

# THE BOTTOM *RUNG*

Issue 1

November 2013

## New Noise Journal Launched

This is the first issue of *The Bottom Rung*, the new quarterly journal from the UK Noise Association. Since it will come out only four times a year it will only carry a few 'hard news' stories, concentrating instead on debates, discussions and talking points. For up-to-date news we strongly recommend you subscribe to the excellent *Noise Bulletin*, edited by Jack Pease – see our back page. *The Bottom Rung* will aim to stimulate debate about noise policy. It will actively seek to put noise issues further up the political agenda. That explains its name! Noise remains on the bottom rung. Despite the effective work of the current team of civil servants at DEFRA in getting other Government departments to think more seriously about noise, it remains difficult to get politicians to take effective action to reduce noise. Many dismiss it as a just a local issue. Yet it is all-pervasive. Local authority officers reading this will know that it often tops the list of complaints to councils. It is *the* big barrier to a third runway at Heathrow. And traffic noise impacts upon millions of people across the country. Countless lives will be improved if more politicians took it seriously. This new journal aims to shout about noise.

### Are climate activists the new noise deniers?

I don't often row with environmentalists. I am one myself. But twice recently I heard greens dismiss wind farm noise as something that 'doesn't exist'; that 'is being used by those who oppose turbines on selfish grounds'. Now it might well be true there are some communities fighting wind farms highlight noise simply because the turbines spoil their view. But the evidence is solid that noise from badly-sited wind turbines can seriously disturb people. A 'noise denier' position is not a credible option. Just look at this moving video of a community sentenced to live with the noise of wind turbines: ["TOO Close, Stories from Those Who Live in the Shadows."](#) Many of the very same campaigners who have rushed to defend communities from fracking have alienated similar communities which opposed wind farms. And, indeed, have helped drive them into the climate sceptic camp. I understand and share the passion which drives climate activists. The danger is that they give uncritical support to any measure which reduces CO2 emissions: uncritical of the wind power companies who can be just as ruthless as oil firms or fracking outfits; in denial about the noise impacts of wind turbines. The Green Party has adopted a more balanced view on turbines. Other activists should follow or they risk being as wrong about wind farm noise as the climate deniers they mock are about climate change.

### Road Building back on the Agenda



It looked as if the huge protests of the 1990s had killed off major road building in the 1990s. But many of the roads – such as the M4 through the Gwent levels – are coming back. It is true that road building is no longer the option of first resort when dealing with traffic problems and some of the planned roads are to link new developments but the Campaign for Better Transport (CBT) reports that hundreds of miles of new roads, costing billions of pounds, are being planned across the country by central government, local councils and new bodies like 'Local Enterprise Partnerships'. Check out this excellent map from CBT: <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/campaigns/roads-to-nowhere/map>

- page 3: the campaign against the Silvertown Tunnel

John Stewart  
Editor *The Bottom Rung*

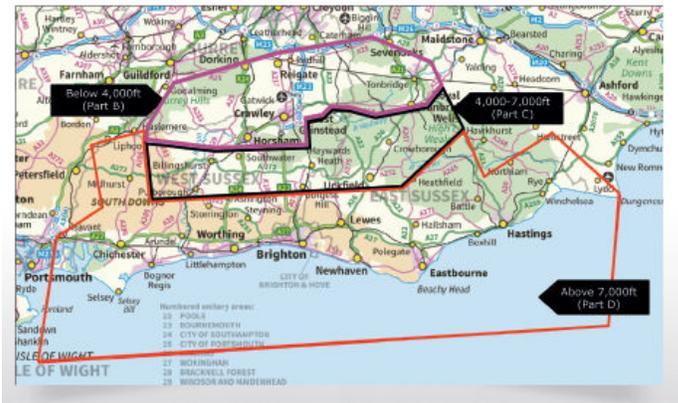
# SESAR is the Name

**It could be more controversial than a 3<sup>rd</sup> runway**

Nobody doubts that any plan for a third runway at Heathrow would face widespread opposition. But plans announced last month by National Air Traffic Control (NATS) that it proposes to reconfigure the UK's airspace could be even more toxic. It will entail the most comprehensive change in flight paths there has ever been, particularly over London and the South East.

The proposals are part of the Single European Sky Agreement, known as SESAR, which aims to create much more coordination between the air traffic control systems of individual European countries to increase efficiency and cut CO2 emissions.

NATS expect all the new flight paths to be in place by 2020. The first proposals, for London City and Gatwick, were issued last month. [www.londonairspaceconsultation.co.uk](http://www.londonairspaceconsultation.co.uk)



## **Brighton – directly under the new Gatwick flight path**

NATS intention is to move any 'holding stacks' to the sea. From there aircraft would be released in straight lines to the airport to minimise the turning movements which currently take place. This would remove planes from some areas which are currently under flight paths but at the expense of increased concentration on other areas, some of them being overflowed for the first time. NATS argues that this could increase capacity by 20%.

Much of this is made possible by the advances in computer technology such as PR-NAV which allows aircraft to be guided much more precisely. It would enable Heathrow planes, for example, to be lined up in the North Sea and fly in two straight, concentrated lines to the airport.



**In Frankfurt flight path changes have resulted in residents occupying the terminal**

## **Flight Path Changes - Toxic**

NATS don't have an easy job. Any changes to flight paths can be toxic. It is probably the reason why they just plan to consult on the principle of airspace changes; not on the new flight paths. This is likely to backfire. At Frankfurt up to 5,000 residents have occupied the terminal every Monday evening since the 4<sup>th</sup> runway opened in 2011. The protest has been less about the runway than the flight path changes which accompanied it. NATS has the chance to avoid that by engaging in a genuine debate. The new computer technology could be used to share the burden of living under the flight path. NATS has expressed interest in doing that. In conjunction with the airports, which are likely to retain responsibility to flights below 4,000ft, it needs to be bold enough to do so. The alternative could make the protests against the third runway look like a mere skirmish.

## **Fancy a Quiet Pint?**

**A really quiet pint.**

### **Head for Holborn**

**To find a pub without background music these days is a luxury. To be able to go on a 'quiet' pub crawl is almost unheard of! Not in the Holborn area of London!**

**Start at The Crown on New Oxford St. Pleasant old-fashioned pub which serves food. Don't mix it up with the noisy New Crown nearby.**

**Then visit The Princess Louise. Full of nooks and crannies. Cheap food upstairs. Don't miss Victorian toilets in basement!**

**A short stagger to a massive Wetherspoons, The Shakespeare's Head, just down from Holborn Station**

**And finish the evening at The Lambs Conduit in Lambs Conduit St, about a 7 minute walk. Go via the quiet Red Lion St**

<http://www.beerinthevening.com/pubs/s/33/3327/Crown/Bloomsbury>

[http://www.beerinthevening.com/pubs/s/19/194/Princess\\_Louise/Holborn](http://www.beerinthevening.com/pubs/s/19/194/Princess_Louise/Holborn)

[http://www.beerinthevening.com/pubs/show.shtml/33/Shakespeares\\_Head/Holborn](http://www.beerinthevening.com/pubs/show.shtml/33/Shakespeares_Head/Holborn)

<http://www.youngs.co.uk/pubs/lamb>

**Slurp**

# Living in an Acoustic Hell

**John Stewart went to meet some of the people fighting the plans for the Silvertown Tunnel under the Thames in East London.....**

I wasn't a dispassionate observer. The Blackwall Approach Road and I have too much history for that. Thirty years ago, shortly after arriving in London, I took a wrong turning and found myself walking up the road. I was hit by a wall of fast-moving traffic all the way from the Blackwall Tunnel to the Bow flyover, a distance of approaching two miles. And this was a *residential* highway with tower blocks, flats and estates within yards of the road; children playing beside the roaring traffic.

Within a decade I was back to meet the people fighting a second Blackwall Tunnel, led by the radical nun, Sister Christine. The meetings were remarkable: desperate *and* inspiring. The anger, helplessness and passion were palpable. The plans were stopped.

And last month I was there for a third time. The Mayor of London wants to build.....a parallel Blackwall Tunnel. He's renamed it. He is calling it the Silvertown Tunnel. And it has a slightly different alignment to the previous proposal. But it will still bring a flood of extra traffic onto the road since it will double the capacity of the existing tunnel, from 6 to 12 million vehicles a year.

I retraced my steps of 30 years ago. The tower blocks have had a lick of paint. Some of the flats have had been modernised. Some, indeed, were new. There seemed to be a few more noise barriers than previously. But the roar of the traffic was still there. I had taken a noise meter with me. The official statistics shows that it averages out at over 75 decibels, much higher than the aircraft noise experienced by most people in West London. When I was there the noise never fell below 60 decibels and frequently exceeded 85.

The children were still playing within yards of the road. I spoke with a mother and her young son, laden with their shopping, as they trudged along the road to catch the bus. Of course she would prefer wide open spaces and a bit of quiet, she said, but what could she do about it. And I chatted to the youths having a quick fag outside the chip shop before they disappeared down the gray, featureless underpass: "It's life mate; ain't got a choice."

A couple of weeks later I was on the south side of the Thames at a packed public meeting in East Greenwich organized by the impressive [No To Silvertown Tunnel](#) campaign. I discovered that it was not only noise that was at a dangerously high level. Air pollution both north and south of the river exceeded the EU legal limits. The leader of Greenwich Council has brushed aside the noise and air pollution concerns saying they will be resolved by the introduction of electric vehicles. Can he guarantee that, when as an old man in 30 years time I walk up the Blackwall Approach Road, I won't be meeting yet another generation condemned to live in an acoustic – and polluted – hell? I thought not.



## **'It's traffic reduction, stupid'**

The protests of the 1990s may have changed attitudes towards road building but they didn't usher in policies to halt the remorseless rise in traffic. Thus, pressure for more roads was always likely to return. But another lesson of the 1990s needs to be learnt too. The SACTRA Report (Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment), published in 1994, found that new roads in mature economies simply generate extra traffic because of the latent demand for car travel. This vicious circle will only be broken with policies targeted at reducing traffic, including, if necessary, road pricing.

## Listen Out!

• the chance for you to sound off!

### **The public sector 'tick-box culture' is stifling initiative on neighbour noise**

**Neighbour noise problems are not being sorted out.** We are told that Government cuts are to blame. And, yes, things are tougher when there is less money about. But the problem existed before the cuts. It was there in the good times. I put it down to what I call the public sector's 'tick-box' culture. Housing officials or environmental health officers (EHOs), when assessing the sound insulation in a property or the extent of the noise problem or how likely the noise victim is to qualify for a transfer, will be required to use a pretty rigid set of criteria. If that set of criteria is met, if those boxes are ticked, then it is job done regardless whether the victim is still left with her noise problem. It is process which matters, not outcome. By contrast, when a private sector company goes in, outcome is all-important.

### **The private sector only gets paid if it delivers results; the process-driven public sector has no such initiative**

It only gets clients if it consistently delivers results. It doesn't get paid for simply following the right process. As a result, it is motivated to use the sort of creativity and experimentation that is alien to so much of the tick-box culture. I hesitate to write about local authorities and housing associations like this because so many people I've met who work for them do a first-rate job: conscientious, efficient, effective. Yet, time and again over 20 years working in the public sector I saw the tick-box culture stifle initiative and induce complacency. I despaired when some of my colleagues defended the status quo. They probably do sense that their culture will become less comfortable if it is opened up to competition. But change has to happen. It is outcome that matters not process. Until the public sector is focused on outcome, many sufferers will simply be left to endure the noise.

- **Listen Out!** is an opportunity for people with a strong opinion on a noise matter to have their say. Jack Craig is a former Environmental Health Officer who recently moved into the private sector. Have your say!

## **Noise: It's not just a human problem**

It is estimated the underwater noise in the world's oceans has doubled during each decade during the last 50 years. The main cause is shipping. This video <http://vimeo.com/77623625> explains simply and movingly the effect it has on dolphins and whales. You can read more about the impact of ocean noise on mammals in [Why Noise Matters](#), published by Earthscan in 2011.

## **Noisy Announcements**

A straw poll of UK Noise Association members voted the new Victoria Line trains as the noisiest and most irritating. Yet London Underground seems to be proud of their achievement! The newest trains are on the Victoria and Metropolitan lines. In both cases the new trains have many more announcements than the ones they replaced (the old Met trains had none). The craze started when Tim O'Toole ran the Underground a few years back. All that is required by regulations to assist blind and partially-sighted people is that the next station is announced. That is what happens in most other European cities.

### Advertisements



**Noisedirect**  
08453 31 32 30

NATIONAL NOISE ADVICE LINE  
[www.noisedirect.co.uk](http://www.noisedirect.co.uk)



<http://www.empublishing.co.uk>



+44 (0)1722 790622; +44 (0)7971 518976

*The Bottom Rung*, is a quarterly journal, published online by the UK Noise Association. It is edited by John Stewart. We are always looking for contributions, be it letters, articles or opinion pieces. We are also looking for your suggestions on how it can be improved. We also want to hear from if you are keen to advertise with us. John Stewart can be contacted at 13 Stockwell Road, London SW9 9AU. Tel 020 7737 6641. Email [johnstewart2@btconnect.com](mailto:johnstewart2@btconnect.com)