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Smart motorway 'madness': Van driver died after colliding with lorry swerving to avoid stranded car

Lorry veered away from a stationary vehicle in on the M1 and crashed into Martin Davies's pick-up - the first time such an incident occurred

By Steve Bird

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The brother of the first motorist to die in a smart motorway crash involving only vehicles swerving to avoid a broken-down car has condemned scrapping hard shoulders as “utter madness”.

Martin 'Gerb' Davies, 54, was killed when his flat-bed pick-up collided with a lorry veering away from a stationary car in a live lane on the M1.

His death is believed to be the first where only those vehicles steering clear of a stranded car were involved in the collision.

Criticism of smart motorways has often focused on how people are killed after their cars fail to reach an emergency refuge before being hit by traffic because Highways England fails to spot them and close the lane.

Mr Davies's brother, Andrew, 56, is calling on Transport Secretary Grant Shapps to halt the rollout of smart motorways to prevent more people dying.

Martin Davies, a delivery driver, had been returning home in his Volkswagen Crafter Flatbed when he was involved in a collision with a Volvo near Milton Keynes on March 20.

His brother has spoken to police investigating the crash and understands both vehicles were approaching a broken down Vauxhall Astra stranded on the inside lane for up to 15 minutes.

That stretch of the M1 between junctions 15 and 16 was being converted into an all lanes running smart motorway, and so the hard shoulder had been removed. The driver managed to get out of his vehicle and flee to safety.

Heavy traffic on the M1 'smart motorway' in Bedfordshire England UK | CREDIT: Geopix / Alam

It is understood the Volvo driver took evasive action to avoid the car moving right into the middle lane.

Mr Davies, known as “Gerb” from Stoke on Trent, was in the third lane moving left into the same space but hit the lorry’s rear and was dragged under. The Vauxhall was unscathed. Mr Davies was confirmed dead at the scene.

His brother Andy, 56, from Stone in Staffordshire, says his brother was not speeding, but the exact reasons for the collision remain “a mystery”.

He said the prospect of encountering stationary vehicles in live lanes can trigger “a series of catastrophic and fatal split second decisions”.

“Those decisions would not be needed if there was a hard shoulder for vehicles to pull over on to,” he said.

“We don’t yet know what happened directly in front of my brother. Someone may have seen the lorry pulling out and applied their brakes. Martin may have had to swerve and so collided with the lorry.

“It’s devastating for everyone who knew him and all those involved.”

He said he “blames the Government” for introducing smart motorways, adding: “I have stopped using smart motorways now. Everyone knows they are a bad idea.”

John Gleave, transport manager at Stoke-based Barkers Fencing which hired Mr Davies for 30 years and was making a delivery for them the day he died, said he was tremendously popular among their 170 staff.

He added: “Like anyone who drives on motorways for a living, Martin had expressed concerns about smart motorways.”

A Highways England spokesperson said: “Every single death on our roads is a tragedy and our thoughts are with the family and friends of Mr Davies.”

A Thames Valley spokesman said an investigation is ongoing and no arrests have been made.

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