

Green light for quiet asphalt



Concrete surfacing on UK trunk roads and motorways is to be scrapped in favour of quieter asphalt thin surfacing materials, according to a recent Highways Agency (HA) statement. The plug has also been pulled on conventional porous asphalt as a quiet surfacing because, in common with whisper concrete, it has been labelled as 'just not quiet enough'.

The HA's change in policy comes 10 years after porous asphalt and whisper concrete were proclaimed as the quiet road surfacings of the future. But advances in asphalt technology over the last decade have resulted in a new generation of high performance thin surfacings which are even quieter plus display high skid resistance and spray reducing qualities.

The HA is committed to resurfacing 60% of the UK's trunk road network with quieter materials under the Government's 10 year transport plan, which swung into action in April this year. New HA policy means that all existing concrete trunks roads and motorways will be resurfaced using new generation thin surfacings over the next decade.

Refined Bitumen Association chairman Julian Peake said: "It is great news for the asphalt industry not just in terms of increased workload but also in

terms of recognition of the performance of the new asphalt technology which has been developed in recent years.

"Nonetheless, these plans must be put into perspective by considering the fact that trunk roads only make up 4% of the UK's total road network. Local roads are still receiving a poor deal. Given the time scale over which the work will be carried out and the spread, the general motoring public will not notice any dramatic difference in the overall quality of our roads."

Work on the HA's consultation with local authorities throughout England to establish the criteria to prioritise the resurfacing of concrete roads is already under way. The agency has already earmarked the concrete surfaces which are set to disappear from the country's road network during this financial year. They include:

- M25 between Junction 26 and 27
- A1 in Nottinghamshire between Winthorpe to North Muskham
- M42 Junction 9 to 10 (northbound)
- M27 Junction 2 to 4 (east and westbound)
- A12 from the M25 to Witham in Essex
- Selected sections of carriageway on the M5 between Junction 26 and 27

Funds fall further short of target



Local authorities have reported a 30% increase in the shortfall between current levels of highway maintenance funding and what is actually needed to maintain roads adequately. This is according to the 2001 Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey published in April by the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA).

This year's ALARM report also reveals that continual under funding of road maintenance is impacting on road user safety and has led to a 50% increase in claims against local authorities for injuries and vehicle damage.

"The ALARM survey has been carried out annually since 1995 and has shown that the total road maintenance fund received by local authorities each year is around £1,000M below what is actually needed," said an AIA spokesman. "This year's survey shows the shortfall to have increased to £1,300M."

Local authorities are responsible for the up keep of 96% of the UK's road network but, according to ALARM, they only receive a third of what is needed to adequately maintain these roads. The survey also

reveals that around £1M is being paid out every week by local authorities or their insurers to settle insurance claims for injuries and damage caused by poorly maintained roads.

Highways engineers questioned by the survey report that under current local authority budgets roads can be resurfaced, on average, only once every 87 years as opposed to the recommended 10 to 20 years.

Shortage of funds is also affecting the ability to implement cost-effective planned maintenance programmes and a third of budgets are being spent on reactive maintenance. One local authority engineer said: "It has gone from planned maintenance to reactive maintenance – all we can do is plan to react."

Results of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' National Road Maintenance Condition Survey (NRMCS) are due to be published as Modern Asphalts goes to press and is expected to present a similar view. But the DETR is confident that next year's surveys will present a more positive picture as additional funds from the Government's 10 Year Transport Plan start to be distributed.