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Dear Heidi Alexander

I write to you about smart motorways, as unfortunately I am only too aware of how the removal of the hard shoulder is so dangerous, it leads to minor incidents becoming **“a scene of utter carnage”**

Those were the actual words of the Police Liaison Officer assigned to knock on my door and give me news that would change the course of my life. I had asked him why it had taken over 4 hours and me, myself, phoning the police to say I thought my husband must be in that incident all over the news, for anyone to be able to notify next of kin.

The officer had to explain to me, only minutes after telling me my husband was dead and having to pick me up off the floor, that “the scene was utter carnage and they weren’t sure who was with which vehicle and possessions had been flung far and wide, further hindering identification” I also later found out that the bodies (a 22 year old was also killed) were “not whole”!

All this from a minor bump on the motorway!

It should have just been a bad start to the day, Jason and Alexandru should have been on their way in ten minutes, but

because the hard shoulder had been removed there was no safe(r) place for them to comply with the legal obligation of stopping after the initial minor bump.

because there had been no education on how to use smart motorways as they had been rolled out on the quiet, so we couldn’t object to what we didn’t know about

because the smart motorways blanket policy is just rolled out as a one size fits all, regardless of topography, there was no barrier for them to “get over”

They were smashed to bits across 4 lanes of a motorway because **we now have roads that don’t allow for physics.**

The HGV that hit them bodily while they were out of their vehicles (as are most of the victims of these roads) was not capable of manoeuvring like a Ford Fiesta, because 40 tonnes travelling at 60 mph just can’t.

I attended Westminster last month to sit in on a PTSC meeting with the then new SoS, in which smart motorways were discussed. I was shocked how superficial the ‘evidence’ for a session

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called an 'evidence hearing' was, it was just accepted as fact that [paraphrased] "safety standards had improved" and "critical technology was now working better"

There was no extra information provided to back up this brief, but sweeping statement on an issue that has been going on for 10+ years.

As someone that dedicates a lot of time to knowing about these things I can tell you that I know of no such improvements. I'm worried that these statements were entered onto record and just accepted as fact, and now that point is metaphorically ticked off the agenda.

I, nor any of the whistle blowers, control room operators, highways officers and emergency service workers who contact me on a weekly basis know anything at all about sudden, drastic improvements in the operation of the critical technology on SM. All I ever hear about is the on-going failure of the technology and the cover ups and temporary 'fixes' that are used to hide the scale of the issues.

I have control room operators emailing me saying they dread going on shift because they have to sit, watching screens, knowing that they are powerless to help motorists that become stranded on these dangerous roads and all they "can do is sit there and watch them get maimed or killed"

**One actually wrote that it's not unusual to see operators watching the screens in tears!**

Safety is not improving; more smoke and mirrors are being used to hide the full facts. National Highways and DfT use the stats that best justify the financial and corporate cost of these multi billion pound roads and in response I can always find many, many more stats that prove there's massive issues under the surface.

Stats aside though, **I have a question for you to consider personally:**

If you had to stop on a motorway would you rather stop in the middle of a live running lane, where you have the time it takes the HGV behind to reach the space you now occupy, to get through the middle of the vehicle and out the passenger door (government issued advice) with any other occupants of the vehicle, or would you prefer to stop on a dedicated, permanent, hard shoulder?

Also a very big question that is never addressed is how do these refuge areas allow EMS vehicles through? **They couldn't even get the coroner through to my husband, never mind an ambulance!** He's body was stuck on the motorway for over 8 hours after he was smashed to bits.

Why are we piling more dangers on to an already dangerous environment? National Highways are meant to be "taking motorists concerns about smart motorways seriously" but it just feels like they are instead sticking two fingers up.

And all we hear about is the difficult budget decisions that are needed, across all government spending. Yet the complete scrapping of all smart motorways would be a very rare thing, **it would be a welcome budget cut.**

The cost of altering a few physical signs and road markings would be a fraction of the cost currently earmarked for the finishing of the remaining projects and the "retro fitting" of all the others.

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Its only due to sheer luck there hasn't been a bus full of school kids break down on a SM yet,

**Please don't just reply to me saying you're aware "of motorist concerns" and then quote this week's figure for how much is being spent on installing more refuge areas (but not address they don't allow EMS through to the scene of an incident)**

**and then finish with the very over used NH/DfT line of "one death on our roads is blah, blah, blah"**

**If it was sincere, if you felt the human, real effect of living with a road death and a completely unnecessary road death at that, which came about because a privatised department of the government wanted to cut spending, while paying more bonuses, you'd do something.**

**This is your watch now, please be the one that admits they know smart motorways are madness AND does something about it!**

Regards

Claire Mercer

On behalf of Smart Motorways Kill

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