

Additional funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) combined with Essex County Council (ECC) funding will deliver an enhanced response to severe weather damage to the highway network.

In early 2014 Essex County Council (ECC) allocated an additional £1m revenue funding to be spent on ditch clearing and other environmental maintenance by the end of March 2014 to alleviate road side flooding problems and associated congestion.

A similar sum has also been allocated for 2014/15. ECC has also increased its annual capital sum for road drainage schemes from around £750k to £2m for 2014/15, in recognition of the need to alleviate more substantial surface water issues. This will bring the ECC capital sum for road repairs for 2014/15 to around £39m.

The main focus of the ECC funding will be to carry out repairs to the main routes, to safeguard the flow of commerce and resources across the county, although works will also be carried out on other local roads.

The additional DfT funding of £2.7m (£990,967 capital funding and £1,709,419 revenue funding), announced in March 2014, will increase the total capital sum for road repairs for Essex to around £40m for 2014/15. This will facilitate an enhanced revenue funded pot-hole repair programme as well as an enhanced capital funded surface treatment programme. It will also fund strengthening works to make parts of the network more resilient to extreme weather in the future.

One of the effects of the extreme wet weather has been to cause ground movement which has resulted in cracking of the road surface as well as other defects. This is more pronounced on the older parts of the network which have evolved over time and in consequence are not of modern construction. The ingress of water through cracks is a major contributor to the eventual decline of the road surface and the subsequent formation of troublesome defects such as pot holes and the like. The pot-hole repair programme will address the effects of this water damage – especially on main routes – and the surface treatment programme will provide low cost, value for money surface treatments to seal roads and make them more resistant to damage in the future.

The DfT will also provide an additional £200m nationally for 2014/15 to help tackle pot holes and surface deterioration of the local road network, with the intention of running a bidding exercise in order to allocate the funding to Local Authorities. ECC is poised to submit a bid, and in anticipation of further funding is already considering areas for additional treatments.

Our detailed road condition and safety inspection information will inform the locations across the county for planned treatments. To maximise value, some of the benefits will actually be realised beyond the year of expenditure, via the application of preparatory treatments in 2014/15 for wider, low cost effective surface treatments to be applied in 2015/16.

Our spending plans will be a combined approach of environmental works to improve drainage, more substantive drainage improvements, a pot-hole repair programme focusing on main routes, road strengthening works to improve network resilience, and broader low cost surface treatments to seal roads. This combined approach will not only address the symptomatic maintenance requirements resulting from the effects of the extreme weather but will also address the main causes.

This broad spectrum of treatments is fundamental to the asset management principles being promoted through the Highways Maintenance Initiative Programme (HMEP). The HMEP is a government-sponsored but industry-led initiative designed to deliver value for money outcomes for tax payers. Essex Highways, on behalf of ECC, has an established asset management approach which is steeped in HMEP principles. Essex Highways has embraced the HMEP as a means of complementing its ongoing refinement of practices to deliver continuous value for money improvements for Essex residents.