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RAC severe reservations over Highways Agency all-lane running Smart Motorway schemes

The RAC has voiced 'severe reservations' about the safety of new all-lane running schemes which will turn the hard shoulder into a permanent live traffic lane on many sections of England's busiest stretches of motorway.

Eight miles of the M25 between junctions 23 and 25 became England's first 'Smart' section of motorway with traffic running permanently on the hard shoulder on Monday 14 April.

The scheme is one of 10 Smart Motorway All-Lane Running schemes planned by the Highways Agency to increase capacity and reduce congestion. Another version of the Smart Motorway scheme known as Dynamic Hard Shoulder Running is in operation on sections of the M42, M1, M6 and M5 where the hard shoulder is temporarily used as a running lane during busy periods.

Under the new all-lane running schemes, however, the hard shoulder would be permanently used as a running lane and only closed to traffic via overhead and verge mounted signs in the event of an incident.

The RAC's main safety concern for traffic using the hard shoulder permanently centres around the fact that emergency refuge areas will be further apart in sections of these schemes (up to 2.5km apart) than the Hard Shoulder Running ones (500-800m apart).

This means motorists who break down on an all-lane running stretch will often find it impossible to reach an emergency refuge area and, therefore, have to stay in a live running lane until it is closed to traffic by the Highways Agency. Despite extensive CCTV coverage, the RAC believes this will inevitably lead to lives being put at risk and has been highlighting concerns for some months.

RAC technical director David Bizley said: "The RAC has raised concerns with the Highways Agency about the added risk arising from increased distance between emergency refuge areas, and we are disappointed so far at the absence of action to address them.

"Dynamic hard shoulder running has proved to be very successful in terms of reducing congestion at peak periods and has a good safety record. Indeed, so far, these sections of motorway have proven to be significantly safer than a conventional three-lane motorway with a hard shoulder. However, we believe the greater distance between emergency refuge areas creates an unnecessary risk to the safety of any motorist breaking down in lane one on an all-lane running section."

Eighty-four per cent of drivers surveyed by the RAC felt that the hard shoulder was important in breakdown and accident situations and 82% said they would feel 'very concerned' if they broke down in lane one – formerly the hard shoulder – of a four-lane/all-lane running section of motorway.

Nearly half of people surveyed (46%) were in favour of the introduction of permanent all-running lane sections on our motorways to increase capacity in congested areas, but 61% altered their views when they were informed that risk assessments showed they would be at greater risk of being killed or injured in a breakdown situation.

The RAC wants motorists to be fully aware of the major differences between the current Smart Motorway Hard Shoulder Running schemes on the M42, M1 and M6 and Smart Motorways: All-Lane Running.

SMART MOTORWAYS: Dynamic Hard Shoulder Running v All-Lane Running			
Dynamic Hard Shoulder Running	All-Lane Running	RAC Comment	
Hard shoulder	Only used as a running lane in busy periods	Used as a permanent running lane and only closed to traffic in response to an incident	This is potentially a major safety concern for motorists. Motorists will be at greater risk if they break down than on either the conventional three-lane, plus hard shoulder, or on dynamic hard shoulder schemes if they cannot reach an emergency refuge area
Emergency Refuge Areas (ERA)	500-800m apart	Up to 2.5km apart	This significantly reduces the likelihood of a motorist being able to reach an ERA in an emergency

CCTV	Approx 95%	100%	This could present issues in the 'gap areas' which could add risk when incidents occur in these areas
Overhead gantries	Minimum 500m	Spacing between signs can be greater and some overhead gantries are replaced by verge mounted Variable Messaging Signs	This shouldn't be a problem and makes economic sense. Arguably the gantries on early stretches of dynamic hard shoulders are too close to one another because motorists can see two or more at any one time and may be confused if they are displaying different information
Vehicle recovery	Motoring organisations can attend motorists in an ERA or on the hard shoulder when not in use as a running lane	Motoring organisations will be unable to attend motorists breaking down in a running lane and will rely on the Highways Agency moving casualty vehicles to a place of safety	Motorists' safety may depend on how fast a vehicle is removed to a place of safety

RAC technical director David Bizley said: "All-lane running is the cheapest option for increasing motorway capacity and risk assessments appear to show that it is no more dangerous overall than motorways with a traditional hard shoulder. However, the overall risk is a combination of added dangers when a motorist breaks down or is involved in an incident offset by the safety benefits of better traffic control through variable speed limits and better driver information.

"We are very much in favour of increasing capacity on our motorways and we are not opposed to the use of the hard shoulder as a running lane, but, as a society, we should be aiming to make our roads safer for people who break

down and not the reverse. The Government appears willing to compromise the safety of those breaking down in order to save on the cost of building more emergency refuge areas. We believe more needs to be done to communicate the changes and safety advice to motorists, particularly to infrequent motorway users or people who don't live near these stretches.

“Even though all-lane running has now become a reality, the RAC strongly urges the Government and the Highways Agency to ensure that those features that have led to the hard shoulder running concept having such a good safety record are applied to all-lane running. Whilst the Highways Agency needs to save cost we must ensure the combination of variable speed limits, emergency refuge areas, clear and frequent signage and saturation CCTV is employed in all-lane running so that it is no less safe than dynamic hard shoulder running.”

SMART MOTORWAYS: DYNAMIC HARD SHOULDER RUNNING

In operation

- M42 – J3a to J7
- M6 J4 to J5
- M6 J8 to J10A
- M1 J10 to J13
- M4 J19 to J20 & M5 J15 to J17
- M62 J25 to J30

Under construction

- M6 J5 to J8 ('Birmingham Box Phase 3')

SMART MOTORWAYS: ALL-LANE RUNNING SCHEMES

In operation

M25 J23 to J25 – full scheme is to J27, work on this second section is still underway

Under construction

- M25 J5 to J6/J7
- M25 J25 to J27
- M1 J28 to J31
- M6 J10a to J13
- M1 J32 to J35a
- M1 J39 to J42

Starting in 2014/15:

- M3 J2 to J4a
- M60 J8 to M62 J20 – this scheme combines three Smart motorway schemes which were previously managed separately – M60 J8 to J12, M60 J15 to J12 Lane Gain and M62 J18 to J20

Notes to Editors

* Research conducted online by One Poll in May 2013 with 1,000 UK drivers

Motorway safety information

Motorways are statistically the safest roads in Britain, only recording 4% of accidents*. In 2011*, 6% of fatalities occurred on motorways, despite them taking 20% of all traffic.

In 2012 5% of the RAC's 2.2m breakdowns (112,000) were on motorways.

1. M1 – 15,600; 2. M6 – 14,000; 3. M25 – 12,500; 4. M4 – 12,400; 5. M5 -11,000

About the RAC

First formed in 1897, the RAC has been looking after the needs of its members and championing the interests of drivers for more than 120 years.

Today it has more than eight million members and is one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists. Whether it's [roadside assistance](#), [insurance](#), [buying a used car](#), [vehicle inspections and checks](#), [legal services](#) or up-to-the-minute [traffic and travel information](#) – the RAC offers a solution for all motoring needs. The

RAC is committed to making motoring easier, safer, more affordable and more enjoyable for drivers and road users.

The RAC is the motorist's champion and campaigns to support the interests of its members and UK drivers at a national level. This includes voicing concerns about the increasing cost of motoring, particularly the price of fuel and the high level of tax levied on it, advancing levels of road safety, and supporting the needs of all drivers, from young to old.

The RAC's annual [Report on Motoring](#) – first published in 1989 – is one of a kind and provides a clear insight into the concerns and issues facing today's motorists.

For the very latest news on UK fuel prices, check [RAC Fuel Watch](#). It provides a comprehensive guide to the latest UK unleaded petrol and diesel prices – both at the wholesale level and at the pump - and tracks these prices daily to help drivers check if the price they pay to fill up is a fair one.

Contacts



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