

October 2023 Division Members Report

Cllr Sara Randall Johnson

This month my report is a single-issue one giving an update on Highways and related items that might be of interest to you.

As you might imagine with Devon having the largest network of roads in England at over 8000 miles (12,000km) the permanent challenges posed by roads largely built for horse and cart, with little in the way of proper foundations is massive!

Safety defects

That said like all plans sometimes things do not go as you hope, and in the case of Highways that is invariably down to unexpected 'weather events' diverting resources away from day to day work, leading to delay in delivering those plans.

Following the extremely high numbers of publicly reported potholes across the network during the first part of the year, and the increase in repair gangs as a response, numbers gradually stabilised through the spring and into the summer, however, but remain above average for this time of year. This has led to some residual pressure on inspection teams in assessing backlogs. Evening and weekend working has remained in place in some areas to assist with this.

Work is underway to improve the messaging on the 'report a problem' webpages to reduce the number of defects that are incorrectly reported – since January this year this represents around 55% of all reports received.

Following a very challenging winter for asset condition and safety defects, the numbers recorded across the network had reduced sufficiently that Highway Safety Inspectors (HSI) were able to re-start the identification of non-safety or 'serviceability' defects in June. This process offers HSI's the discretion to record defects that do not meet investigatory criteria in our Highway Safety Policy.

A trial with material called 'Elastomac' is taking place and this product is providing a lower carbon and cost-effective means of repairing carriageway defects. This 'mastic' (natural resin for bonding) product uses up to 70% recycled materials, including lorry tyres, that would otherwise be incinerated, This can allow reactive works gangs to undertake repairs much more quickly when compared to conventional techniques.

Winter Service

Preparations for winter have been taking place over the summer, with the fleet of gritters receiving their annual servicing and calibration checks. Works to install solar panels on some of the salt storage barns have also been progressed and salt stocks have been replenished ahead of winter.

By keeping the age of the DCC gritting vehicles under 10 years old, maintenance costs are reduced and ensure the fleet is safe and appropriate for the task in hand.

In preparation for this winter, eight of our oldest/most costly gritters will be 'traded-in' against six nearly new vehicles. This will reduce the secondary fleet from twelve vehicles down to ten, striking an appropriate balance of service resilience against financial pressures.

Gully Cleaning

Over 5,000 drainage issues identified by the gully cleaning crews and highway officers have been resolved since April. The challenge remains dealing with over 15,000 outstanding reported issues with limited funds available.

The ongoing trial to pre inspect gullies due to be cleaned on the cyclical programme has shown 49% of gullies inspected to date do not require cleaning. The aim of the trial is to ensure plant and equipment is deployed where it is most effective.

A joint trial with Devon's Flood team to place gully sensors in selected streets in Devon is in the preparation stages. It is hoped this externally funded trial will offer insight into whether technology can be used to inform policy or reaction for cyclical gully cleaning. The trial intends to run for an 18-month period from the winter period.

Road Markings

Since April, remarking has been undertaken in six of our market towns with works planned in a further seventeen. The main road remarking and road stud replacement programme has completed eight locations with a further twelve locations planned.

Following a review, it has been identified that the condition of our rural give way markings was an area for improvement and that these provided important information to drivers. Plans have been developed to systematically remark these features in rural areas. There are approximately 6,000 markings that will be treated through this project that is anticipated to take 4-5 years to complete.

Traffic Management

Since April 2023, 162 requests for waiting restrictions have been delivered through the various area Highways and Traffic orders committees (HATOC) Waiting Restriction Programme across Devon and work has continued on 20mphs limits in Winkleigh, Atherington, Ashburton and Tiverton, which will be implemented later this financial year. In addition, the Traffic Management team have progress 350 applications for new or the remarking of disabled bays and 56 applications for new or the remarking of Access Protection Markings, which have been processed, and orders for works placed.

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