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News release

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Need for urgent action to tackle road maintenance

An Audit Scotland report published today calls on the Scottish Government to consider a national review of how Scotland's road network is managed and maintained.

The report also says key routes should be prioritised and services may need to be redesigned. It suggests that there may be room for more flexibility in how staff and machinery are deployed.

Despite high levels of overall spending on public services, the condition of Scotland's roads worsened over the past six years. In 2010 only 63% of roads were in an acceptable condition and the cost of the maintenance backlog increased to £2.25 billion, £1 billion more than in 2004.

During the financial year 2009/10, £654 million was spent on maintaining roads (£162million went on trunk roads and £492 million on local roads).

Transport Scotland, which has responsibility for **trunk roads** such as motorways, estimated it would need to spend an additional £275 million to get trunk roads into a 'steady state' whereby a fixed amount of roads needed structural maintenance each year.

Auditor General for Scotland Robert Black said: "Members of the public are increasingly dissatisfied with the condition of our roads. The pattern of spending and scale of backlog means that the value of these public assets is not being sustained. But by deferring essential expenditure on infrastructure, public bodies are storing up problems for the future and passing a greater burden onto generations to come."

In 2010, the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland estimated that councils needed to spend an additional £45 million each year for the next decade to maintain **local roads** in their existing condition. Without this, the value of the local road network would decline by £1 billion and the condition of these roads would worsen by 10%.

Today's report is a follow-up to Audit Scotland's last report on this topic, which was published in 2004. This looked at councils' responsibilities and performance and had strong findings and recommendations for improved services. However limited progress has been made in implementing those recommendations.

Chair of the Accounts Commission for Scotland John Baillie said: "It is very disappointing to see the limited progress made to improve road maintenance since we last reported on this. A third of councils still need to develop road asset management plans, a fundamental requirement of good management. Far better information is needed on costs and performance. We recognise that some councils are working together to be more efficient, and we welcome these initiatives. However overall councils could be doing much more to get better value from the limited funding they have available."

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Notes to editors

1. This audit is based on information available between March and October 2010. We did not examine the impact of winter 2010/11 on road condition.

2. This report is a follow up report to Audit Scotland's 2004 report, *Maintaining Scotland's roads*, http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/work/local_national.php?year=2004

3. The Scottish Government is responsible for maintaining motorways and trunk roads. Councils are responsible for all other roads, except private roads.

4. Tayside Contracts is a consortium carrying out work on behalf of Dundee City, Perth & Kinross and Angus Councils.

5. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission for Scotland:

- The Auditor General is responsible for the audit of most public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He is independent and reports his work to the Public Audit Committee of the Scottish Parliament.
- The Accounts Commission is responsible for the audit of local authorities, fire and police boards. The Accounts Commission operates independently.
- Audit Scotland is an independent statutory body set up in April 2000 to deliver services to the Auditor General and Accounts Commission. Its reports are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk