



Transport User Community

Road surface quality

May 2021

What did we ask our community?

Road surface quality (part one)

Who does our community think manages and maintains local roads versus motorways and major 'A' roads?

When it comes to England's strategic road network (SRN), what does the community think of the quality of the surface on these roads? How important is road surface quality?

road surface quality (part two)

If respondents could 'wave a magic wand', what one thing would the community change about the road surface quality on motorways and major 'A' roads?

Has anyone had experience of driving on a road with poor surface quality? What problems did this cause and what do drivers think can be done about it?

Who is our road users community?

40

people using
motorways and major
'A' roads in England



Across England



Mix of vehicle types



Mix of commuters,
leisure and business
travellers, and those
who drive for work



A spread of age,
gender and ethnicity



Some have
disabilities

Awareness of Highways England being in charge of motorways and major 'A' roads is patchy

- Rarely referred to as Highways England, most people recognised that 'The Highways Agency' (or, on one occasion, 'Agencies') is in charge of this network.
 - *There is a loose sense among these respondents that there must be some regional variation in terms of how motorways and major 'A' roads are managed. Some misconceptions included:*
 - Transport for London managing the M25
 - Local councils managing their local 'patch' of the network entirely
 - Local councils 'hiring' Highways England to maintain the network on a local basis
 - Highways England as 'maintainer' but not 'manager' of the network
 - 'The Government' managing the network directly

This blurring of the lines between different transport bodies does make it difficult for respondents to know precisely who to report issues to.

If I wanted to report an issue I'd probably do a Google and check. Doing that now I can see Highways England but I think that shows most people would be the same, and have no idea.

Female, 35, North West

I think far more urgency needs to be given to addressing potholes and cracks on major 'A' roads but let's not forget the poor rain drainage that can be a bigger nuisance and cause greater damage and alarm, as flooding can cause roads to close unexpectedly

Male, 50, South East

A much bigger national plan needs to be set up with a nationwide campaign requesting motorists to contact an email address or fill in a webpage with necessary details to get something done.

Male, 36, South East



The community is almost universally aware that local roads are managed by local councils

- However, confusion emerges in terms of how local councils then 'interact' with other bodies and authorities they know to be involved with transport.
 - This is particularly confusing within London. How do local councils collaborate with the Greater London Assembly and Transport for London?
 - How does local council management differ from parliamentary constituencies? Do MPs have any say on how the roads are managed?
 - How does Highways England interface with local councils in terms of where the local roads 'meet' the motorway?

It should be noted that this is not something the community had given much thought to prior to being asked – it is not a high-salience issue.

There's always work being done, but let me ask you a question - have you ever encountered a road being fixed or resurfaced only to discover it is having problems soon after? I think we've all been there and sometimes they underestimate the traffic or weight vehicles on these A roads.

Male, 24, South East

As mentioned the M62 past Leeds is in quite a poor state. It wasn't easy to drive when the weather is poor and worry about potential accidents. As well as the safety aspect, the comfort is impacted with lots of noise when driving over the roads.

Male, 32, West Midlands

If I could wave a magic wand one thing I would definitely change in the M25 unsmooth bumpy surface. I absolutely hate driving over this and my children hate the noise of it end up covering their ears. I reckon it damages tyres as well.

Female, 36, South East

M1 is fine - at least from J15 to J6. By comparison some motorways appear to have waves throughout so one is either rising or falling - very disconcerting! Like the M11. Or some give off a noise that might cause alarm as you wonder if your tire is punctured!

Female, 57, North West



Respondents generally argued that road surface quality on strategic roads they use was superior to their local roads

- Respondents recognise a **trade-off** between road surface quality and delays caused by road maintenance. The SRN was felt to offer the best of both worlds: a generally high quality of road surface but speedy maintenance when required.
 - Only one respondent in the West Midlands felt that his stretch of the strategic road network was undergoing frequent maintenance without tangible results.

Why is road surface quality valued?



- **Safety:** In the abstract, road surface quality is understood in the context of potential accidents or collisions. Particularly in wet weather, a good road surface is understood to keep drivers safe.
- **Quality:** Road surface quality is a feature that a modern road network 'ought' to get right. 'We pay road tax, they ought to be done up' was a common refrain.
- **Calm:** Several members of the community point out that they feel more on-edge driving on roads with poorer surface quality. Driving on these roads is stressful, and they feel that they need to be more alert as they drive.

As with previous research, road surface quality is often understood as the absence of potholes, bumps or cracks.

An even and smooth road surface would be a very positive thing. I've not had any recent experiences of travelling on terrible road surfaces but I've had a couple of occasions where standing water was on the motorway and I was very scared.

Male, 37, South East

In truth I don't know who to report concerns about a road to, but I'm going to do my research now and make sure that a pot hole has been reported. I always report a bad pothole on Waze as it helps me when others have done so.

Male, 35, South East

I experience poor road conditions on a daily with local and major A roads, I feel this is impacted when the weather conditions are poor or tyres are low pressure or worn be it on the outer or inner tyres. Safety is paramount, my concern always is what would you do on a major A road in light of an incident occurring?!

Male, 35, East Midlands



If our community could wave a magic wand, almost unanimously they would have maintenance works take place overnight

- In essence, this would cut through the perceived trade-off between delays due to maintenance and optimal road surface quality. Roads would be well-maintained with less interruption during the times our respondents tend to travel.

Other suggestions included:

- More tech-led ways of reporting road surface quality issues to the relevant authority or 'people in charge'. Again this is vague – some would go to their local council or local MP.
- 'New tarmac' – we know from previous research that there is a latent expectation that more high-tech materials 'ought' to have been implemented on the SRN but few know what this might look like in practice.
- Addressing the issue of sunlight glaring against recent rainfall on the roads making it difficult to see.

While few respondents had ‘horror stories’ relating to road surface quality, frustration was common

- Road surface quality is understood as a major contributor to a safe and comfortable journey their needs are broadly met by the SRN in this respect. However, lapses in road surface quality have led to:
 - Raised lines and rocky gravel causing ‘panic’ for one driver, again on the M25
 - Stones hitting the windscreen and causing chips
 - Difficulties driving on the M62 during periods of poorer weather, attributed to poor road surface quality
- Again, respondents are somewhat at a loss as to where to report these issues, to the extent that some would simply flag them on Waze, or their local community Facebook group.