



Transport User Community

Road diversions

February 2021

What did we ask our community?

Road Diversions

We wanted to understand how road users experience and think about diversions on England's motorways and major 'A' roads.

How do respondents navigate these diversions? Are they done with confidence or trepidation, and what can be done to make road diversions easier for road users?

When it came to signs, we wanted to know if road users trust the signs and if they are comfortable following them, or would they rather stick to the directions from a Sat-Nav?

We also looked at how those with long-term health conditions and those with children would need to plan a journey that was affected by a diversion.

Who is our road users community?

40

people using
motorways and major
'A' roads in England



Across England



Mix of vehicle types



Mix of commuters,
leisure and business
travellers, and those
who drive for work



A spread of age,
gender and ethnicity



Some have
disabilities

While road diversions are usually well-understood and done 'on autopilot', external factors can complicate things

Diversions are usually a minor frustration, but with the underlying anxiety that they could turn a relatively straightforward, short-distance journey into one more complicated.

In the grand scheme of possible delays, road diversions are not a significant concern. But, diversions were highlighted as a concern for many weeks prior to this task being assigned.

External factors can make road diversions particularly difficult:

- **tiredness** – hindering drivers' ability to follow signage 'on autopilot'
- **adverse weather** – reducing visibility of signs and turn-off points
- **unlit sections of road** – adding anxiety and reducing visibility overall.

I've regularly experienced 'A' road and motorway diversions, seldom knowing about them beforehand. I remember a dreadful diversion between the M6 which took you around the houses and onto the M40 after going back in yourself a few dozen times.

Male, 33, East of England

I am not very familiar with the diversion signs above and would not know what they mean, I would rely on my navigation to get me to my destination. I have three children under seven years old, so if a diversion was going to add a significant amount of time to our journey that would be a problem if the diversion took us away from where we planned to stop to take the children to the toilet or getting something to eat.

Female, 40, South East



While the short-term navigation instructions are clear, more work could be done on broader information needs

- **Signs often leave respondents with unanswered questions including:**
 - Where is the diversion going through, and what impact will this have on my journey time?
 - When will I make it back onto my main route?
- **Sat-Nav information can fall short here.** The navigation aid does not know how long the diversion will last. Its alternative routes (and projected journey time) are based on assumptions that the diversion may not allow for.

One HGV driver was pleased that the signs always divert traffic to roads that are suitable for all vehicles, including lorries.

Those with health conditions did not see any qualitative differences in their experience of diversions.

I've experienced a number of diversions, the most inconvenient one I had was a one hour diversion from the A1 between Peterborough and Grantham, totaling our journey to six hours. I never know that diversions are happening until we start the journey and then we just go with it. The most frustrating is when the routes are so far away from the destination.

Female, 32, South East

It was a couple of years ago and I was driving up to deliver kit for an exhibition in Edinburgh and I set off late that night and the diversion I experienced was very poorly signposted as there was a diamond route and a triangle route. It was very easy to make a split second mistake and end up going around the diversion again and that's exactly what I did.

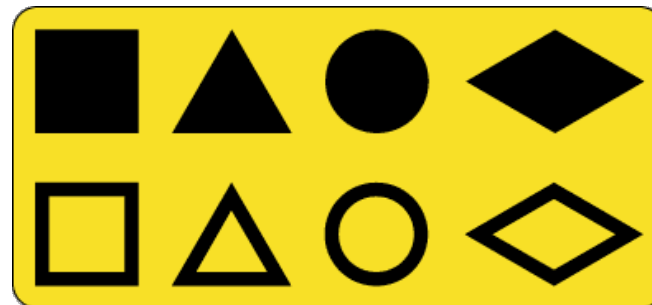
Male, 39, South East



Almost universally, the road community would trust their Sat-Nav systems over road signs

- Awareness of exactly what the different symbols mean was low, and in an either/or scenario most respondents would take the Sat-Nav's direction even if it differed from the signs.
 - One respondent had a bad experience in trusting the Sat-Nav and ended up in a country lane with other drivers who had made the same error.
 - It is usually seen as sufficient to follow any sign marked 'Diversion' and hope that the diversion ends soon. The symbols can come across as cryptic and unclear.

Road signs shown to the community:



Yes, I know about diversion symbols on signs; what they mean, and how to follow them. I do trust those signs now. I used to think I could find a better alternative but sometimes that can lead to an even longer and slower journey, as once my Sat-Nav gave me and quite a few other people directions along a single lane country track that ran parallel with the M25. It became gridlocked and we were stuck there for hours in the dark. A lot of reversing and tempers fraying. Not good for folks with kids, elderly passengers, or high blood pressure...

Female, 58, South East

I thought I knew all the symbols until you showed me these ones. I'd always trust my Sat-Nav over these since Waze is so trustworthy and updated in real time by other drivers.

Male, 40, South East



Our community highlighted several instances of difficulties with diverted routes

Some examples of these:

- A diversion taking a respondent 'round the houses' of local roads or onto motorways.
- Diversions taking place at night when respondents are tired make it difficult to follow signs 'to the letter'.
- Respondents travelling in circles trying to find a sign that would put them back on track.
- A respondent experiencing a diversion at the entry point to an 'A' road, leaving them unsure how to find their way onto the 'A' road itself.

I actually have no clue what the symbols mean. I will usually just see the word 'diversion' and that will be enough for me but it probably would be helpful to understand what they mean. I'm not sure I would completely trust the signs, especially the ones that are on existing direction signposts. I do worry about how often they are actually updated whereas if you see diversions close to the work happening you know that the people working on the road will have put up those signs when they arrived.

Female, 35, North West

The great thing about these permanent diversion signage on and around motorways is that they will always take you to the next junction or final destination, on safe roads for all vehicles (where possible as sometimes HGVs have a secondary diversion) and if closed or congested, you can still follow diversion symbols as they daisy chain across the motorway.

Male, 63, Lorry Driver

