

The Do Nothing peak hour forecasts of significant **traffic flow** increases seem totally unrealistic based on personal experience of the M4 locally. Highways England (HE) agree that the M4 is already close to practical capacity which makes these forecasts even more puzzling. (para 3.1.1 et al of their response) Significant increases up to 2022 are surely even more unlikely when the M4 would be subject to 50 Km of road works, narrow lanes and traffic management. I would expect to see evidence of future peak hour spreading under these conditions rather than significant peak hour growth.

In contrast, the further 25% peak hour traffic increase for the J10-11 section, forecast following major expenditure on the new scheme, represents a relatively small return on investment over the Do Nothing. Similar increases are also forecast over the full day which is counterintuitive given that more “spare” motorway capacity exists off peak presenting more potential for peak hour spreading and greater overall growth.

DfT’s Road Transport Forecasts 2015 suggests traffic demand rises across the UK of 29-60% by 2040 on the Strategic Road Network (SRN) with up to 53% on remaining roads. The high levels of economic activity, affluence and car use across the South East in general, combined with high levels of committed and ongoing development locally across Berkshire, would suggest that the higher end of the range would be a plausible outcome locally. As a result, HE’s design figure increases for the M4 from 2013 of around 43% are, in all probability, low estimates of the likely demand for traffic movement suggesting that the scheme may have a limited effective life.

For any increased traffic demand to materialise on the newly improved M4 it must, in practice, travel on a mix of feeder roads to access or exit the motorway via existing junctions. In turn, this suggests that these junctions and the adjacent road network will experience similar volumes of increased traffic demand. Quite clearly, many of these motorway junctions, particularly those involving roundabouts, and much of the adjacent road network are already congested and will struggle to carry more traffic. However, HE’s response places great store (para3.8.3) on much of this increased traffic being already present on the local network and simply reassigning to the freed up M4 route. This may indeed be partly true but, in reality, reassigned traffic to the M4 will still provide new movements around the key and most heavily congested road network in the vicinity of and through existing M4 junctions. In turn these key points are the focus for natural traffic growth and also growth associated with major development now committed or in the pipeline across the area. HE conclude (in their para 3.10.1) that:-

“The scheme is predicted to have a neutral effect on the local road network”

In context I take this to encompass the motorway junctions, the A404T and the M25 as well as the Local Authority Network although this is far from explicit. As a professional who has worked in these fields locally for 27 years, who has an insight into the scale of local development pressures and who has been heavily involved with several of the current M4 junctions I find this conclusion totally unrealistic.

HE also contend that they are not responsible for any necessary improvements to the local network in view of this neutral impact. As a result, if my concerns prove accurate then any necessary further improvements will need to be funded by the Local Highway Authorities. As the existing roundabouts at Junctions 5, 6, 11 and 12 are technically local highway then this

will presumably apply equally to improvements at those junctions. How would this work be funded?

I remain concerned at the **safety** of All Lane Running as outlined in my submission and agree with HE that it is still premature to draw conclusions from the limited experience to date. Doesn't it then follow that it is equally premature to take this and other schemes forward?

In my submission I drew out the limitations of the standard **noise assessment methodology** which has remained largely unchanged for 40 years and may now perhaps be seen as out of step with current views on environmental pollution. The process produces a generalised picture of a noise environment rather than highlighting the scale of regular peaks and troughs in noise caused by traffic fluctuations, wind direction, surface conditions etc. Put simply the methodology tends to underestimate the true scale of the problem for individuals, the true impact on their quality of life and the real need for effective noise mitigation. Indeed, recently, I have seen several international reports suggesting that the impact of persistent traffic noise on community wellbeing has been underestimated!

Most properties in Lower Earley are 30 years old and planning decisions were made in the late 1970s or early 80s presumably on the basis of M4 traffic forecast over the next 15 years to say the mid 90s. So for a further 20 years residents have endured massive, unpredicted increases in traffic and noise. However, the current approach projects traffic growth to 2022--yet another 7 years of potential traffic growth and unrestrained noise ----and then takes that as the base for assessing the impact of major traffic growth over a further 15 years. The conclusion is that the noise impact is neutral and no further mitigation is justified. Is this really fair and reasonable?

HE's eventual decision to provide low noise surfacing across **all** traffic lanes is, of course, welcomed. However, a barely perceptible reduction of only 3.5dB(A) will be practically meaningless to residents against the relentless scale and inherent variability of the noise source. In addition, the effectiveness of this surfacing has been shown by TRL to disappear completely with wear. Both points were covered in my submission and appear to be broadly accepted by HE despite the technical semantics involved. My comments are also supported by the standard DMRB advice manual, TRL research and general literature on traffic noise. In effect the measure will be seen by residents as far too little and definitely far too late!

The fact remains, and was observed during recent site visits, that local residents already suffer from what can be best described as totally unreasonable noise intrusion from the M4. The scheme, as proposed, will do little, if anything, to change this and even the status quo suggested by HE does not stand up to objective scrutiny. I remain of the view that a major, strategically important infrastructure scheme designed in Britain today, and costing around £0.8Bn, should be properly engineered to mitigate extensive traffic noise rather than merely attempting to accommodate future traffic demand.