



Issue 8 – January 2016

Contents

- [Potholes – 24% increase in vehicles damaged by potholes](#)
- [All-lane running smart motorways – are they safe?](#)
- [RAC Fuel Watch](#)
- [What is the RAC doing in your constituency?](#)

Potholes – 24% increase in vehicles damaged by potholes

The 15th January 2016 was National Pothole Day. To mark this, the RAC analysed its breakdown data to see just how much of an impact Britain's potholed roads were having on motorists. Here's what we found:

- Britain's potholed roads led the RAC to see a 24% year-on-year rise in the number of call-outs to vehicles which had suffered damage likely due to poor road surfaces, when comparing 2015 to 2014.
- RAC patrols responded 5,010 more incidents involving broken shock absorbers, ruined suspension parts or distorted or damaged wheels in 2015 compared to 2014.
- The single biggest increase recorded was for damaged suspension springs which saw a 42% rise from 13,101 in 2014 to 18,417 last year.



WHICH REGION WAS WORST?

- East Anglia reported the highest number of pothole-related call-outs, with 4,547. However, with a total year-on-year increase of 31%, it ranked third in percentage increase in call-outs.
- South East England recorded the highest percentage increase in year-on-year call-outs with 62% more in 2015 than in 2014. The region recorded 2,686 incidents. This indicates road surface quality may have deteriorated significantly here.
- North East England recorded 3,783 incidents with a 30% increase in year-on-year call-outs.
- Scotland recorded a 27% increase (2,537 call-outs) and the Midlands saw a 19% increase (3,491 incidents).

CALLS TO ACTION

1

The RAC urges the Treasury to consider introducing a better long-term funding mechanism for local road maintenance that mirrors the ring-fencing of VED to fund maintenance and development of the Strategic Road Network (SRN), which was announced in the 2015 Summer Budget. In 2014, motorists paid almost £40bn in taxation to the Treasury, and the

current state of local roads represents a poor return. According to the 2015 RAC Report on Motoring, an annual survey of motoring opinion, the poor state of local roads was the top issue for 10% of motorists (more than any other issue), while a further 20% listed the issue as one of their top four concerns. Half (50%) of the 1,555 motorists questioned for the report said the condition of roads in their area had deteriorated in the past 12 months with just 10% claiming it had improved; the remainder reporting no change.

2 The Government should address the funding imbalance that exists at local authority level. Local authorities have specific legal obligations to provide minimum standards in education and social services. It is therefore inevitable that expenditure is biased against investment in road maintenance where similar prescriptive legal obligations do not exist and councillors therefore do not face legal sanctions. Whilst there is evidence that some local authorities have increased their spending on local road maintenance, more needs to be done. In the 2015 RAC Report on Motoring, respondents were asked to prioritise different categories of local authority spending. Across all types of spending, not just those related to transport, road maintenance came out second only to education.



GETTING YOUR CONSTITUENTS INVOLVED:
For more information on how your constituents could report potholes, please see ["What is RAC doing in your constituency?"](#)

All-lane running smart motorways – are they safe?

The Transport Select Committee is conducting an inquiry into all-lane running configurations on smart motorways, and the RAC, whilst supporting the introduction of additional smart motorways is campaigning to ensure that they are as safe as possible and that motorists’ concerns are recognised and addressed. In November 2015, the RAC conducted a poll of motorists who had broken down and patrols who had attended breakdowns on smart motorways in the last year.

CONCEPT HISTORY:
The smart motorway concept was first used in 2006 on the M42 where a trial took place to convert the hard shoulder into a running lane (dynamic hard shoulder) during busy periods of the day to help ease congestion and increase traffic flow. Since then, this motorway configuration has been rolled out on to parts of the M1, M4, M5 and M6. On these stretches of motorways there are emergency refuge areas around every 800m-1km.

However, since 2014, certain stretches of motorway have been converted into an all-lane running configuration. In this instance, the hard shoulder is permanently removed, with emergency refuge areas spaced at up to 2.5kms apart.

Dynamic hard shoulder configuration	All-lane running configuration
 <p>[IMAGE SOURCE: HIGHWAYS ENGLAND]</p>	 <p>[IMAGE SOURCE: HIGHWAYS ENGLAND]</p>
<p>The hard shoulder is opened up as a regular running lane when the volume of traffic requires this (when there is congestion).</p> <p>This is in use on the M1, M6 and M42.</p>	<p>The hard shoulder is permanently converted to a normal running lane, and road markings that characterise the hard shoulder are removed.</p> <p>This is in use on sections of the North East and South East quadrants of the M25.</p>

Our survey of motorists and patrols was our first on this area, and the results suggested there is plenty of work to be done by Highways England and other stakeholders to reassure motorists.

HEADLINE SURVEY RESULTS:

Motorists breaking down

- **Those on dynamic hard shoulder (DHS) felt significantly safer in a breakdown situation than those on all-lane Running (ALR):** Those motorists using ALR averaged 3.9 out of 10 when asked how safe they felt, compared to 5.2 out of 10 for DHS (The scale of 1 to 10 was subjective with 1 equating to "Extremely Unsafe" and 10 to "Extremely Safe").
- **Only a small proportion (1 in 3) of those breaking down on a smart motorway feel as safe as when they broke down on a conventional motorway with a hard shoulder**
- **Awareness of emergency refuge areas (ERA) is poor:** Only 28% of those on ALR said they could see an ERA when breaking down: 1 in 4 did not realise the ERAs even existed.
- **The gaps between ERAs are too far apart:** When explained what ERAs were, around 80% believed they should be 1km or less apart.
- **There is uncertainty about traffic management measures imposed by Highways England when a breakdown occurs:** One in five of those that broke down were unaware of what traffic management measures were supposed to be imposed to protect the scene when a breakdown occurred.
- **Dynamic hard shoulder is more popular than all-lane running:** There is a clear preference for more dynamic hard shoulder configuration motorways when asked for a preference between the two. Less than 1 in 10 preferred ALR.
- **A significant proportion deem a permanent hard shoulder to be extremely important:** 2 in 5 consider a permanent hard shoulder to be 'extremely important'.

Patrols attending breakdowns

- **Feeling safe working on smart motorways:** Patrols feel less safe on smart motorways than on motorways with a permanent hard shoulder. Patrols working on all-lane running feel more strongly about this than those working on dynamic hard shoulder.
- **Traffic Management appears to be better on ALR:** Traffic management measures to protect the scene were more likely to be in operation when a patrol arrived at the scene on an ALR configured smart motorway than on a DHS smart motorway suggesting that Highways England are more alert to the risks on ALR motorways.

RAC RECOMMENDATIONS

The RAC has concerns that a decision was taken to implement the all-lane running configuration on all future smart motorways before operational data was available to confirm whether smart motorways with ALR are as safe as those with DHS. The wider spacing between ERAs, to the point that they are not visible to most motorists breaking down, is a particular concern.

Should ALR continue to be the preferred configuration, we urge consideration of the following options:

- **Increase the number of emergency refuge areas.** Only 22% of those we surveyed believe that gaps of more than 1km between ERAs on smart motorways are acceptable, whilst only 42% of motorists who broke down on a smart motorway section managed to reach the ERA. We therefore regard a spacing of up to 2.5km to be too great.
- **Raise awareness of the existence of ERAs and signage to indicate the distance to the next ERA.**
- **Increase awareness of the importance of compliance with the 'Red X' lane closure signs.** There has been positive work done by Highways England on this over the last six months but there remains a worrying minority of drivers who ignore red 'X' signs.
- **There remain some sections of the smart motorway that are not fully monitored by CCTV cameras,** although this represents only 5%. With ALR set to become the default configuration, this potentially exposes miles of upgraded ALR smart motorways without CCTV coverage. The RAC would like to see coverage increased to 100% on ALR smart motorways.

- The RAC urges greater transparency on the part of Highways England so that data on the performance of smart motorways is made available more rapidly and more frequently.

The RAC submitted its response to the Select Committee inquiry into all-lane running. This provides a detailed brief on the differences in configuration operation on smart motorways. Please contact nlyes@rac.co.uk for a copy.

RAC Fuel Watch

With world commodity market conditions and OPEC's decision in early December not to cut production the price of crude oil has been in free-fall. It has dropped from \$40 a barrel on 4th December to around \$29 a barrel by 25th January. This has resulted in average prices at the pumps reducing to around 101ppl for both unleaded and diesel with many larger retailers now selling both fuels for under £1 a litre. Sterling has lost value against the dollar throughout January, and as of 26th January is at its lowest exchange rate against the dollar since March 2009. This is likely to influence whether motorists see further price falls at the pumps in the short-term as fuel like oil is traded in dollars. Wholesale diesel remains cheaper than petrol, but this is still not being reflected as widely at the pumps as it should be, despite the RAC campaigning on this during the month.



Year-on-year comparison 23rd January 2015 to 25th January 2016

The average UK cost of unleaded on 25th January 2016 was 5ppl cheaper than it was on 23rd January 2015. This represents a 4.7% price drop in one year. The average UK cost of diesel on 25th January 2016 was 12.9ppl cheaper than it was on the 23rd January 2015. This represents an 11.3% price drop in a year.

	23 rd January 2015	25 th January 2016
Fuel Type	Average pump price ppl	Average pump price ppl
Unleaded	106.86	101.86
Diesel	114.03	101.18

Monthly price comparison 24th December 2015 to 25th January 2016

The average UK cost of unleaded on 25th January 2016 was 0.4ppl cheaper than it was on 24th December 2015. This represents a 0.4% price fall in a month. The average UK cost of diesel on 25th January 2016 was 5.2ppl cheaper than it was on 24th December 2015. This represents a 4.9% price fall in a month.

	24 th December 2015	25 th January 2016
Fuel Type	Average pump price ppl	Average pump price ppl
Unleaded	102.22	101.86
Diesel	106.39	101.18

The facts - the cost of filling a typical family car:

Fuel	Petrol	Diesel
Fuel tank in litres	55	55
Avg forecourt price in per litre	101.86	101.18

Total cost to motorist	£56.02	£55.65
Duty	£31.87	£31.87
VAT @ 20%	£9.34	£9.27
Cost of fuel	£14.81	£14.50
Exc VAT	£46.69	£46.37
VAT & duty	£41.21	£41.15
% tax of fuel cost	74%	74%

*Source: Experian Catalist – UK prices as of 25th January 2016

For further information, please visit our fuel pages: www.rac.co.uk/fuelwatch

What is the RAC doing in your constituency?

RAC Report Pothole App

As reported in this newsletter, there has been a 24% increase in the number of pothole related call-outs in 2015 compared to 2014. The RAC has teamed up with Street Repairs reporting tool to power the RAC Report Pothole App, available on smart phones. If the person reporting the pothole takes a picture, it accurately identifies the location via GPS and uploads the report to a central database which then notifies the relevant department at the local authority in charge. Motorists can also upload details of any damage to their car which will help any subsequent damage claim.

The tool is designed to empower motorists in your constituency to report a pothole and help bring Britain's poor local roads back into a reasonable condition. Users have reported significantly faster response times to remedy road faults perhaps because of the backing of the RAC as a trusted motoring organisation.


RAC partnership with Scouts Association

In October, the RAC announced a new partnership with The Scouts Association to promote road safety among their 500,000 young people. Our road safety mascot Horace, created with Aardman Animations, will be visiting many Scout and Cub packs across the UK during the course of the year and the RAC is sponsoring the Cubs' Road Safety Badge. Should you wish to register your interest in potentially joining us at a local road safety workshop with the Cubs or Scouts, please contact nlyes@rac.co.uk for further details.



As the Motorist's Champion, the RAC is expertly placed to advise and guide effective road and motoring policy. Should you wish to discuss anything within this newsletter or any wider policy issues, please contact:

Nicholas Lyes, public affairs manager on nlyes@rac.co.uk or 07875 423875.

 @RAC_Press

 Visit: rac.co.uk/publicaffairs

rac.co.uk

RAC