

Highways Transformation



Annual review

Background

In December 2023, the Highways Transformation Board was created with the view to make improvements across the areas of Highways where there were higher levels of public dissatisfaction.

A number of workstreams were established to sit within the improvement programme:

- Road condition
- Minor works
- Non-safety defects
- Customer journey
- Streetworks
- Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs)
- Communications and engagement
- People and HR
- Data, measurement and policy
- ICT and systems

The programme has achieved significant results and this review outlines those milestones as well as the next steps.



Road condition

Repairing potholes typically involves aiming to keep the road surface in a safe condition to prevent injury or damage to the travelling public, until a more significant repair can be undertaken.

In 2023/24, we trialled many of the new products coming to the market that claimed to be an improvement on the standard road repairs. While all these products can be effective, our learning has enabled us to draw on a range of different techniques and apply them in different circumstances, to maximise efficiency. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for potholes. However, with further trials of innovative products in 2024/25, we will continue to lead the way on quality and cost-effective repairs.

What we trialled in 2023/24:

Spray injection patching

Spray injection patching (SIP) is a cost-effective and efficient method that involves using specialised equipment to spray a mixture of aggregate and emulsion onto a damaged road surface. The aggregate is simultaneously premixed with a heated asphalt emulsion and sprayed through a hose and nozzle into the pothole. It isn't suitable for built-up areas where lots of cars are parked but it is great in more rural areas – an added benefit is that it can also be used to prepare a road for surface dressing.

Following a trial during 2023, we have scheduled a 14-week SIP programme for 2024/25 which started 15 April 2024. We expect this to form part of our routine approach in the future.

Cold lay repair material

Cold lay Tarmac is a specially developed product for Gloucestershire County Council which, unlike the traditional Tarmac product, does not require heating. The benefit of this over the traditional hot product is that we're not restricted by the product going cold during the day and, therefore, having to return to the depot for more hot product – we can be out fixing potholes faster and for longer. Also, it significantly reduces the amount of Tarmac wastage which has big environmental benefits.

The cost of cold material is higher than the traditional hot material but, once you account for the efficiencies associated with not running hot boxes to keep the material warm, avoiding part-load charges and waste from the hot material, cost comparisons improve.

The cold material does not adhere as effectively in high trafficked areas and where there is a high stress area of carriageway so our challenge in 2024/25 will be to create an effective operating model that balances the benefits and efficiencies of using both hot and cold material.



JCB Pothole Pro

The JCB Pothole Pro is a machine that can cut out defects as small as 1sqm. It can produce outputs of up to 250sqm per day. The machine does not lay or compact the asphalt so this needs to be done manually by our operatives.

Like the SIP, the JCB Pothole Pro is less suitable for built-up areas. The main benefits of the machine include a faster and safer operation for the cutting out and removal of any debris, reducing the duration of road closures and reducing the risk associated with Hand Arm Vibration (HAVs) and musculoskeletal issues for our operatives.

We have completed a 6-week trial for 2024/25 which started 10 April 2024.



Roadmender

Roadmender is an overlay material which can be used to seal and repair large but shallow defects. This makes it effective for shallow repairs that might not be safety critical but are a concern for customers.

The material needs to be heated onsite and is also more expensive than traditional products. A key benefit of this material is there is no joints for further deterioration due to water ingress; it seals the road and any repairs that it covers.

Wider operational improvements

All safety defect repairs are photographed. Each week, at least 5% of the repairs are audited against quality standards. Any repair that raises concerns is escalated for further scrutiny to identify the root cause e.g. poor quality material, poor workmanship or weather conditions impacting the repair.

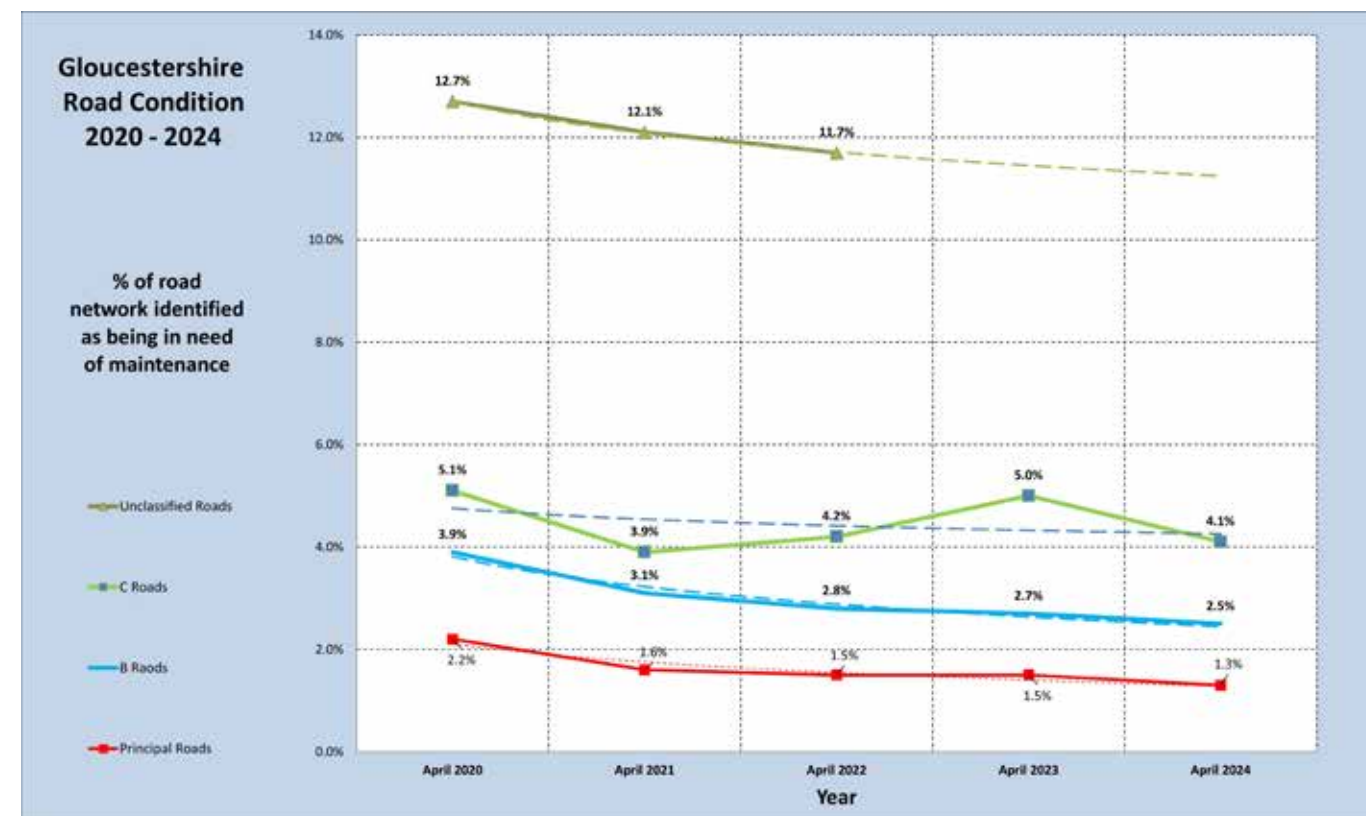
We will continue to work with our contractor to ensure the quality of the repairs being carried out are of a high standard.

We are also reviewing how we carry out our inspections and are looking to bring some of the dates forward so we can identify more safety defects in the summer. This will allow us to fix more potholes ahead of cold and wet weather in the winter.

Surface dressing and resurfacing

Both the surface dressing and the resurfacing programme continue to be delivered alongside the safety and non-safety defect repairs to improve Gloucestershire's overall road condition.

In line with feedback, we are expanding the surface dressing programme. We've also changed our approach to include more unclassified roads. In 2023/24, 129 miles of our network was improved through our resurfacing and surface dressing activity. Every year our roads are surveyed, and this indicates how much of our network needs maintenance. The latest calculation for 2023/24 showed a 1% improvement across all road classifications; a good increase given the 3,400 miles of network and very challenging inflation levels.



Minor works

We understood that more clarity, transparency and certainty was needed for our minor works programme. We now publish our 5-week schedule, showing work planned across the county for five weeks ahead.

This work tends to relate to smaller improvements or wider repairs that Members and customers have asked for. The programme can be viewed on a map in the Road Maintenance section of our website.

In 2024/25, we will look to expand this to publish our 26-week schedule.

Non-safety defects

We understand that residents were dissatisfied with non-safety defect potholes (smaller and less safety critical potholes) being left unrepaired after we had visited to fix a safety defect pothole. So, since June 2023, we have implemented a new approach we call 'Pothole Plus'. This means that where possible, we now fix any non-safety defect potholes within the same traffic management area as a safety defect pothole.

This has resulted in 6,500 additional non-safety defect repairs being made at the same time as operational changes and efficiencies. This will continue throughout 2024/25.

We have also been operating up to 8 Find and Fix gangs who work on a 'site basis' rather than being allocated known safety defects.

Each gang is allocated an area in which they identify and fix both safety and non-safety defects. Over 34,000 non-safety defect repairs have been carried out by Find and Fix since it started. As they are not just focussed on fixing safety defects, they have a big impact on improving the areas they are working in.

We have found this proactive approach to be cost effective. We have also measured a 73% reduction in defects enquiries in those areas, in the 6 months after having a Find and Fix gang.

Find and Fix teams will continue to operate throughout 24/25.

Customer journey

It was recognised that we needed to improve the way we engaged with our customers, by providing easier access to information and making it easier for customers to make and track enquiries. We also needed to embrace advances in digital end-to-end processing which would make our systems more efficient and free staff up to help on more complex customer enquiries.

In April 2023, we undertook a project to procure and develop Fix My Street as our new online reporting system. The new platform has simplified and significantly improved the reporting process for customers. The mobile-friendly app is easy to use and enables users to sign-up for updates about issues that have already been reported. It also has the capacity for new features and further development.

In addition to the new reporting system, new automated responses have been written to provide more information to our customers about what they can expect from us and where they can get more information.

We continue to develop Fix My Street by testing and adding new features, for instance, customers can now see and subscribe to updates for safety defects raised by Safety Inspectors. In 2024/25, we will explore the possibility of adding drainage, traffic signal and street lighting data. This will allow the public to easily identify where an issue is and give us more accurate information, potentially allowing for a quicker repair.

Since its launch in October 2023, over 35,000 enquiries have been made through our Fix My Street site, increasing our online reporting from 20% to 53%.

We have also re-written standard letter templates for responses to common queries, improving plain English and friendlier language so they are easier to understand.

In 2024/25, we plan to continue to improve our customers' experience by introducing an online contact form which is integrated with our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. This will ensure that more contact is recorded and it is a more efficient way to process our enquiries. We will also look to create a consistent reporting process across all Highways teams.

Streetworks

The council's works only account for around 20% of roadworks, but we know that any roadworks can be frustrating for residents, businesses and visitors. We have introduced improvement plans to ensure utility providers operate within the conditions of their permits within Gloucestershire.

During the last financial year we fined utility companies £810,000 for poor workmanship and we have placed 3 companies on improvement plans.

In 2024/25, we will be building additional categories into Fix My Street and running a campaign so the public are more informed about our powers in relation to streetworks, what utility companies themselves are responsible for and what can be addressed by us. We will continue to monitor the improvement plans in place, and will respond to all utility company failures.

Traffic Regulation Orders

Following a high number of Traffic Regulation Order requests we committed additional resources to stabilise TRO delivery through the contracting of external support and internal changes. This has resulted in better throughput of new, existing and historic requests. This is allowing us to better monitor and audit delivery better and the recruitment to vacant roles will improve this further.

Success in winning funding for schemes like M5 Junction 10 and the Cycle Spine has increased the demand for project related TRO's. Resources have been increased and prioritised to keep pace and deliver these new TRO's alongside existing priorities.

Members requested more transparency around the Traffic Regulation Order process, so we introduced monthly reporting and held a seminar for all Members to improve their understanding of the process.

In 2024/25, we will review Traffic Regulation Orders outside schools where they have been identified as having significant problems with inconsiderate parking. This will allow for easier enforcement. A cross-party task group will also be established to further review TRO's and improvements that need to be made.



Communication and engagement

Communicating clearly with residents is essential so they have good awareness of what's going on and because of the strong link between feeling informed and levels of satisfaction. We carried out a range of activities to improve our engagement with communities and more consistently highlight the work we're doing. This included seasonal campaigns to highlight the extra investment and work being done to improve highways, such as the 'Summer of Resurfacing' and 'Spring Pothole Repairs'.

We also engaged an agency to conduct high level research into other councils' best practice, take an in-depth look at National Highways and Transport Survey data and use AI to analyse our own customer feedback. This all helped inform our approach and provide some options to enhance the work we were already doing. The campaign used targeted adverts across a range of channels including social media, local radio, Spotify and on-street digital adverts. We also developed a series of short videos to raise awareness of highways operations and simplify complex information on our website. Alongside this we carried out a high profile media event focussed on pothole repairs and the JCB Pothole Pro which attracted valuable television coverage.

With a website refresh we have started to make the Highways pages of the GCC website easier to navigate so it is easier to find useful information. With a style refresh we have reviewed on-street signage and introduced consistency to our social media channels, making it easier to recognise our services and push content up newsfeeds. Each month we send the Your Highways email newsletter to more than 6,600 subscribers who have signed up to receive highways updates. The new bulletin contains seasonal updates about highways operations and highlights activities in each district.

We've also had a heavy focus on channel shift and have actively been involved in the development and promotion of Fix My Street. The new product has pushed online reporting from 20% to 53% which is an enormous increase in such a short space of time. Through social media and web promotion, media, email newsletters and stakeholder engagement we continue to sell the benefits and features of the new reporting channel.

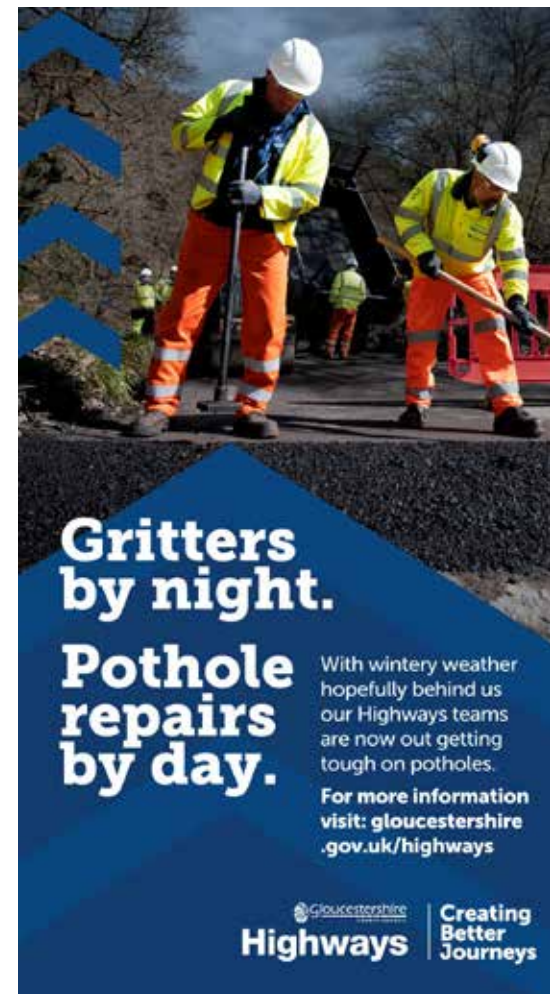
We wanted to get a better understanding of residents' issues and priorities, so in June 2023, we launched a Local Roads Survey. We received 3,353 responses to this survey and the key messages were:

- 93% of respondents stated that road condition was one of the main issues in their local area.
- Only half of respondents were aware they could report issues online.
- Social media, video, a newsletter and the Gloucestershire County Council website were the preferred methods of finding out what we are doing.

We have worked hard on developing our communications, however, we are well aware that to truly shift public opinion it will take consistent messaging backed up by on-the-ground results. During 2024/25 we will reflect on what has gone well and what more we can do to improve. We will take the transformation work into a business-as-usual annual communications strategy, based on our evidence of what is having the biggest impact in our communities.

This will likely include:

- More positive and proactive news stories in traditional and social media
- Developing and enhancing our on-site and vehicle branding
- Shifting our traditional letter-writing to digital communication and more on-site signage
- Further improvements to web content and general messaging to make it easier to understand
- Targeted communication based on seasonal activities that actively encourage channel shift for reporting.



People and HR



A priority of the transformation programme was to ensure we had the capacity to deliver our services. There is a skills shortage nationally, so we wanted to position ourselves to be the preferred employer for skilled candidates.

We introduced a microsite where potential candidates could find out about our vacancies and produced a video giving an overview of what it's like to work for Gloucestershire Highways.

We have reviewed our 'hardest to fill' roles and have done more to ensure that we are attractive to the recruitment market. We continue to support our Skills Academy and Apprentice programmes.

We also undertook a redesign of the Traffic and Transport Service which was carrying a number of 'hard to fill' vacancies. The structure created from the redesign reflected the demand for the service but also created posts that offered potential candidates a varied workload that would allow them to develop their skills and career with us.

In 2024/25 we plan to do more around 'growing our own' and apprenticeships. We will also continue to carry out Workforce Planning so we can identify where we may have gaps in the future and plan for them.

Data, measurement and policy

Every year, we participate in the National Highways and Transport Survey. Data from questions in the NHT Public Satisfaction Survey allow us to canvas opinion of our residents and benchmark us against other participating authorities.

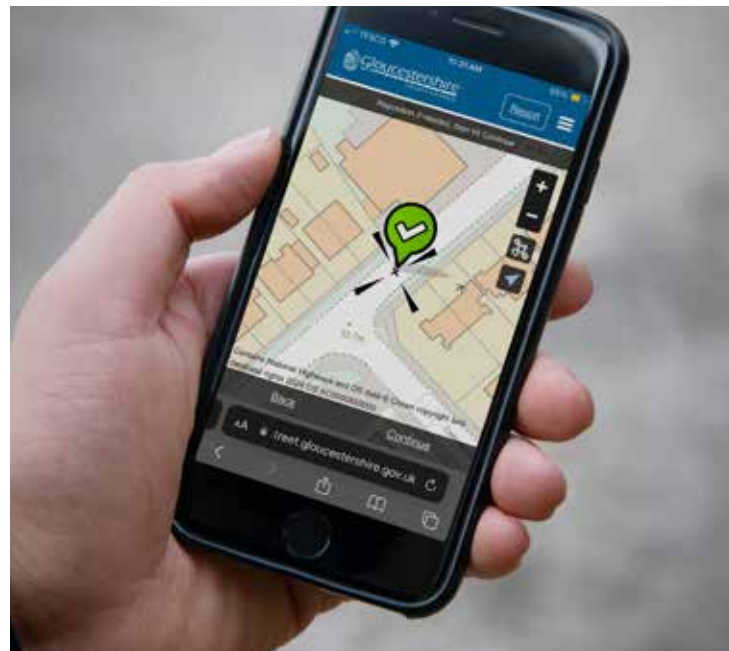
This year we carried out additional analysis to enable us to better understand our performance and what we can do to improve public satisfaction of the service. Highlights included:

- Best theme score was for Accessibility
- Worse theme score was for Highways Maintenance
- Best indicator score was for Street Lighting
- Worst indicator score was for Condition of Highway
- We are closing the gap within our cohort in relation to public satisfaction levels.

The results of the 2024 NHT Survey will be published in November and we will use these to assess any improvements in public satisfaction as a result of the transformation work undertaken. We have also been exploring the use of Power BI to make our data more transparent and easier to analyse.

In 2024/25, we will be reviewing our policies with the view to create a simplified summary of the policy to make it easier to understand and quicker to identify the key messages.

ICT and systems



The biggest focus for the ICT and systems workstream was the implementation of Fix My Street and the decommissioning of 'Report It'.

In 2024/25, we will continue to develop Fix My Street by incorporating 'completed job' photos, introducing a CRM-integrated contact form, and supporting the Customer Journey workstream in creating a consistent reporting process across all Highways teams. We will continue the channel shift journey to streamline our enquiries and continue to explore how AI might improve our services.

Investment

Additional investment was made as part of transformation and this is how it has been spent:

Workstream	Cost
Road Condition, including NSD	£667,500
Customer Journey	£43,000
Communication and Engagement	£51,000
People and HR	£41,000
Streetworks	£10,000
ICT and Systems	£94,000
Data, Measurement and Policy	£10,000

Benefits

We track the benefits of the programme so we can monitor and review the success of the work that we are doing.

Customer Journey (calculation based on 4-month pre and post average)			
Contact Type	Avg before FMS	Avg post FMS	% Change
Call enquiries to Customer Services	2419	1713	-29%
Email enquiries to Customer Services	1202	639	-46%
Fix My Street enquiries	1253	2025	+61%
Road Condition (% of network in need of maintenance)			
Road Type	2020	2024	% Change
Principal Road	2.2%	1.3%	-0.9%
B Road	3.9%	2.5%	-1.4%
C Road	5.1%	4.1%	-1%
Potholes 2024	Safety Defects	Pothole Plus	Find and Fix
Safety defect repairs complete	59,525	-	197
Non-safety defect repairs complete	-	6,500	34,459

Next steps

Our Transformation Programme has shown that proactive repairs are more cost effective than reactive repairs, however, nationally, current investment levels are not sufficient to treat significant areas of the network on a proactive basis. So, our next step is to identify how we can better incorporate the trials into business-as-usual and transition to do more proactive repairs within our existing budgets.

There is now the opportunity to 'bake-in' the improvements and operational efficiencies into business-as-usual through continued improvement to reporting, benchmarking and auditing.

We will continue to look for new technology that will allow us to make faster, more cost-effective repairs.

We will continue to improve our customer journey through the development of Fix My Street, making sure that our responses are easy to understand and that our customers have a consistent experience across all our teams.

We will build on the success of the communications and engagement elements, by continuing to make useful information more accessible and engaging with customers about our service and the work we do. We will also respond to customer and stakeholder feedback to continue to learn and ensure our messages are working for our audiences and having the desired impact on their experience as well as their satisfaction.

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