

MEMBERS' BUSINESS: THE CONDITION OF SCOTLAND'S ROADS

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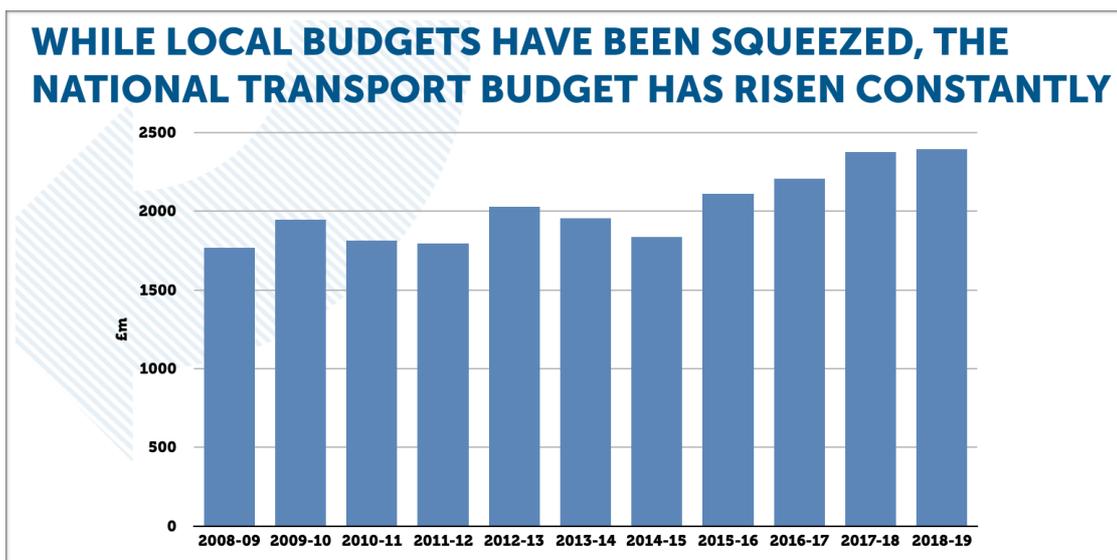
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1. Key Points

- Poorly maintained local roads are a problem for all road users and pose a threat not only to the safety of car drivers, but also bus passengers, pedestrians and cyclists.
- Investment in local roads has declined in recent years due to decreasing Local Authority budgets; at the same time, the Scottish Government has massively increased spending on new trunk roads.
- Opinion polling we commissioned indicated that 84% of the public agreed that priority should be given to repairing current roads ahead of building new roads.
- The Scottish Government should prioritise fixing the local road network ahead of pursuing a £9 billion trunk road building programme. This would benefit more people; it would also provide for greater local economic activity as road maintenance can be carried out by local firms and Local Authorities rather than the international construction companies that typically win the contracts for new trunk road construction.

2. Investment in local roads has declined whilst Scottish Government spending on new trunk roads has increased

Local Authority investment in roads declined by 20% in real terms between 2010/11 and 2016/17 in the face of increasingly constrained budgets at a local level.¹ Reduced spending, combined with severe damage to roads through poor winter weather, has left many local roads in unacceptable conditions. Meanwhile, the Scottish Government's transport budget has increased by around a third over the past decade (see chart below).² The Scottish Government's budget for new trunk roads increased by 66% over the same period.



The Scottish Government's decision to let local roads deteriorate and instead build new roads is economically, socially and environmentally unsustainable and is putting an unnecessary strain on both Local Authorities and road users.

3. Poorly maintained local roads pose a threat to all road users

The effects of poorly maintained roads – such as potholes – pose a threat to the safety of all road users. Car drivers, bus passengers and bus operators all suffer the ill-effects of poorly maintained local roads through damage to vehicles and uncomfortable journeys. For people travelling by foot or bike the impacts can be even more severe, as potholes and poorly maintained pavements can cause serious injuries. Poor quality roads also make travelling by foot or bike unappealing options and restrict these modes being an option for all ages and abilities.

4. The Scottish Government must prioritise investment in improving the local road network ahead of new trunk roads

Scottish roads policy should focus on clearing the £2.25 billion roads repair backlog – a small share of the £9 billion currently planned for new trunk roads. This would benefit all road users – car drivers, bus passengers, cyclists, and pedestrians. A ‘fix it first’ approach is favoured by the vast majority of Scots, with polling that we commissioned finding that 84% of the public agreed that priority should be given to repairing current roads instead of building new roads.³ Repairing existing road infrastructure would also present a huge economic benefit, as local firms could carry out the work, and it would also support Scottish Local Authority finances.

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¹ Improvement Service (2018) National Benchmarking Overview Report 2016/17. Page 10.

² Based upon ‘Motorways and Trunk Roads’ spending line in Scottish Government Draft Budgets published over the past decade.

³ ScotPulse poll for Transform Scotland, May 2014.

Scotland's alliance for sustainable transport

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We campaign for walking, cycling and public transport to be the easiest and most affordable options for everyone. Our diverse membership brings together public, private and third sector organisations from across Scotland. We are a registered Scottish charity (SC041516).