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## **RAC Report on Motoring 2015: State of local roads named number one motoring concern**

The sorry state of Britain's local roads has been found to be the number one gripe among drivers in the RAC Report on Motoring 2015.

One in 10 motorists (10%) said the condition of local roads was their top concern, while a further 20% listed the issue as one of their top four concerns. Half (50%) of the 1,555 motorists surveyed\* for the report – now in its 27<sup>th</sup> year – believe the condition of roads in their area has deteriorated in the past 12 months with just 10% claiming it has improved; the remainder

reporting no change.

Road conditions are a particularly big worry in Scotland and the South West of England, where one in five (19%) motorists say this is their top concern. The latter is not surprising given that Devon has the most miles of roads of any county in England and one of the highest maintenance backlogs in the country. Londoners, however, are more positive: only 30% of motorists in the capital say their roads have deteriorated since 2014. This is half the rate (59%) reported among drivers who live in villages or rural areas.

For the 50% who say roads are worse, the vast majority (99%) attribute this to potholes and general damage to the road surface, although litter is a source of annoyance for a quarter (24%), as is poor maintenance of verges for a fifth (21%).

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The problem, however, appears unlikely to be overcome in the foreseeable future – impacting business, the local economy and road users' lives – as the Government has itself estimated the cost of bringing local roads in England alone back to a state that is fit for purpose to be up to £8.6bn. This is despite only allocating £6bn purely to maintain and improve local roads up until 2021. However, other estimates from the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA)\*\*, put the cost of returning English and Welsh local roads to a 'reasonable condition' to be far greater at £12.16bn (England £11.5bn).

Given the level of concern about the condition of local roads, it comes as little surprise that there is widespread support among drivers for government investment in their repair and upkeep. This year's RAC Report on Motoring found maintenance of local roads to be the number one priority for transport spending with three in every 10 motorists (30%) saying that's where money needs to be used, while a further 48% cite this as a top five priority. Targeted improvements to local roads, such as those designed to improve safety or reduce bottlenecks, are the number two spending priority (12% of drivers) with a further 54% saying this is one of their top five priorities.

When asked how local authorities should prioritise spending of the council tax they raise, those surveyed for the report said education should be the top priority (46%), with road maintenance the second (18%), ahead of social services and housing assistance.

RAC chief engineer RAC David Bizley said: "Motorists clearly want the Government to provide sufficient funding to ensure local roads are maintained properly, but while any central government money given to local authorities for roads must be spent on roads, we also need councils to spend more of their own funds on repairing and replacing road surfaces.

"Currently, this is a challenge as they are under specific legal obligation to provide minimum standards in education and social services whereas their obligations to maintain roads are far less prescriptive. It is therefore inevitable that expenditure is biased against investment in the likes of road maintenance where prescriptive legal obligations do not exist and councillors therefore do not face legal sanctions.

"This significant and damaging disconnection between what a large proportion of council tax payers want local government to spend their money on and where it is actually going is at least in part a result of the inconsistent way in which central government devolves spending decisions to local authorities.

"While the RAC is generally supportive of devolving decisions on local roads to local authorities there needs to be a level playing field for this to work. This means legal obligations on councils need to be equally prescriptive – or non-prescriptive – for all types of expenditure.

"The Government has taken bold steps to ensure that the strategic road

network in England is fit for purpose and is capable of supporting economic growth by the implementing a Roads Investment Strategy and ring-fencing vehicle excise duty to fund the maintenance and development of the network from 2020. Equally, bold and imaginative action is now required to address the deficiencies in local roads as funding from central government is insufficient even to address the current backlog of repairs and local authorities are currently unable to fill the gap from council tax revenues.”

The RAC believes that the current approach is not sustainable in the longer term as virtually all journeys start and finish on local roads and the majority of goods and services have a dependence on road transport. The state of our local roads is therefore very likely to worsen, creating an ever-increasing negative effect on economic growth.

David Bizley added: “It is a measure of the problem that we still talk about success in terms of the number of potholes we can fill. However, most potholes develop because of a lack of preventive maintenance. We urge the Government to follow the recommendations of the Coalition Government’s Pothole Review to ensure that the funds allocated to local roads maintenance are used for preventative maintenance of roads rather than just on short term remedial repairs.

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## **Notes to Editors**

### **About the RAC**

With more than eight million members, the RAC is one of the UK’s most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists. Whether it’s roadside assistance, insurance, buying a used car, vehicle inspections and checks, legal services or up-to-the-minute traffic and travel information – the RAC offers a solution for all motoring needs. The RAC is committed to making motoring easier, safer, more affordable and more enjoyable for drivers and road users.

The RAC is the motorist’s champion and campaigns to support the interests of its members and UK motorists at a national level, including advancing levels of road safety, supporting the needs of young drivers and voicing concerns about the increasing cost of motoring. The RAC’s annual [Report on Motoring](#) – first published in 1989 – provides a clear insight into the concerns and

issues facing today's motorists.

For the very latest news on UK fuel prices, check [RAC Fuel Watch](#) or follow [#racfuelwatch on Twitter](#). This is a comprehensive guide to the latest UK unleaded petrol and diesel prices – both at the wholesale level and at the pump. RAC Fuel Watch analyses how prices changed through the previous month and compares the most recent prices with those from three, six and 12 months before.

The RAC supports and is a founding member of [FairFuelUK](#) which campaigns for fairer taxes on petrol and diesel.

Key facts:

- RAC patrols fix four out of five vehicles at the roadside and on average within 34 minutes
- RAC vans carry more than 500 parts and tools to get members' vehicles going again
- 98% of members would recommend RAC Rescue to their friends and family

## Contacts



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