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# City's road network deteriorates despite extra funding

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**By Matt Smith**

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MOTORISTS and cyclists in Southampton have been told to accept that the city's pothole ravaged roads will continue to deteriorate.

Council chiefs admitted that despite doubling spending on highway repairs from £3m to £6m the state of the roads will get worse - just at a slower rate.

Motoring organisation the AA warned the policy will lead to higher repair costs and compensation claim bills and could increase road casualties.

Ruling Tories said state of the city's roads was a "top priority".

The man responsible for mending them, Cllr Gavin Dick, said the best the cash-strapped council could do was "managed decline" because there was not enough money.

He admitted: "We are not going to improve it."

The council needs £10m just to maintain the present condition of the roads. It says there is already an estimated bill of more than £50m to clear a backlog of repairs.

A survey by the Asphalt Industry Alliance found the average for councils across the country was £7.5m.

After losing out on a £300m bid for Government backed PFI funding to mend the roads over the next 25 years the council is now looking to the private sector to make savings. Cllr Dick said: "The Government is failing to give the council the money the residents of Southampton deserve to fix the roads."

He claimed the council could not borrow more or raid other budgets without it having a "huge detrimental effect on other parts of the council.

Paul Watters, AA head of roads and transport policy, said: "It's not good news for the residents of Southampton.

"If you don't repair the roads it will cost nine times more if they fall to pieces. It's also a worry that sometimes

poor road quality can lead to casualties.

"Highways claims can also be counter productive because the council will end up paying more money in compensation than fixing the roads."

Lindsay Bluemel, chairman of the Southampton Cycling Campaign, said: "Poor road surfaces can be especially dangerous to cyclists.

"It's not going to encourage new cyclists onto the roads. If more people were cycling you wouldn't have the damage to the roads."

Tory council leaders last night agreed to try to make efficiency savings by finding a private company to run its highways division under a ten-year deal worth about £140m. It will save the council between £3m and £7m over the course of the contract.

About 150 council staff would transfer to the "partnership".

The move has angered unions and opposition councillors fear local contractors used by the council will lose work.

Mike Tucker, the council's Unison branch secretary, said: "We are disappointed if the only way the council can improve the city highways is to transfer 150 staff out of the council, putting working conditions, pay and pensions at risk."

Cllr Dick said he was also bringing in new ways of recording and prioritising repairs.

The Tory Cabinet also approved an extra £250,000 for pothole repairs bringing its total spending on on-going road repairs to £1.65m this financial year. The council is ranked 157th out of 204 local authorities for the number of potholes it has filled.

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