

# Tougher penalties for protests causing disruption on motorways

The government will bring forward tougher penalties and new police powers to crack down on disruption caused on motorways and other key transport infrastructure.

Home Secretary Priti Patel announced that a suite of amendments will be introduced to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Bill in the House of Lords.

The announcement follows the dangerous and thoughtless behaviour of Insulate Britain members, who have caused significant disruption and misery to millions of hard-working people in recent weeks.

The measures include a new offence of interfering with the operation of key infrastructure – including motorways, railways, and airports – where the impact will affect the distribution of essential goods, such as fuel and medicine. The new offence would carry a maximum sentence of an unlimited fine, a year imprisonment, or both.

It will also cover media printing premises, in light of the significant disruption caused by Extinction Rebellion protesters to newspaper deliveries last year.

Other measures include:

1. Tougher sentences for obstructing highways – the government proposes to amend existing legislation so that those guilty of obstructing a highway face an unlimited fine, six months' imprisonment, or both. Currently, the offence of obstructing a highway carries a maximum fine of £1,000 and does not reflect the serious disruption caused by these dangerous actions. We will also close a loophole which allows protesters to cause further disruption on a road when it has been closed by the police for the purposes of clearing demonstrations and moving people on.
2. Criminal Disruption Prevention Orders – this measure will enable courts to impose restrictions upon the activities of individuals who repeatedly cause serious disruption or engage in criminal activity at a protest. These orders will give the courts the power to prevent an individual with a history of disruption or where there is intelligence suggesting they are likely to commit a criminal offence from attending particular protests
3. Penalties for blocking construction – a new offence of obstructing the construction of authorised infrastructure will be introduced, carrying a maximum penalty of an unlimited fine, six months' imprisonment, or both.

The government will also propose amendments to deal with the lock-on tactics used by groups including Extinction Rebellion and Insulate Britain.

Members of these groups have repeatedly physically attached themselves to roads, trains, planes, and other objects in order to frustrate the police, who are seeking to minimise disruption. The groups have also used increasingly sophisticated devices that are designed with the sole purpose of increasing the length and severity of disruption caused.

A new offence will be introduced to criminalise the act of locking-on and going equipped to lock-on, whereby it causes or is likely to cause serious disruption. The maximum penalties will be set at an unlimited fine, six months' imprisonment, or both.

In response to feedback from police, we will also introduce new stop and search powers to allow officers to search individuals and seize items that are likely to be used for lock-ons.

The new powers will:

1. Allow police to stop and search an individual, where the officer has a reasonable suspicion that the individual is carrying items, they intend to use to cause serious disruption by locking-on.
2. Separately, enable police to stop and search any individual within a tightly-defined area – in which a protest is taking place – for items that could be used to cause serious disruption. The use of this power would be authorised by a senior police officer and safeguards will be in place to ensure its use is compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights.