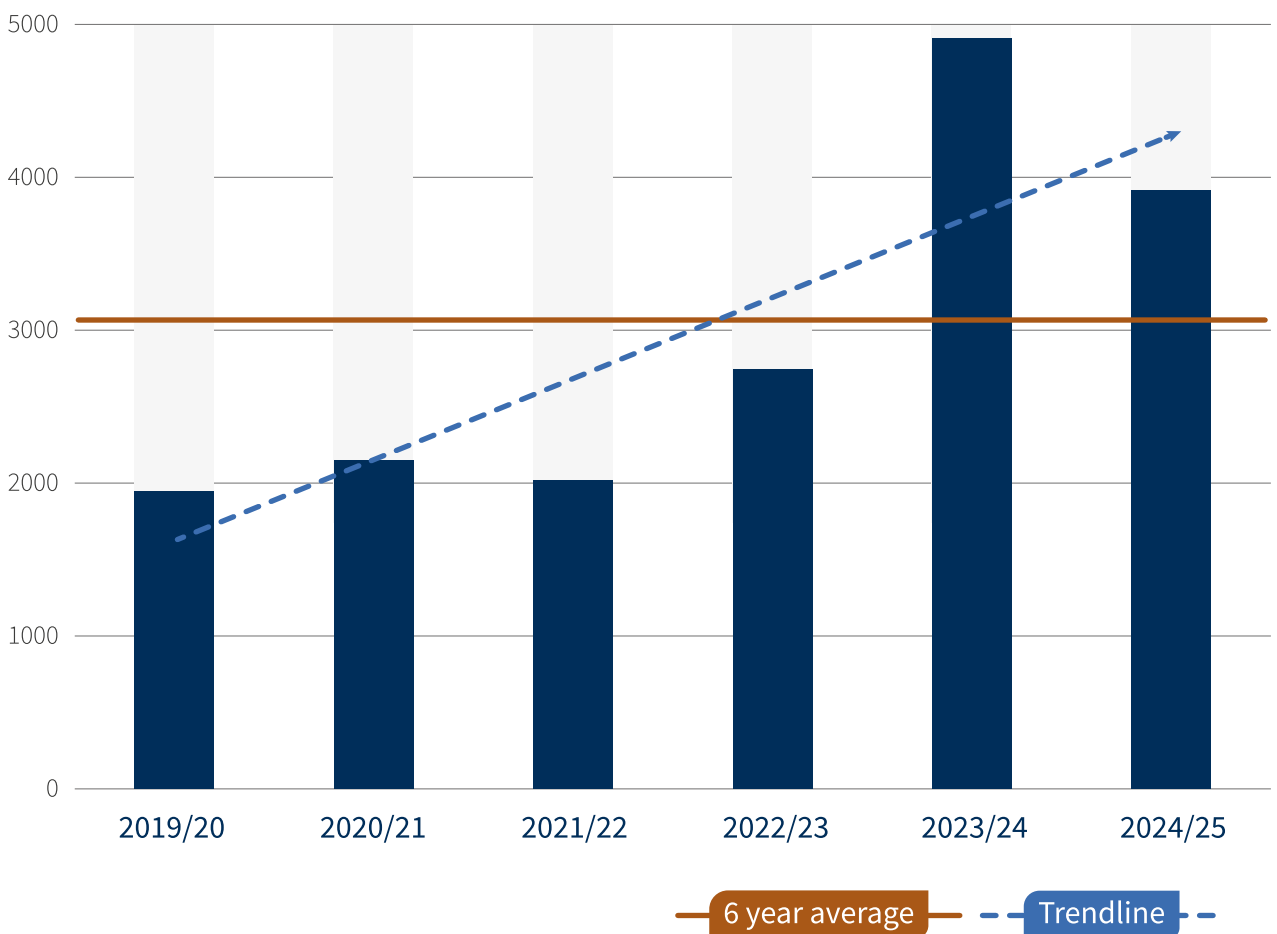
FIGURE 01: Current road condition measured by length (km) per road type



6. It is evident that the overall condition of the road network has been steadily declining. Since 2019/20, there has been an upward trend in the number of road-related public liability vehicle damage claims received by the Department. In 2023/24, the number of claims received was more than double that recorded in 2019/20. Although the volume of claims

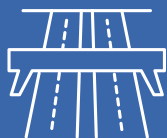
received by the Department declined in 2024/25, it remained well above the six-year average. Figure 2 illustrates the number of claims received in each financial year since 2019/20.

FIGURE 02: Vehicle Damage Claims Received





A New Approach



7. There is a pressing need to develop a new approach to how the road network is maintained; one that focuses our resources in a way that balances safety and cost effectiveness while at the same time, improving the value for money and level of service we can offer.
8. The New Approach should be data driven and supported by sound engineering judgement, so it delivers intelligent interventions that address the challenge in a meaningful and sustainable manner.
9. We are going to build our new approach on three key principles, centred on quality, targeted investment and sustainability. Each principle will be supported by a number of short, medium and long-term actions that set out a clear plan for the future, along with the ability to define and measure performance. This Strategy sets out a series of Objectives and Actions. The Actions are set out in Annex A.

ACTION 1

We will deliver a new operational delivery model aligned with our strategic objectives for road maintenance.

ACTION 2

We will make the financial case for the long term and sustainable delivery of road maintenance functions

Quality Maintenance

10. We will focus on delivering higher quality repairs instead of spreading resources too thinly, ensuring a more reliable and safer road network where we intervene. Our goal is to create a more durable and usable road network over time by emphasising quality over quantity in our maintenance. This approach will give due consideration to effective road drainage which is fundamental to good road maintenance.
11. To support this, we will refine how we deliver repairs and better manage potential risks from problems we cannot immediately address. Longer term, we will seek innovative solutions to increase the efficiency of routine maintenance work, harnessing technology to improve services.
12. Street works have a significant influence on the long-term condition and performance of the road network. To support the objectives of higher quality and more durable maintenance, arrangements for the planning, execution and reinstatement of street works will be kept under review. This will include consideration of enhanced monitoring and inspection regimes, the use of targeted testing and compliance checks, and a review of existing legislation, codes of practice and technical guidance. The aim is to improve the quality, durability and whole-life performance of reinstatements, reduce premature

failure and minimise the need for repeat intervention on the network.

ACTION 3

We will strengthen the governance, compliance, and performance of street works and reinstatements.

13. Actions in this area include the early development of a more targeted structural maintenance programme and the delivery of higher quality road repairs. Within the first year we will seek to baseline the condition of the road network, using existing data from the use of technology, to gain a better understanding of how we should set priorities for action. This will allow us to monitor the success of the new strategy and adjust it as we go. The Department is also developing a new Tree Management policy to improve roadside tree and hedge maintenance and enforcement, informed by research and subject to available resources.

OBJECTIVE

Improve the overall condition of the road network enhancing safety and quality.

14. We will seek to develop techniques for more targeted and intelligent maintenance interventions, delivering better value for money and ensuring that the integrity of the road network is protected for the future. We will also put a comprehensive regime of quality assurance in place to ensure that the work we deliver is to the required standards. Longer term, we will review the delivery model for road maintenance to make sure we continue to have the right skills and workforce for the work overtime.

OBJECTIVE

To deliver a targeted programme of intelligent maintenance investment.

ACTION 4

We will develop a plan and work in partnership with others to enhance the resilience of the road network.

ACTION 5

We will seek to support road maintenance through partnership working with others.

Targeted Maintenance Investment

15. We will use modern technology to direct our investments where they are needed most, ensuring smarter maintenance decisions. Technology will play a bigger role in automating inspections, helping us work faster and more efficiently as we assess road conditions and to use that data to guide better choices.
16. In the short term, this will involve trialling new technology and the development of baselining and decision-making tools. In the longer term, we will develop an improved suite of condition analytics and refine how decisions are made across our operational teams, while making use of emerging digital solutions to develop tools for predictive maintenance.

OBJECTIVE

To deliver a targeted programme of intelligent maintenance investment.

ACTION 6

We will develop a more targeted approach to structural maintenance informed by the collection and analysis of detailed road condition data.

ACTION 7

We will embrace the use of new technology to support the delivery of intelligent maintenance.

Sustainable Maintenance

17. We are committed to future-proofing our roads to meet the changing needs of our society. This includes providing a safe, accessible, and inclusive network for all users, with a particular focus on vulnerable road users such as people with disabilities, older people, pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists.
18. We will target road maintenance investment towards areas in most need, including prioritising rural networks where they are most critical for connectivity, access to services, and economic activity, whilst also continuing to support active travel routes such as cycle lanes and pedestrian paths.
19. Over time, we will reduce the carbon footprint of our operations, seeking to ensure that our road maintenance is environmentally sustainable, and we will create a long-term financial plan to support the viability of our maintenance efforts.
20. Importantly, we will develop a Resilient Road Network Plan to determine the durability of the road network and the ability to ensure its continued use or swift recovery during and after adverse weather events, responding to the challenges of climate change. The role of drainage maintenance, including gully cleaning is an integral component of both routine and structural maintenance activities and as a key contributor to climate resilience.



Measuring Success



OBJECTIVE

To deliver a sustainable maintenance regime.

21. Actions in this area include early enhancement of the footway resurfacing programme to support accessibility for those with disabilities and the elderly, along with promoting and investing in the attractiveness and usability of active travel routes. We will also seek to develop bespoke maintenance standards for our active travel infrastructure that will support the growing network we are planning to build.
22. To place road maintenance on a sustainable footing, we will create a long-term business case for our activities and create a multi-year investment plan to deliver the capacity and capability in our industrial workforce which will be needed to support delivery and improve responsiveness. In addition to the development of our Resilient Road Network Plan, we will also seek to establish partnerships with others and explore new ways to deliver a better service to citizens.
23. Underpinning all of this is the need to adapt to climate change and deliver in a greener and cleaner way. We will appraise the carbon profile of our assets and update our practices to reduce the environmental impact of our maintenance activities. It is important to ensure that this strategy, the associated action plan and resources used are doing what we need them to. An effective delivery plan will support future decision-making, the case for investment and long-term planning while informing and identifying further opportunities for improvement in the meantime.
24. The key measure of success will be identified through the various measurements that make up the Road Condition Reports. These include quantitative data from annual condition surveys such as deflectograph, scanner and SCRIM¹, supplemented by data which can be tracked in real time such as the cumulative Road Condition Index, defect volumes, vehicle damage claims and reported issues.
25. To ensure meaningful analysis, we will baseline the road condition at the beginning of this financial year and develop robust monitoring. We can then compare future conditions to that standard, recognising the need to also improve the timelines of some of the quality measurements (particularly the more detailed surveys that are conducted across a cycle that is multiple years long).

¹ Further details of these surveys can be found at <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-road-network-and-condition-statistics-technical-report>

26. We will deliver a long-term detailed financial plan to make the case for maintenance of the road network and support future decision making. This will include a 'cost per mile' of maintenance to quantify and determine cost-effectiveness and the value we are getting from our work each year.
27. The key actions and enablers listed will be developed into a fully detailed plan supported by a governance structure and progress reported to the Department's Foundations Delivery Programme Board. In addition, the Department will continue to publish its Annual Road Network and Condition Report, along with an enhanced range of metrics through Open Data Northern Ireland as we look to improve the accessibility of information about road maintenance to our delivery partners and the public.

ACTION 8

We will continuously monitor and review the Road Maintenance Strategy, adapting it as necessary based on comprehensive data analysis and performance insights.

Annex A

Road Maintenance Strategy Action Plan			
Action Ref	Section	Description	Timeline
1	Quality Maintenance	Deliver a new operational delivery model aligned with our strategic objectives for road maintenance.	Ongoing
2	Quality Maintenance	Make the financial case for the long term and sustainable delivery of road maintenance functions.	Ongoing
3	Quality Maintenance	Strengthen the governance, compliance, and performance of street works and reinstatements through improved inspection, transparency of costs and performance, enhanced policy levers, and robust oversight arrangements.	12 months
4	Quality Maintenance	Develop a plan and work in partnership with others to enhance the resilience of the road network.	12 months
5	Quality Maintenance	Seek to support road maintenance through partnership working with others.	Ongoing
6	Targeted Maintenance Investment	Develop a more targeted approach to structural maintenance informed by the collection and analysis of detailed road condition data.	12-24 months
7	Targeted Maintenance Investment	Embrace the use of new technology to support the delivery of intelligent maintenance.	6-18 months
8	Measuring Success	Continuously monitor and review the Road Maintenance Strategy, adapting it as necessary based on comprehensive data analysis and performance insights	Ongoing



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