M5 junctions 4a to 6 smart motorway
Newsletter Issue 17, May 2017
Welcome to the final edition of your smart motorway newsletter.

We are pleased to announce that we opened the second and final phase of the smart motorway to traffic between junction 5 (Droitwich Spa) and junction 6 (Worcester) on 26 May.

As part of our continued investment on this key strategic route, the smart motorway is now fully open at speeds up to 70 mph between junctions 4a near Bromsgrove and 6 near Worcester and drivers can benefit from smoother more reliable journeys on this vital route.

The M5 junctions 4a to 6 is part of a major government investment worth £15bn to build a modern and resilient road network and will also support the essential work being undertaken on the M5 at Oldbury Viaduct between junctions 1 and 2 which recently started. More details about the crucial works taking place at Oldbury Viaduct can be found later in this newsletter.

Peter Smith, Project Sponsor said “We'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your patience during the construction of the smart motorway, which has added another 17 lane miles of increased capacity between Bromsgrove and Worcester. Our customers are important to us and we understand that roadworks are frustrating. We would like to thank you for your continued patience throughout these works.”

Emergency refuge areas are installed throughout the length of the scheme and motorists will benefit from smoother journeys following the resurfacing of the carriageway in both directions with low noise surfacing.

Emergency refuge area installed on the project
We’re not just building roads

We made a commitment to contribute to the local community wherever possible whilst we were here. Throughout construction the team has engaged in a series of events, raffles and fundraising for several different charities, including Midlands Air Ambulance, Cancer Research UK and Macmillan Cancer support. Some of the community work we have taken part in whilst constructing the M5 junctions 4a to 6 included:

- In the past year alone, the project raised a total of £3,963.86 for local charities.
- The team held collections and donated food to the Droitwich Spa Foodback. The charity was extremely grateful for the donation which allowed them to continue to support those within the community who were in need of help.
- The team volunteered assistance at local charity Spectrum Days, carrying out maintenance jobs at the charity’s centre such as painting and gardening. Spectrum Days provide physical and mental health care for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities in Worcestershire and the surrounding area.

Know your Smart Motorways

Smart motorways use innovative technology to actively control traffic flows and improve your journey. By varying speed limits and converting the hard shoulder to a permanently running lane, we can help you to avoid having to brake or be at a standstill so that you get to where you need to be on time.

Variable mandatory speed limits

Variable mandatory speed limits displayed in a red circle mean it is the law to follow the speed limit. They are a key feature of smart motorways and are used when traffic volumes increase. The monitoring sensors we use activate lower speed limits to smooth congestion and keep you moving.
Red X – the ‘lifesaver’ sign

Along with variable speed limits we also use a Red X to indicate lane closures, to slow traffic, and create as safe a working environment as possible for traffic officers and emergency services while we manage incidents.

A red X shows that a lane is closed and MUST not be used.

- Driving in a lane with a red X sign is dangerous both to you and anyone working or stopped on the carriageway ahead.
- We sometimes need to set red X signs far in advance of an incident in order to provide access for emergency vehicles.
- Digital cameras can be used by the police to enforce the red X sign.

We use a red X symbol to show that a lane is closed because of an incident or people working on the road. Driving in a lane with a red X symbol is dangerous and drivers must not use it.

Never drive in a Red X lane

The red X can be displayed on signs above each lane or large signs on the verge of the carriageway. Any lane may be closed by a Red X and arrows will show the next available lane.

Emergency refuge areas

Emergency refuge areas are provided at frequent intervals on smart motorway sections, and we advise motorists to stop in one of these in case of an emergency (e.g. a critical vehicle fault).

On all lane running sections, the spacing of emergency refuge areas means that at a speed of 60 miles per hour drivers will pass one of them roughly every 90 seconds; this is approximately equal to the spacing of lay-bys on sections of A-road with no hard shoulder. The average spacing of emergency refuge areas on this scheme is 1970m.

The all lane running design also introduces countdown signs showing the distance to the next emergency refuge area, and minimises the amount of nearside barrier, where it is safe to do so, allowing the verge to be used as a ‘soft shoulder’ if necessary.
What to do in a breakdown

We understand that breaking down on a motorway can be very distressing.

If your vehicle is damaged or experiences difficulties. In the event of a breakdown always switch on your hazard warning lights and we advise you to do one of the following:

Always exit the motorway if possible...
If your vehicle is still mobile, always try to exit the smart motorway immediately at the next junction, motorway service area or other place of relative safety.

Move into an emergency refuge area (if you can’t exit the motorway)
- In some cases, a vehicle may not be able to leave the motorway before needing to stop. In these circumstances, make your way to the nearest emergency refuge area if possible. These are marked with blue signs featuring an orange SOS telephone symbol on them.
- If you can leave your vehicle safely, contact Highways England via the roadside emergency telephone provided in all emergency refuge areas. We will either send a traffic officer to help you, or set the motorway signs to temporarily clear lane one to assist you to re-join the motorway.

Breaking down in a live lane
In the event that your car has broken down in a live lane, once the regional traffic control centre is aware of your situation, via the police or roadside technology such as CCTV, they can use the smart motorway technology to set overhead signs and close the lane to help keep traffic away from you. They will also send a traffic officer or the police to help you.

If you stop in the nearside lane next to a verge and feel you are able to exit safely with any occupants, consider exiting your vehicle via the nearside (left hand) door, and wait behind the safety barrier, if there is one and safe to do so.

If it is not possible to get out of your vehicle safely, or there is no other place of relative safety to wait then you should stay in your vehicle with your seat belt on and dial ‘999’ if you have access to a working mobile phone.
Oldbury Update of Works

The Oldbury Viaduct renewal scheme started after Easter with traffic management including a 40mph speed limit between M5 junctions 1 and 2 currently in place. The main waterproofing and concrete repair works will start on the southbound carriageway by mid-summer and will continue until autumn 2018, with some more minor work continuing into spring 2019.

We have considered many ways of dealing with the resulting congestion, to keep this key route open to all. From mid-summer there will be a contraflow system between junctions 1 and 2, whereby both the northbound and southbound traffic runs on one side of the carriageway, with a 30mph speed limit between the affected junctions. While this enables a safe way of working, it will also allow us to keep two narrow lanes running in each direction whilst maintaining access to the M5 and thereby limit the resulting congestion on the local roads.

To manage the volume of traffic through this busy part of the network and to reduce the impact on the wider local and strategic roads, we will be implementing additional traffic management at key decision points at either side of the works. They include:

- Northbound at M5 junction 4a, there will be two lanes leading onto the M42, with one lane continuing onto the M5 to encourage drivers to take the alternative route around Birmingham
- At the link between the M6 and the M5 southbound, one lane will lead onto the M5, with three lanes continuing onto the M6
- There will be reduced speed limits on approach to the 30mph speed restriction between junctions 1 and 2

This traffic management will be in place to assist north and southbound traffic to take the alternative route along the M42/M6 and away from the M5 Oldbury works area.

We understand that this may not be welcome news but these measures are needed to balance traffic volume across the region in order to reduce the potentially significant congestion in areas of Birmingham, Sandwell and the wider Black Country. The new smart motorway technology between junctions 4a (Bromsgrove) and 6 (Worcester) will be utilised to enable the additional traffic management measures for Oldbury.

To further advise drivers of the quickest routes around Birmingham, we will be using, for the first time, upgraded travel information signs linked direct to our regional control centres that monitor traffic flows to provide real time travel advice. They will suggest multiple alternative routes with up to date travel times and distances for drivers.

In addition, a network of early warning strategic travel advice signs will be deployed many miles from the junctions to allow drivers to choose alternative routes at earlier steps in their journeys.

We are advising drivers to expect long delays and to plan ahead and seek alternative routes or modes of transport where possible. We are also keeping the haulage, freight and distribution industries informed of this essential work to allow their lorry drivers to plan ahead and seek alternative routes.

We have programmed this scheme to start now to help create a safer, more resilient route ahead of the planned HS2 work and proposed work on other areas of the wider West Midlands.

For more information about the Oldbury Viaduct renewal scheme please visit www.highwaysengland.gov.uk/oldburyviaduct
FAQS

What are smart motorways with all lane running?

In 2014, we used the experience gained from safely operating hard shoulder running to introduce an improved design known as ‘all lane running’ which involves permanent conversion of the hard shoulder into a running lane.

Smart motorways reduce congestion, improve journey time reliability, by making the hard shoulder available as a traffic lane, and use variable speed limits to smooth traffic flow. They also add much needed capacity to some of the most congested parts of our network and support economic growth.

Isn’t replacing the hard shoulder with ERAs unsafe?

It is important to note that the hard shoulder does not provide a safe place to stop; around 8% of fatal motorway accidents take place there. Operating without a hard shoulder is also not unique. There are sections of conventional motorway without a hard shoulder, as well as over 1,500 miles of dual 2 and 3 lane All Purpose Trunk Roads – major ‘A’ roads – which operate at the national speed limit of 70mph without the benefits of the controlled environment of a smart motorway or the operational response of our Traffic Officer Service.

The spacing of refuge areas on all lane running sections is approximately equal to the spacing of laybys on sections of A-road with no hard shoulder. The all lane running design also introduces countdown signs showing the distance to the next emergency refuge area, and minimises the amount of nearside barrier where it is safe to do so, allowing the verge to be used as a ‘soft shoulder’ if necessary.

How will emergency service vehicles gain access to incidents?

The situation with our new proposals is not any different from the current arrangements where we operate the hard shoulder as a running lane. We will use the technology to provide an access route for emergency services. The important thing is that we can provide this route in any lane.

If all access to an incident is blocked, there are procedures to allow emergency access from the next junction along by driving in the reverse direction down the carriageway, once the road has been physically closed. We have also set up coordination groups with the emergency services to ensure that we can develop and improve our operations with all lane running in place, especially during incidents.

What is the Red?

The Red X is used when a lane is closed for safety reasons; this may be because of a hazard such as a broken-down vehicle, or to protect road workers or the emergency services as they respond to an incident or set out cones. Drivers must not pass a signal with a Red X, which shows that the lane they are in is closed.

A Red X lane closure will not be set without any warning; it is always preceded by a divert arrow, instructing drivers to change lanes before they reach the Red X.

Why have you put up speed cameras?

Variable speed enforcement cameras are installed as part of every smart motorway scheme, and are operated by the Police. Enforcement is one of a number of measures which are used to encourage compliance with variable speed limits and ensure the scheme is working as intended. Smart motorways have brought significant benefits to motorists at a reduced cost, and the cameras are an essential part of the smart motorway technology. Camera warning signs are widely used to ensure drivers are fully aware that enforcement takes place on these sections.
My property has been affected can I claim compensation?

You can apply for compensation if the value of your property goes down because of pollution or disturbance from the use of a new or altered road. This is known as a ‘Part I claim’. You can claim after a road has been open to traffic for 1 year.

Applications for Part 1 Compensation will be invited in May 2018, further information can found at: **Chapter 13 - Land Compensation Act 1973 Considerations in Planning.**

If noise from a new road exceeds certain levels at your home you might be able to get sound insulation.