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Pioneering motorway noise barrier study moves forward

Groundbreaking ideas for a new form of noise barrier along parts of the M40 have taken a major step forward.

A feasibility study into the new barriers which combine traffic noise mitigation with the production of green energy has been completed.

The study was the result of a partnership between local campaign group M40 Chilterns Environmental Group (M40CEG), Wycombe District Council and the Highways Agency.

The Highways Agency will now start work to develop a performance specification for how the so-called photovoltaic enabled noise barrier should perform and seeking ideas from industry on the possible product.

Councillor Jean Teesdale, Cabinet Member for the Environment at Wycombe District Council said: "Having encouraged M40CEG from the outset, we are excited that the Highways Agency can see the opportunity this solution could have. This not only has the potential to reduce traffic noise and solve a local problem, but also to generate renewable energy. None of this would be possible without local communities, local and central government all working together to find a new way to solve an old problem."

Ginny Clarke, Chief Highway Engineer at the Highways Agency, added: "We've been impressed by the professionalism, energy and organisation this partnership has put in to drive the work to this point. We are committed to our environmental responsibilities and now we're going to take the idea to the next step by looking in real detail how we could use these barriers, which, if constructed, would be a first on roads managed by the Highways Agency."

People living alongside parts of the M40 in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire have been affected by traffic noise for many years. M40CEG has been campaigning locally and working closely with neighbouring parish councils and local district councils (Wycombe District Council and South Oxfordshire District Council) for many years.

M40CEG formed the partnership to look at finding an innovative and environmentally friendly way to mitigate the road noise. The group has been working closely with Wycombe District Council and the Highways Agency; the work was further boosted by an injection of funding from an environmentally focused organisation.

The Agency has noise barriers on its network and solar powered signs but to combine the two in the way proposed by the feasibility study would be a first in England. The Agency will now lead the next stage in consultation with the local community and are aiming to complete more detailed technical and site studies on the suitability of possible products by Spring 2014. The following stage would involve a detailed appraisal for implementing a pilot scheme on the M40.

A copy of the feasibility study is available to download on the Wycombe District Council website at www.wycombe.gov.uk.

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