Good news from the government for motorists? Surely not…

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Author:

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Surprise, Surprise… Government New Year cheer…



or if you prefer… Christmas comes but once every (financial) year…

By Dave Moss

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Immediately before Christmas the Government announced that almost £1.6 billion is to be made available in the 2025-26 financial year to help local councils get a tighter grip on fixing the ever-burgeoning number of potholes appearing on England's roads.

Making the announcement, Transport Secretary, Heidi Alexander, said: "Potholes have plagued motorists for far too long, but today's record investment will start to reverse a decade of decline on our country's roads. This government is firmly on the side of drivers… Every area of England will get extra cash to tackle this problem once and for all."

The Government claims that the amount is enough to fix the equivalent of seven million extra potholes in 2025 year – a level of funding going well beyond Labour's election manifesto pledge, and a part of its "Plan for Change to boost infrastructure". Authorities will be required to spend the money wisely, collect the right data, and deliver proactive maintenance before potholes start to form – and will be incentivised by the withholding of 25% of the funding – until authorities show that they are actually delivering.

Few motorists and riders will disagree about the need to comprehensively address England's current, worryingly long term "pothole plague". The investment also represents a welcome boost to road safety, and will help to reign in vehicle repair costs. £1.6 billion will increase local road maintenance funding by almost 50%, and comes as latest RAC data suggests that drivers encounter an average of six potholes per mile in England and Wales, while the average cost of repairing vehicle pothole damage is around £500.

RAC head of policy, Simon Williams, says: "This is the biggest one-off road maintenance funding settlement councils in England have ever been given, so we have high hopes it's the turning point that ends the degradation of our roads, and finally delivers fit-for-purpose,

smooth surfaces for drivers and all other road users.

What's particularly positive is that this announcement is not just about giving councils money to fix dangerous potholes, it comes with the important caveat of using the money wisely by carrying out preventative maintenance to stop more potholes appearing in the future. It's also good to see the government proactively encouraging drivers to report potholes, requiring councils to collect the right data to capture the true state of their road networks and incentivising authorities that use the money to good effect."

According to AA research, fixing potholes is a priority for 96% of drivers. Edmund King, the AA's president, reckons: "Drivers and riders across England will be pleased to see this significant cash injection into smoothing out the local road network. With most journeys starting and ending on local roads, it is vital to restore the structural integrity of the streets we live on. We urge councils to focus on permanent and innovative repairs rather than adopting a 'patch and run' approach. Better maintenance of the road network is the number one concern of drivers, as damage costs a fortune and potholes can be fatal for those on two wheels. "

Each local authority can use it's share of the £1.6 billion to help identify which roads most need repairs and then deliver immediate fixes for communities. Every region of England apart from the East will receive at least £300 million, though for unexplained reasons east of England councils will share only £244 million.

The Transport Secretary made two more "good news for motorists" announcements at the same time. At least 50% of surplus lane rental funds, where local highway authorities can charge companies for the time that their street and road works occupy the road, will in future be mandated for reinvestment into highway maintenance. In addition, there's to be a clampdown on disruptive street works, with fixed penalty notices doubled for utility companies who fail to comply with rules, and extended charges for street works which run into weekends.

AA president Edmund King feels these are important steps forward. He says: “Clamping down on poor works carried out by utility companies and overrunning roadworks is sorely needed, and we are pleased to see action being taken here. We hope it means more roads can be opened in first class condition”.