



Briefing 08-62 December 2008

Highways and Winter Maintenance: Trend analysis

This briefing provides details on the performance information available from APSE's performance networks service looking at performance indicators and current policy issues for councils who provide highways and winter maintenance services

Key issues

- The condition of the highways asset has improved based on survey (TRACS / SMRCS for Principal roads and surveys for non-principal roads)
- Improvements have been made in the time taken to make good damage to roads and footpaths whilst response times for winter maintenance have also improved
- This briefing highlights some of the key performance indicators collected through APSE's performance networks services including cost, productivity and performance issues.

Introduction

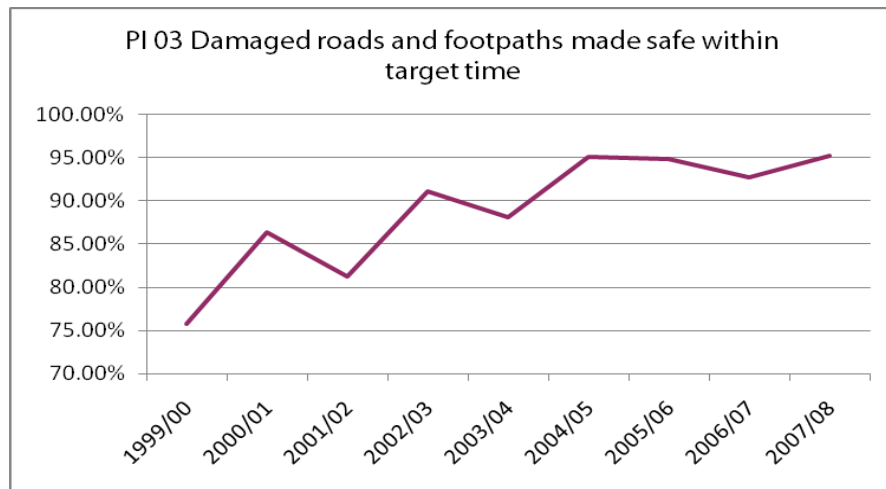
The APSE performance networks programme for highways and winter maintenance provides performance indicators for price, service uptake, key cost indicators and productivity and qualitative measures for the service throughout the UK. This briefing aims to provide local authorities with a picture of a selection of service trends and some future steps for individual authorities and their benchmarking groups. The analysis in this briefing is based on 'service wide averages' across all family groups for the past 9 years (from 1999/00 to 2007/08).

Trend analysis

Particular points of interest are as follows:

Highways

PI 03 which shows the percentage of damaged roads and footpaths made safe within target times has shown a significant improvement after two years of decline. It now stands at 95.2% an increase from 92.7%. The number of category 1 defects (PI 28) has increased slightly from 1.02 per km of maintained road to 1.1 however this is still significantly less than 1.82 from the previous year, 2005-06.



The four survey PIs all show improved condition of roads via survey. In England and Wales, PI 2b (principal roads via TRACS) shows improvement of 48% on last year; PI 2c (non principal roads) shows improvement of nearly 16%. These two figures are the lowest average figures received over the period of time this data has been collected. The actual figures for these 2 PIs are 4.9% and 12.9% of roads which should be considered for maintenance respectively.

In Scotland PI 2d (principal roads via SMRCS) shows an improvement of 10% whilst PI 2e (non principal roads) shows an improvement of nearly 12%. The actual figures for these 2 PIs are 28.4% and 41.9% respectively.

PI 31, the percentage change in the number of third party claims in last 3 years compared to the previous 3 years shows a reduction of over 15%, building on reductions in the previous 2 years.

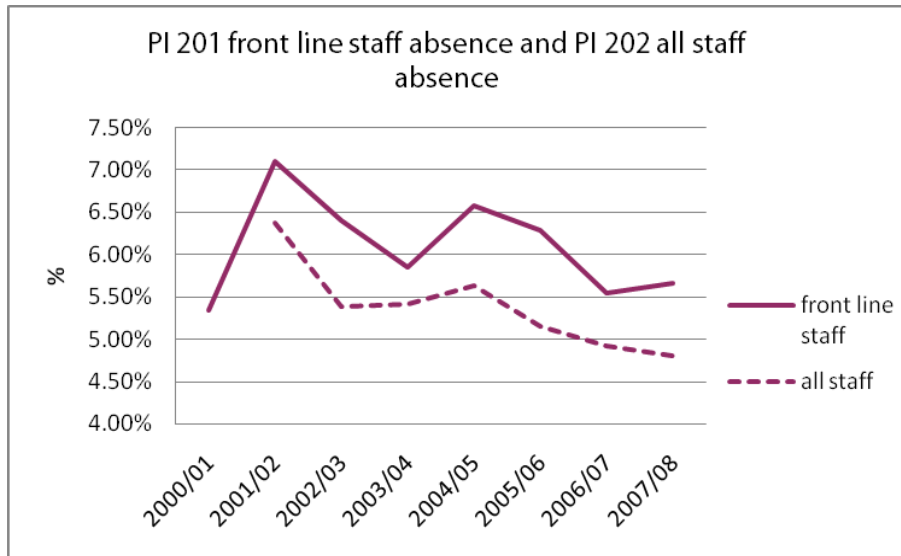
Winter Maintenance

PI 115 which reflects the cost of salting per km of road went down from £29.87 in 2006-07 to £24.89 in 2007-08, a reduction of nearly 17%.

The average actual response time in hours for completion of planned pre-salting (PI 116) has improved from 2.92 to 2.81 hours. This is a relatively minor improvement but brings the PI to the lowest average response time in the 4 years that this PI has been collected.

PI 117 showing the average response time (including allowed mustering time) for non planned salting for priority routes has shown a further reduction on top of the reductions shown on all previous data collections of this PI. This now stands at 3.35 hours reflecting steady decline from 3.47 hours 4 years ago.

Front line and all staff absences have shown further improvements with the average figures dropping for both PIs. From a high in 2001/02 of 7.1% front line staff absence is now 5.7%. Absence for all staff has reduced from a high of 6.4% to 4.8%.



Interpretation of data

From the above analysis, it is noticeable that there is strong evidence of improvement across the last six years. The number of third party claims, an area of concern for local authorities, has gone down again as councils address this issue. Improvements in meeting target times for making roads and footpaths safe and winter maintenance response times show operational improvement, which will also have an impact on the safety of roads.

Clearly weather conditions play a significant part in the ability of highways and winter maintenance services to plan work and this is a somewhat unknown factor. However improvements in a number of the PIs reflect best improvement over a number of years appearing to show improvements irrelevant of weather conditions.

The need to work closely with the Highways Agency and the utilities has a higher priority following the Traffic Management Act. Problems on the network are more likely seen as the fault and responsibility of the council than anyone else but co-operation is paramount if the economic costs of road delays are to be minimised. Access to roads is fundamental for the provision of many other council services and delivery to many dependent groups, such as the elderly or rural communities.

The corporate focus on asset management has highlighted the need to invest adequately in local infrastructure and APSE feels that capital investment in highways projects will support the economy coming out of recession as well as having benefits for the local economy.

Direction of travel statements have been produced for the first time in 2007-08 and show 5 year trend information based on the performance levels of a selection of PIs from the service area. These are available on the web portal. Bespoke reports can also be requested from the PN database for example looking at cross tabulations between specific PIs.

Future focus

APSE will continue to provide services to address the need to move from data to process benchmarking such as advisory groups, e-mail queries as well as developing the Performance Networks template

The requirement to collect, analyse and compare performance remains with local authorities throughout the United Kingdom.

The statutory guidance issued by CLG in July 2008 'Creating strong, safe, prosperous communities' stresses the need for local authorities to "regularly and rigorously assess and review the competitiveness of services against similar services", including those externally provided. There is also an emphasis on service improvement and the need to address under-performance within the guidance.

Audit Scotland are also highlighting the importance of effective performance management to corporate plans in recent audit reports, and councils must demonstrate that service outcomes have been maintained or improved to claim efficiencies under the Efficient Government initiative.

The consultation paper issued in 2008 by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), 'Delivering a shared responsibility; performance improvement and community planning' reinforces the importance of benchmarking and the WAG has stated an intention to legislate for performance comparison amongst local authorities.

The Department of Environment in Northern Ireland has also pledged support for the development of appropriate performance management systems to deliver modern, high quality and efficient public services.

The fact that all the relevant assemblies and governments have emphasised the importance of undertaking benchmarking indicate that the benefits of using benchmarking arrangements such as those provided by performance networks to evaluate service performance and to assess competitiveness will continue to increase.

Data collection and statistical comparison, as provided by performance networks, is a necessary but only first stage of benchmarking. The opportunity for process benchmarking provided by APSE advisory groups takes the process to the next stage by enabling the sharing of experience from real life best practice examples. The chance to keep abreast of new developments, innovations and legislation offered by APSE training courses is a further stage and support offered by APSE best value consultancy associates is another stage. Ensuring customer satisfaction levels are monitored is an element in maintaining service improvement and is also part of the benchmarking process and this is also something APSE can help with via APSE survey solutions. The various stages of benchmarking should be pursued if it is to be used as a service improvement tool.

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