

ROAD DEFECTS AND RESPONSE TIMES

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This briefs the Short Life Working Group (SLWG) on defect definition and response times in the context of a risk management and long term value for money approach.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the SLWG confirms its agreement to the proposed Category 1 pothole definitions.
- 2.2 That the SLWG confirms its agreement to the maximum response time for Category 1 defects being increased to 5 working days.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 2004 Argyll and Bute Council produced its Roads Maintenance and Asset Management Plan (RMAMP) based on guidance in "Well Maintained Highways – a code of practice for highway maintenance management." (CoP)
- 3.2 This document included definitions of Category 1 and Category 2 defects and response times for dealing with these categories of defect.
- 3.3 Category 1 (Cat 1) defects were described in the CoP as requiring to be made safe immediately if practicable and, in any case, within 24 hours. Our RMAMP amended this to the end of the next working day.
- 3.4 In practice, most Cat 1 defects identified in roads inspections are potholes. These are also, particularly in late winter and spring, the defects which cause most concern to road users and give rise to most insurance claims.
- 3.5 Studies by the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme and by ADEPT (the association representing chief roads officers in England) have identified the need to improve quality of pothole repairs by carrying out permanent patches. These provide much longer life with better value for money than multiple temporary repairs and give improved customer satisfaction.
- 3.6 In order to support the greater use of first time permanent or Right First Time repairs it is proposed to revise the definition of Cat 1 potholes to better reflect the risk associated with them, and to allow more time for the repair to be carried out.

Defect	2004 Category 1 Pothole Definition	2013 Category 1 Pothole Proposed Definition
Potholes Rank 1 Roads ; >40mph	If >40mm deep and >150mm dia on carriageway If > 100mm deep and > 150mm dia then 2 hr response	If >40mm deep and >150mm dia on carriageway If > 100mm deep and > 150mm dia then 2 hr response
Potholes Rank 1 Roads; <40mph		If >100mm deep and >150mm dia on carriageway
Potholes Rank 2, 2a Roads; >40mph		If >40mm deep and >150mm dia in wheeltrack
Potholes Rank 2, 2a Roads; <40mph		If > 100mm deep and > 150mm dia in wheeltrack
Potholes Rank 3, 3a Roads		If > 150mm deep and > 150mm dia

3.7 Response time can be lengthened to allow time to plan and mobilise resources to carry out a Right First Time permanent patch. For example, Northamptonshire County Council lengthened their Cat 1 response time from 24 hours to 5 days. As a result they have made an annual saving of £300,000 and have also improved customer satisfaction. Some authorities are wary about adopting this approach, as it is felt that by departing from the CoP recommendations they will be more open to insurance claims. (The most common defence to claims arising from pothole damage is that roads were inspected in accordance with our RMAMP and that repairs were carried out within the timescales in the RMAMP which are based on the CoP.) However as we make no reference to the CoP in our repudiation of claims it is not obvious that this risk is as high as is perceived. Our present “end of the next working day” timescale can result in Cat 1 potholes identified on Friday morning being repaired on Monday afternoon – more than 3 days. Allowing 5 days to ensure a better quality repair should be an acceptable increase in risk.

3.8 Definitions can better reflect risk by taking more account of the speed and volume of traffic. In Table 1 below showing the existing and proposed definitions of Cat 1 potholes, Ranks 1 to 3 indicate where the road sits in our Road Hierarchy. Generally, traffic volumes should be expected to increase as we move from Rank 3 to Rank 1.

Table 1 Proposed changes to Cat 1 pothole definition.

3.9 It should be noted that this could result in a 100mm deep pothole on a minor road waiting more than 5 days for repair. In reality, as the current “end of next working day” is the next day after the inspection, 100mm deep potholes can be present for weeks before they are identified in an inspection. In practice, if we are aiming at Right First Time repairs we would programme a patching gang to follow up the inspection within 5 days. To get maximum production from this resource we could be repairing for example, 2 Cat 1 defects and 14 defects which are not Cat 1 but are worth doing. Because of the planned approach and better longevity of the repair, this could give us a “win – win” with better quality work costing less in the medium to short term, and

providing a better road surface for the public. In turn this will result in increased customer satisfaction, fewer defect reports and less staff time spent dealing with defect reports.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The proposed changes to Cat 1 defect definitions and to response times will improve our management of risk, allow improved efficiency and effectiveness in our repairs to potholes and provide a better service to the public.
- 4.2 The proposed changes will require higher priority to be given to the quality of pothole repairs. This will impact on other activities and requires a commitment from all levels of staff to make it work.

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