Project update
Welcome to the summer edition of the M6 junctions 16 to 19 smart motorway newsletter.

Work is progressing well along the motorway verges between junction 19 (Knutsford) and junction 17 (Sandbach) while we are carrying out an extensive upgrade to the drainage system in what was formerly the hard shoulder, and installing new ducting to house the cabling that will power the new smart motorway.

We are also constructing the emergency areas (EAs) at various points along both carriageways. These are available for vehicles in the event of an emergency situation when it is not possible to leave the motorway.

EAs will contain an emergency phone to alert emergency and recovery services.

Work is also underway to construct the foundations for the new overhead gantry signs that will be placed along the verges, to inform drivers about incidents ahead, closed lanes indicated by a red X and to display mandatory speed limits.
Between junction 17 (Sandbach) and junction 16 (Crewe), we are nearing the end of the central reserve construction work. We will shortly be installing the final section of concrete safety barrier between these junctions. On completion of the central reserve at the end of the summer, we will be switching the flow of traffic to the other side of the carriageway to allow our teams to work in the verges. This will involve a series of full carriageway closures between junction 17 and 16 while we alter the carriageway layout accordingly. Details of the closure will be circulated in advance of the closure dates, while residents on the diversion route will be sent a letter and parish councils will also be informed.

Trent and Mersey Canal

Trent and Mersey Canal overbridge

Trent and Mersey Canal

Works have now been successfully completed on the Trent and Mersey Canal overbridge located between junctions 16 and 17 on the M6. Our structures team have been working hard to strengthen the concrete supports underneath the overbridge as part of the project. As most of the waterways infrastructure in the UK is more than 200-years-old, our work here had to be overseen by the Canal and Riverside Trust in accordance with their code of practice.

The original bridge supports required upgrading to allow them to be able to stand the extra weight of the carriageway above. The concrete strengthening took just six weeks to complete and was carried out using an inflatable pontoon to ferry materials from one side of the canal to the other, ensuring no disruption to canal users. A total of 200m of trackway was also laid down on both sides of the canal towpath to provide safe footing for towpath users.

Canal locks are also protected and as such are treated as historic buildings, so we had to reproduce historic mortars to reinstate the towpath under the bridge to the original specification.

We planned the works outside of the busy summer season to cause minimum disruption to canal users and pedestrians.

Upcoming full carriageway closures

There will be full carriageway closures in August and September. If you would like to be added to our email distribution list for project updates, closures and diversions, please get in touch M6J16-19SmartMotorway@highwaysengland.co.uk

M6 junction 16 to 19 smart motorway quick facts

- 1,329,904 working hours to date
- Zero reportable accidents (RIDDOR)
- 19,000m³ length of concrete barrier installed to date
- 180,000 tonnes of material excavated from the central reserve
- 99.94% of excavated material recycled and reused on site
- Over £2,500 raised by the project team for local and national charities

What we are currently working on:

- 18 Emergency areas (EAs) under construction
- 61 Cantilever variable message signs (VMS) to be installed
- 1 Super span gantry to be installed
- 20 Super span cantilever gantries to be installed
- 14 Overbridge pier strengthening or protection works

Betchton Road and Malkins Bank overbridge work

During the winter months, passing vehicles spray rock salt from road gritters onto the concrete covering the bridge supports which, over time, causes erosion and significantly deteriorates the strength of the bridge. We have been working on the carriageway underneath Betchton Road overbridge to provide the necessary re-strengthening that the structure requires while works were being carried out.

There was a weight restriction enforced on the bridge to enable the works to be carried out safely as it was being supported by a strut. The bridge was then closed for six weeks while essential works were carried out.

During the closure, we replaced the concrete using an improved method that will have greater longevity and hardness to rock salt, further increasing the lifespan and resistance to deterioration. Customer information posters were displayed along the footpath explaining the work we were doing underneath the carriageway and the reasons why we had to close the bridge.

Customer information stations at your local library

We have recently installed information stations at local libraries in Homes Chapel and Sandbach for members of the public to find out more about the M6 junctions 16 to 19 smart motorway scheme.

You can pick up a copy of the latest project newsletter and a Highways England smart motorway booklet, or find contact details for the project if you have a question for us.
The information stand is marked by a Highways England pull up banner and is located just inside the main library area. We will be keeping this stand updated with relevant information on the project as work progresses.

Educating new drivers about smart motorways

As we see more smart motorways across England it is vital that we all know and understand how to drive on them, so what better way to educate motorists than to focus on learner drivers.

The M6 junctions 16 to 19 project has approached Lets Pass driving school in Sandbach to give them valuable information about what a smart motorway is and how to use it. We also got in touch with Surepass and offered them a supply of the Highways England Making Motorways Smarter booklet which explains exactly what a smart motorway is, the difference between hard shoulder running and all-lane running (like the M6 junctions 16 to 19 project). It also outlines the use of mandatory speed limits and the importance of the red X on overhead gantry signs, either in the verge or above each lane. We are keen to spread the message as far as we can and we are hoping to extend this information to other driving schools in the area to educate all new drivers. If you would like to receive a leaflet for yourself, or for a company or organisation, please email Sam Thorpe at M6J16-19SmartMotorway@Highwaysengland.co.uk

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.

Environmental update – volunteering at Oakhanger Moss

Regulated by Natural England, Oakhanger Moss is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest. The woodland, which is semi-shaded and damp, is the perfect place for plant life such as the Himalayan Balsam to thrive. Introduced to the UK as an ornamental plant in the Victorian era, Himalayan Balsam is a non-native species which dominates habitats, grows densely and shades out native plants. The plant can rapidly out-compete native flora due to its ability to reproduce and grow.

It also produces a large amount of nectar which may result in less pollination of native species by bees and subsequent loss of biodiversity. Regular and controlled clearance is essential to keep it under control. At the beginning of June, nine volunteers from the project team joined Natural England to assist with the first wave of removing the Himalayan Balsam at Oakhanger Moss. The volunteer’s hard work in cutting back and uprooting the balsam, resulted in large areas being cleared and kept under control, and there are plans to return in September to repeat the activities with Natural England to keep on top of it.
Volunteering at Sandbach Transport Festival

Once again the project team and our supply chain partners, Speedy and Garic, were on hand to help organisers and long term residents of Sandbach, Elsie and Graham Alcock, put on a superb show for the local community at the local Sandbach Transport Festival. The festival, which has been running for over 20 years, includes a vehicle exhibition, motorbike parade, performances by Fodens Band and a variety of arts and crafts.

The free event solely relies on external funding. The team implemented road closures and provided traffic management during the 2 day event and our suppliers provided crowd barriers, radios, portable toilets and a welfare unit for the marshals who volunteered at the festival.

We also put out all the barriers for the start of the event and collected them after all the revellers had left; a job usually left to Elsie and Graham!

The festival committee were so overwhelmed with the projects contribution that we were awarded ‘Star of the Show’.

We were approached by the Parish Council to ask if we could help with the condition of their access road to the community centre on Station Road. When we came to inspect the area we found a blocked gulley which required repair before we could carry out the work.

Our contractors, Lanes Group, were called in to help unblock the gulley and Tarmac to resurface and improve the entrance road for visitors to the facility. Nicola Clarke, Holmes Chapel Parish Council clerk said: “We’re very pleased to get this support from the M6 project team and their partners as we couldn’t have managed to fund this by ourselves. The centre is well used by many in the community and this upgrade will be greatly appreciated.”

We attempted to scale the heights of Mount Snowdon last month to raise funds for our project’s chosen charity St Lukes Hospice, Winsford.

An intrepid team of 10 hikers set off up the Llanberis Path to the summit of Wales’s highest mountain, but unfortunately severe wind and rain made the walk even more of a challenge and they were turned back for safety reasons, (the wind actually blew someone from the group off their feet!).

Despite the typical weather, the team still managed to raise an impressive £2,800 for the local hospice that provides much needed care and support for those with life threatening illness in the local community.

Well done to everyone involved – a fantastic feat!
Contact us

If you have any questions relating to the M6 junctions 16 to 19 smart motorway project, please get in touch. You can contact the stakeholder engagement manager, Sam Thorpe on switchboard number: 07792 021 657 (office hours).

You can also contact the Highways England project team at: M6J16-19SmartMotorway@Highwaysengland.co.uk or by calling the customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000 (email: info@highwaysengland.co.uk)

Alternatively, you can visit our website at: http://roads.highways.gov.uk/projects/m6-junctions-16-19-smart-motorway/