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Driven to despair: Concern about the dire state of the nation's local roads reaches record levels

Drivers' despair with the woeful state of Britain's local roads – those which make up 98% of all roads* – has reached the highest level ever, scathing new figures from the RAC show.**

For the first time ever, a majority of drivers – nearly six-in-10 (56%) – surveyed for the RAC Report on Motoring say the condition and maintenance of roads for which councils are responsible was one of their top motoring

concerns, up seven percentage points compared to 2023 (49%). Frustration with local roads is now an incredible 21 percentage points ahead of drivers' second biggest concern, the cost of insuring a vehicle, and 24 ahead of the third biggest issue which is the cost of fuel.

A record, and growing, proportion of drivers are also reporting that local roads they use are in a worse state than the 12 months before. This year, almost three-quarters (73%) of drivers say the condition of the local roads they use regularly is poorer than a year ago, compared to 67% last year and just 49% who said the same thing in 2019. Just 6% of drivers believe local road surfaces have improved this year compared to last, a statistic that underlines the desperate state many councils now find themselves in when it comes to looking after some of their most vital assets.

The appalling state of many local roads also has clear consequences for cars. More than a quarter of drivers (27%) say their vehicle has suffered damage as a result of potholes in the last 12 months, a figure which rises to 32% among those who live in rural areas. Punctures (47%) are the most common problem reported, followed by wheel damage (43%) and broken suspension springs (29%). The latter two problems can be particularly expensive, with RAC data showing that the average cost of repairing a family car costing anything up to £460.

The RAC's figures show that the problem of substandard local roads is more acute in rural areas, where 81% of drivers say conditions are worse in 2024 than in 2023, and in suburban locations where the proportion is only slightly lower at 78%. Both figures are record highs.

But even in towns and cities, a majority of respondents – 53% – believe the condition of local roads they regularly drive on is worse than a year earlier. Across the UK, the greatest proportions of drivers who report the condition of local roads as being bad are those in the East Midlands (85%), the South East of England (83%) and the South West (79%). Even in London, where as many as 18% of respondents said they believed their local roads had improved during the previous 12 months, half (50%) still said the opposite.

Separate RAC breakdown data*** shows that patrols went out to 25,085 pothole-related breakdowns in the 12 months to the end of June. Since the start of 2020, the total number of breakdowns most likely to be caused by potholes stands at a staggering 167,000.

While potholes and other surface defects are the main problems affecting local roads, cited by almost all drivers (98%) who say conditions have worsened, the problems do not end there. Poor drainage and a lack of adequate run-off in wet weather are also significant issues, noted by 61% of drivers, with 58% noticing faded road markings and 34% poor signage visibility.

The fact that many roads are slow to drain in wet weather may be exacerbating the dangers potholes pose to drivers, especially when those potholes are hidden by standing surface water. This is backed up by the fact that 86% of drivers see potholes as the road defect that poses the greatest safety risk, followed by 50% who say it is poor drainage. Four-in-10 respondents (38%) meanwhile believe faded road markings are one of the biggest hazards.

Drivers' dismay with the state of the roads is also not confined to local roads, with the RAC's report finding a jump this year in the proportion of drivers who say the condition of motorways and dual carriageways is one of their top concerns – 16% of drivers responded to that effect, up from 11% in 2023.

The RAC has written to both the new Secretary of State for Transport and Minister for the Future of Roads outlining the gravity of the issue and calling for urgent clarification of the funding councils will receive for road maintenance – something that may not come until October's Budget. But it also advises that the problems with the UK's local roads are more complex than simply a lack of money, a point most recently made in the National Audit Office's report published on 23 July. This uncovered multiple issues, including the way that road maintenance funding is allocated to councils and the fact government does not have an accurate picture of the true state of roads in council control.****

RAC head of policy Simon Williams said: "These new figures are a damning condemnation of the commitments made by previous governments to fix Britain's perpetual pothole plague. It's as clear as day that councils simply haven't had the financial support they need to bring the standard of the roads in their care up to a reasonable standard.

"Whatever promises about road maintenance funding that have been made in the past – whether that's through things like the Pothole Action Fund or so-called 'Challenge' funds, where councils were asked to bid for extra cash –

haven't delivered. And it's all road users, including drivers, bus users, and those on two wheels, who are continuing to pay the price. At best, journeys are made downright uncomfortable as a result of potholes, while at worst they cause expensive damage or even represent a danger to life and limb.

“It is absolutely remarkable that, on average, drivers we surveyed are far more concerned about the state of their local roads this year than they are about either the cost of motor insurance – which has been rocketing in recent years – or the cost of fuel which is still at an uncomfortably high level. If this doesn't underline the seriousness of the situation we now find ourselves in, we're not sure what does.

“The new Government simply must do something differently. Without a promise of far more funds for councils – something we will push hard for ahead of the autumn Budget – its options are extremely limited. Put bluntly, the less we spend as a nation on our roads now, the more it will cost us in the future. That's the pattern we've been in for years now, as is clearly shown by data from ourselves and from many other parts of the industry. So, the ultimate question is this – in terms of the inevitable costs we'll face in the future, can we really afford not to fix our dilapidated roads?

“Drivers, who contribute billions to the Exchequer in taxes every year, have been driven to despair by a local road network that, in far too many parts of the country, is just going from bad to worse. It shouldn't be this way. They need something to believe in from both national and local government. Anything less than a step change in the condition of the roads over the course of this Parliament simply will not do.”

Notes for those analysing the data

* Sources – latest Department for Transport road length and road condition statistics

** Research conducted on RAC's behalf by Online95 for the RAC Report on Motoring 2024. 2,691 drivers completed the survey. Only those who hold a full, current UK driving licence, drive at least once a month and have a motor vehicle in their household took part. Responses were rim weighted to be nationally representative of UK motorists in age, gender, socio-economic

groups and all UK regions. Effective sample size 1,925 drivers

*** RAC pothole breakdown data deliberately excludes punctures, as these can be caused by a variety of issues – e.g. over- or under-inflated tyres – and not just potholes

**** <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/the-condition-and-maintenance-of-local-roads-in-england/>

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 nearly 14 million UK 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. Included in this is the first-of-its-kind nationwide Mobile Mechanics service which brings the garage to homes and workplaces.

At the forefront of new solutions for business fleets and consumers, the RAC's breakdown service is electric-ready with mobile EV charging technology and can be called on using [myRAC](#) – the all-in-one route planner, fuel finder and breakdown reporting app.

Visit the [RAC website](#).

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