

Anthony Smith
Chief Executive
Transport Focus
Albany House
Ground floor west
86 Petty France
London
SW1H 9EA

By email

18 June 2021

Dear Anthony

Meeting summer demand and keeping road users informed

Thank you for your letter dated 16 June on the above topic within which you requested that I provide you with information regarding how we maintain a safe environment at our MSAs and provide information for road users during what is likely to be a period of exceptionally high demand.

Firstly, I would like to assure you that we are, and have been for some time, planning how best to ensure we provide a safe and comfortable environment for all road users during the summer period and how we do so on the assumption that, regardless of subsequent government guidance on social distancing and Covid security, our visitors are likely to continue to have concerns about Covid-19.

We have identified the MSAs that are likely to experience the most significant levels of demand, namely those on tourist routes for example the M5 and M27. We have already installed, or will shortly install, a range of external facilities such as toilets and food and beverage service points to ensure that we increase our capacity to cope with the increased demand and that those facilities can be accessed without the need to enter the amenity building. In addition, we have provided those MSAs with additional materials and training to enable them to marshal the car parking and building flows to safely maximise the utilisation of those facilities and to increase the throughput capacity. We have also invested in providing a large amount of external seating across the estate which is deployed in safe areas in the vicinity of the amenity building. All sites are fully briefed on their individual building capacities, and these will be updated in line with government guidance and will be adhered to at all times. In addition, we have invested heavily in recent years in the provision of drive thru services and have 24 coffee drive thrus and one QSR drive thru which enable those who do not need to stop but simply require food or beverage to purchase and depart the site very efficiently which assists in freeing up capacity for those that need to take a break. Finally, we have also been investing in technology at each site enabling customers to order via apps ahead of arrival (assuming it is safe to do so) or via order entry screens in the building, this too increases throughput and reduces the time customers need to spend in the main amenity building.

As it pertains to keeping road users informed of how busy individual MSAs are at any given time, we would always advocate that road users plan their journey in advance and that they reference Google Maps which shows the busiest periods at each MSA (see Fig.1 below). In addition, we are working hard to upgrade our door counter systems such that we will enable us to monitor, in real time, the footfall of each location – we expect this work to be completed within the next two weeks. We intend to use this information to inform our regular contact with HE and Police and to alert them to any locations where we anticipate major congestion and would hope that the VMS can be used to provide live updates to road users as appropriate (although this is clearly dependent on HE). We hope to also show this live data on our website if it is technically possible for us to do so.

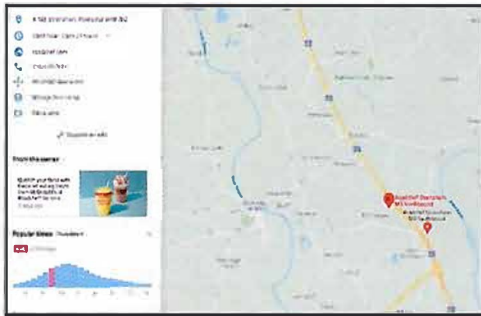


Fig. 1

We are obviously accustomed to high levels of traffic during the summer, especially at our M5 sites, but given the additional demand anticipated this year for all of the reasons you have stated, we have both increased capacity and amended operational plans to seek to ensure we are able to cope with expected record visitor numbers and we have invested close to £1 million in those capacity and Covid Secure enhancements to ensure the safety of road users and our employees.

We are closely monitoring government guidance as it evolves and will ensure we operate our facilities in compliance with the then current guidance and we are counting on the co-operation of HE and motorway Police in the event that demand significantly outstrips our enhanced capacity. Whilst we are confident that our highly experienced site management teams, together with the preparation we have completed, will enable us to deliver a safe and relaxing experience even in the event of record visitor numbers, we will keep in regular contact with HE and Police if we believe that excessive visitors may raise any safety concerns and I would hope that, with their assistance (for example using the VMS or providing advanced warning of congestion at sites using their mobile units), we can avoid any major issues arising.

I would be more than happy to discuss our plans with you at any time and share more details on a site-specific basis with you, but I can assure you that we take our role in ensuring the safety of road users very seriously and have invested significantly in preparing for record levels of demand. We also remain open to any new ideas that Transport Focus or HE might have specifically as it pertains to the provision of information to road users.

I hope that the information provided proves useful and remain at your disposal to discuss the matter further should you wish to do so.

Yours sincerely

Mark Fox
Chief Executive