

**Our Littered Motorways**  
**A briefing note for Colin Mathews, Chairman of the Highways Agency**  
**Prepared by Peter Silverman of Clean Highways.**

**Duty to keep the motorways clear of litter**

Under the [Environmental Protection Act S 89\(1\)](#) the Secretary of State for Transport is **required to ensure, so far as is practicable, that the motorways in England (special roads) are kept free of litter and refuse**. Under the Infrastructure Bill this responsibility will pass to the Highways Agency company.

In March 2010 Mike Penning MP initiated a [debate on Motorway Litter](#) in which he described our motorways as being **blighted by litter** and said that the legislations was not working.

In his subsequent two years' tenure as the minister with responsibility for the Agency he was obliged to reduce the Agency budgets and brought in the new Asset Support Contract.

**A defective contract**

In respect to sweeping and cleaning the ASC fails to specify outputs and/or inputs in such a way that the Agency could monitor the provider's performance against specification.

In any case [the Agency carry out no routine physical inspections](#) of cleanliness levels. The provider is allowed to mark his own homework.

When the [contract was introduced in Area 10](#) no cleaning whatsoever was carried out for two months. Thereafter the average number of bags of litter collected was 57% down on the level achieved previously.

In Area 2 the slip roads on the M32 seems to be [cleaned at the rate of once every 10 months](#) and the main carriageway verges only every 4 months. [One slip road verge](#) has not been cleaned for over 2.5 years!

Areas operating under the old MAC contracts are just as bad. The [provider for Area 7 has stated](#) that: *".. we are only obliged to clear litter once a year or when possible within any maintenance works where traffic management is in place"*.

**A culture of denial, spin, obfuscation and excuses**

In their newly minted 19 page [Litter Strategy](#) the Agency make no reference the EPA duty to keep the motorways clear of litter.

In correspondence it is spun as being just to ["collect litter"](#). More examples of obfuscation can be seen [here](#) .

75% of [complaints about litter](#) made to the Agency information line are not categorised as complaints. *"Caller reports severe litter problems"* was logged as an "enquiry".

**Conclusion**

Central London streets were once notorious for litter. This is no longer the case. If you walk down Oxford St you will inevitably see someone litter picking. How often do you ever see litter picking taking place on a motorway?

The problem will only be solved when the Agency clearly specifies what it wants it's providers to do and then makes sure they deliver. It is not about spending more money.