



Making the case for roads

In an exclusive interview with *Highways Magazine* editor Alec Peachey, Roads Minister Robert Goodwill says there will be no rewarding bad practice when it comes to deciding capital maintenance allocations for local authorities

"We want to reward good practice," the Minister tells me across a table at the Department for Transport's (DfT) headquarters in Horseferry Road, London.

He is referring to local authorities that spend their money wisely when it comes to fixing roads.

"People who maybe aren't spending their money as effectively as others need to look at where the good practice is and emulate that. We're not going to ignore them completely, but they need to understand that it's all about getting more bang for your buck."

According to the Asphalt Industry Alliance's (AIA) most recent Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey, the estimated cost to get the local road network in England and Wales back into reasonable condition has increased to £12 billion (from £10.5bn in 2013).

Much has been made of these figures, but in the interests of fairness it should be pointed out that the government is committing £10 billion of investment in road repairs between 2015-16 and 2020-21.

More than £4bn will be spent on national road maintenance – enough to resurface over 21,000 miles of road – while the other £6bn of that money will be spent at a local level, allowing local authorities to fill the equivalent of 19 million potholes a year.

"We're trying to skew the system a little bit more so that we actually reward good practice rather than giving money to the people who haven't spent previous money effectively"

Robert Goodwill

The MP for Scarborough and Whitby added: *"We understand that we have a number of local roads run by local highway authorities that are in need of repair and investment. Indeed, we need to understand how our roads need to be managed in a way that is cost effective. Running around mending potholes may not be the most cost effective solution, so in some cases they need to*

understand when to resurface rather than continue to repair."

The Minister, who was appointed Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Department for Transport in October 2013, has recently visited two local authorities – Oldham and Kent – to see first hand the type of good practice that is being put into action.

"I think in the future we need to see how we can use technology to better monitor what is happening on the roads. Certainly with some of the advances in mapping and GPS and vehicle mounted sensors it may be possible for a highway authority to spot a pothole the moment it appears because a vehicle driving over it monitors it, and then gives details of the impact on its suspension, at the same time as its location. I think ➡"

Goodwill on...

Drug testing

"From 2 March 2015, our police are going to have roadside equipment to detect for drugs. There will be a legal framework listing illegal drugs and some prescription drugs that people are taking at much higher levels than they'd ever be prescribed. In the past, we've had something called the field impairment test. Basically a police officer would ask you to walk down a line at the side of the road or touch your nose. If you could do that it was then argued whether or not you were fit to drive. It's very difficult to prove that in court so now if it's an illegal drug and you've got a level in your bloodstream that is above the level you could have got by sitting next to someone smoking a joint then you will be prosecuted in the same way as you can be for alcohol."

“in future we’re going to get much better information.”

Mr Goodwill points out that the government has invested “unprecedented sums into local highways maintenance”.

In March this year Chancellor George Osborne confirmed an extra £200 million pot to help councils repair potholes in his 2014 budget with local authorities invited to bid for funding.

Then in June local authorities were allocated £168m of funding from a dedicated Pothole Repair Fund. Both these allocations were made following the wettest winter on record.

“We understand that local authorities have had a backlog and we’re determined to get ahead of the curve,” Mr Goodwill continued. *“The bad weather fund was partly because of damage to the roads through poor weather, but some of the potholes were there before the flooding.”*

“Some local authorities have been very intelligent. In my own local authority (North Yorkshire), they have match funded the £5m they got from the Department by putting in £5m from their own reserves. Local authorities

that do that sort of thing will certainly find that we’re keen to help. The other thing that we’re keen to do in terms of local roads is ensure that we don’t perpetuate the situation where in the past I think we’ve been rewarding bad practice. The local authorities who spend their money least effectively tend to be those with the most potholes. They are then the local authorities that make a case for more money to mend those potholes.

“We’re trying to skew the system a little bit more so that we actually reward good practice rather than giving money to the people who haven’t spent previous money effectively.”

Using a football analogy, he continued: *“That’s something local authorities will have to get their heads around because if they’re in the premier league of councils that are spending money effectively then they’ll find that they are getting the help to build on that good practice. If they’re in the conference then they will find they need to up their game otherwise they’ll fall behind the curve.”*

Sharing knowledge

The Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme (HMEP) is a £6m, Department for Transport funded and sector led transformation programme. It connects networks from across the highways sector and provides the tools and resources to ignite ideas and help leaders and managers to transform delivery of roads and services through greater efficiencies. ➔

Goodwill on...

The rollout of smart motorways

“The big surprise with smart motorways has been the safety improvements.

I get people writing to me saying ‘you can’t remove the hard shoulder, it’s the safety aspect of a motorway’, but the first point I’d make is if it is such a safe place why don’t we put hard shoulders on single carriageway trunk roads? If you look at the statistics the hard shoulder is actually the most dangerous place you can be on a motorway.

Ninety per cent of stops on the hard shoulder are for non-emergency reasons and of the remaining 10 per cent the majority of those will be able to get into one of the refuge areas where they will be absolutely safe. For the ones that can’t get into the refuges, with the camera systems we’ve got we can identify almost immediately that a vehicle is stationary, and can then direct the traffic away from that lane. And of course we can get our Highways Agency people out to try and sort out the problem. It has been very successful and we’ve had half as many collisions on the smart motorways as on conventional motorways. We’ve got more traffic going through much more cost effectively, in terms of our investment, because we’re not having to build additional lanes. Smart motorways are more successful than we could even have imagined and that’s why we’re building many more up and down the country.”

Goodwill on...

Increased speed limit for HGVs

“We’re increasing the speed limit for heavy goods vehicles on single carriageway roads from 40mph to 50mph. It’s all about speed differentials. Cars travelling behind a lorry at 50mph where the speed limit for cars is 60mph, in the majority of cases will be content to stay behind and certainly wouldn’t be tempted to overtake in a dangerous place. Cars travelling behind a lorry at 40mph where they can travel legally at 60mph are much more likely to try and overtake.

Increasing the speed limit for lorries from 40 to 50 mph will not only increase the efficiency of our distribution network in terms of HGVs travelling more quickly, it will also improve the environmental performance of trucks as they will get better fuel consumption, and it will be safer.”

Mr Goodwill at the site of the £115 million smart motorway M6 scheme



Mr Goodwill welcomes the work that is being done in this area and is keen to encourage the sharing of best practice.

"It is important that not only highway engineers at a local authority level, but also the councillors themselves actually find out where they are in the league table of local authorities," he remarked. *"I suspect that many councillors are blissfully unaware that there are other councils spending money much more effectively than they are. It might be down to investment in equipment or who they actually employ to do the work. It might be that a partnership with an established highways maintenance company could be a better way forward than other more traditional routes that some have been using."*

Investment in roads

Earlier this year Mr Goodwill called on Britain's road building companies to get ready for a massive increase in work ahead of the biggest investment in the road network since the 1970s.

The government is tripling funding on the road network over the next eight years with more than £24 billion to be spent on upgrading and improving the network until 2021.

The Roads Minister, who will open this year's Seeing is Believing, told *Highways Magazine*: *"It's a tripling of the budget that the previous government put in. When Tony Blair came into power in 1997 he announced a moratorium on road building and that meant an awful lot of work that had been done on planning roads, and in some cases procuring land, was all wasted. Then of course later on in the Labour*

Goodwill on...

Road safety and cycling

"Contrary to the general impression that people may have about road safety we are continuing to improve statistics in terms of deaths on our roads every year. But last year 1,713 too many people were killed, but that is the lowest figure on record. There are a number of areas that we need to look at. Drink driving is one – where figures are still stubbornly high in terms of convictions and deaths.

We are revising traffic signs and markings and some of that will be aimed at further improving cycle safety. Things like traffic signs that allow cyclists to get away first, changing the way that advanced stop zones are controlled, looking at new designs of roundabouts and cycle lanes. We've doubled the investment we've made in cycling but we need to make further progress."



Goodwill on...

Apprenticeships

"One thing I think we need to do is ensure that people who take degree level engineering courses actually go into engineering. A little bit of that is about salaries. In the past people have been tempted to go to the city. The glamour and the large salaries tempt them. I think the glamour has gone a little bit. If you go into a pub and mention you're a banker now you are likely to be given almost as hard a time as if you mention you're a politician or a journalist. We do need to ensure that people who are training to be engineers come into the industry.

The other big challenge is to get more young women and girls into engineering and civil engineering. There's a tremendous pool of talent that we should be seeking to encourage. Anything I can do to get women who have got good technical and academic qualifications to come into the industry is something I'd be delighted to encourage."

administration they realised that they did need to build some roads. But just at the point they decided they should invest in roads they ran out of money because of the financial crisis.

"It was stop go all the way through. We have committed long-term budgets to road building and the changes that we're making to the way that the Highways Agency is run by making it a government owned company will give that much more continuity of investment and allow them to have better relationships with contractors. It will enable them to retain staff and recruit them in a much more organised way."

Beating the weather

The severe weather last winter caused major disruption, particularly on local roads, but Mr Goodwill was impressed with how well the strategic road network held up.

"What was interesting is I sat in on the Cobra meeting during the bad weather and whilst we had a lot of problems on our rail network due to landslides and the sea washing away the lines at Dawlish, and flooding, by and large the Highways Agency network kept operating.

"It's great for the resilience of our country that we have a strategic road network that we can rely on to ensure that parts of the country do not become cut off from important supplies. More than ever we're finding in developed economies that there's much more specialisation. Goods do need to

move around the country efficiently. Never before has efficient and reliable transport been more important to the performance of our economy."

He is confident that the sector will cope well again if the UK is met with another bout of bad weather this winter.

"We should not try and plan for the last bout of bad weather, because we had a very wet winter and instead we might have a very cold and icy winter," he notes. *"For example I've had meetings with officials about salt stocks on the ground and local authority access to them. We need to plan for the worst in either regard – whether it is a wet winter or an icy one. We need to be prepared for whatever the environment throws at us and ensure that we keep the wheels of the country rolling. Because without road haulage and passenger transport the economy grinds to a halt. Everything is inter-connected and I think that local authorities more than ever before have the equipment, salt and expertise. I'm very proud of how we rose to the challenge last winter."*

Highways Agency reform

The policy paper *Action for Roads: a network for the 21st century* details new arrangements for the Highways Agency and commits to providing funding for roads.

This commitment includes a guarantee of six year funding certainty for capital projects and maintenance. This funding and reform will be underpinned by legislation so future ➔

← governments cannot walk away from the commitments – something that Mr Goodwill believes is fundamental.

"It means that we will get much better value for money in the investment that we're putting into roads," he explains. "That works in a couple of ways. The first way is of course that we don't spend money in planning projects that don't then go ahead. It also means that by having better long-term relationships with contractors and design consultants, plus others who the Highways Agency company will work with, they can I think get much better deals. The contractors themselves will know that they've got work that can follow on rather than a situation where they don't necessarily know where the next job is coming from."

With the Highways Agency set to become publicly owned, some feel it could be the first step towards privatisation. However, Mr Goodwill is quick to deny this.

"This isn't about changing the character of the Highways Agency."

"It's certainly not about fattening it up for privatisation as some of our critics say," he states. "This is about allowing the Highways Agency to have more long-term planning, to become more efficient in terms of long-term staff contracts and long-term relationships with contractors."

Under the plans a 'Road User Focus' within Passenger Focus and a 'Strategic Road Network Monitor' would be set up within the Office of Rail Regulation to represent the interests of all those who use and rely upon the strategic road network, and to monitor the efficiency and performance of the company.

I asked Mr Goodwill if the proposed regulator should include the views of highway experts? *"I think that those views will be fed in,"* he responded. *"We haven't got to that stage yet as the legislation hasn't gone through. The legislation will be going to committee and there may be ideas fed in on how the two bodies might work."*

"Obviously the passenger focus side of it has to be about the people who



SEEING IS BELIEVING

19 | 20 | NOVEMBER | 2014

BRUNTINGTHORPE | LEICESTERSHIRE

WWW.SIB.UK.NET

The Roads Minister will officially open this year's **Seeing is Believing**.

The show is taking place at **Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground, Lutterworth, in Leicestershire from 19 to 20 November 2014.**

"I know that when I was in opposition I went to a road markings and signs conference and some of the stuff that was going on I hadn't been aware of."

"I'm looking forward to seeing what innovations are going on in the industry in terms of technology that is advancing year on year."

To find out more information about what's on offer at this year's event visit www.sib.uk.net

Goodwill on...

Drink driving

"On the same day as the new roadside drug testing is rolled out we are introducing new roadside evidential breathalysers for the police to use. So you'll no longer have the statutory option of going back to the police station for a blood test. And of course during the time that you get taken to the station the police have to find a doctor and your blood levels may have fallen. Now you'll be prosecuted on the basis of the roadside test. Together with the removal of the statutory option that will improve the way that we police drink driving."



use the roads. Highway engineers are a little bit more on the other side of the equation.

"It is important that both the taxpayer is represented in terms of value for money and the way that the new company is ordered and the road users. The legislation is in the Lords at the moment. It'll come back here (to the Department) and we'll see how it progresses. Who sits on these bodies is not written in stone and we're always open to suggestions."

So does he now think the industry is ready for an inevitable increase in work?

"I go to roundtable lunches with all the big names in project development and delivery and they are gearing themselves up," remarked Mr Goodwill. *"They are aware of course that not only are we investing unprecedented amounts in our roads, but we're also putting £38 billion into our classic rail network. There's a lot of money going into rail and of course we've got the HS2 project, which is another big price tag project that will also have to be delivered by the same companies, and in many cases the same engineers, workers, plant and equipment, etc. They're aware that there will be a need to improve capacity overall. I think they are gearing up, but of course there is a slight question mark over what happens in May next year. We have our long-term plan in terms of investment and if we are successful at the General Election we are determined to press that investment home."*

"If we can secure a majority at the next election then we are determined to deliver these big projects that will have positive effects on the travelling public and on the movement of goods and services for the next half century at least," he concludes. →