

EIR Request (received 08 April 2021) - Reference: DFI/2021-0130

Can I request some information in relation to the budgets allocated by the Minister for Rural Roads Maintenance for THIS financial year compared to the overall budget available?

May I also request, if known, the total spend required to bring roads up to standard in the Fermanagh and Omagh Council District Council area?

Can you also confirm if the Minister made a bid under the January Monitoring Round just past to address the issue of rural roads maintenance?

Response (issued 10 May 2021)

Thank you for your email dated 8 April 2021 to the Department and subsequent clarification received on 12 April 2021, under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), information held by this office to include: budgets allocated for Rural Roads Maintenance for 2020-21 and 2021-22 including any bids made in January Monitoring to address the rural roads maintenance and total spend required to bring roads up to standard in the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area. Your request has been passed to me to respond.

In considering your request on behalf of the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) I have determined that the information requested falls under the aegis of the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, as opposed to the FOI Act 2000.

A guide explaining the Environmental Information Regulations can be found at:

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-environmental-information-regulations/what-are-the-eir/>.

Recognising that there has been historical under-investment in our road network for a significant number of years and that many rural roads are in need of repairs, the Minister allocated £12 million to a Roads Recovery Fund in 2020-21 of which £10 million was specifically allocated to repair defects on rural roads. Looking forward and building upon this work, the Minister has committed to establishing another Roads Recovery Fund in 2021-22.

The rural road network also attracts other resource and capital budget funding which is not categorised separately and as such the precise investment in rural roads cannot be identified.

78% of the road network is rural and therefore, a significant proportion of the annual Structural Maintenance expenditure is spent on rural roads, including the specific allocation from the rural roads fund

It has been independently established (Barton 2018) that some £143m at 2018 prices is needed to maintain the structural integrity of Northern Ireland's road network. However, for many years, available funding has fallen well below the level required.

During the 2020-21 financial year, the Department bid for and received additional capital funding for Structural Maintenance as follows:

Monitoring Round	Bid Description	Bid £m	Allocation Received £m
June	Road Maintenance and Street Lighting repairs	11	0
October	Structural Maintenance	4.5	
	Minor Works	1	2
	Street Lighting	1	

From the partially successful bid of £2.0m received in October monitoring, £1.1m was allocated as a priority to Structural Maintenance with the remainder directed to Street Lighting repairs and Minor Works.

In January monitoring, internal reallocations of £4.5m of capital funding to Structural Maintenance were made to utilise the available capacity to deliver additional work on the road network over the remainder of the current financial year.

Expenditure¹ for total Capital Structural Maintenance in 2020-21 is currently £82m of which £28m was spent in the Western Division. Fermanagh and Omagh along with Mid Ulster and Derry City and Strabane areas are contained within the Roads Western Division.

Capital Structural Maintenance activities include Resurfacing, Surface Dressing, Structural Drainage, and Structural Stability.

Our divisional teams are currently developing and establishing programmes. In line with our commitment to Councils, details of the road maintenance programmes will be presented by Divisional Roads Managers to the various District Councils at their Spring meetings over the coming months.

¹ Draft, subject to audit.

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