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## Smart motorways - which way now? RAC reaction to Highways England's transport committee appearance

Following the [examination of the safety of smart motorways at a session of the Transport Committee](#), RAC head of roads policy Nicholas Lyes said:

“While Highways England feels smart motorways are safe, we know many drivers believe that removing the hard shoulder compromises safety for those who break down in a live lane. [In early 2017 the Government claimed there was ‘good progress’ being made in making smart motorways safer](#) by reducing the space between SOS areas, ensuring drivers comply with red X ‘closed lane’ signs and rolling out stopped vehicle detection technology so anyone stranded in a live lane is quickly protected by lane closure signage.

“Sadly, we understand that only a fifth of ‘all lane running stretches’ of smart motorway are currently benefiting from stopped vehicle detection technology which hardly constitutes a roll-out. We believe this technology needs to be retrofitted to all existing smart motorways as a matter of urgency.

“There has been a similar lack of progress in reducing the distance between SOS areas. Schemes currently under construction, and new ones being consulted on, still feature SOS areas at up to 2.5km apart as opposed to the lesser distance of 1.5km which we believe Highways England had committed to.

“We strongly believe the Government should compel Highways England to make smart motorways as safe as possible by implementing these measures. Only then can drivers have sufficient confidence in using them knowing that

all smart motorways are operating to a consistent safety standard, particularly in the event they break down on one.

“Given that the ‘dynamic hard shoulder’ style of smart motorway, where the hard shoulder is opened and closed according to the volumes of traffic, was abandoned in favour of ‘all lane running’, we feel a decision should also be taken to standardise all smart motorways so drivers are not confused by the different types. While there are relatively few stretches of ‘dynamic hard shoulder’ motorway, these differ considerably from the now default ‘all lane running’ smart motorway. At the moment there is a risk that some motorists use the hard shoulder when they shouldn’t, perhaps as a force of habit from doing so most days because they tend to use these types of motorway at peak hours.

“While it is vitally important that we increase capacity on our motorways, we must do all we can to ensure they are as safe as possible so drivers feel comfortable and confident using.”

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## **About the RAC**

The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to nearly 14 million UK private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. As well as its premium nationwide breakdown assistance service – with an expert branded patrol workforce attending more than two million breakdowns every year – it offers a wide range of market-leading products across insurance, legal services, vehicle inspections and service, maintenance and repair. Included in this is the first-of-its-kind nationwide Mobile Mechanics service which brings the garage to homes and workplaces.

At the forefront of new solutions for business fleets and consumers, the RAC’s breakdown service is electric-ready with mobile EV charging technology and

can be called on using [myRAC](#) – the all-in-one route planner, fuel finder and breakdown reporting app.

Visit the [RAC website](#).

## Contacts



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