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Apr 12, 2024 12:34 BST

## Ten years of smart motorways without hard shoulders - RAC statement

Reacting to today's news, RAC head of policy Simon Williams said:

"It's incredible to think that a decade has gone by since the first all-lane-running stretch of smart motorway opened on the M25 in Hertfordshire, and that it's a year to the day since the Prime Minister cancelled all 14 future schemes, citing financial pressures and a lack of public confidence in them.

"There is a real irony when it comes to talking about cost pressures in

relation to these distinctly unpopular types of motorway. While heralded as a cost-effective way of increasing capacity on some of our busier roads, a colossal amount of public money has since gone into trying to make them safer – for instance by installing radar-based technology to detect stricken vehicles more quickly, plus the creation of additional emergency refuge areas. This cash needn't have been spent had the Government not taken the decision to plough on with building all-lane running motorways, regardless of concerns expressed by drivers, the RAC and even the Transport Committee.

“However, the ultimate question remains: will the motoring public ever be entirely comfortable driving on the 200-plus miles of motorway where the hard shoulder has been permanently removed? The hard shoulder is by no means a safe location, but in the event of a breakdown, it is far safer than being stranded in a live lane of traffic waiting for the ‘red X closed lane’ sign to be turned on and then for other drivers to do the right thing and move into another lane.

“We continue to believe that the Government should either convert existing all-lane-running smart motorways to ‘dynamic’ ones, where the hard shoulder is only opened to traffic during busy periods, or repaint the white line and reintroduce a permanent hard shoulder on these roads. In either case, queue-busting technology, such as variable speed limits, could remain to help ensure traffic flows as smoothly as possible.”

#### Key points and data:

- The first all-lane-running smart motorway to open was a short 1.5-mile stretch of the M25 in Hertfordshire, between junctions 23 and 25. It opened on 14 April 2014
- In June 2016, a Transport Committee report advised the Government that it should not proceed with all-lane-running schemes, citing “major safety concerns”:  
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmtrns/63/63.pdf>
- Prime Minister Rishi Sunak cancelled the roll-out of future all-lane-running smart motorways on the evening of 15 April 2024. This was followed by a statement to Parliament on 17 April 2024: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/plans-for-new-smart-motorways-cancelled>
- The latest National Highways report shows there were 193 miles

- of all-lane-running motorways as of 2021. Since then, work has progressed on completing schemes on the M6 and M56
- RAC research released in April 2023 showed seven-in-10 drivers (69%) wanted the hard shoulder to be reinstated on existing all-lane-running smart motorways, regardless of the Government claiming it would be too disruptive and costly
  - Separate RAC research released in December 2022 showed half of drivers (49%) said they frequently or occasionally avoid using lane one on all-lane-running smart motorways, and three-quarters (77%) of these said they were worried they might encounter a stationary, broken-down vehicle as there is no hard shoulder

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The press office email address is [press.office@rac.co.uk](mailto:press.office@rac.co.uk) and media centre is at [media.rac.co.uk](http://media.rac.co.uk). **Please note:** the press office is unable to help with individual customer enquiries - please visit the [RAC contacts page](#) to find the right contact.

## 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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