

THE SMART MOTORWAY DEBATE THAT NEVER WAS

Very disappointedly the widely publicised Parliamentary Smart Motorways debate in Westminster Hall, on February 22nd, didn't happen.

Sarah Champion, Claire's MP and the member for Rotherham, made a passionate sixteen minute speech to an empty debating chamber, although two MPs and the Roads Minister, Richard Holden (for the government) were present.

With almost fifty seats available for MPs in Westminster Hall and only four MPs present it would be easy to suggest our elected representatives couldn't really care whether people die or suffer life changing injuries on dangerous All Lane Running smart motorways.

Whether they care or not, (and it has to be said if 650 Members of Parliament cared smart motorways would never have seen the light of day) cannot be judged by the empty debating chamber because, at the conclusion of the twenty four minute session, Claire and I learnt it was simply an opportunity for a backbench MP to take to task a minister with responsibility for smart motorways.

There was no opportunity to actually debate the issue and that is why so few MPs attended.

After Sarah's address the Minister responded on behalf of the government.

Now, defending the indefensible is an impossible task for those who are experts in their subject but, as a Minister with no knowledge of All Lane Running smart motorways (except what he has been told by his bosses at National Highways) so it proved for Richard Holden.

He trotted out the usual party line that smart motorways are as safe or safer than conventional motorways. A false claim we have become used to over the years but he did challenge Sarah's claim that the current death toll on motorways with no hard shoulders is 79.

Was the trip to London to watch what can only be described as a non-event worth the effort? Has the campaign benefitted and are we any nearer convincing government All Lane Running smart motorways MUST be scrapped and hard shoulders reinstated?

With the greatest respect to Sarah I am afraid an emphatic NO is the only answer.

Mike Rawson