

# The end of the road?

Local investment in road safety in England



# About the IAM

As the UK's largest independent road safety charity, the IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists) is dedicated to improving standards and safety in driving, motorcycling and cycling. With more than 200 local volunteer groups and over 100,000 members, we are best known for the advanced driving, motorcycling and cycling courses. The commercial division of the IAM operates through its occupational driver training company IAM Drive & Survive. The IAM's policy and research division offers advice and expertise on road safety, and publishes original research on road safety issues. The IAM has a strong interest in how road safety is delivered on a national and local level.

## **Introduction**

Local authorities in England spend around £4 billion on roads each year. They are responsible for 98 per cent of the road network and have a duty to maintain roads and promote road safety.

Some councils are very successful in prioritising road safety, delivering innovative work and reducing casualties, while others struggle to keep pace.

The reduction in government spending has added pressure on how local councils prioritise their budgets, and has raised concerns that some authorities are cutting road safety disproportionately.

This report looks at local investment in roads and road safety within the context of reductions in government spending. It hopes to open up a debate on local performance, spending decisions and local priorities. Although it is too early to understand the impact of government cuts on road safety, we hope this report begins to track how investment is affected.

## **Collecting the information**

To produce this report information was collated and analysed from:

- In-depth spending figures given by English local authorities
- Financial statistics from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)
- Road casualty and road condition information from the Department for Transport (DfT)
- Results from an IAM opinion poll on road safety investment (2,434 responses)

We also looked at information from the Audit Commission, particularly their Value for Money profiles on specific local authorities. Government announcements, policy positions and reports have also informed our work.

## **Spending figures from local councils**

We submitted a request for spending information to all English unitary authorities (including London councils), county councils and metropolitan districts – 152 councils in total. We did not request information from district councils, as they are not highways authorities. The vast majority of district councils do not spend money on highways and road safety. Those that do have very small budgets, which are subject to significant fluctuation.

Eighty-one councils gave us information, giving a response rate of 53 per cent. Many of the councils not giving information reported that they were unable to provide the level of

detail required due to their limited resources. Some councils said they did not hold the level of information we needed.

The in-depth information from the 81 councils who responded gives further insight into spending figures released from central government. It provides another level of detail and checks the accuracy of central government figures. We believe the response rate of 53 per cent provides extensive information and sound evidence on current trends in road safety spending across all parts of England.

The information from councils covers expenditure figures for the last five years on:

- Structural maintenance on roads
- Environmental, safety and routine maintenance
- Safety cameras
- Winter road services
- Road safety education and safe routes (including school crossing patrols)
- Other traffic management and road safety expenditure.

We also asked for the number of staff dedicated to road safety and the number of volunteers involved in council road safety initiatives. We covered staff time and money spent on partnerships and the details of any planned staff reductions/increases.

## **Context**

As part of the government's spending review local government will receive a 26 per cent reduction in their budget over four years. However, the cuts affect councils in different ways. Some are more reliant on central government grants than others and have been severely affected by reductions in funding. For example, DCLG estimates that North East Lincolnshire lost 8.8% per cent of its overall spending power in 2011/12 (with further reductions planned) while Windsor and Maidenhead lost just 1.8 per cent.

Under the previous government, money for road safety was allocated to local authorities through a dedicated area-based grant. Councils could only spend this money on road safety, until a change in 2009. From 2011/12 councils started to receive this money as part of their overall grant for all services. This means that it is no longer possible to distinguish how much money is allocated to road safety by central government.

The total grant from central government to local areas is significantly less than under the previous government's funding programme. Councils now have more flexibility in how they spend their money, but significantly fewer resources.

The IAM appreciates the need for local authorities to reduce expenditure but has concerns that some authorities are cutting road safety by a disproportionate amount. We believe that cuts to road maintenance and safety significantly above the total reduction

in councils' budgets cannot be justified, particularly when the social and economic benefits of reducing road casualties are so high. All council departments are being cut but road safety is being cut deeper.

Each fatal road accident costs the UK £1.8m, and each serious injury costs an estimated £180,000. Reducing the number of road casualties by 50 per cent would save the UK £5billion pounds each year.

Given the clear financial benefits of improving road safety, we believe that investment levels should be in-line with other areas. We understand that this will mean different amounts depending on the local circumstances. However, a year on year cut of 8.8 per cent is the maximum we would expect, as this is in line with the maximum overall reduction in local authorities' spending power<sup>1</sup>.

### Spending public money locally

Local councils spend around £100 billion on services<sup>2</sup> each year, an average of £2,000 per person. There are significant variations in how this money is spent depending on the local area.

The next table shows a breakdown of spending by service area over the last two years. It is clear that local authorities have reduced their spending on highways and transport by significantly more than other areas – a reduction of 20.7 per cent compared to a 5.81 per cent reduction overall.

#### Net current expenditure by service (£millions)

	2010/11	2011/12	Percentage Change (%)
Highways & transport	7,065	5,602	-20.7
Housing (excluding Housing Revenue Account)	2,733	2,339	-14.4
Cultural, environment & planning	10,959	9,796	-10.6
Education	45,966	43,002	-6.4
Central services	3,644	3,525	-3.3
Police	12,165	11,840	-2.7
Fire & rescue	2,284	2,224	-2.6
Social care	20,857	21,201	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>105,672</b>	<b>99,529</b>	<b>-5.81</b>

Source: Department for Communities and Local Government Finance Estimates

<sup>1</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government Finance Settlement (Overall reduction in revenue spending power)

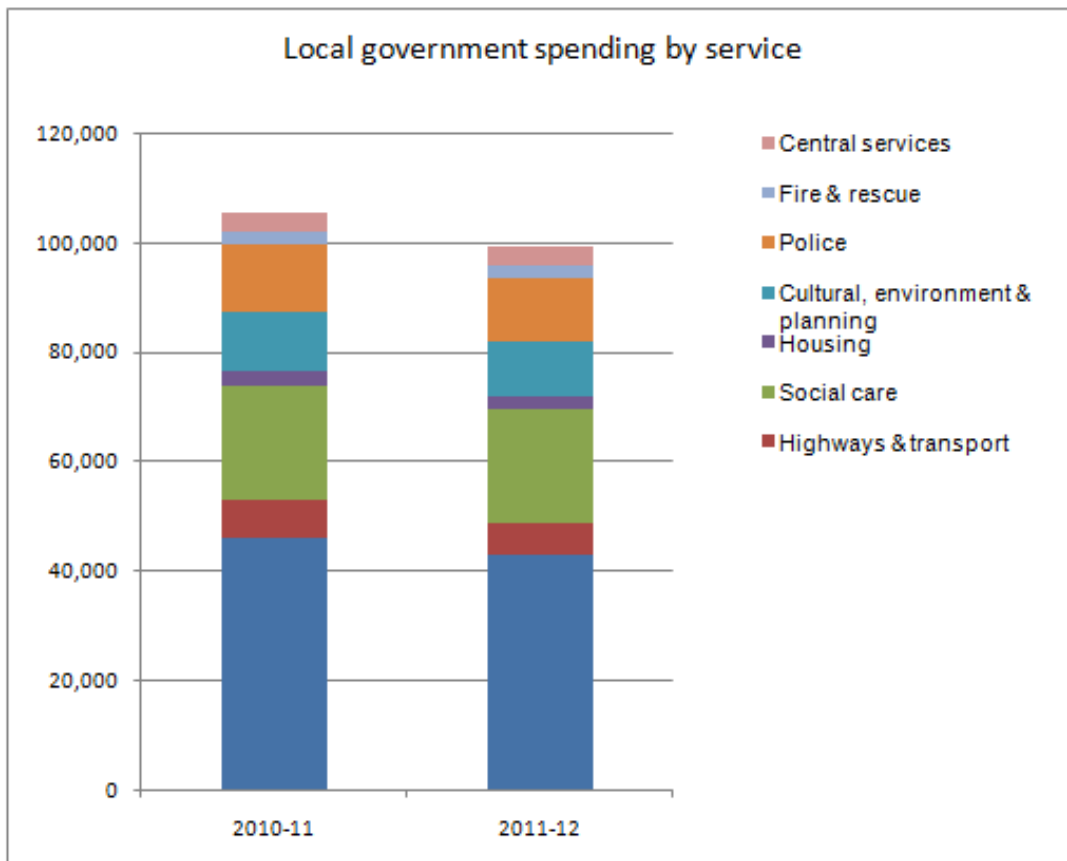
<sup>2</sup> DCLG estimates 2010/11 figures, not including benefit payments.

It is worth noting that this figure includes public transport provision. The figures for highways and maintenance in the rest of this report do not include public transport.

The reduction of 20.7 per cent is deeply concerning as it only represents the first year of a four year reduction in local government spending. This cut is 3.6 times more than the reduction in the total budget of 5.81 per cent.

The reduction in police and fire and rescue services budget is also likely to affect road safety. As well as providing emergency services, the police and fire service are regularly involved in road safety education, preventative initiatives and road safety partnerships. We are also concerned that the police will have less capacity to enforce lawful behaviour with its reduced budget.

This chart shows the proportion of money spent on each service area over the last two years. The overall decrease in expenditure is visible, as well as the disproportionate reduction in spending on highways and transport.

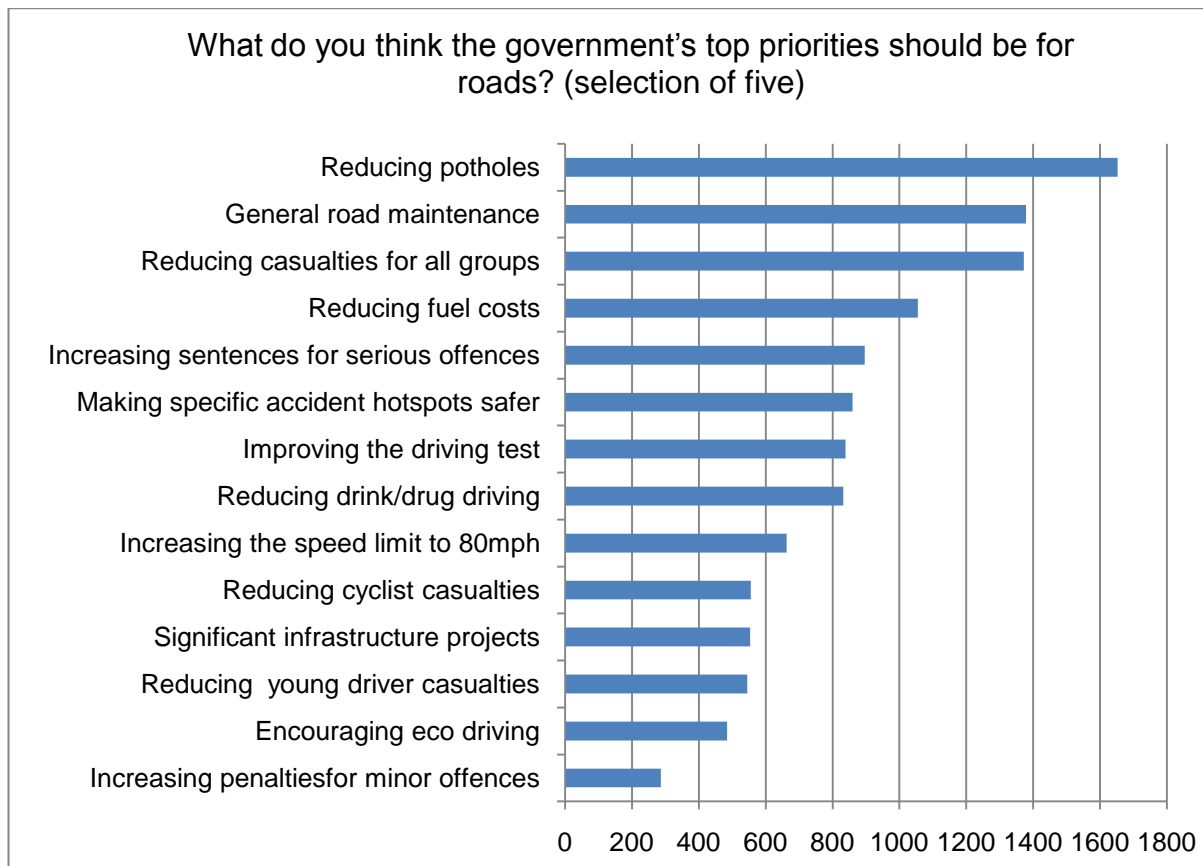


## Public opinions on investment in roads

Road and pavement repairs are regularly highlighted as a top priority for residents, coming second only to ‘activities for teenagers’ in the 2008 Place Survey.

We carried out our own web survey to understand opinions on road maintenance and safety. This received 2,434 responses. When asked about what the government’s top priorities for roads should be, respondents overwhelmingly said that potholes and road maintenance should be first.

Respondents thought that this was a bigger priority than reducing casualties for all road users and reducing the cost of fuel.

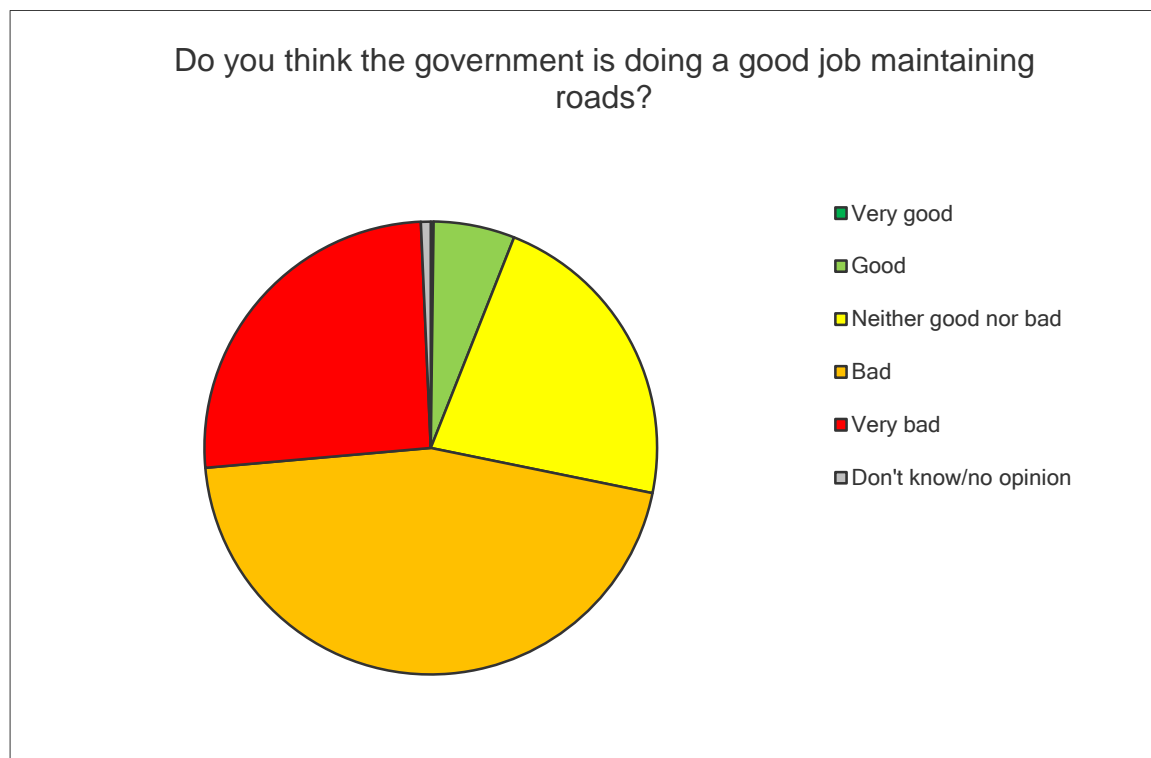


Road safety issues also feature significantly and come above fuel costs, significant infrastructure projects and increasing the speed limit to 80mph.

There is a clear implication that the government should concentrate on getting the basics right for the road network. This means improving road surfaces and reducing accidents. Local government has a major role to play in this.



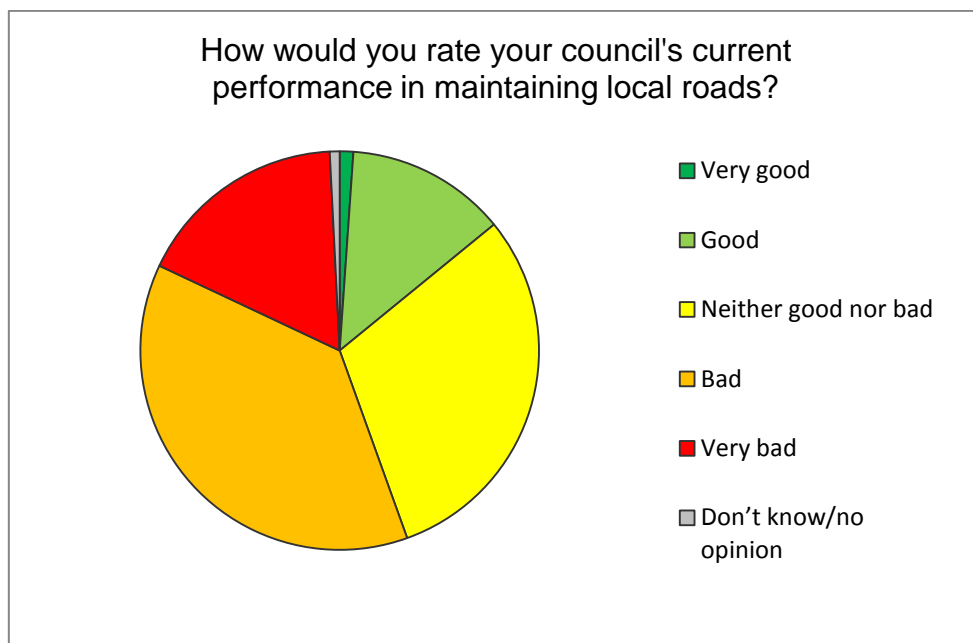
When asked 'Do you think the government is doing a good job maintaining roads?' 71 per cent of respondents think the government is failing on road maintenance, with only 6 per cent saying that the government is doing a good or very good job.



Interestingly, respondents are more satisfied with their own local authority than with national government.

When we asked 'Do you think your local council is doing a good job maintaining roads?' 54.7 per cent said their council is doing a bad or very bad job. This is still a majority, but a significantly reduced one. Fourteen per cent of respondents thought their council did a good or very good job maintaining roads.





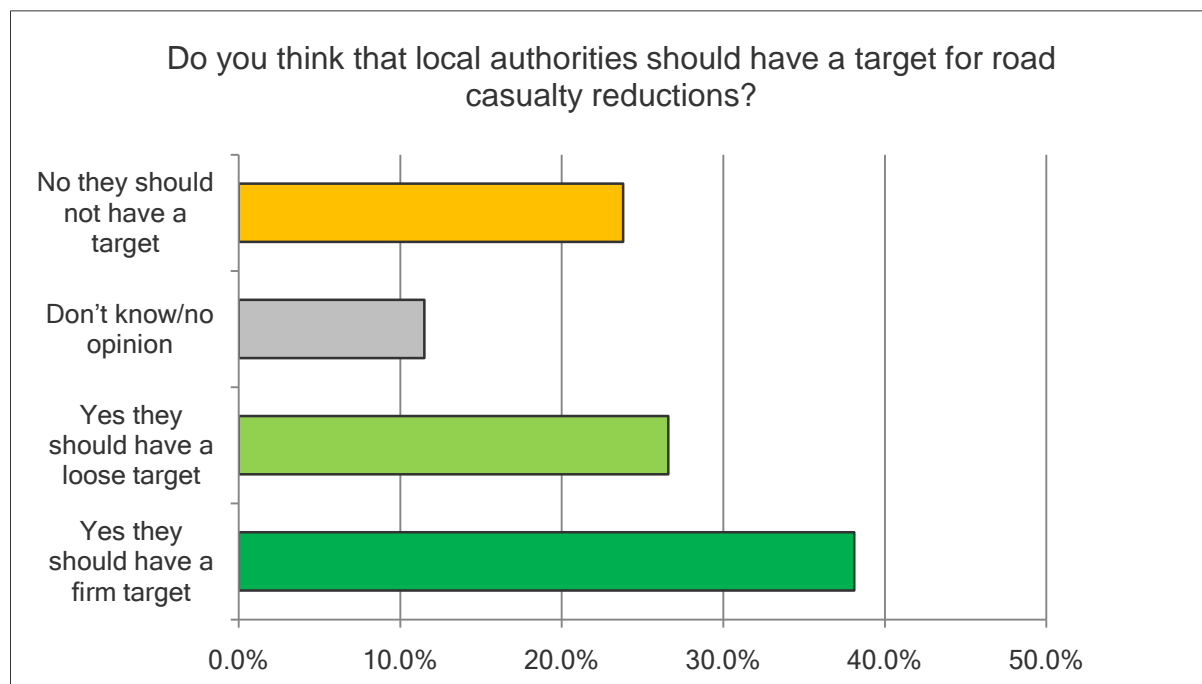
### Opinions on road safety

Under the previous government local councils had targets (National Indicators) around reducing road casualties. These were percentage reductions for:

- **NI 47** People killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents
- **NI 48** Children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents.

The current government abolished all targets for local authorities when it was elected. It also reduced the amount of scrutiny and performance management of councils.

We asked the survey respondents whether they thought targets were a good idea. The respondents were in favour of targets for road casualty reductions. 38.1 per cent (914 respondents) thought that the target should be firm, while a further 26.6 per cent (638 respondents) thought that loose targets were a good idea.



We gave respondents the opportunity to give us their comments and views. Some of the respondents who thought that local authorities should not have a target felt that reducing road casualties should be a top priority for investment by all councils regardless of any central government measurement.

A very small number of respondents thought that road safety was not an issue, or that government action would not make a difference. However, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they wanted strong government action on tackling road safety issues on both a national and local level. They highlighted the importance of safe well-maintained roads and the impact poor road safety has had on their lives.

When asked about expenditure cuts most respondents did not know whether their council was cutting road maintenance or road safety. This raises a question on whether the information is readily available to the public. Of the respondents that were aware an overwhelming majority knew of reductions.

	Is your council cutting spending on road maintenance?		Is your council cutting spending on road safety?	
	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Responses
Yes	36.2%	872	19.1%	460
No	3.4%	82	3.5%	85
Don't know/no opinion	60.4%	1,456	77.3%	1,860

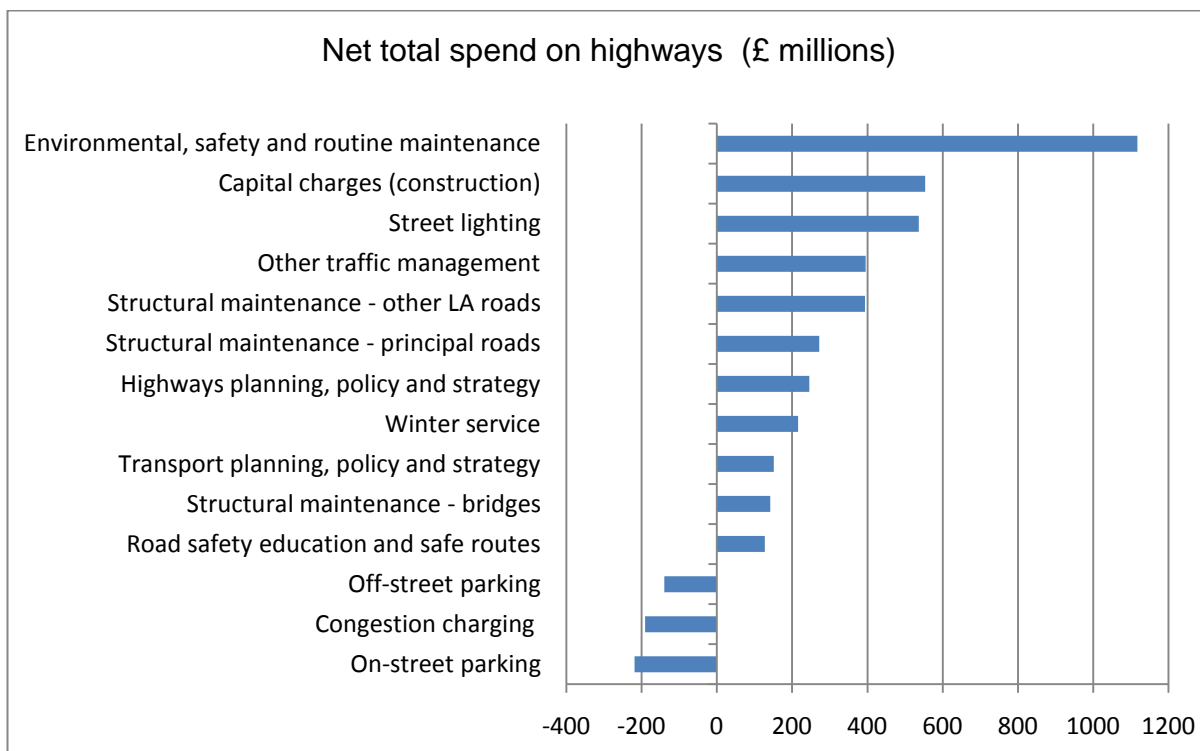
## How the Highways budget is spent

The next section of the report looks at where money for local roads is spent using figures from the Department for Communities and Local Government.

An average of £102 per person is spent on highways and transport<sup>3</sup>; this is around 5 per cent of the average total spend per person.

Councils spent £3.22 per person on road safety education and safe routes per person in 2010/11. This represents 3.15 per cent of highways and transport spending, and only 0.16 per cent of the total money spent by all councils<sup>i</sup>. However, councils do spend more on infrastructure, maintenance and winter services, which all contribute to improved road safety.

This chart shows the break down for the highways budget (we have removed spending on public transport). It is clear that spending on road safety education is significantly less than other areas.



It is not possible to find out the precise amount spent on reducing potholes, as this is part of routine and structural maintenance.

The chart shows that councils are able to generate a significant income from parking charges; £358 million was raised in 2010/11. However, this money represents only 8.62 per cent of the total spending on highways and maintenance.

<sup>3</sup> Audit Commission Value for Money profile 2010/11 figures, includes public transport

Councils have a wide variety of ways to invest money in road safety. The following list of examples shows there is scope for considerable amounts of flexibility and innovation.

Spending on road safety education and safe routes includes:

- Publicity, training and other initiatives to improve road safety
- Contributions to road safety charities and training organisations
- Cycling and motorcycle proficiency
- Schools liaison
- Road safety literature
- Rehabilitation courses for motor offenders
- Safe route schemes (to school, to work, etc)
- School crossing patrols.

Spending on other traffic management includes:

- Planning and scheme design (e.g.: urban safety management schemes, home zones, new pedestrian crossings and traffic calming measures)
- Street naming
- Traffic monitoring, including CCTV cameras
- Area traffic control centres
- Administration and enforcement of lorry ban schemes

As traffic management schemes have a considerable impact on road safety we have included them when we look at cuts to road safety.

### **Reductions in highways expenditure**

This table compares planned expenditure on highways for 2010/11 and 2011/12. The IAM will look closely at the final DCLG estimates when they are released later in the year. It is worth noting that money dedicated to the Greater London Authority skews these figures as 25 per cent more was added to its road budget for 2011/12. Presumably this is partly to accommodate the Olympics.

	2010/11 (£ thousands)	2011/12 (£ thousands)	Percentage change (%)
<b>Road safety education and safe routes</b> (including school crossing patrols)	<b>147,520</b>	<b>124,226</b>	<b>-15.79</b>
Traffic management and road safety: other	313,498	327,876	4.59
Road safety education and traffic management (combination of two above)	461,014	452,102	-1.93
Winter service	161,556	155,755	-3.59
Structural maintenance	823,879	817,688	-0.75
Street lighting (including energy costs)	530,264	536,631	1.20
Environmental, safety and routine maintenance	1,147,352	1,166,655	1.68
Transport planning, policy and strategy	357,160	365,406	2.31
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,481,229</b>	<b>3,494,237</b>	<b>0.37</b>

A disproportionate cut to road safety education and safe routes is clearly visible.

If the Greater London Authority's budget is removed then the overall change in spending is a reduction of 2.73 per cent, going down from £2.86billion to £2.78billion.

### Analysis of local evidence

Eighty-one councils provided us with information on their investment in road safety and road maintenance. We reviewed this and analysed changes in casualty numbers, accident rates and staff levels.

There are some significant negative trends:

- 54.3 per cent of authorities were decreasing their investment in road safety by more than 10 per cent. This is a much bigger cut than the overall reductions in local authority budgets.
- Nine of the councils who responded have cut road safety education and road safety traffic management by more than 50 per cent. This is roughly in line with estimates published by DCLG which suggest that 16 per cent of highways authorities have cut road safety education by more than 50 per cent.
- The information we collated only represents the first year of a four-year reduction in government spending. The picture for the future of road safety is unclear. However, such a disproportionate reduction in road safety investment within the first year is alarming.
- Many authorities do not have a clear idea of how much they are spending on road safety. We received detailed information for all years from a minority of the councils. At least 20 councils said they did not hold road safety spending figures.

This is concerning as all councils are asked to submit data on their investment to DCLG. This creates some doubt over the accuracy of central government's financial estimates.

- A number of authorities only gave recent figures and did not know how much they had spent in previous years. This means that it is not possible to track investment in detail over time.
- This lack of clarity about spend, and the lack of knowledge of spend over time would suggest that not every authority is regularly looking at whether investment is affecting casualty figures.
- Some councils are reverting to spending amounts close to their 2004/05 budget, but inflation means that this is much less in real terms. Investment in road safety peaked in 2009/10, and is now declining.
- There have been significant reductions in road safety staff numbers.

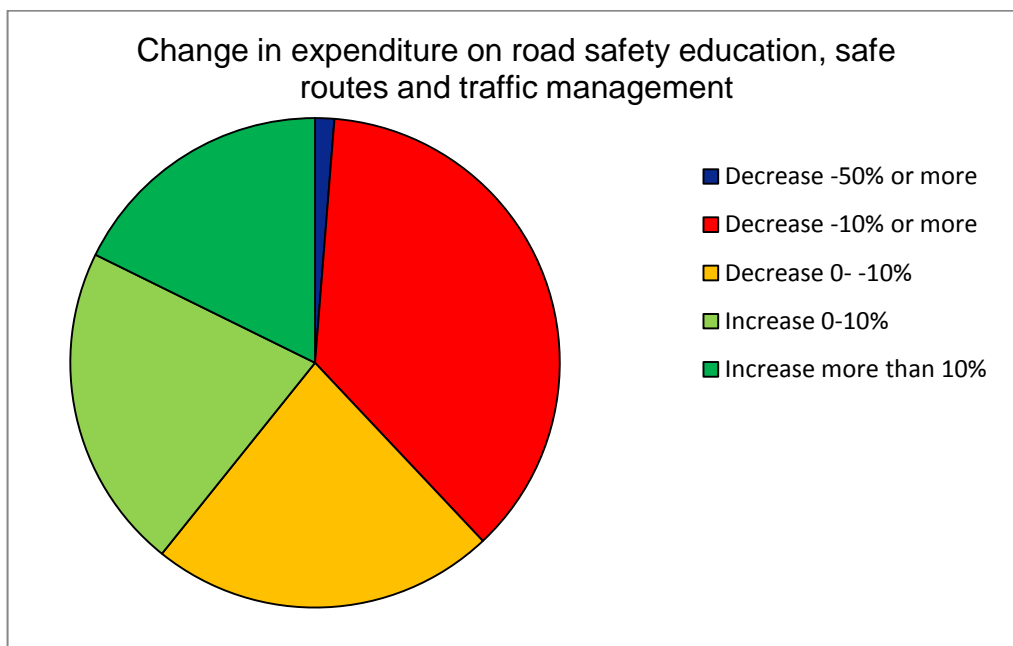
There were also a number of positive and neutral trends identified from the review:

- Some authorities are continuing to invest in road safety education and traffic management – 15 of the respondents increased their planned budgets for 2011/12 by more than 10 per cent, although the picture for 2012/12 is less clear.
- The type of investment varies significantly between authorities with some focusing on structural improvements while others spend more on education. This suggests that councils are able to respond to local needs and priorities.
- The number of casualties has reduced in most authorities over the last 5 years. Almost a third of authorities have seen casualty reductions of 25 per cent or more.
- Some authorities are retaining their road safety staff, and keeping a constant number of dedicated road safety professionals. A small minority are maximising opportunities to involve volunteers with some volunteer schemes involving hundreds of local people.

The overall cut to road safety education and safe routes is 15.79 per cent according to DCLG estimates. We found an average reduction of around 12.8 per cent from councils surveyed. There are likely to be discrepancies due to changes in budgets from the date councils give information to DCLG (Spring 2011) and when we submitted our own request to councils (November 2011).

Both estimates are well above the overall spending reduction in council's budgets of 5.8 per cent.

## Road safety education, safe routes and traffic management



This chart shows the breakdown of how councils have changed their expenditure on road safety education, safe routes and traffic management between 2010/11 and 2011/12. It shows that the majority are decreasing their spending.

	Number of authorities	Percentage of authorities
Decrease 50% or more	1	1.23%
Decrease 10% or more	29	35.80%
Decrease 0 - 10%	18	22.22%
Increase 0 -10%	17	20.99%
Increase more than 10%	14	17.28%
Information not clear	2	2.47%
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100%</b>



### Councils making disproportionate cuts to road safety

Calderdale has gone from spending £75,000 on road safety partnership activity in 2010/11 to spending nothing in 2011/12 and 2012/13.

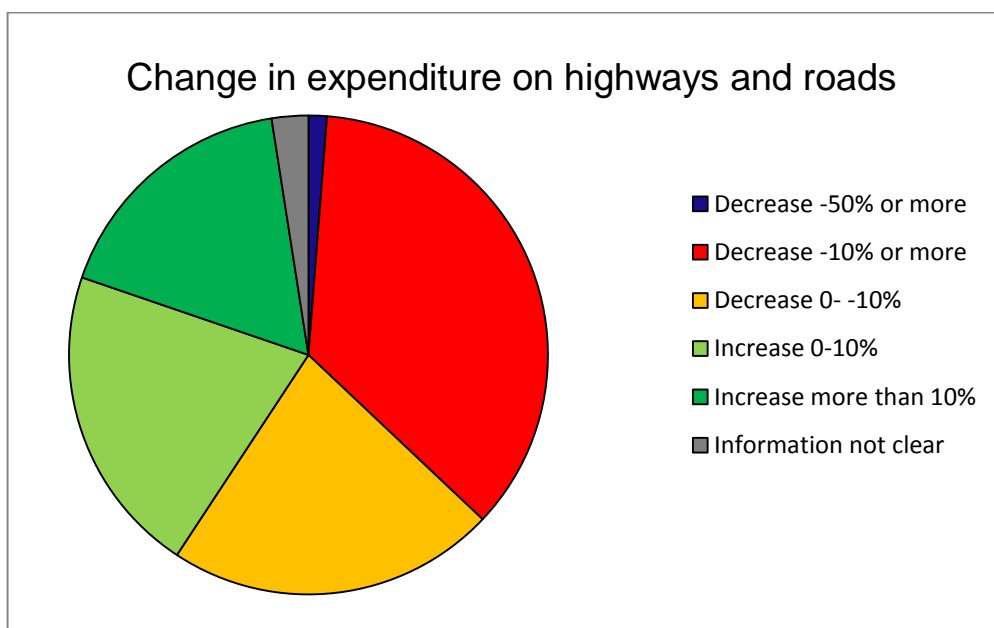
Rutland is spending 21.2 per cent less on structural maintenance for roads in 2011/12 than it was in 2010/11. This is a disproportionately bigger cut than the one DCLG estimates that the council will have (5.44 per cent less to spend over the same period). The cuts to structural maintenance are being made despite the fact that 7 per cent of the authority's non-principal (LA maintained B and C) roads require maintenance.

Croydon has half the number of road safety officers, and engineers working specifically on road safety this year (2011/12) than it did in 2004/05.

Hull (Kingston upon Hull) is cutting road safety by 65.8 per cent, reducing its budget from £839,000 to £287,000. This means Kinston upon Hull will now only spend £1 per person on traffic management and road safety, compared to the average of £6 per person. Its overall highways and roads budget is being cut by 26.2 per cent. In 2010 7 per cent of its principal roads required maintenance – more than the national average of 5.8 per cent.

Camden cut road safety spending by £4million (73.56 per cent) in 2011/12. This is despite the fact that road casualties have increased by 10.6 per cent in Camden since 2006. 112 people were killed or seriously injured on Camden's roads in 2010. Neighbouring borough Islington plans to increase funding for road safety and traffic management by £134,000 despite the cuts.

### Total highways and road maintenance



This chart shows the breakdown of how councils have changed the total money spent on highways and road maintenance between 2010/11 and 2011/12. This includes spending on road safety education, safe routes and traffic management. It does not include public transport, capital charges relating to construction, or income from parking charges or congestion charging.

	Number of authorities	Percentage
Decrease 50% or more	1	1.23%
Decrease 10% or more	29	35.80%
Decrease 0 - 10%	18	22.22%
Increase 0 - 10%	17	20.99%
Increase more than 10%	14	17.28%
Information not clear	2	2.47%
Total	81	100%

Overall councils are decreasing their spending on highways and transport by similar proportions to road safety. However, it is not necessarily the same authorities doing this. Some councils have protected road safety while reducing their overall expenditure on roads.

For example, Wigan increased its road safety budget from £1.2million to £1.67million while reducing spending on highways and roads by 10 per cent. Others have cut road safety by a much greater amount than the changes to their overall transport budget.

## Regional variations in road safety and traffic management

By returning to the spending estimates from the Department for Communities and Local Government we can see significant regional variations in expenditure.

	Planned spend on road safety education and traffic management		Percentage change (from 2010/11)
	2010/11 (£ thousands)	2011/12 (£ thousands)	
North East	30,762	17,566	-42.89
East England	48,136	33,462	-30.48
South East	55,438	44,785	-19.22
Midlands	58,518	47,961	-18.04
South West	25,807	21,466	-16.82
Yorkshire and the Humber	30,688	26,648	-13.16
North West	38,643	35,274	-8.72
London local councils	52,875	57,206	8.19
Greater London Authority (GLA)	116,334	168,166	44.55
<b>All England</b>	<b>457,201</b>	<b>452,534</b>	<b>-1.02</b>
England excluding the GLA	340,867	284,368	-16.56

The North East has the highest spending reduction for road safety and traffic management, cutting spending by 42.9 per cent. The North East is one of the areas most affected by central government funding changes; however, its reduction in road safety and traffic management funding is far greater than the overall reduction in its spending power.

Excluding the Greater London Authority, local English councils are cutting road safety by a disproportionate 16.56 per cent. Councils may be viewing road safety as an easy target for their first round of spending reductions

## Regional variations in overall highways and roads spending

The regional breakdown for overall spending on highways and roads shows a very similar picture. Again, the North East is reducing its spending by more than other areas.

	Planned spend on highways and roads		Percentage change (from 2010/11)
	2010/11 (£ thousands)	2011/12 (£ thousands)	
North East	178,949	140,933	-21.24
East England	359,436	321,209	-10.64
South West	309,715	288,053	-6.99
Midlands	513,447	499,196	-2.78
North West	395,203	389,988	-1.32
South East	457,670	453,761	0.85
London councils	382,478	383,101	0.16
Yorkshire and the Humber	262,388	304,809	16.17
The Greater London Authority	583,978	729,633	24.94
<b>All England</b>	<b>3,443,264</b>	<b>3,510,683</b>	<b>1.96</b>
All England councils excluding the GLA	2,859,286	2,781,050	2.74

The significant increase in the Greater London Authority's roads budget is very apparent – this money will benefit local London boroughs. The decision-making process for the allocation of this money to London could be more transparent on the Department for Communities and Local Government's website.

### Staff resources

The number of staff dedicated to road safety varies dramatically between councils, with some councils employing around twenty or thirty road safety professionals and others employing only one or two. Factors affecting staff levels can be how the council defines road safety, and whether it uses external contractors for some work.

Only 51 councils provided information to the IAM on their staff. Not all of the councils held the information over time and some were involved in consultations on staff reductions and restructures. Some councils reported that departments have merged, with staff given additional responsibilities covering other areas. This means that they are no longer dedicated road safety officers, but still spend some time on road safety

We found evidence of significant reductions in staff levels across a number of responding councils:

- 180 road safety positions have been removed from councils
- An average of 3.5 road safety positions have been removed from each council.

Some of the councils that did not give precise staff numbers said they were currently consulting on reformed structures with job losses expected.

The 51 councils who gave in-depth information on staff numbers represents just over a third of highway authorities. If the number of staff reductions is extrapolated then around 534 road safety positions have been removed already. From the estimates we have been given we can assume that highways authorities were employing around 2,000 staff dedicated to road safety, so the reduction represents a loss of around 25 per cent.

The IAM has serious concerns about the number of road safety staff losing their jobs. A reduction of around 25 per cent represents a dramatic loss in resources and expertise. Road safety initiatives should be well targeted, and require staff to plan, deliver and evaluate them. Regaining lost expertise will be very difficult and costly to do.

### **Redcar and Cleveland**

Between 2004 and 2007 Redcar and Cleveland employed 8.14 road safety staff with two dedicated road safety officers. This reduced slightly a year later, and then in 2009/10, the council took the decision to remove any dedicated road safety staff. It has cut around 50 per cent of its road safety budget and 43 per cent of its roads budget. The reduction in road casualties between 2006 and 2010 was close to the national average of 20 per cent.

DCLG estimated that Redcar and Cleveland faced a reduction in overall spending power of 8.46 per cent in 2011/12, close to the highest rate of cuts of 8.8 per cent. It also faces a further reduction of 3.46 per cent for 2012/13. Even after considering these figures, it appears that Redcar and Cleveland have cut road safety by a disproportionate amount.

### **Southwark**

Southwark was the only respondent who had increased the number of road safety staff over the last three years, with one additional staff member added in 2010/11 making around 4.5 in total. Southwark did not provide staff estimates for 2012/12 but confirmed that its road safety education budget would be the same as last year (£263,000) with the same being spent on traffic management (£1.3million). However, both of these are significantly less than Southwark's total road safety spend in 2009/10 which was around £2.5million.

## Bexley

Bexley increased its planned spending on road safety education and safe routes in 2011/12 by £591,000 (52 per cent). This is more than the estimate it gave to central government earlier on in 2011/12. Although there have been reductions in road maintenance these are not significant in comparison to other London boroughs.

Bexley has eight school crossing patrol staff. Its staff levels have remained relatively constant over the last seven years. The council estimates that it will continue to have this number in the future. There are two road safety officers, and 3.15 (full time equivalent) dedicated road engineer staff, making a total team of around 13. Road casualties have reduced steadily since 2006. Sixty-eight people were killed or seriously injured on Bexley's roads in 2010.

## Using volunteers in road safety

The vast majority of councils do not use volunteers in road safety activity. However, some councils use significant numbers. This table shows the councils who reported the highest numbers of volunteers.

Council	Number of volunteers involved in road safety
Lancashire	446
Cambridgeshire	350
Norfolk	300
Worcestershire	165
East Sussex	130

Other councils have had varying numbers of volunteers over the years. Greenwich used a small number of volunteers between 2004 and 2006 but does not currently use any. East Sussex was using 460 volunteers in 2008/09, but last year only around 130 volunteers took part in school crossing patrols. However, in some areas volunteers have become paid staff members, for example, North Yorkshire was able to turn some of its cycling volunteers into paid Bikeability instructors.

More councils could use volunteers to boost their road safety activity. However, using volunteers isn't necessarily a quick fix for budget issues, and should not be viewed as a cheap alternative to paid experts. Resources and expertise are needed to recruit and train volunteers. Programmes involving volunteers need to be well promoted and organised, and a combination of volunteers and professional experts is necessary. The IAM wants to explore how its volunteer groups can work more closely with local councils.

## **The future of funding**

The information in this report represents only one year of planned funding changes. The IAM will analyse the final spending data for 2011/12 when it is released by central government in autumn (2012).

It has not been possible to analyse further changes to investment in road safety or roads. Most councils did not provide estimates for 2012/13, and even fewer had spending plans for 2013/14. Many said their budgets were agreed weeks before the start of the new financial year. This means that most councils are not planning their budgets in a long-term way.

Road safety and road maintenance require consistent planning and investment. The Audit Commission and the HMEP pothole review have recommended that local councils plan their expenditure over a longer period of time in order to secure the best value for money.

But central government does not enable councils to do this. The Department for Communities and Local Government allocates grants from central government in December. This gives councils only three months to plan their finances and gives no real vision for the following years. Authorities who are less dependent on grants may be able to plan budgets over a number of years, but those reliant on additional money will continue to struggle.

The Department for Transport has recently announced that money available for structural maintenance, as part of the pothole review, will be released over four years. This is welcome news. We would like the government to take this approach for all highways-related government funding.

While the new £560m Local Sustainable Transport Fund is good news for many authorities it amounts to significantly less than the funding received from the previous government.

For example, York city council was spending £69,980 on its road safety partnership in 2010/11. It is now using money from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund for 2011/12 but will have only £22,000 to spend.

The Local Sustainable Transport Fund does not focus on increasing safety. It is mostly designed to increase the use of public transport, walking and cycling. We believe that it should have a stronger focus on improving safety, particularly that of vulnerable road users.

## **The impact of the localism agenda**

The localism agenda seeks to empower councils and people to improve their local areas. This involves reduced performance management and scrutiny of local government, including the removal of casualty reduction targets. This may be justifiable for councils who have reduced casualties and responded to local priorities. However, we have serious concerns about the performance of some areas.



The government's 'Strategic framework for road safety' does not address how it will engage with poor performing councils; we believe that this should be a top priority. In the context of spending reductions, it makes sense for the Department for Transport to focus on the needs of struggling and poor performing areas.

The majority of our survey respondents believed that local road safety targets were a good idea. We are concerned that by removing targets and reducing funding the government has created a risk that road safety will be given less priority. This is evident in the spending decisions made by some councils explored in this report. We believe that restoring targets for some councils would prevent road safety becoming disposable.

We understand the desire to give local authorities greater flexibility. However, when it comes to road safety we have found no evidence that councils were being constrained by central government. Many were running highly successful and innovative local schemes.

It is still not clear what the positive aspects of localism will be in terms of road safety. It may encourage better cooperation between councils and local residents. However, many authorities have been using significant numbers of volunteers or schools partnerships for a number of years.

We believe there is still scope for many councils to improve how they engage with the voluntary sector, and for voluntary sector organisations to improve their relationships with local government. The IAM would like to work in partnership with more councils on road safety issues. We will be giving more resource to local partnership activity over the coming months.

### **Information on roads and road safety**

Some of the information in this report has not been easy to access and has required the use of the freedom of information act. Our survey shows that most people do not know whether their local council is cutting highways investment. This is not surprising given the limited amount of information available on council websites.

The current government requires all local authorities to publish their expenditure over £500. However, this only gives a list of payments and the name of the organisation that has been paid. The information is published on a monthly basis and does not provide insight into long-term investment. It would be more helpful for councils to publish their expenditure on specific projects and initiatives, giving the reasons why they were making the decisions and the expected outcome. However, this requires staff time and resource.

Some councils regularly publish statistics on road casualty rates, and specific incidents. However, this is not widespread. There is a clear need for greater transparency from local and central government on investment in road safety and roads. This could help local residents understand why certain decisions are made and manage expectations. Central government could do more to initiate greater transparency. Providing a web-based resource on local government spending and performance could empower local people to hold their council to account.

## **Concluding comments**

Roads are a top priority for local residents. Our evidence shows that people want the government to focus on getting the basics right, safety and road maintenance. By removing the specific road safety grant, reducing expenditure and abolishing targets road safety is at risk.

The IAM understands that there will be reductions in public spending. However, such a disproportionate cut to road safety is deeply concerning. It is shortsighted when the social and economic benefits of improving road safety are so high. Reducing the number of road casualties by 25 per cent would save the UK £2.5billion each year – almost the same amount as the total local roads budget.

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### Main Sources of information

1. Department for Communities and Local Government Financial Returns
2. Freedom of Information Request to 152 highways authorities (81 responses)
3. IAM opinion poll web survey