



## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Roads maintenance expenditure falls far short of what is required to prevent serious deterioration in the condition of the road network**

A report published today (26 March 2019) by the Comptroller and Auditor General has outlined how decades of funding shortfalls are having a deteriorating effect on the overall condition of Northern Ireland's road network.

Mr Kieran Donnelly's report on '*Structural Maintenance of the Road Network*' notes that the Department for Infrastructure estimates that, in recent years, annual funding has been, on average, £50m less than what is needed to maintain the network in a steady and sustainable state. This underfunding has increased the overall backlog of required maintenance funding to £1.2 billion.

The report also highlights how the Department relies heavily on late in year funding for structural maintenance, reducing its ability to plan this work properly and carry more of it out in periods of better weather. The resulting uncertainty over workloads impacts negatively on private contractors.

Commenting on the findings of his report, Mr Donnelly said:

**“It is clear from this report that short term, inadequate funding of road maintenance expenditure is causing the serious deterioration of a key public asset. The securing of a long term funding option<sup>1</sup> needs to be a priority.**

**“One of the surprising findings within the report is the absence of a roads maintenance strategy to demonstrate long-term development and maintenance requirements of the network. I am also recommending some reconsideration of the way maintenance funding is allocated. While major roads such as motorways are in better condition than previously thought, minor roads, including much of the rural network, continue to deteriorate.”**

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<sup>1</sup> Highways England works with a five year cycle of ring fenced funding for structural maintenance of the strategic road network.

The report also recommends that the Department undertakes more engagement with road users, and calls for more routine publication of information on the condition of roads.

#### Notes for Editors

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). He, and the NIAO, are totally independent of Government. He certifies the accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. He has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. His reports are published as Assembly papers.
2. This report is available on the Audit Office website at [www.niauditoffice.gov.uk](http://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk). The report is embargoed until 00.01hrs on 26 March 2019.
3. Background briefing can be obtained from the Audit Office by contacting Colette Kane (028 9025 1064).