

# HIGHWAYS – MAINTAINING A VITAL ASSET

What Should Councillors Know  
About Asset Management?



### How asset management can support better highway maintenance

**Strong leadership and commitment from elected councillors and their chief officers is vital in maintaining our highways. This leaflet explains how asset management can help councils to improve highway maintenance, by ensuring best use of available funds and demonstrating need for investment.**

#### What is the challenge?

Managing our highways is now a **critical challenge** to local councils, who have to manage an ageing network with high public expectations for **safe, reliable and comfortable travel**. At the same time, resources are reducing, with less funding available, increased pressure for other local government services and skills shortages.



Highways are increasingly fragile and less resilient to damage from wear and tear, ageing, increasing traffic and severe weather. This regularly results in visible defects like potholes, damaged road signs, defective street lights and in extreme cases, damage to bridges. These defects are seen and felt by all, including your electorate, and often put you and your council in the media spotlight.

It is clear that something must be done if our highways are going to continue to provide the service for which they were built. The approach to highway maintenance must change to make the best possible use of available funding.

#### Why invest in highway maintenance?

Highways are your council's most valuable asset. They are vital to the economic, social and environmental well being of your area. They provide access for business and communities, as well as contribute to the area's local character and your electorate's quality of life. Highways really do matter to people. Public opinion surveys continually highlight dissatisfaction with the condition of local roads and the way they are managed.

The current tough economic climate poses big challenges to councils to make the best use of limited resources in providing an acceptable highway service to the public, yet critically to maintain the integrity of our highways for future generations.

Public pressure can result in just short-term fixes, to potholes for example, rather than properly planned and implemented longer-term solutions. Short-term repairs provide poor value for money and often undermine the structural integrity of the asset.

## How can asset management help to improve highway maintenance?

Asset management promotes a business-like way to highway maintenance. It makes better use of limited resources and delivers efficient and effective highway maintenance. It takes a long term view of how highways may be managed, focusing on outcomes by ensuring that funds are spent on activities that prevent expensive short-term repairs. This makes the best use of public money whilst minimising the risk involved in investing in highway maintenance.



But good asset management is not just about making best use of existing funds. It also provides a clear evidence base to justify the need for investment in highway maintenance, for example through prudential borrowing.

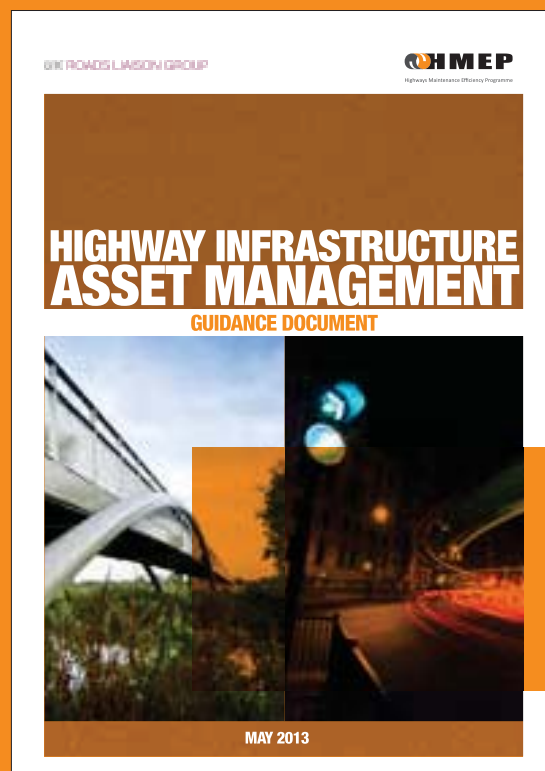
Many councils understand the potential benefits to them of good asset management, but often cite a lack of resource as the main reason for not adopting good practice, resulting in a short term, reactive approach being used. This is inefficient, allows more defects to develop and is more costly in the longer term. Research has shown that reactive repairs are four times more costly than preventative treatments.

Highway infrastructure asset management is an established and widely recommended approach both in the UK and internationally. Where it has been adopted for highways, **savings of at least 5% on budget** have been reported. It also supports decision-makers in reconciling short-term problems with long-term priorities. In other public services sectors such as the water industry, asset management has been well established for some years, and has produced **savings of up to 15%**.

### What is good practice in asset management?

The Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Guidance, published in 2013 by the UK Roads Liaison Group (UKRLG), with the support of the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme (HMEP), provides comprehensive advice to enable the successful implementation of good asset management practices.

The Guidance includes 14 recommendations that should be adopted if councils are to achieve the full benefits of asset management and make better use of their scarce resources. It also introduces a flexible framework that is designed to support councils in developing an approach to highway maintenance that matches their strategic priorities and meets efficiency requirements and stakeholder expectations.



### What next?

Strong leadership and commitment from councillors and chief officers is required now in order to implement the principles of asset management. You need to empower and support officers to implement a maintenance strategy that is based on the right principles. Those on the front line can then monitor highway maintenance in the context of asset management to ensure that value for money is achieved.

### Further information

The Guidance and other information on maintaining highways is available from:  
<http://www.dft.gov.uk/hmep/> and <http://www.ukroadsliaisongroup.org/>.