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Dear Anthony,

We welcomed Transport Focus' December 2020 research into all lane running smart motorways as a valuable insight into how people feel about their journeys on our network. We want to do all we can to help people feel confident using our roads, and, as you are aware, we have been taking forward the measures the Secretary of State for Transport set out in the Smart motorway safety evidence stocktake and action plan from March 2020¹.

You will also be aware we have published our 'Smart motorway stocktake first year progress report', which can be found on our website [here](#).

In light of the above we feel now is an appropriate time to formally respond to your research.

Transport Focus recommendation 1

Highways England should implement the conclusions of the Secretary of State's smart motorways evidence stocktake as rapidly as possible and report publicly on progress. It should keep listening to drivers' views and continually explore ways to make journeys on all-lane running motorways safer still.

- We are determined to do all we can to help drivers feel safe and be safer on our roads – all our roads – and we are committed to delivering the 18-point action plan published alongside the Smart motorway evidence stocktake in March 2020.
- On 20 April 2021 we published our 'Smart motorway stocktake first year progress report', which can be found on our website [here](#).
- The report sets out what we have already done to deliver the action plan promises, and our plans to accelerate measures.
- We are committed to continuous improvement. Safety is our first imperative, and we aim to at least halve the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads by the end of 2025, against the 2005-2009 annual average baseline. Achieving this target will keep us on course to reach our goal of zero harm on our network by 2040.
- And we will keep listening to road users' views: we will continue to undertake our own customer surveys and focus groups, and also take into account research carried out by other organisations.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/smart-motorway-evidence-stocktake-and-action-plan>

Transport Focus recommendation 2

Highways England should increase its efforts to communicate practical advice about how to drive appropriately on an all-lane running motorway, including what to do if you break down. This is likely to require imaginative use of different channels to achieve cut-through with numerous audiences. This should not be seen as a 'one off', but a sustained effort over time.

- We recognise that concerns have continued to be raised about smart motorways and that drivers want more information about how to drive on them.
- Raising awareness and giving drivers the information they need is a vital part of helping to make sure that happens. That is why we continue to invest in road safety initiatives and public awareness campaigns.
- To ensure that drivers have the information they need to be safe on our roads we regularly run information campaigns which are based on road safety data, which is regularly reviewed, and customer insight. They are subject to rigorous expert review and customer testing.
- We select the most effective and relevant channels to reach our target audiences. In addition to paid for advertising we also use social media channels, partner marketing, stakeholder channels, and media campaigns to widen the impact of the overarching campaign. The campaigns are fully evaluated by external market research organisations.
- We have run a number of campaigns specifically addressing smart motorways and all lane running and will continue to raise awareness of safer driving across all our roads. And public information campaigns to date have tackled what to do if you breakdown on a high-speed road (including smart motorways) and the top causes of deaths and serious injury on the network and include tailgating, vehicle checks, the dangers of driving in the rain and campaigns specific to motorcyclists.
- We have further campaigns planned to discourage tailgating, a summer campaign encouraging tyre checks and a campaign giving advice on driving in the rain. We will also build into these campaigns information about how to drive on smart motorways.
- To achieve cut-through, campaigns are repeated over time. For example, in Autumn 2021 and Spring 2022 we plan to deliver further phases of our 'Go Left' breakdowns campaign to encourage long term behaviour change.
- The planning and construction of every new section of smart motorway is supported by a public engagement plan. Besides information on the works, we include information on the benefits and features of smart motorways, how to drive on them and what to do in the event of a breakdown.

Please see Annex for our breakdowns advice.

Transport Focus recommendation 3

Highways England should communicate how the individual elements of an all-lane running smart motorway work together as a system to reduce congestion and maintain safety. This should focus on technology and human oversight. It should allow drivers to see how they make up a coherent system that compensates for not having a hard shoulder. Again, this is not a 'one off' need.

- All lane running smart motorways make journeys less congested and more reliable, and, in terms of fatality rates, they are the safest roads in the country. But some people do not believe they are, and we do understand this. We must ensure that we

explain the steps we have taken to help drivers feel safe and be safer, to ensure an already strong safety record is further enhanced.

- Besides campaigns explaining how smart motorways work, our communications have concentrated on individual elements of smart motorways, such as Red Xs; on advice for drivers, such as what to do in a breakdown and the importance of vehicle checks to avoid breakdowns; and on scheme-specific information.
- We now need to build on this and provide a more systematic approach to explain how smart motorways work, why this makes them safe, and what we are asking of drivers. We will develop this as a priority. It will be an ongoing approach and underpin our smart motorway communications going forward.

Transport Focus recommendation 4

Highways England should, internally and in the tone of its external communications, acknowledge that many drivers have reasonable concerns about having no hard shoulder and should guard against downplaying those concerns. Care should be taken to avoid communications appearing to defend an existing policy position irrespective of how some drivers feel about it.

- We appreciate that most drivers are used to hard shoulders and understandably want to know more about what driving on motorways without a hard shoulder means for their safety.
- Our acting chief executive Nick Harris wants the organisation he leads to continue to be one that listens, puts the needs of drivers first and helps drivers feel safe and be safer.
- We are determined to reduce the number of fatal incidents, and injuries, on our roads.
- In our response to recommendation 1 we have set out the measures we have taken to help improve public confidence in smart motorways.
- We will listen to public concerns and tailor our public information campaigns to focus on specific elements of motorway driving to continue to raise awareness and provide clarity to drivers.
- We will learn from and continue implementing the findings of the 2020 Stocktake, and work with drivers to make increasingly busy motorways even safer for drivers who use them.
- We have also heeded further concerns. In March 2020 we signed a strategic partnership agreement with the independent recovery industry to strengthen our relationship. This provides a structured approach to regular engagement with industry leads, a means to develop best practice training and to enhance safe operating procedures across the industry. The agreement encourages recovery operators to work safely on our network in a standardised way.

Transport Focus recommendation 5

Highways England should work with the Government and the police to increase compliance with road traffic law on all-lane running motorways. In particular, obeying the 'red X' given that it is fundamental to driver safety when a vehicle breaks down or there is a crash.

- Red X signs are a key feature of how smart motorways operate.
- We have accelerated our commitment so that by September 2022 we will have upgraded all enforcement cameras to automatically detect vehicles passing illegally under a Red X or entering the lane beyond a Red X, so the police can take enforcement action. We are doing this for the safety of those in the closed lanes and

because it's illegal to enter the lane beyond a Red X, until such time that you pass a sign and signal cancelling the restriction.

- We are also committed to working with police forces to raise awareness of Red X signs and enforcement measures, so that drivers know they must not drive in lanes closed by a Red X.
- Since 2016 the police have issued more than 200,000 warning letters to drivers who have either illegally used the hard shoulder or to those who have failed to comply with a Red X symbol when one is displayed.
- We worked with UK Road Offender Education (UKROEd Ltd) to deliver the National Driver Offender Retraining Scheme (NDORS) National Motorway Awareness Course and to date over 300,000 drivers have attended it for a range of motorway offences.
- We are committed to working in partnership with the police and other organisations to improve compliance with current legislation and guidance across the whole strategic road network. Throughout the development of smart motorways there is extensive consultation with the emergency services to ensure they have safe and effective operating procedures. We have signed a national agreement with the police, fire and ambulance services, setting out the principles of operating on smart motorways and responding to incidents, along with regional operating agreements to cover individual schemes.
- We monitor the effectiveness of the inventions we are putting in place and will continue to evaluate and refine our approach.
- We have developed the 'Road User Compliance – Our Approach' for improving compliance and have a programme of interventions and research to understand and improve a range of non-compliant behaviours. Currently we have on road trials covering tailgating, mobile phone use and the non-wearing of seatbelts.
- We have also committed to a new action to use the Driving for Better Business programme to raise awareness of the benefits of using Advanced Driver Assistance Systems, together with the management of driver distraction, fatigue, and close following. This will help improve compliance with current legislation and guidance.

Transport Focus recommendation 6

Highways England should measure, and strive to continuously improve, its performance on each all-lane running section in respect of:

- *time taken to spot a stopped vehicle or a crash*
- *time taken to then display the 'red X'*
- *time taken for a Highways England traffic officer or the emergency services to arrive at the scene.*

Although an ongoing need, this is particularly important before stopped vehicle detection is installed on every section of all-lane running motorway

- Needing to stop, or being forced to stop, in an emergency on a live traffic lane is very rare. It can of course happen on any road but on high-speed roads it is more frightening, and help needs to be at hand quickly.
- We already measure and improve the performance of how we operate the strategic road network (including all lane running sections), but we are an organisation committed to continuous improvement
- We will enhance our existing practices for capturing information that tells us how long it takes us to spot a stopped vehicle, set signs and signals and for our traffic officers to respond. We also continuously improve in response to what this information tells us.
- We have committed to reduce our average Traffic Officer response time from 17 to 10 minutes in locations on all lane running sections where places to stop in an

emergency are more than one mile apart. This average response time compares favourably with the 15-minute target for police response time.

- To do this we have adjusted patrol route strategies across regions, giving greater focus to those sections of smart motorway where the average distance between places to stop in an emergency is more than one mile, and so where drivers may need extra help from our patrols, and introducing park up points either within, or closer, to those sections.

Yours sincerely,



Nick Harris
Acting Chief Executive

Annex: Highways England breakdowns advice

The advice to drivers who experience a problem with their vehicle is to leave the motorway if possible. But if that is not possible Highways England recommends the following, which can also be found on our website here: <https://highwaysengland.co.uk/road-safety/breakdowns/>

If your vehicle has a problem, or you get into trouble on a motorway, stay calm and try to exit at the next junction or motorway service area. If that's not possible:

Go left

- put your left indicator on and move into an emergency area, onto a hard shoulder, motorway service area, left-hand verge or A-road lay-by.
- switch your hazard warning lights on, even during the day. If it's dark, use side lights and in poor visibility use fog lights as well
- on a motorway without a hard shoulder, it should be possible for most vehicles experiencing a problem to reach an emergency area. These are spaced regularly, and are marked by a clearly visible orange road surface and blue signs featuring an orange SOS telephone symbol.

Get safe

- if it is safe to do so, and you can get out with any passengers, exit your vehicle on the side furthest from traffic. If it is not safe to do so, stay in your vehicle and wait for help.
- keep well away from moving traffic and your own vehicle. Get behind a safety barrier where there is one, and where it is safe to do so. If you're on a verge, be aware of any unseen hazards such as uneven ground or debris.

Get help

- contact Highways England on 0300 123 5000 and then a breakdown recovery provider.
- if you are unable to exit your vehicle and get to a safe place, have stopped in a live traffic lane or feel your life is in danger, stay in your vehicle with your seatbelts and hazard lights on and call 999 immediately.