

Keeping roads litter-free

Roadside litter blighting our motorways is not only unsightly, it's expensive with taxpayers footing a hefty bill of £10 million annually. And with car owners now facing fines if other people drop litter out of their vehicles under new laws approved by peers, it's a topic that was recently at the centre of debate in the House of Lords. The Highways Agency is calling on road users to help reduce the amount of litter on its motorways and major A-roads and recently launched its first litter strategy

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The strategy takes a different approach to managing litter on motorways and major A-roads. It sets out the Agency's vision for a network which is predominately free from litter, without compromising safety and delivered affordably.

The aim of the strategy is to reduce the need to collect litter in the first place, while ensuring it delivers an effective and safe litter picking service. It plans to do this by:

- Encouraging road users and the wider public to not drop litter in the first place
- Improving the way it collects litter safely and causing as little disruption as possible
- Seeking and responding to customer feedback about litter
- Working more closely with key partners and stakeholders, including local authorities, motorway service areas, Keep Britain Tidy and the freight and haulage industry.

Graham Dalton, chief executive of the Highways Agency, said: **"Our contractors collect in the region of 165,000 sacks of litter annually, which can be hazardous and has the potential to cause accidents. Safety for both road users and road workers is a top priority, and clearing litter from along the carriageway can put workers at risk."**

"As well as being unsightly, we estimate that it costs £10 million of taxpayers' money each year to collect litter from motorways. Our goal is that there will be a reduced need to collect litter and to deliver an effective service, which will not only result in saving money but also reduced network disruption."

The document, which can be read on the Highways Agency website at www.highways.gov.uk/publications/litter-strategy/, includes case studies of some of the work that has already been done, such as campaigns using variable message signs (VMS), closer working with local authorities and working with traffic commissioners to reduce litter from commercial vehicles.

And it's so far, so good. Since its launch in April 2011, the Highways Agency's Bag it. Bin it campaign has seen the amount of litter on its roads reduce by an estimated 25 per cent. Now, it is repeating the push for action in an attempt to try and reduce the amount even further.

Collecting litter

But collecting litter from motorways and major A-roads requires careful planning as traffic management has to be put in place to ensure the safety of workers and road users. That's why litter is collected from motorway central reservations once a year and, on average, once a month from verges and slip roads.

However, litter hotspots still blight the network, with more rubbish found close



to service areas and on their slip roads and also on some slip roads joining the motorways and major trunk roads.

In the past, the Bag it. Bin it campaigns have made use of variable messaging signs (VMS) in selected regions to display roadside messages reminding road users to dispose of their litter responsibly.

The anti-litter messages included:

- ➔ Bin your litter, other people do
- ➔ Don't drop litter, bin it
- ➔ Help stop litter, bin it

These targeted messages were trialled over the last three years and evaluation showed that in two of the three regions where a VMS message was used, there was a reduction in the amount of litter collected, compared to other regions.

Analysis of future trials is due to take place to determine whether future use

of VMS will be rolled out and which type of message generates the biggest impact on behaviour.

The Agency works closely with Defra and Keep Britain Tidy with their campaign.

Talking about the launch of the new litter strategy, Phil Barton, chief executive of Keep Britain Tidy, added: **"We are delighted that the Highways Agency has adopted a new strategy**

for reducing litter along England's motorways and trunk roads.

"Better co-ordination of maintenance operations, coupled with high-profile campaigns aimed at drivers and passengers in all types of vehicles, is a welcome development. Keep Britain Tidy looks forward to partnering the Agency in helping to make this new strategy a real success – for all our benefit." 🟢

