

Mr Jim O'Sullivan
Chief Executive
Highways England
The Cube
199 Wharfside Street
Birmingham B1 1RN

Transport Focus, Fleetbank House
2-6 Salisbury Square, London, EC4Y 8JX
w www.transportfocus.org.uk
t 0300 123 0840 f 0207 583 9848
e info@transportfocus.org.uk
direct 0300 123 0852
e anthony.smith@transportfocus.org.uk

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Drivers and the M1 closure on 19 September

The closure earlier this week of the M1 between junctions 14 and 15 clearly caused significant problems for road users. Many of the features of the incident echoed those seen in relation to the M6 closure on 4 February 2016. I wrote to you about this at the time – a copy of the letter is enclosed.

No one is pretending dealing with an incident like this – especially one that initially was being treated as potentially terrorist related – is easy. However, again, those road users stuck in the considerable queues for hours received scant attention.

Information was patchy or non-existent, no one seemed to have considered the welfare of those who might need medical help, water, toilets or access to mobile phones. It appeared to be left to local people to get out and help with no co-ordination or support.

I repeat some of the questions we asked in 2016:

- How soon after an incident does Highways England expect, working with the Police, to help road users avoid the disruption by physically preventing more vehicles passing the last junction?
- How soon after the start of an incident does Highways England expect to start evacuating stranded road users, whether through a managed return to the previous junction, access to the opposite carriageway or some other method?
- What are the arrangements for distribution of welfare-related essentials like food and drink when road users are stranded for long periods? Had this incident happened in sub-zero temperatures, or during a heat-wave, what would Highways England have done differently?
- How does Highways England safeguard the welfare of disabled road users and those with time-critical medical conditions?



Highways England has a duty of care to those trapped on their network. Highways England must do more and be seen to be doing more, to offer information and help to those trapped people. With the heightened state of security and the onset of winter answering these questions seems even more important.

The relationship and communication between Highways England and the police is clearly vital in these sorts of incidents. I wonder if there is anything that can be learned from the experiences of British Transport Police over the last few years? In any event we will take the matter up with the Chief Constable Anthony Bangham, the National Police Chiefs' Council lead on road policing who we are meeting soon. We will also discuss this matter with the Home Office as well.

I hope we can meet to discuss this soon. In any event I would like to invite you to address our public Board meeting in Manchester on 14 November 2017. This will give you an opportunity to set out Highways England's plans in this area.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Smith
Chief Executive

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