



Image: Getty (all rights reserved)

Feb 24, 2024 00:01 GMT

Council road maintenance in England drops to lowest point in five years

Council road maintenance in England dropped by 45% in 2022/23 compared to five years ago resulting in 3,366 fewer miles receiving any kind of improvement work, according to RAC analysis of new government statistics.*

Figures show that 764 miles of A roads were strengthened, resurfaced or preserved in 2022/23, a 37% decrease (458 miles) from 1,222 in 2017/2018. For minor roads listed as B, C, and unclassified, the numbers were 3,380 in the last financial year compared to 6,288 five years before, a drop of 46%

(2,908 miles).

Worryingly, just 4% of the 17,853 miles of A roads maintained by councils in England were resurfaced or given life-extending preservation treatment in the last financial year.

Looking at specific types of road maintenance, 1,223 miles of all road types were entirely resurfaced by councils: a small 9% increase on 2021/22 but 22% fewer than six years ago. Meanwhile preservation treatments – such as surface dressing and micro surfacing used to extend the life of roads – fell to their lowest level in five years. Just 2,698 miles of roads were given preservation treatment in the last financial year, a 50% dip on the 5,345 miles treated five years ago and a 25% drop year-on-year compared to 2021/22.

Regionally, more than a third (35%) of the 158 roads authorities in the latest data failed to carry out any road surfacing while six-in-10 (61%) did no preservation maintenance work at all. And over the last 12 months, the average length of roads resurfaced for all authorities was just 17 miles and 28 miles for preservation work.

For two years running, Kent resurfaced the most miles of A roads out of all authorities: 26 miles of its 502 mile-network (5%), three miles less than the 29 it completed last year. Meanwhile, Staffordshire carried out the most amount of preservation work, treating 36 miles of its 412 miles of A roads (9%).

Moving southwest, Gloucestershire topped the tables for the highest number of minor roads resurfaced by replacing 64 miles of its 3,066-mile network (just 2%), while in the East, Norfolk completed the most preservation work by treating 251 miles of 5,573 roads (4.5%).

But the highest percentage of roads were treated in the West Midlands, with Telford and Wrekin resurfacing 18% (nine miles) of its 52-mile network and Sandwell carrying out preservation treatment on 13% (seven miles) of its 54-mile network.

The analysis follows a pre-Christmas period pockmarked with road defects for RAC patrols who attended the highest number of pothole-related breakdowns

in any fourth quarter since 2019.**

RAC head of policy Simon Williams said: “These figures lay bare just how little resurfacing and life-extending preservation work councils have managed to carry out in the last financial year. We suspect this means road maintenance in England has reached a new low point – a sorry state of affairs considering how car-dependent the country is.

“It’s especially concerning to see that so few miles of A roads received any form of road maintenance last year when these important routes are used by millions of drivers every day. Meanwhile, our minor roads that are essential in connecting rural areas have received barely a crumb of the pie.”

It’s not just councils bearing the cost of damaged roads – pothole repairs can also be extremely expensive for drivers. RAC garage data from December 2023 shows that for anything more serious than a puncture, drivers can expect to pay up to £460 if their car needs to go to a garage after hitting a pothole.

Simon Williams continued: “Highways authorities need to take a ‘traffic light’ approach to road maintenance. Roads in ‘green’ and ‘amber’ conditions should undergo preventative maintenance by filling potholes and carrying out the most appropriate surface dressing treatment between April and September. This will seal the roads against water and prevent cracking in the cold winter months. Roads deemed to be in ‘red’ condition need to be fully resurfaced, or strengthened, as no amount of preventative treatment will stop them from falling apart.

“With road maintenance levels taking a nose-dive, it’s no surprise the RAC’s Pothole Index has got worse recently with drivers now nearly twice as likely to suffer a pothole-related breakdown than they were in 2006. That’s why the Government’s £8.3bn cash injection over 11 years still isn’t nearly enough for a long-term fix. We believe a proportion of money raised through fuel duty should be ringfenced to give councils the certainty of additional dedicated roads maintenance funding for years to come.

“Otherwise, this serious, decades-long problem will continue, meaning more roads will literally crumble away. The longer this is left unaddressed, the bigger the eventual bill for councils.”

To help highways authorities monitor as many road surface defects as possible, the RAC has partnered with technology company Metricell to encourage drivers to use [Stan](#), a free mobile app that collects data on the state of UK roads and engages local authorities to fix the issues.

After downloading Stan, users can report a road defect by taking a photo or video with their smartphone, only if it's safe to do so when the car is at a complete stop. The app uses AI to identify the defect which feeds into a national road map of surface issues on the RAC and Stan websites.

Download Stan on the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

* RDC0321

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1115168/rdc0321.ods

Data for 2022/2023 to 2017/2018 provided by the Department for Transport

** The RAC Pothole Index is a 12-month rolling measure of the share of pothole fault breakdowns compared to 2006, corrected for seasonal weather effects and improving longer term vehicle reliability Data has been collected by the RAC since 2006. Data deliberately excludes punctures.

The press office email address is press.office@rac.co.uk and media centre is at media.rac.co.uk. **Please note:** the press office is unable to help with individual customer enquiries - please visit the [RAC contacts page](#) to find the right contact.

About the RAC

The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to more than 13 million private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. As well as its premium nationwide breakdown assistance service – with an expert branded patrol workforce attending more than two million

breakdowns every year – it offers a wide range of market-leading products across insurance, legal services, vehicle inspections and service, maintenance and repair. The RAC is also at the forefront in helping drivers make the switch to electric vehicles and leads in the development of new solutions for businesses and OEMs, partnering with the best in the motoring and mobility space.

Visit the [RAC website](#).

Contacts



RAC Press Office

Press Contact

press.office@rac.co.uk

Emails monitored during normal office hours. For breakdown queries, call 0330 159 0740

ISDN number on request