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Half of drivers say the condition of local roads has got worse

The equivalent of nearly 20m UK drivers think the condition and maintenance of the roads they use every day has got even worse over the past 12 months, [new RAC research has found](#).

Half of drivers (49%) surveyed for the [2019 RAC Report on Motoring](#) say the condition of local roads – that is all roads that are not motorways or major A-roads – has deteriorated since last year, primarily as a result of potholes and other road-surface problems. Only one in 10 (11%) believe the roads in their area have improved with around four-in-10 (40%) saying there was no real

change in the past 12 months.

There appears to be a clear town-versus-country divide in terms of road maintenance with drivers based in rural locations being almost 10% more likely to say their local road conditions have worsened in the past 12 months (rural 58% v UK average 49%). Meanwhile, 25% of London-based motorists say conditions are in fact better this year, against the UK-wide average of 11%.

While potholes and related road-surface problems take most of the blame for worsening conditions, they are not drivers' sole concerns. There has been a sharp rise in dissatisfaction about grass and foliage maintenance on local roadsides, with 22% of drivers saying this is one reason conditions are worse. There has also been a doubling in the proportion of motorists who say signage visibility on local roads has deteriorated (8% to 17%). The RAC believes these two issues may be linked, with substandard foliage maintenance leading to an increase in signs being obscured by vegetation.

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Growing sense of resentment

The research also highlights a growing sense of resentment among eight in 10 drivers (83%), or the equivalent of 31m people – who say the quality of roads should be better given the amount of tax they hand over to the

Government every year.

Almost as many drivers (77%) favour having at least a chunk of their existing motoring taxes ring-fenced to fund local road maintenance. In July 2019, the Parliamentary Transport Committee published a report calling for long-term funding solutions to enable local authorities to better maintain roads under their control. The RAC has welcomed this report and urged the government to develop a five-year investment plan for local roads.

Drivers' views on motorway and major dual-carriageway conditions are somewhat brighter than on local roads, but there is still considerable room for improvement. Well over twice as many motorists – 28% – think the conditions here have worsened over the past 12 months as think they have improved (11%).

But this is less damning a verdict than in 2018, when 40% of drivers said the state of major roads had deteriorated. Unfortunately, though, this year there has been a sharp increase in the number of motorists bemoaning the amount of litter by the side of major roads: 30% of those drivers who said motorway and A-road conditions had worsened blamed litter, up from 25% last year.

Not as bad as recent years?

But while the picture is certainly gloomy, there are some indications this issue is not as bad as it has been in recent years. In 2018, for example, the condition of local roads was the top overall motoring-related concern for a staggering 17% of drivers – equating to roughly 6.8m people – outstripping issues such as illegal handheld mobile phone use, drink-driving and the cost of fuel. This year, however, that proportion has dropped to 10%, making it the third biggest concern overall.

There has also been a notable fall in the percentage of motorists who think local roads have got worse – in 2018, the proportion was 66% compared with this year's 49%. These figures chime with the findings of the RAC's Pothole Index which show that RAC patrols are attending fewer pothole-related breakdowns than they have done previously. In the third quarter of 2019 call-outs for damaged shock absorbers, broken suspension springs and distorted wheels equated to just 0.8% of all RAC breakdowns. In this period there were 8,823 of these pothole-related breakdowns – 62 fewer than between April and June, and nearly 5,400 fewer than the 14,220 seen in the same quarter in

2018.

RAC head of roads policy Nicholas Lyes said:

[“The state of our roads is always one of the biggest bugbears for drivers.”](#) This year our research findings showed a third of drivers (33%) we surveyed listed the condition and maintenance of local roads as one of their top four concerns from a list of 20 motoring issues.

“Despite data from our patrols revealing fewer of the breakdowns they have attended this year have been related to pothole damage, it seems that drivers still feel that road surfaces are not as good as they should be. Those living in rural areas definitely feel more hard done by, perhaps because they rely on their cars more than those in towns and cities so they are more inclined to notice defects that hinder their journeys.

“There is also a very clear divide between opinions about the condition of local roads and motorways and dual carriageways with local roads appearing to be in a far worse state than their major road counterparts. This points towards the difference in the way both are funded with only major roads having certainty of funding from central government.

“We believe local roads are just as vital to the UK’s economy so should be [treated in a similar way](#) which would allow local authorities to plan routine maintenance rather just filling in potholes as they appear.

“This idea is popular with motorists as more than three-quarters (77%) of those we questioned said they would like to see a proportion of current motoring taxation ring-fenced to fund maintenance of local roads.”

The 2019 RAC Report on Motoring research highlighted widespread support among motorists for the Government’s plans to use all money collected from Vehicle Excise Duty for the new National Roads Fund: 72% think this is a good idea.

From 2020-21, vehicle excise duty (VED) receipts will be ringfenced for use on strategic and major routes to increase capacity on the network to future-proof anticipated increased traffic volumes as well as to improve maintenance. The strategic road network presently carries [around a third of](#)

[all traffic while making up just 2% of all roads.](#)

Notes to Editors

* Research for the RAC Report on Motoring 2019 was carried out by Quadrangle. In total 1,753 UK motorists (i.e. those who hold a full, current driving licence, drive at least once a month and have a motor vehicle in their household) were surveyed between 23 May and 3 June 2019, with the questionnaire taking around 30 minutes to complete.

About the RAC

The RAC provides complete peace of mind to 11m UK private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. Its services include:

- **[Breakdown assistance](#)**. Its highly-skilled, 1,600-strong branded patrol workforce attends more than two million breakdowns every year, fixing on average four out of five vehicles at the roadside. The RAC's patrol fleet is one of the most advanced in the world, and was the first to roll out both an [All-Wheels-Up recovery system](#), allowing the vast majority of vehicles to be recovered from a single patrol van, and [EV Boost](#) mobile electric vehicle charging units
- **[Insurance](#)**. The RAC is a top-five [car insurance](#) broker having surpassed the 500,000 policies-in-force milestone in 2018. It also offers ['black box' telematics policies](#), as well as home and travel insurance
- **Other motoring services**. The RAC leads in the development of new solutions for business, fleets, electric vehicles and future car technology. Its additional products and services include a [personal loans offering](#), a [used car buying website](#), [vehicle inspections and checks](#), [legal services](#) or up-to-the-minute [traffic and travel information](#). It also has a network of [Approved Dealers](#) and [Approved Garages](#) which combine the trust of RAC brand with local service and convenience

The RAC also works to support the interests of its members and UK drivers on the most important motoring issues which it identifies via the annual [RAC](#)

[Report on Motoring](#) and the [RAC Opinion Panel](#). The Report on Motoring is the longest running analysis of driver opinion in the UK having been published every year since 1989.

For more information about the RAC, visit www.rac.co.uk

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