



Our ref: ST/MH/LN/Alcohol

6 February 2013

Home Office (Drugs and Alcohol Unit)  
Alcohol Strategy Consultation (4<sup>th</sup> Floor)  
2 Marsham Street  
LONDON  
SW1P 4DF

Dear Sirs,

### **Response to Consultation on Alcohol Strategy**

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to respond to the above Consultation.

Roadchef is one of Britain's leading roadside service area businesses, operating at 20 Motorway Service Area locations (with 28 sides of the road) covering the length and breadth of the country. The company has been serving the needs of the travelling public for the last 40 years.

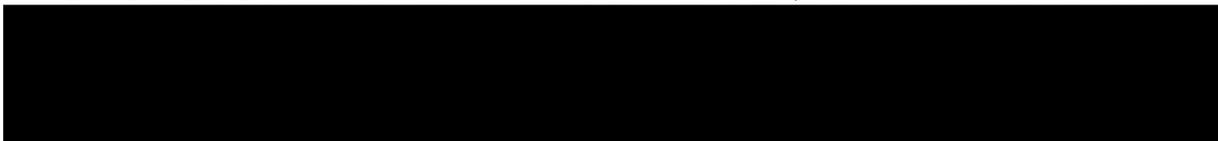
We operate a portfolio of leading catering, retail and accommodation brands from Costa and McDonald's to WHSmith and Days Inn. We have 15 Days Inn lodges which offer overnight accommodation on or adjacent to our service areas. We also have our own in-house catering brands featuring The Burger Company, Hot Food Co., serving hot meals from a contemporary food servery, as well as our free-flow restaurant offer called Restbite.

The Roadchef estate now employs over 2,400 people and cares for an estimated 60 million customer visits per year. On 22 October 2010, the company announced the creation of over 400 jobs as part of a multi-million pound investment programme to regenerate its entire estate over the ensuing five years. Since that announcement, Roadchef will have seen some £12 million spent on redeveloping the catering facilities at ten key sites, with further improvements at our remaining service areas scheduled to take place over the next two to three years.

We note that, under paragraph 9.22 of the Consultation document, the Government is considering deregulating more widely elements of the ban on alcohol sales that applies to Motorway Service Areas ("MSAs"). We also note that one option is to lift the centrally imposed restriction and make on-sales and off-trade sales of alcohol at MSAs a matter for licensing authorities to determine locally, in the same manner as any other application for a licence. We also note that there is a separate question as to whether lodges and other overnight accommodation at MSAs should be able to serve alcohol to residents.

We strongly support the removal of the centrally imposed restriction to allow on and off sales of alcohol at MSAs as a matter for licensing authorities to determine locally, both within the main MSA and within the lodges/accommodation at MSAs. This would ensure that there is a level playing field for all MSAs across the country. It would also level the playing field between MSAs and non-motorway garages which are permitted to sell alcohol under certain circumstances, roadside lodges which are a short distance from motorway junctions which are not restricted and other premises which sell alcohol (both shops and restaurants/pubs) which are short distances from motorway junctions, on trunk roads and even in some cases on motorway junction roundabouts.

Currently, under section 176(2) of the Licensing Act 2003 excluded premises are "*premises situated on land acquired or appropriated by a special road authority...*". However, any MSAs developed since 1992 have been acquired/appropriated by the private sector, not by the Highways Agency; and therefore section 176(2) does not apply to these sites. As set out in





your recent letter addressed to the CEOs of MSA operators, there are therefore a few licensing authorities which have granted licences to premises on privately acquired land and we see no reason why this distinction should continue.

Whilst the Consultation notes that there is a need to balance any proposals with strong messages relating to drink-driving, we would stress that any licence application for MSAs would of course be subject to the normal procedures under the Licensing Act, where it is open for any Responsible Authority, including the police and planning authority, or indeed any other person to make representations. If representations are made, the decision would be made by the Licensing Committee at a hearing.

We would also urge the Government to consider that there are many shops, restaurants, pubs and hotels which sell alcohol a short distance from motorway junctions across the country, at the side of trunk roads. The continued prohibition on the sale of alcohol at MSAs therefore seems a complete anomaly, particularly as the management teams at MSAs are used to dealing with the prevention of crime and disorder, the protection of children from harm and public safety.

For example, the management teams at each MSA regularly deal with sudden influxes of passengers and liaise with the police on a regular basis particularly in relation to travelling football fans. Since I started here at Roadchef in 2007, as far as I am aware, there has not been a serious incident of disorder at any of our MSAs. The management and senior members of staff are experienced in "supervising" customers and preventing them from bringing restricted products into the services building, including their own food and drink. They also manage and supervise gaming machine areas. They are therefore well-equipped to deal with the supervision of alcohol sales.

In addition, we would be grateful if you could consider that MSAs are required by statute to provide hot food overnight. Therefore, the requirement to have a Premises Licence authorising Late Night Refreshment to comply with this statutory obligation seems to be unnecessary red tape. We would welcome the removal of this requirement.

Finally, we would also ask that consideration be given to the practices in other parts of the European Union, where, for instance in France and Italy, on and off sales of alcohol are permitted at MSA locations with, as far as we are aware, no reportedly significant impact on road safety.

We trust that you will take our views into account as part of this Consultation and would stress that we strongly agree with the proposals to deregulate alcohol sales at MSAs and ancillary lodge accommodation; and suggest that red tape for our business would be significantly reduced if the requirement for authorisation for Late Night Refreshment were removed.

Yours faithfully

