

Environment, Development and Transport Committee

Item No.

Report title:	Highway Asset Performance
Date of meeting:	14 October 2016
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe – Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services
Strategic impact <p>The highway network is fundamental to the local economy as it plays a major part in every aspect of our lives. An effective network enables everyone to move around the county more easily for access to work, key services and leisure.</p> <p>Our goal for is to provide a value for money highway service, whilst continuing to provide a safe highway network and maintaining public satisfaction, in line with corporate priorities.</p>	

Executive summary

This report highlights performance of the highway asset against current service level priorities, based on previous Member decisions. It covers planned capital structural maintenance of the assets only.

The 2016-17 budget of £34m includes recent capitalised revenue activities of £3m, £2.9m from the DfT Challenge fund, and the surface water drainage scheme in Greater Norwich. The estimated budget is £34.5 in 2017-18.

The condition data for 2006-7 is used as a baseline against which the highway backlog is measured. The overall highway asset backlog at June 2016 is £48.9m, which has improved from the 2014/15 figure of £59.2m.

Public satisfaction with highway condition in Norfolk, remains positive. We are ranked 2nd of 25 shire counties. The reduction of the backlog and increase in public satisfaction suggests that the current asset management strategy has been effective.

The report also covers a number of improvement actions for the next Department for Transport (DfT) Incentive fund submission and some proposed changes to standards that require Member approval.

Recommendations:

- 1. Members to review, comment and approve the proposed;-**
 - a. Revised Asset Management Strategy and Performance framework**
 - b. Stakeholder Liaison and Communications Plan**
 - c. Asset Data Management Strategy**
 - d. Recommendations in the Highway Maintenance Efficiency Programme(HMEP), Management of Highway Drainage Assets**
- 2. Members to review, comment and approve the proposed changes to standards and procedures for**
 - a. Frequency of highway safety inspections**
 - b. Rural grass cutting**
 - c. Winter service decision making for the 2016-17 season.**

1. Proposal

1.1. DfT Highways Incentive Fund

- 1.1.1. Members received a paper on the Highway Asset Management Improvement Plan in November 2015 with an update of changes to the funding mechanism for local highway maintenance capital funding and the steps being taken in preparation.
- 1.1.2. The amendments to the improvement plan require Member review and approval. These will aid our funding submission as we seek to receive the full allocation of funding available from DfT.
- 1.1.3. The individual proposals are detailed in Section 3.

1.2. Highway Standards

- 1.2.1. The Code of Practice is not statutory but provides highway authorities with guidance on highways management. Adoption of the recommendations within this document is a matter for each highway authority,
- 1.2.2. The standards included in our Transport Asset Management Plan are developed with reference to the Code, based on our own legal interpretation, risks, needs and priorities.
- 1.2.3. A new Code of Practice is due to be published on 30 September 2016. It will change to a risk-based approach determined by each Highway Authority and will involve appropriate analysis, development and approval through authorities' executive processes.
- 1.2.4. The individual proposals for highway safety inspections, rural grass-cutting and winter service decision making are detailed in section 4 and have been developed with the new Code in mind.

2. Highway Asset Performance

- 2.1. Our Highway Asset Management Policy and Strategy was agreed in July 2014 by EDT committee.
- 2.2. The priorities are:
 - A roads – maintain current condition
 - B and C roads – maintain current condition
 - Bridges – give priority to bridges on the HGV network
 - Traffic signals – target the controller replacement programme on those over 20 years old
 - Footways – maintain current condition
 - U roads – give priority to more heavily trafficked roads in village centres
 - Drainage – local maintenance schemes
- 2.3. It was recognised that the current level of funding makes the maintenance of current condition challenging and that in most circumstances the strategy will be to manage deterioration.
- 2.4. Any shortfall in achieving 2006-07 service levels, or otherwise agreed in 2013-14, is described as a backlog. The overall highway asset backlog at April 2016 is £48.9m. This is an improvement compared with £59.2m in 2015 and £72.5m reported in 2014. This has been summarised in Appendix A.
- 2.5. A summary on the performance of individual asset types can be seen in Appendix B.

2.6. Customer Satisfaction

- 2.6.1. The National Highways and Transport Network Survey is carried out annually. For the 2015 survey 3,300 Norfolk residents, chosen at random, were asked to rate a range of highway and transportation services, including public transport, walking and cycling, congestion road safety and highway maintenance.
- 2.6.2. Altogether 100 local authorities signed up for the 2015 survey. Out of the 27 county councils, Norfolk ranked:
 - Condition of highways - 3rd
 - Traffic management - 4th
 - Local bus services - 8th
 - Road safety education - 9th
 - Street lighting - 18th
 - Satisfaction with public rights of way - 24th
- 2.6.3. Overall Norfolk County Council ranked second against comparable county councils, compared with third in 2014.
- 2.6.4. The results of the 2016 survey will be released shortly after the committee meeting, on 16 October.
- 2.7. The asset management strategy now needs revision to include a performance framework with a 3-year horizon to reflect recent and possible future budgetary decisions.

3. DfT Incentive Fund

3.1. Asset Management Strategy and Performance Framework

- 3.1.1. The strategy is detailed in Appendix C and the performance framework in Appendix D
- 3.1.2. It is proposed that an annual Highway Performance report be presented to members in order for them to be informed on whether the strategy is delivering the performance targets, and to take corrective action or manage changing circumstances such as annual budgets or the regulatory framework.
- 3.1.3. This will clearly show that members are regularly involved in approving the direction for asset management, and there is consultation on an appropriate basis via an annual review cycle. This will confirm the approach on these two items as well the leadership and commitment required by the DfT incentive fund.

3.2. Stakeholder Liaison and Communications Plan

- 3.2.1. Norfolk County Council and the Norwich City Agency work together with Tarmac, Mouchel and Dynniq to deliver the highways service in Norfolk. A Stakeholder Liaison Plan outlines our joint approach for how we liaise and communicate with our stakeholders. This forms part of the collaborative work taking place that has allowed us to achieve the 'BS11000 Collaborative Business Relationships' accreditation.
- 3.2.2. Principally the plan outlines how we will inform stakeholders about our policies and activities and how we listen to them when maintaining and developing our highway network. It also incorporates an annual communication plan which outlines key activities to help improve and maintain good communication with our stakeholders across the highways service.
- 3.2.3. The plan includes direct reference to our Transport Asset Management Plan

- 3.2.4. The plan can be seen in Appendix E.
- 3.2.5. A good communication process for highway infrastructure management demonstrates our approach to asset management to the public. This is viewed as good practice in the Highway Maintenance Efficiency Programme (HMEP) incentive fund. The proposal is to formally adopt the Stakeholder Liaison and Communications Plan.
- 3.3. **Data Management Strategy**
 - 3.3.1. The proposed strategy builds upon current practice and gives the visibility required by the DfT incentive fund.
 - 3.3.2. The plan can be seen in Appendix F
- 3.4. **HMEP Management of Highway Drainage Assets**
 - 3.4.1. Our current practice is in line with DfT recommendations and how we apply these in practical steps is shown in Appendix G. The review and adoption of the recommendations is considered as a good practice in the HMEP incentive fund questionnaire. The proposal is that these are formally adopted by the EDT committee.
4. **Highway Standards**
 - 4.1. **Frequency of Highway Safety Inspections**
 - 4.1.1. The new code of Practice for Highway Maintenance allows a risk based approach rather than prescribing standard frequency for highway inspection. It is proposed to change from a monthly inspection on our Principal, Main Distributor and HGV access routes to six weekly. Details can be seen in Appendix H. It is proposed the change will take place from April 1st 2017.
 - 4.1.2. Our roads are relatively lightly trafficked when compared to national roads, and our repudiation rate on these roads is good. The proposed inspection cycle aligns well with our 35 day response time for planned defects, making it clearer upon inspection if programmed works are overdue.
 - 4.2. **Rural Grass cutting**
 - 4.2.1. EDT Committee in November 2015 approved the cutting regime for the 2016 as;-
 - An intermittent cut in May/June.
 - A second intermittent cut in July/ August.
 - The second treatment to be replaced bi-annually with a “single swathe/visibility cut’
 - 4.2.2. In the course of the season a decision by EDT committee in July was taken that the second cut would be a single swathe/ with visibility, at an additional cost of £25k.
 - 4.2.2.1. It is proposed that Members adopt this change in the rural cutting standard in future years to;-
 - An intermittent cut in May/June.
 - A ‘single swathe’/visibility cut annually in July/ August.
 - 4.3. **Winter Service Decision Making**
 - 4.3.1. The winter service is managed by highway staff making decisions based on information supplied by a specialist weather forecast provider. The current matrix when making a decision about whether to mobilise winter gritting actions uses 1C as the trigger point. If the weather forecast states that the road surface temperature will drop below 1C gritting should probably take place.

- 4.3.2. Based in the anticipated revisions to the national code of practice which is expected to introduce a more risk based approach, it is proposed to change the trigger point to 0.5C which would reduce the number of gritting actions taken when the road surface temperature is above zero. This should reduce the number of unnecessary actions.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. It is anticipated that proposed changes in highway safety inspection frequency, will result in a reduction in the resource for dedicated highway inspection. The implications and use of resources will be reviewed in as part of the wider departmental work on localities.
- 5.2. The increase in grass cutting coverage will cost an additional £25,000 per year.
- 5.3. Winter Service decision making. It is anticipated that changing the trigger point to 0.5C would achieve savings within the winter service budget of circa £100,000 per year. However, this is based on the average winter costs and can vary based on the actual winter requirements.

6. Issues, risks and innovation

- 6.1. Highway Safety
- 6.2. Visibility at bends and highway junctions is a highway safety concern. Cutting at these areas will be maintained twice a year.
- 6.3. Outside these areas, visibility at private and field entrances will only be cut as part of the single swathe/visibility cut.
- 6.4. In exceptional growing conditions additional cutting would need to be considered.
- 6.5. We have analysed our traffic data and 3rd party claims and following a risk-based approach believe the change in highway safety inspections frequency and winter service decision making will not diminish highway safety.

7. Background

- 7.1. At the EDT committee meeting on 20 November 2015 Members approved the Highways asset management- Improvement [EDT committee minutes 20 Nov 2015 Highways asset management- Improvement plan](#)
- 7.2. At the EDT committee meeting on 8 July 2014 Members approved Highway Asset Management Strategy [EDT committee minutes meeting 8 July 2014](#)
- 7.3. At the EDT committee meeting on 20 November 2015 Members approved Rural grass-cutting standard [EDT committee minutes 20 November Highway maintenance- grass cutting standards and community 'top up' opportunities](#).
- 7.4. At the EDT committee meeting on 8 July 2016 Members Rural grass-cutting standard [EDT committee 8 July 2016 urgent business](#)

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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