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Smart motorway where four motorists died after being stranded with no hard shoulder is 'cash cow' for speeding fines



Smart motorways are being rolled out across the country by Highways England on behalf of the government CREDIT: HIGHWAYS ENGLAND

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By **Steve Bird**

7 SEPTEMBER 2019 • 6:00PM

A stretch of smart motorway where four motorists have been killed after being stranded with no hard shoulder has become a “cash cow” raising more than £6 million in speeding fines since 2017, the Telegraph can reveal.

A total of 62,337 tickets were issued between junction 30 and 35a of the M1 in just two years and eight months, boosting government coffers by up to £6,233,700.

Relatives of those killed there who are calling on ministers to scrap smart motorways now fear the government’s refusal to do so could be because variable speed limits are proving so lucrative.

Figures obtained by the Telegraph show the majority of speeding motorists were caught after Highways England reduced the speed limit from 70mph on the 16 mile stretch of the M1.

Of those 62,337 tickets, 52,948 were for motorists who exceeded new lower speed limits introduced by Highways England, the Government-owned company responsible for maintaining the motorway network.

And so far this year, 12,075 tickets - more than half the 21,078 fines issued on that route in 2019 - were for those ignoring temporary speed limits of 60mph, 50mph, 40mph and even 30mph that are displayed on gantries.



Jason Mercer, 44, was killed on a stretch of the M1 that operates as a smart motorway

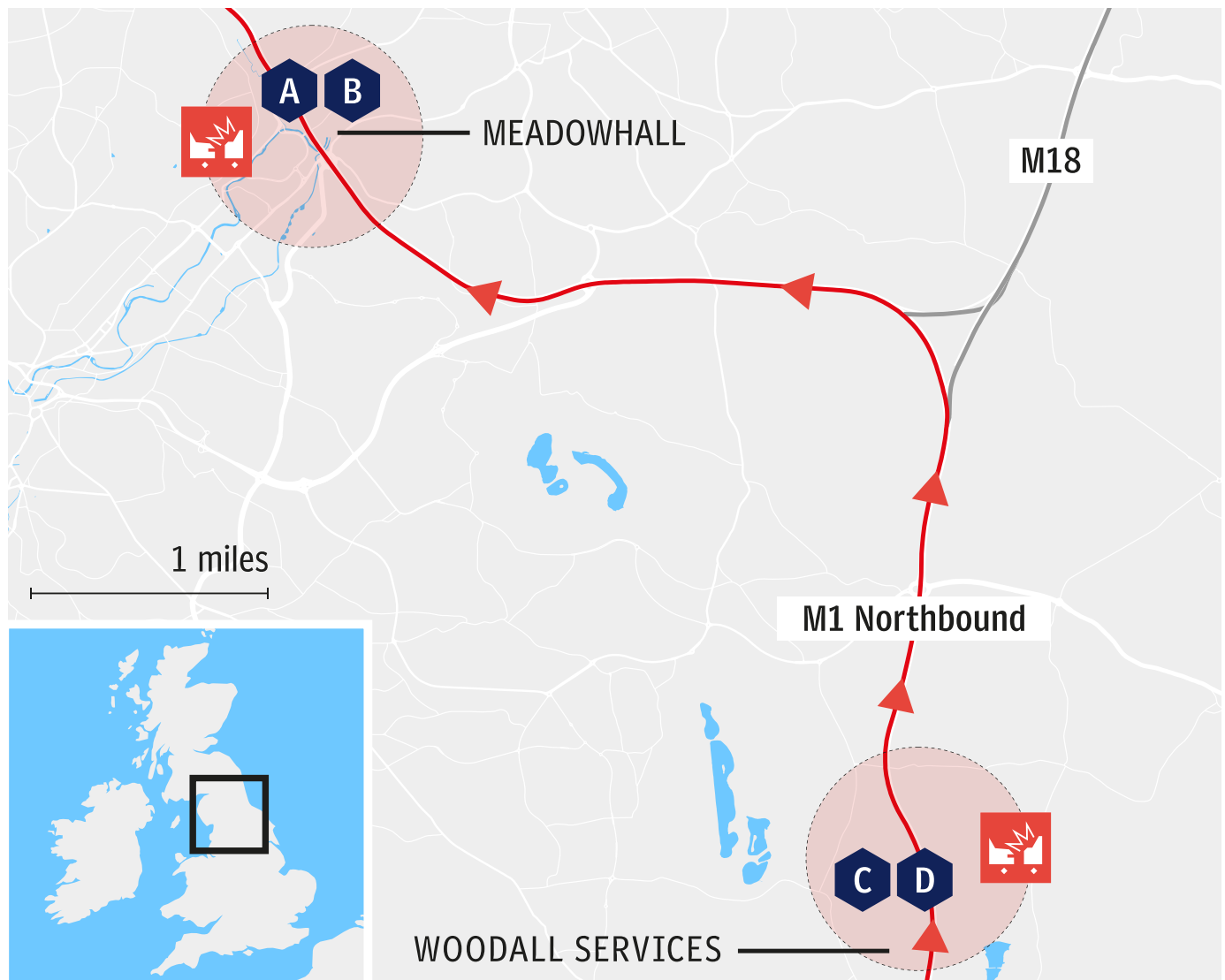
Claire Mercer, whose husband Jason, 44, (<https://www.facebook.com/smartmotorwayskill> <https://smartmotorwayskill.co.uk>) was killed in June when he pulled over near junction 34 but could not find an emergency refuge area and was hit by traffic, said: “While no one condones speeding, my worry is the Government may be determined to keep smart motorways because they are producing so much money for the Treasury through these fines.

“The Government remains determined to continue rolling out smart motorways despite a rising death toll. Are they literally saving money and not lives?”

The Sunday Telegraph last week revealed four people were killed on this stretch of M1 (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/08/31/smart-motorways-risk-life-says-widow-suing-highways->

england/smart motorway in just 10 months after they were hit by traffic in a live lane that used to be the hard shoulder.

The government vehemently denied it was expanding smart motorways to make money.



A Alexandru Murgeanu (22-years-old)
Meadowhall – June 7, 2019 (8.15am)

C Derek Jacobs (83-years-old)
Woodall Services – March 22, 2019 (12.30pm)

A Department for Transport spokesman said: “Speeding is completely unacceptable, which is why there are tough penalties and rigorous enforcement in place for those who speed.

“Cameras on smart motorways help to keep these roads safe for users and ensure they also benefit from more reliable journeys. Ideally, people wouldn’t speed and put their own life and that of others at risk so fines would be redundant.”

The statistics, obtained through a Freedom of Information request to South Yorkshire Police (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/01/29/smart-motorways-making-harder-us-pull-criminals-say-police-chiefs/>), reveal how a single camera on the northbound M1 between junctions 30 and 31 made a staggering £1,893,300 from fines since July 2016. This year alone, that camera issued 3,884 fines when the speed limit was lowered from 70mph.

In 2019, the number of fines has increased six-fold compared to 2016, when the majority of the route was not 'smart' and only had a 70mph limit. During the latter half of 2016, just 1,600 speeding motorists were caught meaning an estimated 3,200 fines were imposed that year.

A fixed penalty notice for speeding incurs a £100 fine and three penalty points unless the offender is given the option of attending a speed awareness course. Any money raised from such fines goes into the Consolidated Fund, the government's bank account, and is not ring-fenced to be spent on transport.

In the next few months, motorists who fail to move out of lanes marked with a red 'x' signs will also be fined.

Samantha Cockerill, who set up Campaign for Safer Roadside Rescue Recovery (<https://www.csrrr.co.uk/>), after her partner, Steve Godbold, a vehicle recovery worker, was killed by a lorry which had strayed on the hard shoulder of the M25, said "I am astounded money earned from speeding tickets is not reinvested into road safety infrastructure, like having refuge areas closer together and educating the public about what to do if you break down on smart motorways. Is this more about money than safety?" (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/08/30/dangerous-smart-motorways-cynical-attempt-save-money/>)."



Claire Mercer, 43, is calling for a judicial review into the safety of smart motorways after her husband, Jason, was killed in June
CREDIT: CHARLOTTE GRAHAM

Edmund King, AA president, said: "The safety of smart motorways is critical so the millions raked in from fines should be invested in extra lay-bys to prevent more fatalities.

"Drivers shouldn't speed but we know that these variable speeds and gantry signs aren't always accurate. Highways England has just admitted that 20mph signs were incorrectly left running for 14 hours after a crash on the M5. Despite this almost 100 drivers had to pay

up and have not been refunded. This kind of attitude suggests the authorities are more into the financial windfall than fairness or improving safety.”

The number of speed cameras on UK roads soaring

The number of speed cameras on Britain’s roads has increased by 1,400 in just seven years, analysis for The Sunday Telegraph shows.

Research conducted by TomTom (https://www.tomtom.com/en_gb/) reveals that there are now a total of 6,526 speed cameras across the country, compared to 5,126 in 2012.

The location technology company also found that on England’s motorways there are 224 speed cameras, an increase of 135 compared to 2012 when there were 89. And 79 of the cameras now are monitoring motorists’ average speed.

Highways England, the government owned private company which maintains England and Wales’s motorway network, said there were “around 150” speed cameras on smart motorways. The bright yellow devices are usually placed between each junction on smart motorways which have variable speed limits.

A record 2 million speeding tickets (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/10/25/record-two-million-speeding-tickets-handed-last-year-punitive/>) were issued in England and Wales in 2017, an increase of 48,000 compared to the previous year. However, about half of all speeding motorists opted to take a driving awareness course instead of paying a £100 fine and getting three points on their licence.

Dr Heiko Schilling, head of navigation for TomTom, said: “Our maps have got a highly accurate overview of where speed cameras are located in 175 countries world-wide, in part because we use a variety of sources to gather information, including our large community of 600 million drivers who can report the locations.

“When compared to the statistics obtained from the governments themselves, we believe our statistics are precise and up-to-date.”

A Highways England (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/highways-england>) spokeswoman said: “Speed enforcement cameras play an important role in smart motorways. By encouraging compliance with the speed limit they help safety and tackle frustrating stop-start congestion.

“Soon they will be used to detect people driving in lanes that have been closed with a Red X, helping improve safety further still. The vast majority of drivers on smart motorways drive within the speed limit.”

A Department for Transport has invested £100million to improve safety on England’s most dangerous A roads and this summer announced more than 70 moves planned over the next two years to make roads safer.

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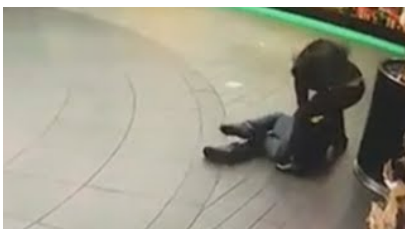


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