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Daughter of woman killed on smart motorway accuses Highways England of being responsible for her death

Speaking publicly for the first time, Saima Aktar said her mother would be alive today if the M1 had not had its hard shoulder converted

By Steve Bird

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Premium



The daughter of a woman killed after the car she was in broke down on a smart motorway has accused Highways England of being responsible for her mother's death.

Speaking publicly for the first time, Saima Aktar said her mother, Nargis Bashir, 62, would be alive today if the M1 had not had its hard shoulder converted into a live lane for traffic.

Mrs Bashir, a mother of five and grandmother of nine, was killed as she sought safety before the car she was a passenger in was hit and then ploughed into her. She and her husband had been driving home to Sheffield after visiting friends in September 2018.

Her daughter has agreed to her first interview because she hopes it will help give [Grant Shapps, the transport secretary](#), “the nerve” to end the “madness” of smart motorways.

Her family is also planning to sue [Highways England](#) for corporate manslaughter because it removed the hard shoulder without having adequate technology to spot stationary vehicles.

Mrs Bashir, whose identity has never been disclosed until now, was one of four people the Sunday Telegraph revealed were killed after becoming stranded on smart motorways on a short stretch of the M1 in just 10 months.

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The Nissan Qashqai her husband, Mohammed, was driving broke down shortly after Woodhall Services near junction 31 but failed to reach an emergency refuge area before two cars hit it.

The vehicle was stationary with hazard lights on for 17 minutes before the collision. Highways England failed to spot it on its CCTV cameras, and the lane was not closed to traffic.

Mrs Bashir's daughter, a mother of two also from Sheffield, arrived at the scene to see paramedics fighting to resuscitate her.

"I hold Highways England responsible," Mrs Aktar said fighting back tears. "Mr Shapps must speak to those who have lost people on smart motorways before he reaches any conclusions about how to protect us all.

"He must understand how devastating it is to lose someone because a simple thing like a hard shoulder has been removed and a motorway absurdly rebranded as 'smart'.

"He must think hard because now he will be accountable. He needs to answer a simple question - does he have the nerve to speak the truth about smart motorways?"

The Bashirs, a well known and respected couple in Sheffield, had been returning home after meeting family who had been to the Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca.

“I got a call from my dad at 9.26pm to say they had broken down and needed the breakdown recovery papers to get help.

“I told them to get out of the car and get over the barrier.”

Mrs Aktar began a 15 minutes journey to where her parents were stranded to offer help and support.

“It was cold, so I brought a blanket for my mother. Then my father called and said very quietly: ‘Sweetheart, the situation has changed. Your mum has been hurt.’

“I could hear sirens in the background. I panicked. A policeman then took the telephone.”

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When Mrs Aktar arrived at the scene of the crash she hugged her father who was uninjured. She learned that the lack of lighting meant rescuers struggled to find her dying mother.

“Holding my dad, I glanced over and saw my mum on the ground with people around her giving her CPR. There was a tube in her mouth.

“I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. A few minutes later someone came up to me and said: ‘I’m really sorry, your mum is no more.’ That was it - our world came to an end.”

For months, Mrs Aktar felt she was partly responsible for her mother's death because her parents had borrowed her car, which broke down.

But she now believes that Highways England should have fully factored in the possibility of breakdowns before removing the hard shoulder.

Mrs Bashir's 66-year-old husband is still haunted by nightmares of that night. The family has not released a picture of the mother for fear it will severely upset her father.

"It shook the entire family to the core. My father has lost his rock and life partner. He is devastated. And everyone who knew my mother has been affected," she continued.

"I just hope that the Government now does something so others do not have to endure what we as a family have experienced."

A Highways England spokesperson said: "Any death on our roads is one too many, and our deepest sympathies remain with the family and friends of those who lost their lives.

"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."

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