

this month

Take the challenge to win



The highways sector needs to take a well-deserved bow. News that the maintenance backlog has been reduced for the first time in many years from £12.2bn to £4.8bn must be noted as a true success story, considering the struggles councils have had with budgets and resources.

This means highway authorities are not only investing wisely based on more comprehensive asset management, but they are also ensuring the right practices are being put in place to maintain the local road network more efficiently and effectively. Armed with a far greater understanding of priorities on the network, councils have now laid the necessary foundations for maintenance to be tackled more proactively.

But lingering just around the corner is a climate of fear that the investment tap could be turned off at any given moment and all the hard work could be undone. The Government has committed to long-term investment in roads and it has so far been true to its word. However it is still up to industry to provide evidence that investment in local roads is making a difference.

Moving forward, highway authorities can only hope that local roads will feature more prominently in the Government's second Roads Investment Strategy. Local roads have a crucial role to play in linking the strategic network to our cities and towns and the key economic hubs that keeps our economy moving.

Perhaps the next phase should focus around developing more Key Route Networks (KRNs). Once again we look to Manchester (pages 20-21) as a fine example of how this can be done. Could this be the key to unlocking more funding for local roads?

If a route has been identified as a 'major' one – whether that is motorway, dual carriageway or A and B roads – then investment must be for the whole of that route and not just part of it.

Is the Government more likely to pay attention if more major route networks can be identified by local authorities with a view to boosting the local region and economy? The simple answer is yes. By developing more KRNs, such as the one in Manchester, local authorities will be putting themselves in a strong position to create more evidence to suggest these networks cannot be ignored.

A more regional approach to highways management is also likely to open many doors when devolution starts to gain momentum across the country. Only those willing to take on the challenge can be the true winners in end.

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