

CLIVE JONES ON BEHALF OF WOKINGHAM LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

WRITTEN REPRESENTATION

HIGHWAYS ENGLAND'S RESPONSE

Dear Mrs Burden, Mrs Miller and Mr Ebert,

1. *Once again thank you for your courtesies extended to all the interested parties who attended and /or spoke at your public hearings on the 10th & 11th February and thank you also to all the Highways England staff and advisors for the professional and courteous way they dealt with our questions.*
2. *At the public hearings held on 10th and 11th February Stephen Whale pointed out on behalf of Highways England that no one had questioned or commented on the assessment criteria used in Appendix C of their Enhanced Noise Mitigation Study. He seemed to imply that absence of critique was in some way evidence of the reliability of the study. Leaving that rather bold assertion aside, the truth is that the data presented in the summary tables are difficult for the layperson to follow, especially in the absence of an explanation of some of the technical terms used. However, his comments have prompted us to take a closer look at the assessment criteria and the accompanying data.*
3. *This is a 3-stage process involving a noise reduction test, a cost/benefit analysis, with 'professional judgement' thrown in to allow flexibility. The noise reduction criteria and the cost/benefit analysis hurdles must both be met for new or replacement barriers to be recommended. Between junctions 10 and 11 of the M4 there are very few replacement barriers. As I was able to point out on the accompanied site visits there are some fences which are there to keep people away from the motorway. Its somewhat disingenuous of Highways England to call them current barriers. I am thinking particularly of the barriers around the end of the Cutbush Lane area.*
4. *If we understand the data correctly, Lower Earley (EM8) passes the cost/benefit test at all barrier heights up to 4m, but passes the noise test only with 2.5 m high barriers. The tables show that the 2.5 m high barrier reduces noise by 4.7 dB (easily passing the test) but reduces noise by only 0.9 dB at the 3.0m barrier height (thus failing the test for this height by just 0.1 db.). Thus a 2.5m high barrier is recommended.*
5. *We notice that three other identified areas pass the cost/benefit test at the 4m barrier height, but pass the noise reduction test only at the 2.5m barrier height, which prompts us to question why the cost/benefit analysis alone is considered inadequate? Why was it considered necessary to place a restriction on the results of the cost/benefit analysis? Whether by accident or design, the introduction of a noise reduction test has had the effect of reducing barrier use and cost across the scheme.*
6. *We would have thought that a direct comparison of the health benefits that barriers bring to local residents most affected by motorway noise with the cost of installing the barriers ought to have been sufficient. It is not as if the cost/benefit analysis provides an open door to more barriers. Of the 35 identified areas for which data is provided, 17 fail the cost/benefit test at all barrier heights and 7 pass both tests.*

7. *So can the Examining Authority please ask Highways England why they found it necessary to introduce the noise reduction test into their assessment? It would also be interesting to know the total cost of new barriers and the resulting health benefits if the noise reduction test was taken out of the equation.*
8. *Moreover, if for some reason the noise reduction test is retained, what is the basis for the criteria used in the assessment? For example, why was 1.0 dB chosen as the criterion for an increase of 0.5 m increase in barrier height rather than 1.0 plus or minus 0.1dB? This minor change would have given Lower Earley a 3.0 m barrier rather than a 2.5 m barrier. The chosen criteria for success or failure seems arbitrary when compared with the well documented science based approach used in the cost/benefit analysis.*
9. *Are the noise reduction criteria nationally derived – or has Highways England arrived at them independently? If the noise criteria are Highways England's own, there would appear to allow HE some flexibility with regard to cost.*
10. *Speaking of which, Stephen Whale was at pains to point out that the total cost of the ENMS was an estimated £9.7m. Could he provide an estimate of the calculated health benefits to the community of this expenditure.*
11. *I was concerned about Stephen Whale's comment when I asked about compensation for residents if the scheme created more motorway noise for residents. Basically he said there won't be an increase so the matter of compensation does not arise. This was a disappointing response. Can we ask that there is continued monitoring of noise levels for several years (perhaps up to 20 years) after the scheme is finished. This will show if Highways England models have been correct. If the models are shown to be incorrect and if there is an increase in noise as a result of the scheme, then compensation should be available to the many residents who live near to the motorway.*
12. *I understand that, under Part 1 of the compensation scheme Highways England currently has, compensation can be paid if the value of a property is reduced because of effects of a scheme. Is there a mechanism for compensation if the "rate of increase in property prices" in an area is not as great as it should be because of the scheme. Additionally can there be a compensation scheme to give residents a better quality of life with contributions to enhanced double glazing and doors?*
13. *Professor Duncan Laxen spoke of evidence that reduced speed limits can greatly improve "air quality". I am sure that he will be providing you with the evidence for this assertion. Assuming that he is correct then a recommendation from you of a permanent reduction of speed from 70mph to 50mph on the 3 mile stretch of M4 between junction 10 and 11 would make a huge difference to the health of the 30,000 people who live near to the M4 in Earley, Lower Earley, Shinfield, Sindlesham, Winnersh and Emmbrook.*
14. *In conclusion we would like to see the acoustic fence proposed by Highways England extended to cover the entire length of the motorway from junction 10 to 11. We would like this fence to be increased in height from the proposed height of 2.5m to at least 3.5 and maybe even 4.0m.*
15. *We would like Highways England to consider compensation for residents living near to the motorway if it can be shown that the scheme increases noise from the motorway.*
16. *If the evidence from Professor Duncan Laxen is agreed then we would like you to be bold and recommend a permanent reduction in speed between junctions 10 and 11 to 50mph to improve the air quality for local residents. This could as I said at the hearings create a*

precedent for speed reductions through densely populated areas on other areas of our national motorway network that could give significant health benefits to people living close to motorways.

17. We look forward to seeing the conclusions of your enquiry in the next few months.

Highways England Response

- 17.1 In relation to paragraph 11 above, Highways England can confirm that ‘Part 1’ is not a Highways England compensation scheme but refers to Part 1 of the Land Compensation Act 1973, which applies to any scheme of public works and under which compensation can be claimed where the value of a property is depreciated by specified physical factors emanating from the use of those public works. The assessment of compensation under Part 1 is evidence based and if it can be demonstrated that a property has been devalued by, or has not risen in value by as much as would otherwise have been expected but for, specified physical factors emanating from the use of the works, then compensation might be payable.
- 17.2 Highways England acknowledges the remainder of the comments made by Mr Jones relating to noise and air quality, but believes that all matters raised have been addressed in previous responses by Highways England to the Examination. The comments on noise and air quality were dealt with in detail in sections 3 and 5 of the response to Mr Jones Deadline IV submission (REP5-003) and in the written summary of the Issue Specific Hearing related to Environment – Noise (paragraphs 16 to 33) and Air Quality (paragraph 17 to question E1 question 4.6.8) issued at Deadline VII.