

## JD Wetherspoon to open motorway pub

Pubs could become commonplace on British motorways in a move to deregulate the current licensing laws, risking a major setback for the campaign against drink-driving. On 21 January 2014, pub chain JD Wetherspoon plans to open a bar and restaurant at junction 2 of the M40; the country's first motorway pub will be able to serve alcohol at the Beaconsfield Extra Services in Buckinghamshire between 9am and 1am.<sup>1</sup> This is part of a wider systematic relaxation of the laws governing the sale of alcohol at Motorway Service Areas (MSAs).

### Alcohol and Motorway Service Areas: What is the situation at present?

At the moment, the **sale and consumption of alcohol at MSAs is prohibited nationally** under section 176(2) of the Licensing Act 2003 **for MSAs still owned by the Government** (and are on land bought by the Secretary of State), **but any businesses operating at privately-owned MSA sites can apply to the relevant local authority for a licence to sell alcohol**. Premises on at least 12 of the privately owned MSAs currently have a licence to sell alcohol, including the Beaconsfield Services.

As part of the public consultation on aspects of the Government's Alcohol Strategy, the Home Office sought views on lifting the national ban on the sale of alcohol at publicly owned MSAs, in order to 'reduce burdens on businesses'.<sup>2</sup> Of those that responded to this consultation question, 65% were against the proposal, 26% were in favour and 9% were unsure. However, despite a high level of opposition, in its response to the Alcohol Strategy Consultation, the Home Office stated that following a wider review of the Government's roadside facilities policy for major roads, the issue of alcohol sales at MSAs will be considered further.<sup>3</sup>

### What is wrong with this?

The proposed relaxation of legislation prohibiting alcohol sold at MSAs is symptomatic of the ever-rising availability of alcohol in the UK occurring as a result of the Licensing Act (2003). **Alcohol sold in close proximity to high speed roads greatly increases the scope for combining drinking and driving, thus increasing the risk of death and injury.**

This comes at a time when **road safety campaigners are calling for tougher drink-driving policies in England and Wales**: The **UK currently has the highest Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) limit for drivers in the EU** (0.8mg ethanol per ml blood), matched only by Malta,<sup>4</sup> and latest statistics from the Department for estimate **drink-drive deaths rose by 17% in 2012** compared with the previous year.<sup>5</sup>

The current UK drink-drive limit does not have to be exceeded to result in traffic accidents and loss of life on the road. Adverse effects on a driver's vision have been found at blood alcohol concentrations of 0.3mg, and the psychomotor skills required for driving have been found to show impairment from 0.4mg. Given that **motorway service areas are intended to act as places of rest for drivers, providing alcohol risks exacerbating symptoms of tiredness and therefore increasing the likelihood of accidents occurring on the roads.**

Furthermore, **passengers who drink can be 'as dangerous as drunk drivers'.**

Research from one insurance company in 2011 found that three-quarters (76%) of UK drivers have driven drunk passengers home from parties and, that in one Christmas it was anticipated that over 750,000 drivers will lose control of their vehicle, swerve or crash because of drunk passengers, while 650,000 passengers will grapple with the driver's steering wheel or handbrake, causing further potential hazards on the road.<sup>6</sup>

**UK public opinion has consistently been against the sale of alcohol on motorways.** This year's Automobile Association (AA) Populus Polls found just over two-thirds (68%) of its members in agreement with the idea that bars in motorway service areas should not serve alcohol at all. Almost two-thirds (63%) said a total ban on drinking and driving would reduce road traffic accidents.<sup>7</sup>

### Call for action

The Institute of Alcohol Studies calls for the following:

- An end to proposals to lift the national ban on the sale of alcohol at publicly owned MSAs
- Greater restrictions on the sale of alcohol across all MSAs, including those privately owned
- To lower the drink-drive limit from 0.8mg to 0.5mg, thereby bringing the UK in line with the majority of fellow EU member states
- Greater powers for Police to conduct random roadside breath testing

- <sup>1</sup> Telegraph (January 2014), '[England's first motorway-side pub to open](#)'
- <sup>2</sup> Home Office (November 2012), '[A consultation on delivering the Government's policies to cut alcohol fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour](#)'
- <sup>3</sup> Home Office (July 2013), '[Next steps following the consultation on delivering the Government's alcohol strategy](#)'
- <sup>4</sup> The European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) (April 2012), 'Drink-driving: Towards zero tolerance'
- <sup>5</sup> Institute of Alcohol Studies (September 2013), '[New official UK data reveals 17% increase in drink-drive deaths](#)'
- <sup>6</sup> Swiftcover.com (January 2011), '[Drunk passengers 'as dangerous as drunk drivers', says swiftcover.com](#)'
- <sup>7</sup> The Automobile Association, '[The AA-Populus Motoring Panel](#)'