



Rt Hon Heidi Alexander MP
Secretary of State for Transport

15 July 2026

Dear Heidi,

I am writing regarding the potential for AI-enabled cameras mounted on bin lorries to transform the way local authorities identify and repair potholes and other road defects.

Poor road surfaces continue to be one of the issues my constituents most frequently raise with me. Beyond the inconvenience they can cause to motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians, potholes present a significant safety risk and can lead to expensive vehicle repair costs. Whilst the government has committed funding towards road maintenance, much of the current system remains inherently reactive: defects are often only repaired long after they have arisen, by which time they may have deteriorated to the point that they require more extensive and costly intervention. Pothole reporting is a manual process, subject to significant delays. In rural areas such as Herefordshire, minor roads may only be inspected once annually, meaning that responsibility for reporting potholes rests almost entirely with the general public. As a result, huge numbers of potholes go unreported and thus un-fixed until after they've become deeply problematic.

However, these delays in pothole reporting and fixing could be easily addressed. Advances in AI technology now offer the opportunity to take a far more proactive approach. By fitting existing council vehicles with cameras capable of automatically identifying defects in road surfaces, local authorities could continuously monitor the condition of their roads as those vehicles carry out their normal duties. The technology can identify defects, record their precise location, and transmit that information directly to councils' maintenance teams, enabling repair work to be undertaken before defects develop into larger and more expensive problems.

What makes this approach particularly cost and labour-effective is that it makes use of vehicles already travelling residential streets on a regular basis. Bin lorries, maintenance vehicles, and street cleaning vehicles together provide extensive coverage of local road networks without requiring dedicated inspection vehicles or additional staffing.

One impressive example of a programme of this kind comes from Noosa Council in Australia. The council has equipped its bin lorries with AI-enabled cameras which continuously scan roads and footways during their normal collection routes. The system automatically identifies defects, prioritises them according to urgency, and integrates directly with the council's asset management software to generate repair work orders complete with location data, photographs, and work instructions. According to the council, more than 4,300 defects were identified and rectified within the first two months of this technology being in operation.

I was encouraged by the government's response to my recent written question on this topic, which confirmed that your Department has published a road condition monitoring data standard to enable local authorities to procure AI-based monitoring technologies. However, whilst the government has established a framework through which these technologies can be approved, it remains unclear to what extent your Department is working to support their widespread adoption. Without national leadership or support, there is a risk that these technologies will only be adopted by councils with the financial capacity and technical expertise to procure and implement them, while others continue to rely on more reactive approaches.

I would therefore be grateful if you could answer the following:

1. Has your Department undertaken, or does it intend to undertake, an assessment of the potential benefits of supporting wider adoption of AI-enabled road condition monitoring technologies by local authorities?
2. Does your Department intend to provide any financial or technical support to encourage local authorities to adopt technologies which have been approved under the road condition monitoring data standard?
3. Has your Department evaluated the outcomes of the UK's earlier "Pothole Spotter" pilot in 2017, including whether there are lessons which could inform a modern national approach using today's AI capabilities? If so, I would be grateful if you could share that evaluation.
4. Has your Department considered whether existing council fleets – including bin lorries, maintenance vehicles, and street cleaning vehicles – could provide the basis for a national proactive road monitoring network, rather than leaving individual authorities to develop their own systems independently?

As the government has recognised through the publication of the data standard, the technology now exists to transform how local authorities identify and manage road defects. The remaining challenge appears to be one of implementation rather than innovation. I would therefore welcome your thoughts on what role your Department sees for itself in ensuring these technologies can be deployed consistently across the country, rather than their adoption depending solely on the resources and priorities of individual councils.

I look forward to receiving your response.

With thanks and best wishes,

Dr Ellie Chowns MP

Member of Parliament for North Herefordshire