

Roads still not on record

Insufficient measurement of road condition, assets and performance and incomplete maintenance records have been criticised by a recent National Audit Office (NAO) report. The NAO's audit of trunk road maintenance for the Government has also found poor cost control within Highways Agency road maintenance contracts.

"The HA needs to improve its measure of the trunk road network and we have discovered a culture of poor cost control within the HA's maintenance contracts," said NAO director Keith Holden, launching the report in March this year.

"The HA is looking at annual accounts when it should be considering costs over the duration of projects. Prices are increasing and the HA needs to demonstrate value for money. Full maintenance records and information on untimely maintenance and the true condition of the network are essential for accurately measuring contract performance and value."

The NAO audit, which did not look at the performance of the HA's single point of contact Managing Agent Contracts, reports that the condition of the

trunk road network has improved overall. Allocation of funds to regions and capital maintenance projects has also improved and the impact of maintenance work on motorists has been reduced.

But it also states that information on the condition of assets is incomplete. Performance against some of the HA's maintenance targets could not be verified and project proposals are not assessed on the basis of money that can be saved in future by carrying out the work now.

The HA plans to introduce a 'spend to save' project ranking in April 2004, according to the report. And the HA's 2003-04 Business Plan, which was released in March, said a 'whole life' approach to road maintenance is to be developed using a new maintenance indicator due in 2004/05.

Also, the agency's team leader for pavement engineering Les Hawker said collation of a national asset inventory was expected to be completed by the end of April 2003.

"The initiative has been taken forward and a central database of assets is about 75% to 80% there," he said. "The main benefits of such a resource will be greater contract clarity, ease of contract negotiation and better value for money as a result."

The national road asset inventory has been collated from the HA's agents' regional databases. It will not yet include maintenance records of all items as contractors have been slow in providing information.

"The HA has been criticised for still not having fully up to date maintenance records. Although this can not be done overnight, the instruction has been in place for some time. Contractors are not carrying out their obligations, but they have been reminded," said Hawker.



MA website grows

Following the successful launch of the Modern Asphalts website last November, the site's archive section is now being expanded to meet the demand for information from previous issues of the magazine.

All back issues of the magazine will soon be available for download from the archive pages of www.modernasphalts.com to give you instant access to every feature ever published.

The website has now been updated with this issue of the magazine so you can read up on the latest asphalt product and technology developments even if you don't have a copy at hand.

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