



Photo Voltaic Barriers on M40 – Programme Announcement

We have been silent since our AGM in December last year. At that meeting Highways Agency stated its goal of a first installation of a trial Photo Voltaic Noise Barrier (PVNB) in 2016. We apologise for the silence, during which the Agency has been developing its programme and discussing it with us and with Wycombe District Council.

We are very pleased now to be able to share a high level view of the activities which will lead to installation of Photo Voltaic Noise Barriers on the M40 at locations between Loudwater (J3) and Wheatley (J8). Through our monthly working meetings with Wycombe District Council and the Agency, we will develop details of the programme and share them with you as soon as we can.

The programme consists of three streams of activity.

1. The objective of the first stream is to qualify a range of PVNB products for use in UK. The Agency wants to stimulate innovation in this area through the government's Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI). It will release its specification for PVNBs to the industry, through the mechanism of a competition targeted at small and medium sized businesses. Following assessment of responses, potential suppliers will be funded to provide proof of their concepts. Suppliers with existing products will also be included.
2. The second stream, running in parallel with the first, involves development of an implementation programme relating to specific locations at which PVNBs will be installed.
3. The third stream involves procurement of PVNBs along the M40. The Agency has alerted M40CEG that it wishes to invite us to participate in the relevant streams of activity.

1. It is intended to start the SBRI competition by call for expressions of interest on the SBRI website (www.sbri.innovateuk.org) within the next month.
2. The feasibility competition will run for 3 months, with a further month for judging the entries. The judging to be carried out by a panel of HA and community representatives.
3. The selected entries will then be funded by the HA to develop their proposals over a 6 month period to prove the concepts they have proposed.
4. In parallel with 3 above HA and community will develop programme for implementation including deciding on barrier types for individual locations.
5. It is intended that companies with existing products will be able to enter the competition
6. At the end of proof of concept the HA expect to have a range of suppliers who can provide products and with whom we can contract to build the PVNB's along the M40. This procurement aspect is currently being explored with procurement experts within the HA.
7. In the unlikely situation where products are found to not fully meet the specification after the 5 year evaluation period will be reviewed at the time and decisions on the way forward taken with the community based on the evidence of the evaluation.

We are very pleased with this statement. The dates implied are challenging. If they can be met, the Highways Agency will deliver on its commitment at our AGM to a first barrier by 2016.



[The Highways Agency and the Queen's Speech.](#)

One of the less publicised elements of the Queen's Speech was a new Infrastructure Bill. We were concerned that this might impact on the plans announced above, and asked for clarification from local MP, Steve Baker, (Wycombe). We reproduce the response below, which provides reassurance that planning for 'sound-proofing the M40' should not be affected by changes to the Highways Agency. Steve Baker's office is continuing to work with MEP [Richard Ashworth](#) to find out more about how different administrations in the European Community approach sound proofing of motorways.

The Infrastructure Bill was announced in the Queens Speech; Part 1 of the Bill contains a measure to replace the Highways Agency with strategic highways companies.

The implications as we see it:

- The creation of an arms-length Government-owned company and the transfer of powers and duties to allow it to discharge functions currently discharged by the Highways Agency.
- Power for the Secretary of State to make transfer schemes which would allow assets and liabilities (including land and contractual obligations) to be transferred to a strategic highways company.
- Arrangements for two bodies—a road user watchdog and efficiency monitor— providing independent scrutiny of the company's performance, advising government and being a focal point for road users.

A separate section of the bill would simplify the process for making changes to development consent orders (DCO) by speeding up non-material changes to a DCO, and allowing simplified processes for material changes. An examining authority to be appointed immediately after an application has been accepted and for the panel to comprise two inspectors, speeding up the process and saving money, the government hopes.

A number of planning reforms are also included with the aim of increasing efficiency in the planning system by:

- Making changes to the procedures in the *Planning Act 2008* for handling minor changes to existing development consent orders for nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs). It would also simplify the processes for making more significant changes;
- Allowing the examining authority, (a panel of planning inspectors who consider development consent order applications), to be appointed earlier on in the process, immediately after an application has been accepted;

With regards to soundproofing the M40:

The library specialist says that any plans that are in the pipeline should not change as a result of the changes to the Highways Agency. In the coming months, the Department for Transport will set out detailed plans for the board of the new strategic highways company, decisions on planning powers and the company's role in the planning process.