

“ PPP ”

People for Proper Policing in North Wales

Subject: [Road safety on rural roads.](#)

The following series of letters are from a PPP supporter (previously employed in the field of highways development) Mr Xxx to a local authority highways safety dept.

Dear Sirs,

I am dismayed that there does not appear to be any commitment or mission statement on your part, on your road safety homepage, regarding the standards of road maintenance that you should be striving to achieve to make our roads safer.

You are encouraging drivers to take safety initiatives, which are all well and good, but it is of little use if they are travelling on roads, which are inherently unsafe. I am referring to the poor condition of many of our rural roads, which have deteriorated to such a degree that there is little or no texture depth in many places.

Conscious decisions must have been taken over recent years to dramatically reduce the frequency of surface dressing, presumably to save money but at the same time in the certain knowledge that it would compromise road safety. Improvement of skidding resistance by surface dressing has been clearly proven in the past to have a major effect on reducing skidding accidents, thereby saving many injuries and lives. You are probably aware of the statistics produced by the Transport Research Laboratory for the Greater London Council during the 1960s and 70s, which proved a clear link between accident frequency and lack of road texture. Surface dressing seems now to have been largely abandoned and many rural lanes, when icy or wet, have become potential death traps. This is exacerbated by the lack of any coherent policy on your part to control the use or size of the ever-larger agricultural vehicles, too wide and heavy for the roads they travel on, which are seriously eroding and destabilising road edges on rural lanes.

Please can I ask that you get your own house in order and make our local roads safer to drive on before suggesting a raft of safety initiatives for the driver to take. When you do this then you may get drivers to take you seriously and make the effort. I know exactly why the website is as it is, it is purely and simply down to saving money. It costs peanuts to produce a web page and come up with low cost safety initiatives but it costs a lot of money, time, effort and manpower to maintain our rural roads in a safe state. I have watched the steady decline in the integrity of the rural roads in my area since the 1970's and I wonder just how bad they have to get before an initiative is taken to restore them to an acceptable condition once more by having properly planned maintenance schedules restored. I sometimes feel that I am travelling in a third world country as I negotiate some of the hazards on my daily journeys. As an example of lack of maintenance I can tell you that the Lane in M*****, (used as a through route for many commuters from K****, A**** and M***** to the E**** area) hasn't been surface dressed for at least 23 years!!, whereas it used to get treated about every five years or so, presumably as part of an ongoing planned maintenance scheme.

I don't realistically expect that anything will improve in the slightest by my sending this letter. Maybe, just maybe, it might provoke some thought and a twinge of conscience in the minds of the people responsible for reducing the levels of maintenance in country areas. I would like to think that you may also take on board the fact that there is no policy for dealing with the considerable damage being caused by oversized agricultural vehicles. Farmers have to make a living, but if they choose and are allowed to use vehicles, which are wholly unsuitable for many rural lanes, then a strategy needs working out and put in place to deal with the effects.

Either the lanes need widening and strengthening or controls on the use of large vehicles need to be put in place e.g. width and weight restriction, financial penalties etc.

At present the fault lies wholly with government and not the farmers because of a total lack of any coherent policy on the authorities part for dealing with the situation.

Not everything is bad where I live as the refuse collection service is excellent. This helps to remind me why I pay Council Tax when I watch my local roads deteriorate and the police presence vanish from my area.

Regards, Mr xxxx

Hello Mr xxxx

I have forwarded your email to Mr zzzz as he has overall responsibility for the maintenance work of the county's roads. When he has had the opportunity he will respond to you directly.

In the meantime I attach a copy of our **Road Safety Unit mission statement** which explains our work.

Regards Mr yyyy

Hello Mr. yyyy

Thanks for your response and for forwarding my comments on to Mr.Zzzz. Do you agree with the points that I have made and don't you think that your mission statement should include something about your state of awareness and concern for the safe upkeep of the highways to complement your other safety initiatives? As I implied previously it is not much use being a safe driver if you are travelling on a slippery or damaged road surface. I'm sure you come across plenty of examples if you drive on our rural roads in Cheshire. Surely it is an area of major concern and deserving of some comment from yourself?

Regards Mr xxxx

Hello again Mr xxxx

Maintenance of our road infrastructure does play a role in the efforts, both locally and nationally, to minimise road crashes and casualties. As you are probably aware road safety work is traditionally divided into 3, or even 4, areas of work: education, **enforcement** and engineering - with encouragement included as a 4th (**by some**.)

The Road Safety Unit [RSU] has specific responsibility for the 'education' section of the list above with this again being broken down into education, training and publicity measures. The RSU mission statement only includes those areas of work for which we are responsible. **Having looked again at the website I notice that road maintenance does not get a mention.** This is something that I will draw to the attention of those responsible and those with a more strategic view. **Our Highway Engineering colleagues, including those in maintenance, work alongside us but have a differing set of work initiatives and priorities from the RSU.**

I don't think there is much doubt or dispute that the road infrastructure has suffered for many years from a lack of investment. This is basically down to finances and the choices that are made by those who need to balance the public purse. As a result our maintenance people have a very difficult job prioritising the claims on the maintenance budget. All those involved, including myself, would like to see more money available to redress the situation but there is not an unending pot of public money and choices have to be made.

Drivers do have a difficult job with the changing nature of the quality of the roads they use but the Highway Code is clear that drivers should 'adapt your driving to the appropriate type and condition of the road you are on' [rule 124]. I do not feel that I am able to add anything further but hope that Mr. Zzzz can explain the maintenance issues more fully.

Regards Mr Yyyy

Hello Mr Yyyy

Many thanks for your responses. I appreciate you taking the time to comment on my observations and I am pleased that we share a good amount of common ground. It is a great shame that more funding cannot be found for road maintenance even if it was just towards restoring the status quo of the 1960's and 70's. It seems very strange to me that ever increasing traffic density and axle loadings is matched with decreasing expenditure in real terms on maintenance. **Even if we had carried on with the same levels of maintenance as in previous times it still wouldn't be sufficient, but to actually reduce the maintenance levels seems sheer folly.** As the major damage to rural roads is caused by a relatively small number of very large vehicles a proper strategy for dealing with this situation might actually help to save money in the long term and increase safety levels.

I appreciate all your points about your department's road safety responsibilities. One point I would make though is that the advice in the Highway Code was written at a time when our roads were generally in very good condition indeed. I don't expect the writer(s) envisaged a time when the rural roads would have deteriorated to such a poor state with so many potholes and excessive verge damage. Although what is said about adapting driving to prevailing conditions still holds true, it now needs additional advice on how to balance the conflicting requirements of avoiding road damage and at the same time being fully attentive to approaching traffic.

Thank you again for your advice and for passing my e-mail on to Mr Zzzzz.

Regards, Mr xxxx

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The following article which may be of interest to people concerned about the safety aspects of the innovative "Low noise surfacing" can be found on the Highways Agency site.

<http://www.highways.gov.uk/>

Only the best surfaces 21st February 2005

The Highways Agency has responded to media interest in the choice of materials it uses for road surfaces.

In a statement issued on Monday, the agency said it used only materials that are safe and rigorously tested.

"Low-noise surfacing is widely used across Britain and Europe and provides good adhesion for vehicles and has a proven safety record. All thin asphalt surfacings used on the trunk road network meet the strict standards and specifications and provide a safe and reliable surface on which to drive.

"Thin asphalt surfacings were adopted by the agency for trunk roads following extensive trials with suppliers during the early 1990s and **strong public support** for quieter road surfacings."

Thin asphalt surfacings provide road users and people living next to busy trunk roads with a number of welcome benefits, including: Significant reductions in road traffic noise when compared with traditional surfacing such as hot rolled asphalt; Compared with hot rolled asphalt, there is a significant reduction of spray in wet weather, helping to maintain good visibility for road users;

Thin surfacings can be laid quickly and have good durability properties, reducing congestion due to road works;

Thin surfacings use quality aggregates which have good long-term performance in terms of skid resistance in the wet.

"Newly-laid surfacing can exhibit lower skid resistance which could be because of binder film that initially coats aggregate particles. "The agency is carrying out further research.

We have given **advice to contractors** issued in 2003 **to test skid resistance and put out slippery road alert signs at some locations,**" the statement added.

The PPP comments...They should have issued contractually binding Instructions and have test certificates on file! For public scrutiny)