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Poor state of local roads is number-one concern for drivers despite drop in car use in the pandemic

Despite a dramatic fall in car use seen during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, the poor state of local roads is officially the UK's most widespread motoring concern in 2020, according to research carried out for the RAC's annual [Report on Motoring](#)*.

Some 38% of 3,068 drivers surveyed – representing the equivalent of 15.2m people – listed the condition and maintenance of local roads as a concern, up from 33% in 2019, putting it ahead of other issues such as drivers using handheld phones (32%), the poor standard of other motorists' driving (27%) and the aggressive behaviour of other drivers (26%).

This year's research highlighted a noticeable increase in the number of drivers who say local roads have deteriorated with 52% saying conditions are worse than 12 months ago, compared with 49% who said this in 2019. Only 6% of drivers think the state of local roads has improved, a dramatic fall on last year's 11%.

These national findings correlate with the RAC's own data which shows that the third quarter of 2020 – July, August and September – saw 1,871 call-outs** for damaged shock absorbers, broken suspension springs or distorted wheels – breakdowns that are most likely to have been caused by poor road surfaces. This is the highest third-quarter percentage of all RAC breakdowns seen since 2015.

The [Pothole Index](#), which is the RAC's most accurate long-term indicator of the health of the UK's roads, now stands at 1.57. This means drivers are

nearly 1.6 times as likely to suffer a pothole-related breakdown as they would have been in 2006 when the data was first analysed in this way. While this is the lowest figure seen since Q1 2008 – the point at which a marked decline in the quality of the UK’s began – it unfortunately ends a steady reduction in the index which started to fall from 2.67 in Q2 2018. The index’s all-time high figure was 3.5 in Q1 2010 following a very cold early winter.

Those based in rural areas are more likely to say local roads have worsened (59%), as are older drivers, with 62% of those aged 45 and over saying conditions have deteriorated. Meanwhile, more of those living in London (10%) and other urban centres (12%) think the state of local roads is better in 2020 when compared to the previous year.

For the overwhelming majority who say conditions have deteriorated, problems with road surfaces, such as potholes, remains the number-one gripe for 97% of drivers. But this year there has also been a sharp increase in complaints related to other factors such as the visibility of signage (cited by 46% of drivers in 2020, compared with just 17% a year ago), the amount of roadside litter (35%, up from 23%) and a lack of grass and/or foliage maintenance (34% up from 22%).

RAC head of roads policy Nicholas Lyes said:

“These findings are a big concern given that last year’s relatively mild winter should not, in normal circumstances, have led to a further decline in road surface quality.

“Usually, RAC patrols see the fewest number of pothole-related breakdowns in the third quarter which coincides with the summer, with volumes having dropped steadily from the high point recorded in the first three months of the year. This normally correlates with councils carrying out work to repair potholes in early spring that have appeared over the winter.

“But, faced with the early stages of the pandemic, local authorities might not have been able to keep up their planned maintenance programmes, possibly due to staffing issues, and local roads suffered as a consequence. This also calls into question just how much progress has actually been made in fixing the 11 million ‘nuisance’ potholes cited by transport secretary Grant Shapps in May. On the flipside, with less traffic, there was perhaps a far better opportunity for councils to fix the roads than in previous years, so we were

pleased to see that several local authorities did just that

“It’s also important to point out that our Report on Motoring research was conducted before the re-opening of schools in September – a development that has led to a rise in vehicle use and possibly to further degradation of unrepaired road surfaces.

“While in last month’s Spending Review the Chancellor committed £1.1bn to local roads maintenance in 2021-22, including £500m to fix potholes and resurface roads, we continue to call for a long-term funding strategy for local roads under local authority control to improve and guarantee their condition into the future. The emphasis shouldn’t just be on filling potholes but carrying out proper maintenance that prevents them from occurring in the first place.

“Our research for the RAC Report on Motoring identified increased support for this to be achieved by ring-fencing some funds from current fuel duty contributions. More than four-fifths (82%) of those surveyed were in favour of having a proportion of current taxation – duty and VAT on fuel, as well as Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) or ‘car tax’ – put aside for spending on local road maintenance. This compares to 77% who supported this idea in 2019. Simply ring-fencing 2ppl of existing fuel duty revenue alone would secure £4.7bn of funding over a five-year period.”

Motorways and high-speed dual carriageways

While research for the 2020 RAC Report on Motoring shows there has been no change in the number of motorists who say the condition of motorways and high-speed dual carriageways has deteriorated since 2019 (28%), only 6% believe they have actually improved, well down on last year’s 11%.

As with local roads, surface issues are the most common complaint (82%), but there has also been an increase in 2020 in the number of drivers who say that conditions are worse due to litter (37% versus 30% last year), lane marking visibility (36% versus 27%), signage visibility (30% versus 19%) and lack of grass or foliage maintenance (24% versus 18%).

To report a pothole, or to find out if you suffer from damage from one and wonder if you can claim for compensation, visit [the RAC’s pothole online guide](#).

Notes to Editors

* The RAC Report on Motoring is an in-depth view of driver opinion and behaviour and has been running every year since 1989. It is conducted among a sample of the driving public who are representative of UK motorists. The 2020 survey was completed by 3,068 drivers between 14 July and 4 August 2020.

** The RAC provides 'complete peace of mind' breakdown cover for more than 12m private and business drivers. The figures quoted are based on its individual members who buy policies direct from the RAC.

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About the RAC

The RAC provides complete peace of mind to 12m UK private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. Its services include:

- **[Breakdown assistance](#)**. Its highly-skilled, 1,600-strong branded patrol workforce attends more than two million breakdowns every year, fixing on average four out of five vehicles at the roadside. The RAC's patrol fleet is one of the most advanced in the UK, and was the first to roll out both an [All-Wheels-Up recovery system](#), allowing the vast majority of vehicles to be recovered from a single patrol van, and [EV Boost](#) mobile electric vehicle charging units
- **[Insurance](#)**. The RAC is a top-five [car insurance](#) broker having surpassed the 500,000 policies-in-force milestone in 2018. It also offers '[black box](#)' [telematics policies](#), as well as home and travel insurance
- **[Other motoring services](#)**. The RAC leads in the development of new solutions for business, fleets, electric vehicles and future car technology. Its additional products and services include

a [personal loans offering](#), a [used car buying website](#), [vehicle inspections and checks](#), [legal services](#) or up-to-the-minute [traffic and travel information](#). It also has a network of [Approved Dealers](#) and [Approved Garages](#) which combine the trust of RAC brand with local service and convenience

The RAC also works to support the interests of its members and UK drivers on the most important motoring issues which it identifies via the annual [RAC Report on Motoring](#) and the RAC Opinion Panel. The Report on Motoring is the longest running analysis of driver opinion in the UK having been published every year since 1989.

For more information about the RAC, 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