

The Telegraph

Four coroners have now written reports warning smart motorways pose risk to lives of motorists.

Highways England has been asked to respond to yet another 'fear of future deaths' report from a coroner concerned about smart motorways.

By [Steve Bird](#) 6 March 2021 • 3:00pm



Four coroners have now issued 'prevention of future deaths' reports over fears removing the hard shoulders on smart motorways can result in stranded drivers being killed CREDIT: LIVEPIX

A coroner has warned how more people will die on smart motorways after issuing the fourth 'prevention of future deaths' report about five fatalities in just two years, the Telegraph can reveal.

Tom Stoate, the assistant coroner for Bedfordshire and Luton, has written to Highways England calling for urgent action after a detective declared a teenager would not have died and two others end up in comas if the hard shoulder had not been scrapped on the M1.

In December 2019, five Middlesex University students were returning home from a sports trip when their Kia Sedona suffered a power failure but managed to reach an emergency refuge area (ERA).

Twelve seconds later the car's systems came back to normal and they rejoined the southbound motorway. But, after travelling 475 feet (145m) the car again shut down stopping on the inside live lane.

Three vehicles swerved to avoid a crash, but a Scania articulated lorry hit it at 56mph killing Mr Ahmed, from North London. Highways England failed to spot the stranded vehicle to close the lane.

However, the nature of the breakdown undermined the Government-owned company's insistence that today's high-tech cars are better able to alert motorists to system problems ensuring drivers can reach ERAs.

Mr Stoate's damning report says: "The vehicle in which the deceased was a passenger suffered a mechanical defect which caused it to lose power.

"It is not clear where the vehicle could have pulled to a halt in a safe place in these circumstances, given that there was no hard shoulder and all lanes were live."

Mr Ahmed's brother, Nasir, told the Telegraph: "If there had been a hard shoulder, the car would have had somewhere to stop, this terrible accident would not have happened and my brother would be alive.

"Hard shoulders are there explicitly to prevent accidents like this when a car breaks down. "Zahid cared for his two disabled sisters. Losing his love and support has had a terrible impact on them."

Lorry driver, Wojciech Bukowski, 65, from Poland, was jailed for more than four years for causing death by dangerous driving. He had up to 10 seconds to spot the vehicle.

Despite securing that prosecution, DC Ben Amondsen, of Bedfordshire's serious collision investigation unit, questioned the Government's "cost saving" introduction of smart motorways.

In a recording of the January inquest, obtained by this newspaper, the officer said: "The absence of a hard shoulder contributed to the collision.

Had the vehicle been able to stop in a location other than a live lane the offending HGV would not have driven into the back of it."

He added: "Simply put - if the car wasn't there it couldn't have been hit. So, yes there is an ongoing concern around all lane running motorways."

The latest report piles yet more pressure on Grant Shapps, the Transport Secretary, to confront the mounting opposition to smart motorways.

Now, four coroners have issued 'fear of future death reports' relating to five deaths where motorists or passengers were killed after their car became stranded where there is no hard shoulder between August 2017 and June 2019.

A Highways England spokesman said their "deepest sympathies" were with Mr Ahmed's family and they would respond to the report.

He added: "We are continuing to deliver on the actions set out in the Government's smart motorway evidence stocktake to further raise the bar on smart motorway safety."

Jill Greenfield, of lawyers Fieldfisher which represents Mr Ahmed as well as two others in the car who suffered serious brain injuries, said: "Statistics reported to defend the use of smart motorways only report fatalities. What they don't do is record the loss inflicted on those injured and their families - the worry, pain and distress caused by life-changing injuries and the sheer hard work needed to put the pieces back together - which sometimes is simply not possible.

"Smart motorways and the mistakes by drivers as a consequence not only generate this terrible personal cost but also the actual costs of rebuilding someone severely injured - surgery, rehabilitation, support and care provided by the NHS and private.