

**Department of Finance
Memorandum on the Thirteenth
Report from the
Public Accounts Committee
Mandate 2022-2027**

Road Openings by Utilities

**Presented to the Northern Ireland Assembly
by the Minister of Finance**

16 June 2026



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Contents

Pages 5-9

Department for Infrastructure:
Road Openings by Utilities

Glossary of Abbreviations

DFI	Department for Infrastructure
DOF	Department of Finance
HAUC(UK)	Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee (United Kingdom)
NI	Northern Ireland

Thirteenth Report

Department for Infrastructure

Road Openings by Utilities

PAC Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that within 6 months of the publication of this report the Department develops a methodology to determine the cost of maintenance linked specifically to Utility reinstatements. The Department should use this information to determine if its cost recovery approach is appropriate and whether it is achieving value for money.

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: 31 December 2026.

DfI accepts the need to ensure that the costs of maintenance directly linked to utility reinstatements are clearly identified in order to determine that these are correctly attributed. While there are many different factors that cause deterioration of roads including traffic loading, lack of maintenance and exposure to adverse weather, DfI is taking forward detailed work to determine if a proportionate and evidence-based methodology can be developed.

DfI is currently carrying out a digital mapping exercise on the entire Northern Ireland (NI) road network. Once the mapping exercise is complete (to be completed by the end of June 2026), and the data assessed, it will consider whether there is sufficiently robust evidence to determine the effect of road openings on deterioration.

While DfI recognises the difficulties associated with developing such an approach, it will nonetheless seek to address the long-term deterioration of roads caused by utilities. In the meantime, DfI will continue to ensure that warranty periods are enforced in order that the cost of reinstatements and the repair of defective reinstatements remain the responsibility of utilities and the costs are borne directly by them.

PAC Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that within 12 months of the completion of the current mapping exercise (due 31 March 2026) the Department publishes a detailed action plan setting out how the data gathered will be used to support decision-making and action, including clear milestones, KPIs, and commitments on data transparency.

DfI accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: 31 March 2027.

DfI has commenced work on a project to address this recommendation.

This recommendation will be taken forward through the delivery of the new Road Maintenance Strategy, which commenced in December 2025. The Strategy will establish a data-driven approach to road maintenance, making improved use of road condition surveys, baselining of the condition of the network, and clear key performance indicators to support prioritised planning and enable transparent decision-making.

Following completion of the current road condition mapping exercise, (to be completed by the end of June 2026), DfI will use the data gathered to directly inform the prioritisation of maintenance, key performance indicator monitoring, and ongoing public reporting of road condition outcomes. DfI is also assessing how the road condition survey can be used in the on-going monitoring and supervision of Street Works.

PAC Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that within 6 months of the publication of this report the Department undertakes a review of current warranty periods in order to determine that they remain appropriate and provide value for money for taxpayers.

This review should incorporate an analysis of any methods that can be adopted by learning from neighbouring jurisdictions in relation to ensuring sufficient quality of reinstatements.

DfI accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: 30 September 2026.

DfI will undertake a review of the current warranty period which will include a comparative assessment and identify any relevant learning from other jurisdictions. Once an acceptable evidence base has been established, a number of suitable options and appropriate next steps will be brought forward for consideration by the Infrastructure Minister.

PAC Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Department modernise and strengthen its inspection programme as a matter of urgency. This should include:

- i the immediate restoration of a statistically robust core testing regime;**
- ii the urgent analysis of diverging visual and core failure trends; and**
- iii the introduction of risk-based sampling to ensure that inspection resources are targeted effectively.**

DfI partially accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: 31 March 2027.

The test results for the most recent years (2024-25) show 95 per cent pass rates for visual inspection and 70 per cent pass rate for coring.

Regarding the first element of the above recommendation, this has now been actioned. DfI would point out however that due to staff vacancies, sufficient in house resources are not currently available to take this forward, and it is now being delivered via an external contract.

On the second part, as visual inspections and core testing measure different elements of reinstatement performance, it is not possible to undertake direct analytical comparisons. However, DfI agrees that there is a need for a robust inspection regime and will draw together the appropriate data to strengthen the programme.

DfI will explore the use of “risk-based” or performance-related testing and assess if it will provide a statistically robust process that would improve identification issues and drive improved performance by utilities. DfI will ensure that any inspection regime proposed is reviewed and endorsed by an appropriately qualified statistician.

PAC Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that within 12 months of the publication of this report the Department establish a system capable of identifying, monitoring and reporting thematic trends in respect of public concerns about road openings, including issues related to Utilities and their contractors. The Department should ensure it uses this information to improve the public’s experience and contractor performance.

DfI accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: 31 March 2027.

DfI will undertake a systemic review of the current process by which the public report their concerns in relation to road openings. This will also consider the most appropriate method of capturing this information to identify, monitor and report thematic trends while recognising the issues associated with data accuracy, reliability and utility. This information will be shared with utility companies to identify issues and develop the actions to address these and to drive improvements in utilities performance.

PAC Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that within 12 months of the publication of this report the Department reviews and, where appropriate, adopts lessons from other jurisdictions on managing and minimising disruption to the public in relation to road openings.

DfI accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: 31 March 2027.

DfI will review the measures undertaken by road authorities in neighbouring jurisdictions to manage and minimise the disruption caused by road openings. Where suitable and proportionate lessons are identified, any appropriate further actions to be taken will be adopted and incorporated in departmental guidance and operational practice.

PAC Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Department enhance and better promote its public information and reporting mechanisms on road openings, ensuring that they are simple to access, authoritative, and widely understood by road users.

DfI partially accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: 31 March 2027.

DfI will review its information and reporting mechanisms to consider if further functional improvements and opportunities to better promote the current system can be made. This includes the information on road openings which is currently published on the DfI Traffic Watch NI website through the Road Works report tool. DfI will also review the current map-based tool which displays each site and provides details such as the utility responsible, the dates and times of road or lane closures, the nature of the work and the estimated delays. In addition, DfI will implement any improvements identified through comparison with similar mapping tools that are used by other authorities, including Scotland.

In addition, the “Report a Fault” tool is also available on Traffic Watch NI website and currently provides links to the NI Gov webpage providing simple and easy access for the public to report on any issues with ongoing road works.

PAC Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Department immediately commence publication of a greater proportion of the Utility performance information it already collects, including contractor-related data, so that Utility performance monitoring can be used to drive improvement.

DfI accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: 30 September 2026.

DfI has already partially implemented this recommendation to include the routine publication of utility sample inspection to support transparency and drive performance improvement. DfI shall publish all the other key performance indicators. These include Late Notices, Emergency and Urgent Notices, and Extension Notices.

PAC Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that, once current alignment work with Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee (HAUC(UK)) is complete, the Department enhance its published information with benchmarking comparisons with neighbouring road authorities.

DfI accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: 31 December 2026.

DfI has now extracted the appropriate data from the Northern Ireland Street Works Registration and Notifications System and has provided it to the Performance Committee of HAUC(UK). There are some areas where the data is not directly comparable with other authorities and where possible DfI is working to resolve these. Once alignment has been completed and if the requisite permissions from other authorities are received then HAUC(UK) will publish these.

PAC Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that within 12 months of the publication of this report the Department undertake a full evaluation of the costs and benefits of introducing performance related financial penalties for Utilities.

DfI accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: 31 March 2027.

DfI will carry out an evaluation to fully assess the potential costs and benefits of introducing financial penalties. This will then be used to bring forward advice to the Infrastructure Minister for consideration.

PAC Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the Department, working in partnership with the Department of Finance, develop and roll out a region-wide plan to address skills gaps in its technical roles and promote opportunities across Northern Ireland.

DfI accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: 31 March 2027.

DfI will continue to work with the Department of Finance (DoF) to identify opportunities to address skills gaps in its technical roles and will promote opportunities across Northern Ireland, this will include use of alternative recruitment innovation platforms, which DfI will work with DoF to use where deemed appropriate.

A departmental strategic workforce plan is in development, and there is continued focus on expanding early talent pathways, demonstrated by the recent launch of the Trainee Civil Engineering Assistant Skills Academy and the Level 3 Civil Engineering Apprenticeship recruitment competition.