

Louise Haigh
Shadow Secretary of State for Transport
Member of Parliament for Sheffield Heeley
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

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March 2023

Dear,

Re: Safety of Smart Motorways

Thank you for all the excellent work you have done campaigning around the safety of smart motorways. I am writing to set out Labour's position on their safety.

We know that current smart motorways, coupled with inadequate safety systems, are not fit for purpose and are putting lives at risk.

Road safety is a top priority for me as Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, and I believe it is completely unacceptable that potentially avoidable deaths and injuries are occurring on our motorways as a result of the removal of the hard shoulder.

The Government should not be allowing new safety systems to replace the traditional hard shoulder on motorways without strong evidence to prove that these systems are robust and effective.

That is why Labour has been clear in our position that the hard shoulder should be reinstated on all smart motorways until reviews of safety systems and evidence have been completed and can prove their effectiveness.

We are far from alone in that opinion.

The Transport Select Committee concluded in 2021 that:

*"The department and National Highways should revisit the case for controlled motorways. The department should set out how the business case for controlled motorways compares with that for all-lane running motorways"*¹

The Office for Rail and Road has found that stopped vehicle detection technology is failing to meet National Highways' own minimum requirements, with a success rate of just 59.6-79.6%². That is simply not good enough.

Even the Prime Minister himself, during his leadership campaign last year, admitted that:

*"Smart motorways are unpopular because they are unsafe. We need to listen to drivers, be on their side and stop with the pursuit of policies that go against common sense."*³

Yet in office he has failed to act on those words and reinstate the hard shoulder, ignoring calls from Labour and pleas from campaigners.

Ministers themselves have already acknowledged the serious safety concerns associated with smart motorways, even going as far as to pause their rollout in January 2022 whilst safety data is collected⁴. Yet they are refusing to use the powers available to them to address safety concerns on existing smart motorways.

Every death on our roads is a tragedy, and the Government should do everything in its power to minimise deaths, injuries and accidents. Current evidence clearly shows that means reinstating the hard shoulder on all motorways.

Yours sincerely,



Louise Haigh MP
Shadow Secretary of State for Transport

¹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1066/the-rollout-and-safety-of-smart-motorways/>

² <https://www.orr.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-12/first-annual-assessment-of-safety-performance-on-the-srn.pdf>

³ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11128903/Rishi-Sunak-says-hell-brakes-smart-motorways-prime-minister.html>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/smart-motorway-rollout-to-be-paused-as-government-responds-to-transport-committee-report>