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ALARM REPORT HIGHLIGHTS TRUE COSTS OF ROAD NEGLECT

Patchwork road network can't cope with extreme weather

The 15th Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) Survey¹, published on 25 March, reveals the chilling effects on local authority roads – and budgets – of 2009's extreme weather. Most London local authorities (78%) had their roads badly damaged by the winter storms, incurring an additional £48 million in maintenance costs. These additional costs fall on departments already underfunded by a total of £800 million in England and Wales (£50 million in London alone). Seventy per cent of London local authorities do not anticipate receiving emergency funding to help meet this unexpected burden.

The ALARM Survey, which collects information from local authority highways departments (responsible for 95% of roads) across England and Wales, also reveals a 53% rise in the number of potholes in London local authority roads². In 2009, 121,299 potholes were filled across London, at a cost of £8.3 million. The number of trenches dug by utility companies remained similar to last year at 356,000. London local authorities estimate that it would take a minimum of 8.6 years to catch up on the backlog of repairs at present rates of funding.

According to the report, reactive maintenance – the costs of dealing with emergency repairs rather than planned works – consumes one quarter of the average London maintenance budget (28%). The work must, however, be carried out if roads are not to become unsafe.

The majority of London ALARM Survey respondents (85%) think that utility companies should be charged for the additional costs created by their road openings. Even if properly reinstated, deep utility trenches weaken the structure of the road in which they are placed, shortening its life by 30% or more³. ALARM Survey participants estimated that if utility companies met these costs, the pressure on local authority highways maintenance budgets would be reduced, freeing on average 15% of London highways maintenance budgets for planned maintenance work.

ALARM 2010 LONDON QUICK REFERENCE

- **Shortfall in London's road maintenance budget £50 million**
- **121,299 potholes filled in London last year**
- **Average cost to fill a London pothole £68**
- **10,786 deep trenches per London authority**
- **Over £8m spent filling London potholes last year**
- **catch-up cost in London £1.2bn**
- **9 year maintenance backlog (London)**
- **£8.3m spent filling potholes last year in London**
- **Almost £1billion shortfall in road maintenance budgets (England and Wales)**

The Asphalt Industry Alliance, which commissioned the survey, is calling for:

- a new approach to funding roads maintenance, including sustained, longer-term budgets, which would allow for proper planned maintenance,
- better protection of road maintenance budgets at local authority level,
- a one-off injection of funds to tackle the backlog, and easier access to emergency funding to deal with winter damage.

Mike Linley, Chairman of the Asphalt Industry Alliance, comments: “Although there has been a small increase in central government funding over recent years, it is a drop in the ocean compared to the amounts needed to stop the rot. Local authority highways departments don’t want to throw away millions of pounds filling potholes and paying compensation claims – they want to implement cost-effective, planned maintenance programmes which would result in safer, longer-lasting road surfaces.

“Extreme winter weather would not cause so much damage if our roads were fit for purpose in the first place. The consequences of an underfunded roads maintenance service are now writ large on our road network. These include compromised road safety and wasted time as road users are held up by unplanned road works.

“Cutting back on roads maintenance budgets in search of savings would be a false economy. Our road network is the asset on which all other local services rely. Those local authorities which prioritise their roads maintenance budgets report higher levels of resident satisfaction and falls in compensation pay-outs of up to 30% - a real return on investment.”

The ALARM Survey report is downloadable from www.alarm-survey.co.uk

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Notes to editors:

1. The Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) Survey 2010, conducted by the Asphalt Industry Alliance, is based on information supplied by 75 % of local authorities in England and Wales and relates to 2009/10 budgets. Local authorities are responsible for 95 % of Britain’s roads.
2. Compared to ALARM 2009, the number of potholes in England is up 47%; in London up 53%, and in Wales down 1%.
3. A charge structure for trenching in the highway is published by TRL (project report PPR 386:2009).

Further information, interviews, photography:



A range of high resolution colour images are available on request

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