

Essex County Council

Essex Highways

Highways Maintenance Transparency Report

September 2026

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How we maintain local roads, pavements, and the wider highway network in Essex County Council

A1 – What we are responsible for maintaining

Essex County Council (through Essex Highways) is responsible for maintaining the local adopted highway network and associated highway assets, including roads, footways, cycleways, drainage systems, street lighting, traffic signals, signs, highway structures (bridges, culverts and retaining walls), public rights of way, and associated highway land and vegetation.

- **Carriageways** – over 8,190km
- **Footways** – over 6,000km
- Bridges and other Structures – 1,605 (including subway underpasses, retaining walls, drainage culverts and sign gantries)
- Streetlights – over 131,000 street lighting points
- Traffic Signals Infrastructure – over 2,500 (including School Crossing Flashing Warning Signs, Zebra Crossings, Bus Telematics, Traffic Count Sites, and Air Quality Sensors)
- Passenger Transport Infrastructure – over 10,000 (including bus shelters, bus sign posts, timetable cases and flag)
- Public Rights of Way – over 6,400km and 36,000 assets (including footbridges and signage)
- Other assets including Safety Barriers, Illuminated Signs and Bollards, and Winter Management Infrastructure (weather stations and salt bins)

Maintaining the Essex highway network is a major logistical and financial task. As the seventh largest local authority road network in the country, it faces persistent strain from structural aging, heavy traffic volumes, extreme seasonal weather, and overlapping maintenance demands.

A2 – Road conditions in Essex County Council

“A” roads are the principal classified roads within Essex County Council's adopted highway network, providing major transport links between towns, key destinations and the strategic road network.

A2.1. A roads

Year	Percentage of road in red category	Percentage of road in amber category	Percentage of road in green category
2023	3%	24%	73%
2024	3%	25%	72%
2025	3%	28%	69%

A2.2. B and C roads

“B” and “C” roads are secondary and local distributor routes.

Year	Percentage of road in red category	Percentage of road in amber category	Percentage of road in green category
2023	3%	24%	73%
2024	3%	24%	73%
2025	3%	24%	73%

A2.3. U roads

“U” roads are typically local access roads.

Year	Percentage of road in red category
2023	10%
2024	10%
2025	10%

Councils use road condition surveys to assess the state of their roads. The results are grouped into three categories:

- **Green** – the road is in good condition and no further investigation or treatment is required
- **Amber** – the road may need maintenance soon
- **Red** – the road is in poor condition and should be considered for maintenance

The published [official statistics for road condition](#) include more detail about the methodology, timing and coverage of this data

A2.4. - Additional information on carriageway condition

ECC recognises how important the condition of its road network is to its residents and wider customers. The road network is also one of the highest valued assets owned by the Council; its gross replacement cost value (GRC) in 2023/24 was calculated at £10 billion (including the A130 Private Finance Initiative but excluding land value).

The condition of roads is measured and monitored annually, not just through regular, routine highway safety inspections which identify localised defects but through industry standard “SCANNER” surveys which focus on the more structural aspects of road condition. The outcome of road condition surveys, together with reports from customers and Councillors regarding road condition concerns, informs the identification of sites requiring resurfacing treatments to enhance asset life as well as giving an indication of the treatment to rectify any issues.

A3 – What we are doing about potholes and other road defects

A3.1. – What is a pothole?

A pothole is a defect in the road surface that is greater than 50mm in depth and at least 100mm wide in two perpendicular directions. Potholes typically develop when the road surface breaks up due to weather-related deterioration, particularly during periods of snow, ice and prolonged rainfall.

Following a Risk Assessment, defects are assigned a priority category (Priority 1 to Priority 4), with higher-risk defects receiving urgent intervention and lower-risk defects programmed into planned maintenance works:

- Priority 1 (S1) — High Risk: 2 hours to make safe or repair on all road types.
- Priority 2 (S2) — County Routes: 2 working days.
- Priority 2 (S2) — Local Routes: 5 working days.
- Priority 3 (S3) — Low Risk: No stated timeframe; considered for future planned maintenance.
- Priority 4 (S4) — Lowest Risk: No stated timeframe; reviewed strictly for long-term asset programmes

A3.2. – What we are doing to tackle potholes

ECC tackles potholes through a combination of routine inspections, public reporting, risk-based repairs, preventative maintenance and targeted carriageway renewal programmes. The authority's approach is set out in its Highways and Transportation Asset Management Policy, Asset Management Strategy and Highways Maintenance Policy, which together establish a risk-based asset management framework for maintaining the network.

Defects are identified through routine safety inspections and reports from members of the public. All reported potholes are assessed according to risk, ensuring that defects presenting the greatest safety risk are repaired as a priority, while lower-risk defects are managed through planned maintenance programmes. During financial year 2025/26, ECC estimates that it repaired approximately 14,857 carriageway potholes.

ECC seeks to deliver permanent repairs wherever safe and practicable. Temporary repairs may be necessary where immediate intervention is required to make a defect safe, or where weather conditions, traffic management requirements or wider programme coordination prevent a permanent repair at the first visit.

Preventative maintenance is a key element of ECC's strategy. Treatments such as surface dressing, crack sealing and micro-surfacing are used to prevent water ingress and slow deterioration before potholes form. Carriageway resurfacing, drainage maintenance and flood mitigation schemes further support the long-term condition of the network.

Through these activities, ECC aims to maintain network safety, reduce repeat defects and minimise pothole formation through data-led, preventative intervention.

In June 2026, ECC declared a Pothole Emergency, with new and redirected funding being focused on the repair of more potholes. A 28% improvement in the number of potholes fixed is expected over the remainder of the financial year. Further proposals to improve output are currently under consideration by Members.

A3.3. How members of public can report potholes and other highway defects

Members of public can report potholes and other defects in Essex primarily through the [Essex Highways Tell Us Portal](#), which is the dedicated tool managed by ECC. Before reporting a defect, you can use the Track It tool to see whether the defect has already been reported and monitor any updates on inspections or repairs.

The method used to report a defect depends entirely on how dangerous or urgent the issue is.

- Standard potholes, pavement damage, and broken streetlights should be submitted using the online web platform 24 hours a day. It is particularly useful to include the exact location (postcode, street name, What3Words, or map pin), the direction of travel, the approximate size of defect and any photos (if it is safe to take them).
- Urgent hazards (for example, if a pothole poses an immediate danger to public safety such as deep craters on fast roads, or fallen trees), residents must call the ECC Emergency Line at 0345 603 7631, where photos are available urgent potholes, fallen trees, missing covers and floods can be reported online during core hours 08:00 – 16:30.

Alternatively, members of the public may raise concerns through their elected Members, who submit the issue to the Members' Enquiry Team. The enquiry is then reviewed and forwarded to the appropriate service team for investigation and response.

A3.4. What happens after a pothole is reported

When a pothole or highway defect is reported by a member of the public, ECC follows a structured, risk-based process aligned with its maintenance policy and asset management approach.

ECC will assess all reported potholes and if deemed to meet criteria will risk assess them to prioritise their repair. This allows other considerations that the inspector feels relevant to be factored into the risk assessment and is used to determine the level of response. Potholes that meet criteria will either be classed as urgent or will be put into a planned programme of works to ensure they are repaired as efficiently as possible.

A pothole will move through a clear process of logging, triage, risk assessment, prioritisation, and then repair, ensuring that safety-critical defects are addressed quickly while all other issues are managed efficiently within ECC's wider asset management strategy. All actions are recorded to support performance monitoring, legal compliance, and inform future maintenance planning and lifecycle decisions.

A4 – What we spend to maintain the highway network and where the funding is coming from

A4.1 – Spending on highways maintenance

	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27 (projected)
Total spend on highways maintenance	£138,556,000	£142,183,000	£144,811,000
Of which spent on:			
Carriageways	£85,126,000	£75,770,000	£76,011,000
Footways	£10,485,000	£11,519,000	£11,756,000
Structures (for example bridges or tunnels)	£10,217,000	£14,442,000	£15,000,000
Drainage	£4,877,000	£7,639,000	£6,576,000
Street lighting	£5,516,000	£6,668,000	£5,639,000
Other assets	£22,335,000	£26,145,000	£29,830,000

A4.2 – Where our funding for highways maintenance comes from

Funding sources for highways maintenance	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27 (projected)
Funding received through the Department for Transport / UK Government	£41,272,000	£52,515,000	£54,021,000
Additional highways maintenance funding provided by the Council or third parties	£97,284,000	£89,668,000	£90,790,000
Total	£138,556,000	£142,183,000	£144,811,000

A5 – Our maintenance plans for this year

A5.1 – Our plans for highways maintenance for 2026-27

ECC's asset management approach aims to deliver a safe, accessible, serviceable and sustainable highway network, supporting access to employment, healthcare, education and other essential services. In 2026-27 Essex County Council plans to deliver a substantial highway maintenance programme, combining resurfacing, preventative treatments and footway improvements across the county.

- Around 2,000 km of adopted roads are inspected each month in accordance with the Essex Maintenance Strategy, with inspection frequencies based on network hierarchy.
- Highway safety inspections identify and record defects requiring intervention across carriageways, footways, signs and street furniture.

- £7.5 million has been allocated to address outstanding pothole repairs across the network.
- Planned carriageway maintenance includes 57.1 km of resurfacing and 141.5 km of preventative treatments, including surface dressing, micro surfacing and asphalt preservation.
- Planned footway improvements total 114.6 km, including reconstruction, refurbishment and slurry sealing works.
- A further 2.0 km of cycleway improvements is planned, alongside 20.6 km of machine patching and 2.2 km of skid-resistance treatments.

A5.2 - Full list of planned carriageway and footway works

Planned carriageway and footway works for 26-27 can be found on the Essex Highways website: <https://www.essexhighways.org/highways-maintenance-transparency-report>

Additionally, the public can view planned works using the Highways Information Map, which is an interactive mapping tool that enables users to view a wide range of highway assets and related information across Essex. Planned works can be viewed via the Programme layer where several highway datasets can be displayed individually or turned on and off as required. Users can also pan and zoom the map to explore specific areas of interest in greater detail: <https://www.essexhighways.org/highways-information-map>

A5.3 – How decisions are made on our maintenance plans

ECC prioritises highways maintenance using a strict, data-driven framework based on public safety, risk factor scoring, and a designated road hierarchy. Maintenance needs are identified using condition data, inspections and public reports, then assessed according to risk, road hierarchy and usage, ensuring that routes of greatest strategic importance (e.g. PR1 and PR2 networks) receive priority investment.

Decisions are informed by lifecycle planning, which balances reactive repairs (such as potholes) with preventative treatments and long-term resurfacing programmes to maximise value for money. A strong emphasis is placed on preventative maintenance, targeting roads in early stages of deterioration to reduce future defects and costs.

To deliver an efficient service, ECC optimises its extensive infrastructure network by utilising strategic contractor partnerships, leading collaborative regional procurement through the Eastern Highways Alliance, and strictly enforcing Section 58 restrictions to stop utility companies from digging up freshly resurfaced roads. Operational efficiency is further enhanced by targeted investment programmes like Priority One proactive resurfacing and streamlined public reporting tools. This comprehensive, evidence-based system balances cost-effective regional procurement with localised community priorities.