MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

Highway Maintenance Report 2025/26

Foreword from our Executive Member

The Our Manchester Strategy sets the councils overarching priorities for city over the next ten years – priorities chosen by the many thousands of residents who, in 2024, told us about their ambitions for Manchester.

We recognise the importance of our highways in keeping people and places connected. They support our communities to thrive; be healthy and safe; ensure places are well connected and are essential to our economy.

One of our key priorities within the Our Manchester Strategy is to 'have reliable transport that gets you where you want to go, quickly, cheaply, safely and cleanly.'

Manchester's highway network includes over 1,340 km of road, 2,600 km of footway and over 250 km of cycleways. Based on the latest valuations, the total highway asset has a value of over £3 billion, making it one of the Council's most valuable assets.

As such, we place a high significance on how we manage and maintain this infrastructure by implementing its Highway Asset Management Policy, Strategy, and associated delivery plans.

We use whole life costing to help us make smart, long-term investments and ensure our highway maintenance services meet the needs and expectations of our community.

This report highlights the key outcomes and the successes that we have achieved in recent years along with some of the challenges that we will face going forward.

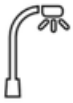
Councillor Tracey Rawlins
Executive Member for Clean Air, Environment and Transport

1. Our highway network

Manchester's roads are vital. People use them daily to commute, and good roads support the city's growth and health. New homes and jobs require strong transport links for easier access. A well-kept transport and highway network helps Manchester's economy thrive.

The City Council manages all its highway assets, including roads, pavements, drains, bridges, and streetlights. We work hard to maintain roads and footpaths with available funding. This supports our goals in the Corporate Plan and the Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040.

Manchester's highway network includes:

Roads	Footways	Cycleways	Bridges & structures	Drainage	Street lighting
					
Over 1,340 km	Over 2,600 km	Over 250 km	More than 350	Over 120,000 gullies	Over 50,000 lighting columns

Traffic signals across Greater Manchester (GM) are maintained by Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) on behalf of GM Combined Authority.

A detailed breakdown of the lengths of our roads, footways and cycleways is shown in Appendix 1.

2. Highway maintenance spending

Highway maintenance spending can be generally split into 2 elements:

- Capital Investment: Money for projects that create or improve assets like roads, bridges, and drainage systems. This helps them to last longer. Capital funding is provided by both central government grants and the council's own borrowing / investment.
- Revenue expenditure: Money for everyday maintenance and reactive repairs, such as fixing potholes, clearing snow, replacing road markings and minor drainage repairs. Revenue funding comes from Council Tax and other sources like business rates, transport levies and grants.

Appendix 2 shows a breakdown of the Council's expenditure on highway maintenance for both Capital and Revenue elements over the last 5 years. It also estimates the percentage of total spending split between preventative and reactive maintenance.

Capital Investment

Since 2017, the Council's internal borrowing capital investment programme has allowed us to spend over £125 million on maintaining and improving roads, footpaths, bridges and drainage systems. This has been a big increase in spending with the aim of making our highways better.
The money spent in recent years has helped us to improve the condition of our highway network significantly. It also supports longer-term planning which has benefits such as:

- Encouraging walking and cycling: Helps people stay healthy and eases pressure on roads and public transport.
- Reducing disruption from reactive repairs.
- Lowering carbon emissions, as cars use less fuel on smooth, well-maintained roads.

Most of the capital investment has been spent on resurfacing and preventative maintenance on roads and footways. These works include:

- Resurfacing, replacing the worn-out surface with a new one, and

- Overlay treatments, applying a thin layer to the surface, which smooths it and stops water penetration.

The council's highway asset management policy & strategy (Policies and strategies - Highways asset management policy and strategy | Manchester City Council) details our approach to Capital Investment. It aims to deliver a longer-term programme of preventative treatments at the right time before roads or footways deteriorate too much. This pro-active work reduces costly reactive repairs and lowers the chance of third-party claims.

In 2024/25 we carried out the following:

- Road resurfacing – 31 km
- Road overlay treatments – 23 km
- Footway treatments – 66 km
- Bridges & structures maintained – 8 schemes

For 2025/26, we plan to carry out the following:

- Road resurfacing – 22 km
- Road overlay treatments – 33 km
- Footway treatments – 63 km
- Bridges & structures maintained – 6 schemes proposed

Revenue Expenditure

Revenue expenditure focuses on reactive maintenance and provides short/medium-term fixes to problems, rather than any meaningful long-term improvement to the road condition. It ensures highways remain safe for use. There will always be reactive maintenance issues that need investigating and we have two main ways of finding out about them:

- We receive thousands of reports annually from our customers and residents. We always want to hear about these issues so if you do see a highway problem please report it online.
- We have a team of highways inspectors who inspect the condition of all our adopted roads & footways, ordering repairs where needed.

We operate a risk-based approach to fixing issues that are found through inspections or reported to us, meaning that serious safety problems are always prioritised for repair. Our criteria for investigating, assessing, prioritising and fixing defects is detailed in the 'GM Framework for Highway Safety Inspections', endorsed by the 10 GM Highway Authorities, as well as the Council's own underlying Safety Inspection Policy.

Potholes

There's no official national definition, but a pothole is usually regarded as a round dip or hole in the road that is 40mm deep or more. From our asset management system, the number of potholes that we estimate to have filled over the last 5 years is shown in Appendix 2.

Most of our revenue budget is spent on repairing carriageway and footway defects each year. Some minor defects don't pose a danger to people or damage the road, so they aren't marked for repair.

Our capital investment has enabled us to adopt a pro-active maintenance strategy. This allows us to increase our spending on preventative maintenance instead of reactive repairs, making better use of our available budgets.

3. Condition of local roads

The condition of our entire highways network is currently assessed every two years (approximately half of the network is surveyed each year). This is done by our survey contractor using video assessments and, if needed, on-foot data collection.

The network is rated in 5 condition categories, shown below. The indicative maintenance treatments required at each condition grade are also shown:

Road and footway condition grades

- **Grade 1: Damage Free**
  - Maintenance: None required
- **Grade 2: Signs of Wear**
  - Maintenance: Minor maintenance
- **Grade 3: Serviceable**
  - Maintenance: Some patching and preventative treatment
- **Grade 4: Functionally Impaired (Poor)**
  - Maintenance: Major patching, preventative treatment, or resurfacing
- **Grade 5: Structurally Impaired (Very Poor)**
  - Maintenance: Resurfacing or full reconstruction

We also aggregate these 5 categories into 3 corresponding condition bands when currently reporting our road condition data nationally:

- Red – should be considered for maintenance
- Amber - maintenance may be required soon, and
- Green - no further investigation or treatment required.

Appendix 3 shows a summary of this data for different road classes over the last 5 years.

The investment programme work has succeeded in significantly improving the condition of our roads. The table below shows the percentage of our roads and footways at grade 4 or grade 5 (poor / very poor) condition since 2016.

In 2017, 25% of all our roads were in this poor or very poor condition, but this has now reduced to about 12% in 2024.

Most investment focused on roads. This is why footway conditions have generally not improved. Now, footways are a priority in upcoming maintenance plans, along with local and neighbourhood roads.

Percentage of all roads and footways in grades 4 & 5 condition

Year	Roads	Footways
2016	19%	12%
2017	25%	16%
2018	24%	14%
2019	20%	11%
2020	17%	12%
2021	16%	12%
2022	14%	14%
2023	13%	14%
2024	12%	14%

Additional information on condition

As well as improving the condition of our roads & footways, the investment has also enabled us to work to improve the condition of our other key assets.

Drainage

The investment programme has helped us increase cyclical cleansing on our highway drainage gullies, which number around 120,000. We have measured silt levels in each gully. We used this data with other risk factors like flood zones and usage. Then, we ranked them into different priority bands. Each band has its own cleansing schedule.

Since 2018, we have also spent about £12m on capital drainage repairs. These repairs include replacing gully lids and frames, repairing and replacing pipes, CCTV investigations, and gully pot replacements.

Bridges & Structures

The overall condition of our structures is best shown by the Bridge Condition Index (BCI). This value comes from regular inspections.

The BCI Average reflects the condition of all parts of a structure. It gives us a clear picture of our structures' state. Data from our Pontis bridge management system shows the average BCI is 79.0. Below is a breakdown of the overall condition ratings for our structures:

- Very good: 2%
- Good: 51%
- Fair: 40%
- Poor: 7%
- Very poor: 0%

These values show an improvement on last year's figures, where the BCI (Av) was 78.2 and 11% of the structures stock had a condition rating of poor or very poor.

4. Plans

Overall strategy

The Council knows that good asset management will clarify standards and service levels. This helps use resources wisely. We want to get the most value from our current resources. We will also look for new funding sources, invest savings, and explore development opportunities. Plus, we'll work with other infrastructure projects.

Our approach to asset management and highway maintenance can be summarised as:

- Data-driven: We use condition surveys and other data to predict how assets will perform in the future. This helps us identify possible failure points. It also shows how different maintenance strategies impact these points.
- A long-term strategy: We use lifecycle planning to look at all costs linked to an asset. This includes acquisition, maintenance, and disposal. By doing this, we can find the most cost-effective treatment strategies.
- Maximising proactive and preventative maintenance: We use low-cost preventative treatments more often. This helps extend network life and reduces the need for costly major renewals.
- Using stakeholder engagement: We listen to our customers and stakeholders. We meet their needs by aligning maintenance activities with their expectations and communicating clearly. As well as using direct customer feedback, we take part in the annual National Highways & Transportation (NHT) customer satisfaction survey, which collects residents' views on which services are most important to them and helps shape our service priorities.

Manchester City Council commits to developing best practice, innovation, and continuous improvement from lessons learned at national, regional, and local levels. Officers regularly contribute to and attend seminars, conferences, and training sessions held by:

- Local Council Roads Innovation Group (LCRIG).
- The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).
- Road Surface Treatments Association (RSTA).
- UK Roads Board.
- ADEPT Asset Management Working Group.

We're committed to sharing our knowledge and experiences in asset management. This includes working with other highway authorities in GM and beyond. The council is part of the GM Highways Group, comprising the 10 districts of GM, as well as the LCRIG Northwest group, currently comprising council officers from Lancashire, Blackpool, Cumberland, Westmorland & Furness, Blackburn with Darwen, Cheshire West & Chester, Halton, and Bolton.

We will keep exploring new technologies and materials. Right now, we aim to maximise recycled materials in our maintenance work. We are also looking to use more sustainable products when we can. We propose using digital image capture surveys to spot defects in our highway safety inspections. This can capture images on all safety inspection routes much faster than traditional methods. It also provides an auditable record of the entire carriageway's condition. This will help us cut down on third-party claims. It also gives us data to track deterioration and act before potholes form.

Specific plans for 2025 to 2026

For 2025/26, the council is continuing to provide additional investment for highway maintenance to sustain the improvements already made to Manchester's network. This investment will allow an increased priority for local road & footway improvements to support active travel, whilst also preserving the condition of our strategic road network.

We are sticking to our annual preventative maintenance plan. Each year, we'll focus on several wards across the city. This will lower set-up costs, coordinate diversion routes, and reduce disruption.

Maintenance works will be planned alongside other capital improvement projects in Manchester. This will save costs, reduce disruption for road users, and enhance the project's value.

It is estimated that we will spend around 85% of our budgets on preventative works, with the remaining 15% spent on reactive repairs. This is in line with recent years. More details are shown in the table in Appendix 2.

In 2025/26, we are planning to resurface about 22 Km of road, as well as carrying out thin surfacing treatments on a further 33 Km.

We are planning to treat around 60 Km of footway length, in 149 schemes.

We have scheduled repair works to 6 bridges in 2025/26.

The condition of our highway network has improved a lot in recent years. However, some defects will still be found that need repairs. We expect to fill about 10,000 potholes which will be identified in 2025/26. Our highway safety inspectors will find most during their regular inspections, along with those that customers report. This number may change due to environmental factors, like severe winter weather.

Street works

The co-ordination of roadworks is essential to ensure disruption from all highway works are kept to a minimum. All works on the road will have varying levels of disturbance and the GM Road Activity Permit Scheme (GMRAPS) allows all GM authorities to assess them before they can be completed on the highway.

GMRAPS provides consistency between all GM authorities as they must work to the procedures set out in the scheme parameters. GMRAPS is intended to make coordination more effective between Permit Authorities, Transport Authorities, Bridge Authorities, National Highways and other highway authorities bordering Greater Manchester.

In managing the highway network, the aims of the scheme are to:

- Improve key routes for workers, customers, and suppliers. This will help them reach major economic centres with greater efficiency and reliability.
- Make the best use of walking, cycling and public transport routes to key centres and major new developments.
- Help people make the best use of the network by sharing information about their travel options, and
- Minimise the impact of road traffic on residential areas and to improve the environment for pedestrians and cyclists on lightly trafficked streets

Once works are approved, Manchester City Council (MCC) staff conduct inspections to ensure compliance with the conditions outlined in the agreed permit application. Where non-compliance is identified, a range of enforcement tools—aligned with current legislation—are available to ensure corrective action is taken and that works proceed in accordance with the approved terms.
These enforcement measures include:

- Issuing Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs): This happens for breaking permit rules or not following legal requirements.
- Section 74 Overstay Charges: These apply when someone uses the highway without permission for too long.
- Cease and Desist Orders: These orders require an immediate stop to work and may need promoters to leave the site.

These mechanisms help maintain safety, minimise disruption, and uphold the integrity of the public highway network.

When the works are on site, our team of street works inspectors carry out routine and sample inspections to check that reinstatements are properly completed. These inspections verify that utility companies and other highway works comply with regulations and standards for returning the road to its original state after works have been completed.

Section 81 of the New Roads and Street Works Act (NRSWA) outlines the duty of Utility companies (like water, gas, or electricity) to keep their equipment in the street in good condition. If our inspectors or the public spot a problem (like a broken cover or lid), we send a Section 81 notice to the utility company with a timescale for them to fix it. If they don't, the Council will make it safe and charge them for the repair.

Coordination of works across the highway network extends beyond the GMRAPS scheme; We employ a range of tools and collaborative practices to ensure that all activities are planned and executed safely, efficiently, and with minimal disruption to the public.

Key coordination mechanisms include:

- One Network: A digital platform used to visualise and manage planned and ongoing works across the network.
- Weekly Coordination Meetings: Regular discussions with utility companies, developers and all stakeholders to review upcoming works, resolve potential conflicts, and align schedules.
- Quarterly Engagement Meetings: Strategic sessions with stakeholders to discuss long-term planning, performance, and opportunities for improvement.

This multi-layered approach ensures that all works are effectively coordinated, promoting safety, reducing congestion, and maintaining the integrity of the transport network.

Climate change, resilience and adaption

Our Highways team focuses on Zero Carbon in every new scheme and contract we award or renew. This aligns with the Manchester Zero Carbon Framework 2020-2038 and the Manchester City Council Climate Change Action Plan 2020-25. We have a dedicated Environmental Sustainability Lead. This person helps us achieve the Council's sustainability goals. This will be achieved by:

- Making Zero Carbon a key consideration in all scheme design, delivery and procurement activities.
- Prioritising maintenance on local roads and footways to encourage walking and cycling.
- Maximising the use of low carbon, warm-lay and recycled materials in our highway schemes; We will explore innovations and opportunities, invest in lasting change, and continually monitor and review the reductions in carbon emissions the service is achieving, including those of our contractors, to identify where improvements can be made.

We create carbon management plans for all our highway projects and Environmental evaluation is part of our service. This ensures we include sustainable drainage and greening in projects whenever we can.

We have increasingly used thermal road repair technology on our roads, which recycles 100% of the existing surfacing in-situ to provide around 90% of the repair material. Coupled with reduced plant and labour requirements, this means that a typical repair reduces carbon by up to 85% compared with a traditional approach.

An LED streetlighting retrofit programme began in September 2017 and by 2021 nearly all, approximately 54,371 LED streetlights, had been installed. This programme has made a significant contribution to the MCC Climate Change Action Plan 2020-25, targeting a reduction in CO2 emissions of around 220 tonnes per annum.

The effects of climate change on our highway assets have already been seen during several severe storm events in recent years, as well as extreme temperatures. Our longer-term approach to highway asset management needs to focus on what effect climate change may have on investment priorities and lifecycle costs of our highway assets.

We are committed to advancing climate resilience and ecological sustainability by embedding nature-positive principles into our infrastructure planning and procurement processes. For future highway schemes, we are setting clear targets to:

- Maximise Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG): Ensuring that all new developments contribute positively to local ecosystems by enhancing habitats and supporting native species.
- Implement green Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS): Integrating SuDS into new developments to manage surface water sustainably, reduce flood risk, and improve water quality while enhancing urban biodiversity.

These initiatives are designed to retain and replenish natural environments, aligning our infrastructure projects with broader environmental goals and contributing to a greener, more resilient future.

Additional information on plans

The council's Our Manchester Strategy 2025-35 gathered the views of over 10,000 people from across the city to help shape Manchester's future. It highlights that good communication, and engagement is very important in everything the council does.
Our highways service uses a local approach to shape priorities, make decisions, design services, and deliver them.

- Place based measures like health inequalities, poverty and deprivation levels are reviewed during the feasibility stage of highway schemes to ensure where possible the scheme will have a positive impact.
- Improving local public spaces through social value commitments from all highway's contracts. Social value is now embedded within the Highways service, and we will continue to encourage

contractors and their supply chain to deliver activities that align to our priorities to help Manchester to become a fairer, inclusive, and more sustainable city.

- Consultation with local communities, partners and stakeholders forms a key part of scheme development.
- We take part in the annual National Highways and Transportation (NHT) Public Satisfaction Survey, to better understand resident's views relating to highways and help to define our service priorities.
- Planned maintenance programmes are formulated after consultation with neighbourhood teams and ward members to incorporate local priorities.
- Quarterly meetings are held to brief Neighbourhood Leads on highways schemes and future planned works.
- We work closely with internal and external colleagues and partners to ensure that future planned works are aligned to strategic growth objectives.

Appendix 1

Lengths of highways, footways and cycleways

Type of highway	Length in kilometres (km)
A road	167 km
B and C roads	156 km
U roads	1,020 km
Total roads	1,343 km
Footways	2,668 km
Other public rights of way	72 km
Cycleways	260 km

These lengths are derived from our highway network data system, which is used to define and manage our maintenance priorities.

Appendix 2

Highways maintenance spending figures

Year	Capital allocated by DfT via GMCA (£)	Capital spend (£)	Revenue spend (£)	Estimate of percentage spent on preventative maintenance	Estimate of percentage spent on reactive maintenance
2025 to 2026 projected	£6,442k	£21,086k	£3,600k	85%	15%
2024 to 2025	£8,044k	£21,825k	£3,689k	86%	14%
2023 to 2024	£9,388k	£24,584k	£3,895k	86%	14%
2022 to 2023	£8,442k	£20,859k	£3,416k	86%	14%
2021 to 2022	£6,988k	£18,910k	£4,294k	81%	19%
2020 to 2021	£6,630k	£22,709k	£3,929k	85%	15%

Estimate of the number of potholes filled

Year	Number of potholes filled
2024 to 2025	10,120
2023 to 2024	15,200
2022 to 2023	22,000
2021 to 2022	13,083
2020 to 2021	16,582

Appendix 3

Summary of road condition since 2020

The tables below show the percentage of red, amber and green condition bandings for the different road classes in Manchester since 2020. These have been collated from our grade 1-5 condition ratings to provide a more consistent measure.
We carry out annual condition surveys capturing about 50% of our total network each year (all road classes). This means that all roads are surveyed within a 2-year period.

Percentage of A roads & Motorways in each condition category

Year	Percentage of A roads in red category	Percentage of A roads in amber category	Percentage of A roads in green category
2020	8%	19%	73%
2021	8%	17%	75%
2022	8%	16%	76%
2023	6%	15%	79%
2024	6%	16%	78%

Percentage of B and C roads in each condition category

Year	Percentage of B and C roads in red category	Percentage of B and C roads in amber category	Percentage of B and C roads in green category
2020	10%	18%	72%
2021	8%	17%	75%
2022	9%	17%	74%
2023	7%	16%	77%
2024	6%	19%	75%

Percentage of U roads in each condition category

Year	Percentage of U roads in red category	Percentage of U roads in amber category	Percentage of U roads in green category
2020	21%	18%	61%
2021	19%	18%	63%
2022	16%	18%	66%
2023	14%	18%	68%
2024	15%	18%	67%

Road condition figures

The numbers in these tables are slightly different from those on the official Road Condition Statistics website. This is because:

- Some changes were made to C and U road lengths.
- The way we have split the 1-5 grading system into red, amber, and green condition has changed slightly and this has been applied to previous years for consistency.