



Your ref: JL/KH- GS2

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Dear Councillor House

Thank you for your letter of 15 October 2020 copied to Jim O'Sullivan, Chief Executive of Highways England. As this issue falls within my area of responsibility, I have been asked to reply to you personally on this matter. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding.

I'm sorry to hear of the concerns you raise and will cover each of your points in turn.

Biodiversity

The M27 SMP has been granted a number of protected species licenses by Natural England including licenses for Hazel Dormice, Great Crested Newt and Badger. These licenses dictate strict requirements for both timescales and methodology for vegetation clearance works, the Hazel Dormouse License in particular states that vegetation clearance in relevant areas may only take place during the period between April and October. Ideally, we would not wish to carry out vegetation clearance works during the nesting bird period but this is unfortunately not an option due to this dictation by our protected species licensing.

Clearance works on the M27 are supervised by an independent, third party ecologist that holds relevant protected species licenses. Nesting bird checks are carried out prior to clearance works starting to ensure no nests are present within the clearance area. Fingertip searches are also carried out at ground level by the ecologist to ensure no harm to small mammals or reptiles. To further promote biodiversity and reduce the impact of clearance works, 1,000 dormouse boxes have been deployed along the length of the scheme and dead hedging has been used extensively to ensure habitat continuity is maintained along with regular monitoring of areas with known protected species presence.

As per our protected species licences, extensive replanting will take place following completion of vegetation removal works, the majority of clearance

works are to facilitate construction and will be replanted once works are complete. Current modelling suggests Biodiversity Net Gain after scheme completion due to improving many areas of poor habitat within the scheme to species rich wildflower grassland and the planting of native tree species.

The M27 team approached Eastleigh Borough Council (EBC) in August of 2019 and met with EBC representatives at Itchen Valley Country Park to discuss opportunities for biodiversity enhancement. The proposed collaborative schemes offered involved improvement of drainage within on-site car parking areas and the potential for construction of a BMX park, neither of which provided any potential for biodiversity enhancement and so not considered further. We have worked with both Eastleigh Borough council and Hampshire Country Council Country Parks teams very recently with several volunteer litter picking sessions taking place at Lakeside Country Park, River Hamble Country Park and Royal Victoria Country Park during September 2020 with 15 sets of litter picking kits gifted to Hampshire's Country Park team to allow them to facilitate further litter picks with volunteer groups. These volunteer events were suggested and organised by the bmJV M27 team and all waste collected was disposed of by ourselves. Further biodiversity enhancement works are planned alongside the Hampshire Country Parks team and we're more than open to continuing to find opportunities with EBC.

Safety

The technology installed as part of the M27 smart motorway scheme falls in line with the scheme's original brief, as stopped vehicle detection (SVD) was not included within the original plans. However, we have a national programme going on to install SVD on all schemes within three years. The technology as referenced at the early stages of the M27 smart motorway scheme was a Motorway Incident Detection and Automatic Signalling system which will be a part of the scheme as planned.

On 12 March 2020, the Department for Transport (DfT) published its response to the evidence stock take requested by the Secretary of State last October. You can view the report on the [gov.uk website](https://www.gov.uk). We are working with DfT to implement an action plan. This will include:

- rolling out stopped vehicle detection on all smart motorways within 3 years so stopped vehicles are typically detected in 20 seconds. It will be standard on smart motorways completing design in 2020.
- launching a large-scale trial on new technology which analyses CCTV images to detect stopped vehicles.
- converting dynamic hard shoulder smart motorways to all-lane running to end the confusion over different types of smart motorway.
- ensuring all new schemes starting from March 2020 have a maximum distance between places to stop in an emergency of one mile (replacing 1.5 mile average), meaning a driver travelling at 60mph will get to one within 60 seconds.

- continuing to make emergency areas more visible, including continued roll-out of bright orange surfacing, dotted lines on the surfacing showing where to stop and better, more frequent signs on approach to emergency areas.
- committing to review the width of existing emergency areas where they are less than the current standard and, if feasible and appropriate, we will widen to the current standard.
- increasing the number of traffic officer patrols on smart motorways where the distance between places to stop in an emergency are more than a mile apart, reducing the average attendance time from 17 to 10 minutes.
- continuing to work with car manufacturers on an eCall or 'SOS' button, which will automatically send location and vehicle information to the emergency services. When a vehicle fitted with eCall is involved in an incident: such as an airbag deploying or by pressing a button inside the vehicle, signs can then be set warning of an obstruction.
- displaying 'report of obstruction' messages – starting with a trial which has already begun on the M25 junctions 23-27 and then on the M25 junctions 5-7 and the M3 junctions 2-4.
- investing in a wide-reaching public information campaign.
- committing to closer working with the recovery industry on improving training and procedures. This builds on the work already done to develop and test operational processes to ensure the safe recovery of broken-down vehicles on smart motorways.

Every incident that takes place on our network is one too many. We continue our work to achieve the target of no-one being killed or seriously injured on our roads by 2040.

Construction issues

We endeavour to notify all stakeholders and local residents of potentially disruptive activities. Residents within 500m regularly receive letters informing them of upcoming activity, with clear information advising why it has the work is required and when it will take place.

We endeavour to keep both our night and daytime activity below permitted noise levels. There are occasions when we need to undertake a specific activity that may go above the thresholds. We are working hard to avoid any exceedance although the guidance permits this as long as we do not exceed either one for 10 consecutive days within a 14-day period. I can confirm this is the case

Noise and vibration monitoring equipment is regularly deployed, and output reviewed daily with results being shared with concerned stakeholders. This is part of compliance with noise and vibration obligations as per the

Environmental Assessment Report (EAR) for the scheme. Noise and vibration monitoring limits and measures in this report are determined by British Standards BS5228-1 & BS5228-2 as provided by the British Standards Institute. Working under this recognised standard was agreed with Eastleigh Borough Council at several meetings and it was agreed that a Section 61 application under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 would not be necessary and bmJV was able to demonstrate best practice was always in place. We take all complaints seriously and have a robust system to investigate and respond to all complaints within 10 working days but often do so within 24 hours.

Road Surface and Noise

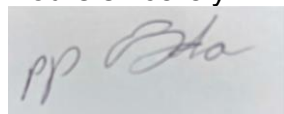
I can give assurance that sufficient funding will be made available to resurface the M27 between Junctions 5 and 7 after the smart motorway scheme is finished.

We recognise there are benefits to resurfacing this concrete section. In December 2018, we committed to replacing it with a low noise surface in the future and are working to find the best way to deliver this, once the smart motorway scheme has been completed. We are now working on a new plan to do this and will announce definite dates for the delivery for the resurfacing scheme, when that plan is complete.

In the meantime, and as part of the smart motorway scheme, we are planning to extend and enhance the noise barriers along the westbound section of the M27 near Allington Lane, and Quob Lane, which will reduce the impact from motorway noise.

I thank you for your invitation to your scrutiny panel. However, it is not usual for Highways England to attend local scrutiny committees as our governance is to DfT and parliamentary scrutiny although we would be very happy to arrange a meeting to update you on our current progress. I do hope this information is helpful. If your office would like more information we would be pleased to hear from you. We can be contacted at smartmotorways@highwaysengland.co.uk or please contact me directly.

Yours sincerely



David Bray
Director of Smart Motorways