

Call for lay-bys on smart motorways

Graeme Paton, Transport Correspondent

November 29 2019, 12:01am, The Times



More than two thirds of drivers believe stripping out the hard shoulder makes motorways more dangerous
RUI VIEIRA/PA



Share



Save

Safety measures need to be installed on hundreds of miles of smart motorway because of concerns that removing the hard shoulder has compromised protection, ministers have been told.

The RAC said that more than two thirds of drivers believed stripping out the hard shoulder to create an extra lane had made [the motorway network](#) more dangerous.

It claimed that only one in ten motorists was satisfied that it was safe to break down in a vehicle lane without reaching an emergency lay-by.

Grant Shapps, the transport secretary, has already ordered an urgent review of the smart motorway system, which has been expanded in recent years to cover about 400 miles of the network in England.

The RAC said that the review should lead to the installation of emergency lay-bys no more than one mile apart and the rapid installation of radar technology that automatically detects broken-down vehicles.

The hard shoulder has been permanently removed on 13 stretches of road including parts of the M1, M3, M5, M6 and M25, with another eight in development. Seven parts of the network have a “dynamic” hard shoulder that can be used as a lane at busy times with differing speed limits imposed.

Lanes are closed with a red X on a gantry if a vehicle has broken down ahead and refuge areas are situated up to 1.5 miles apart to allow cars to pull off in an emergency.

However, the project has been criticised after a series of deaths involving vehicles unable to reach a lay-by that were stranded in live lanes. Nine people were killed on smart motorways last year. Highways England insists that the system is safe, with casualty rates 25 per cent lower than on traditional stretches of motorway with a hard shoulder.

However, the RAC said that the majority of drivers had concerns. It published findings from its report on motoring, an annual study based on interviews with 1,753 drivers.

It found that 68 per cent believed “removing the hard shoulder compromises safety for those who breakdown in a live lane”. Some 72 per cent were worried about not being able to reach an emergency area if their vehicle stopped suddenly on the motorway, it said. Only 10 per cent were satisfied that they would be safe to stop in a live lane.

Drivers can be fined up to £100 for driving through the red X sign used to close lanes on smart motorways. Almost one in five admitted to ignoring the red X and carrying on towards a stricken vehicle ahead, only moving to another lane at the last second.

Nicholas Lyes, the RAC’s head of roads policy, said: “Motorists strongly believe the permanent removal of the hard shoulder compromises safety and tell us that emergency SOS areas are located too far apart.

“We are calling on the government to ensure the latest stopped vehicle detection technology is retrofitted on all sections of smart motorway as a matter of urgency and for more SOS areas to be built so drivers are never more than a mile away from one.”

A spokeswoman for Highways England said: “The transport secretary has asked the Department for Transport to carry out, at pace, an evidence stocktake to gather the facts about smart motorway safety. We are committed to safety and are supporting the department in its work on this.”

- Law
- Cars
- Transport



Share

Save

Related articles

Bad drivers to blame for crashes on smart motorways, says roads chief

Graeme Paton Transport Correspondent
October 19 2019

Dozens of drivers a day stranded on smart motorways

Graeme Paton, Transport Correspondent
October 10 2019



What happened when Bill Bailey and son Dax went paddleboarding?

SPONSORED



The only mixer you will need in your Christmas cocktails

SPONSORED



Are these 5 of Italy's best-kept secrets?

SPONSORED



The groundbreaking new superyacht setting sail for a greener future

SPONSORED

Comments are subject to our community guidelines, which can be viewed [here](#).

▲ BACK TO TOP

GET IN TOUCH

About us

Contact us

Help

The Times Editorial Complaints

The Sunday Times Editorial Complaints

Place an announcement

Classified advertising

Display advertising

The Times corrections

The Sunday Times corrections

Careers

MORE FROM THE TIMES AND THE SUNDAY TIMES

The Times e-paper	The Sunday Times e-paper
Times Currency Services	The Sunday Times Wine Club
Times Print Gallery	Times Crossword Club
Sunday Times Driving	Times+
The Sunday Times Rich List	Times Expert Traveller
Good University Guide	Schools Guide
Newsletters	Best Places to Live
Best Places to Stay	Sportswomen of the Year Awards
Times Appointments	Podcasts

© Times Newspapers Limited 2019.
Registered in England No. 894646.
Registered office: 1 London Bridge Street, SE1 9GF.

Privacy & cookie policy	Licensing
Cookie settings	Site map
Topics	Commissioning terms
Terms and conditions	