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1. [Home](#)
2. [Apply to the local highways maintenance challenge fund](#)

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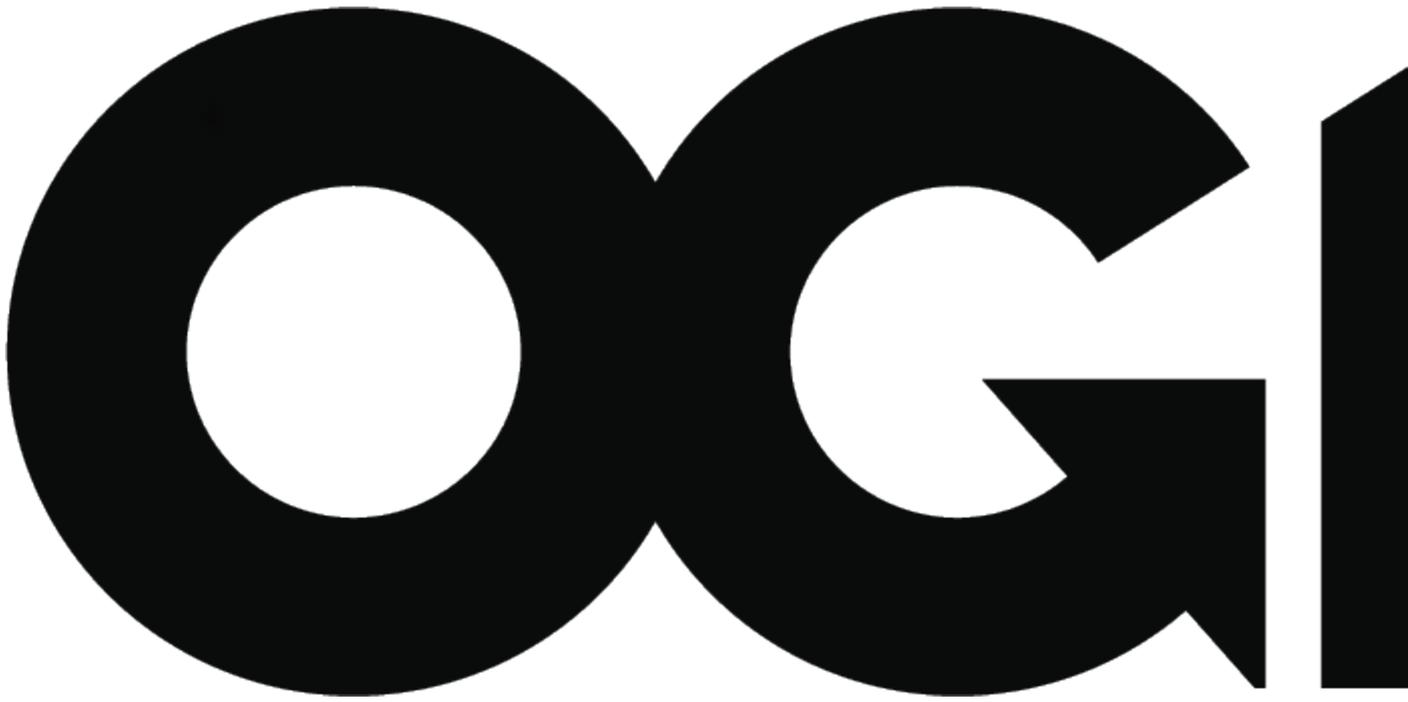
Form

Local highways maintenance challenge fund: guidance for applicants 2019

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Contents

1. [1. Introduction](#)
2. [2. Who is eligible to apply?](#)
3. [3. Scope of the fund](#)
4. [4. Assessment criteria](#)



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1. Introduction

1.1 Aims of the challenge fund

The local highways maintenance challenge fund reflects the government's strong commitment to ensure that we have well maintained local highway infrastructure fit for the 21st century. It was first announced in the 2014 Autumn Statement.

The purpose of the fund is to enable local highway authorities in England to bid for major maintenance projects that are otherwise difficult to fund through the usual formula needs element allocations they receive from government.

Following a competition in 2015, tranche 1 was launched and, with additional schemes added in the summer of 2015, 34 schemes were funded by the Department for Transport, which awarded £285 million in total. In autumn 2017, tranche 2A awarded £75 million to 19 projects following a further competition.

This tranche of the challenge fund will be available for 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2021, with a total of £198 million on offer. Local authorities will be able to bid for projects that will carry out improvements to the quality of roads and surrounding infrastructure, including bridges and viaducts, to benefit the local economy and make driving safer.

Highway assets have an optimal operational lifespan, after which they deteriorate. It is clear that some of this country's existing highway assets may now be moving to more costly stages of their natural life-cycle with some components already reaching the end of their serviceable life. In addition to the natural ageing process of highway infrastructure, the life-cycle of the asset has in places deteriorated at a faster rate than perhaps originally envisaged, sometimes as a result of past under-investment, as well as severe weather events which have compounded the problems.

The roads network is a vital lifeline which needs to be enhanced and maintained. The government is committed to upgrading and renewing local road infrastructure so, through the challenge fund, it is encouraging local authorities to invest in these roads and make journeys safer.

2. Who is eligible to apply?

2.1 Funding profile and timetable

A local highway authority at county or unitary tier in England outside London can apply for funding. Where an authority falls within a combined authority (CA) each component authority may submit a bid via the CA bid co-ordinator and the CA should then rank these bids to indicate the relative priority they attach to each one. If a bid spans more than one local authority area, a lead authority should be identified in the bid.

Funding is £198 million in total, profiled over 2 financial years from 2019 to 20. In 2019 to 2020 the funding available is £98 million. Each local highway authority is eligible to submit one bid for up to £5 million of DfT funding for 2019 to 2020. We are also seeking expressions of interest – but not bids – for larger projects in 2020 to 2021 with a minimum DfT contribution of £5 million each, for which a total of £100 million is available in that year.

Local authorities should fund a proportion the total scheme cost. The proportion is not specified but could include their own and third party (developer) funding.

The application process has been simplified to make use of centrally held data and to minimise the burden on authorities. For the 2019 to 2020 bidding process applicants must complete a simple proforma which is designed to calculate the benefit cost ratio of their proposal using the data input by the applicant.

The bidding timetable is as follows:

1. By 31 July 2019 – guidance issued to each local highway authority.
2. 31 October 2019 – deadline for authorities to submit bids up to £5 million.
3. 31 October 2019 – deadline for authorities to submit expressions of interest for larger schemes with funding in 2020 to 2021.

The department intends to notify winning bids for 2019 to 2020 funding by the end of December 2019. For larger schemes the department intends to identify schemes from expressions of interest to the same timetable, with the funding for larger schemes provided in 2020 to 2021. A small number of schemes will be identified from the expressions of interest, and subject to the caveat that they subsequently successfully complete a DfT business case assessment that provides confidence about value for money, they will be awarded funding. This process is intended to avoid councils putting lots of work into business case preparation on proposals that do not succeed.

The contact for enquiries about the process is paul.o'hara@dft.gov.uk on 020 7944 2291. For an application form for bidding and a form for expressions of interest please contact roadmaintenance@dft.gov.uk.

3. Scope of the fund

3.1 Eligible types of project

Structural maintenance, strengthening or renewal of bridges, viaducts, retaining walls or other key structures, footbridge or cycle bridge renewal.

Major maintenance, full depth reconstruction of carriageways, and structural maintenance of tunnels.

Resurfacing of carriageways including improvements to footways or cycleways that are within the highway boundary.

Renewal of gullies and replacement of drainage assets.

Note that it is not proposed to fund street lighting works in this competition.

It is not proposed to fund bids which propose to improve or maintain other public rights of way such as bridleways.

3.2 Delivery of the project

Bids should demonstrate that the project will be delivered to a realistic timetable. The department may also factor into its assessment the promoting authority's track record of delivery, taking into account other projects completed or in construction.

Where projects involve the process for securing planning permission for works outside the highway boundary, necessary rail possessions, road closures, diversion of utilities or other statutory permissions these should be clearly set out in the bid.

4. Assessment criteria

4.1 Strategic case

For the 2019 to 2020 funding a short strategic case is required. The department is not looking for voluminous bids with numerous annexes. The strategic case will need to demonstrate that the asset is coming to the end of its lifecycle and needs urgent repair or renewal. Bids should also explain why the proposed works have not been undertaken previously and include evidence about how current problems are to be addressed, why the asset is in urgent need of funding, what options have been considered and what alternatives have been rejected.

The strategic case should also set out what might happen if funding is not secured, and whether a lower cost alternative solution is feasible. Applicants should set out the expected impact of the project once completed, such as improved journey times, or road safety benefits.

4.2 Data proforma

For the 2019 to 2020 funding applicants must complete a data proforma to be submitted alongside the short strategic case. This proforma has been designed to minimise the burden for authorities in producing data and collating information, and does not require any new additional modelling. It requires some key data to be entered by the applicant. The proforma will then calculate the net present value over a 30 year appraisal period using cost inputs for present value cost and a calculated present value benefit, subject to the type of project. These will produce a benefit cost ratio for the project.

Information to be collected on the proforma includes:

- the proposed opening date of the repaired section of route
- the number of vehicles using the affected section
- the length of the scheme (km)
- the average traffic speed on the route
- information about the diversion route and length of diversion
- the average extra time per vehicle on diversion
- the current or planned weight restriction on bridges in the scheme
- the number of days per year the weight restriction is in effect
- the number of closures owing to flooding per year and the average duration of closure

4.3 Expressions of interest

For 2020 to 2021 funding we are only seeking expressions of interest (EOI) for proposals. These must be for maintenance of existing highways and structures, particularly those which need repair urgently, eg for structures which require strengthening to prevent weight restrictions or lane closures, or other measures which would require lengthy diversions or other disruption that would affect businesses and residents.

There is no specific size of project but applicants making an EOI should bear in mind that the total available funding is £100 million for 2020 to 2021, so there is limited scope to fund several large maintenance projects. The date by which EOIs must be submitted is 31 October 2019. The email address for responses is roadmaintenance@dft.gov.uk.

[Contents](#)

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 - [News and communications](#)
 - [Research and statistics](#)
 - [Policy papers and consultations](#)
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