



Department for
Transport

From Mike Penning MP, Parliamentary
Under Secretary of State

Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DR

Tel: 020 7944 3084
Fax: 020 7944 4521
E-Mail: mike.penning@df.gov.uk

Web site: www.dft.gov.uk

Our Ref: PH/MP/003550/11

Alex Cunningham MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

11 FEB 2011

Dear Alex

Thank you for your letter of 20 January about residents' concerns with increasing traffic noise levels in the Norton and Billingham area.

Residents living in the area of the Billingham Bypass have made the Highways Agency aware of the traffic noise problems and the Agency has already corresponded directly with many residents regarding the issue.

At present, the condition of the concrete road surfacing on the A19 at Billingham is such that the Agency does not expect there to be a need for major maintenance works for many years. The Highways Agency did have a widely publicised target, as part of the original "Ten Year Plan for Transport", to resurface all remaining concrete trunk roads with quieter materials, irrespective of the need for maintenance, by the end of March 2011. However, the resurfacing of concrete roads ahead of maintenance need has not been allocated funding for some years and this position hasn't changed. Also, where funding is made available, it is accepted by the Highways Agency that in a time of increasing pressure on spending it is more important than ever that its funds are targeted as effectively as possible and where there is the greatest need.

The Highways Agency continues to work with The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to deliver the noise mapping and action planning requirements of the Environmental Noise Directive. Managing noise levels at locations identified in the Noise Action Plans recently published by DEFRA will be given priority over the coming years. The plans have been designed to identify 'Important Areas' that are impacted by noise from major sources and therefore must be investigated. However, the action plans require those Important Areas that contain 'First Priority

Locations' to be investigated as a priority. The definitions of Important Areas and First Priority Locations which apply to major roads are set out below:

- Important Areas: These are where the 1 per cent of the population that are affected by the highest noise levels from major roads are located according to the results of DEFRA's strategic noise maps.
- First Priority Locations: These are those locations within Important Areas that have road traffic noise levels in excess of 76 decibels according to the results of DEFRA's strategic noise maps.

The Billingham Bypass has not been identified as a First Priority Location i.e. a site with the highest priority for investigation and action. The local residents who have contacted the Highways Agency have been notified of this fact. However, DEFRA have recently confirmed to the Agency that an Important Area has been identified in the vicinity of the Billingham Bypass, but in common with all other Important Areas, this is currently being validated.

The Agency will be investigating First Priority Locations during 2011 and Important Areas during 2012, in accordance with the timetable set out in the Noise Action Plans. These investigations will identify what measures would be effective at reducing noise levels at the individual locations, as well as confirming whether existing noise mitigation measures are adequate or need improvement. However, we cannot yet confirm whether any noise mitigation schemes will result from the investigations, as any schemes will be subject to funding.

The impact of the Second Tyne Tunnel on road traffic noise at Billingham is not yet known. However, the surveys carried out by the Highways Agency during 2010 will provide a baseline for future monitoring of this issue. Even so, there are First Priority Locations identified nearer to the tunnels that are likely to remain a higher priority for investigation than Billingham Bypass.

I am aware this will be disappointing news for your constituents, but I do hope this explains why the Agency is unable to accommodate the requests of the local residents at this time.

With Regards
MP

MIKE PENNING