

VIEWPOINT

FROM **Mike Rawson (Ret Traffic Sergeant)**

SUBJECT **SMART MOTORWAYS UNSAFE – OFFICIAL**

During the Conservative Party leadership contest Rishi Sunak said, '*Smart motorways are unpopular because they are UNSAFE*'. He made a commitment that there would be no more conversions of traditional motorways, with a hard shoulder, to ALL LANE RUNNING (ALR) smart motorways where the hard shoulder becomes an additional lane for traffic.

The Prime Minister has kept his promise not to commission any more ALR smart motorways and the *Smart Motorways Kill* campaign welcomes his decision – the battle has been won but the war will continue for as long as it takes to get hard shoulders reinstated to all motorways and the term, *All Lane Running*, is confined to history.

Making the decision to end the dangerous ALR smart motorway policy was easy and ministers, the Department for Transport and National Highways will comply with the directions of the Prime Minister and, in theory, this should be an end to the issue.

The reality, of course, is very different because there are two distinct issues which have significant legal implications for the government.

Firstly, there are conversion schemes already underway and, IF they are completed *without hard shoulders*, National Highways will have **knowingly** opened an **unsafe** road.

In collisions which result in deaths and serious injuries, due to the absence of a hard shoulder (e.g. stationary vehicle in a live lane), it is

almost certain the company will be liable because it will be impossible to defend the policy which has been declared **unsafe** by the Prime Minister.

The second issue relates to the existing four hundred miles (both directions) of ALR smart motorways which are in use today.

These motorways are now branded **officially unsafe** and they cannot be allowed to remain **unsafe**.

The government has no option but to commence a program of hard shoulder reinstatement if it wishes to avoid multiple claims for deaths and life changing injuries where the absence of a hard shoulder has been judged to be the primary cause of the collision.

Hard shoulders must be reinstated between bridges, sprayed in red paint with signs every 400 metres stating, **HARD SHOULDER FOR EMERGENCY USE – PENALTY FOR IMPROPER USE £1000 & 6 Points**.

It is reported the savings associated with scrapping all new schemes is in the region of £1bn and this will cover the cost of returning hard shoulders.

The scrapping of future ALR schemes allows for contracts to be signed for hard shoulder reinstatements thereby avoiding any job losses.

The ambition for ministers must be for Controlled Motorways across the entire motorway network in which safety is the priority, and where the most important safety feature, the emergency hard shoulder, is available throughout the entire length of the motorway.

UNTENABLE

The *Smart Motorways Kill* campaign has called for the resignation of Nick Harris, CEO of National Highways because his position is no longer tenable.

Harris has continually claimed, '*Smart Motorways are as safe, or safer than, conventional motorways*'. His view is directly opposed to that of the Prime Minister and it must be remembered the ALR smart motorway policy has cost many lives.

National Highways has continually sought to defend its indefensible All Lane Running policy by stating 'A' Roads are subject to the same 70 mph national speed limit and 'A' Roads do not have hard shoulders.

With that one exception there is simply no comparison to be made. 'A' Roads do not have Control Centres and the roads are not patrolled by National Highways Traffic Officers.

There are no restrictions on the use of 'A' Roads – pedestrians, cyclists, farm tractors etcetera are permitted and in rural areas there are grass verges accessible to drivers who suffer mechanical problems. In urban areas 'A' Roads are subject to lower speed limits are there are frequent junctions that allow drivers to seek safety.

IN CONCLUSION

The ALL LANE RUNNING SMART MOTORWAY policy was conceived as a money saving solution to the problem of increasing traffic volumes on the motorway network.

Safety has been sacrificed and ministers, the Department for Transport and the company created by government (known by

differing names over the years - Highways Agency, Highways England & National Highways) have persistently refused to accept the dangers associated with the lack of an emergency hard shoulder.

Those who have died as a direct result of the policy were simply collateral damage and the usual mealy mouthed words were uttered by various spokespersons after each tragic death – *‘Every death is to be regretted etcetera’*.

I have it on good authority that, if Labour is successful at the General Election and forms the next government, motorway hard shoulders WILL be reinstated across the network.

In the meantime, Claire Mercer and I, on behalf of the *Smart Motorways Kill* campaign, will continue our efforts to ensure motorway users have the *safest possible* environment when using these high speed roads.

Mike Rawson

www.smartmotorwayskill.co.uk