

Rt Hon Grants Shapps MP
Secretary of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR



27th January 2020

Dear Secretary of State

As you well know, there are concerns about safety on smart motorways, particularly in relation to all-lane running (ALR). These have been raised by the Transport Select Committee, families of people killed, organisations such as the AA and RAC, and by sections of the media. PACTS has followed these matters closely.

The M42 managed motorway trials, which established the safety case for use of the hard shoulder as a running lane, tested peak-hour use of the hard shoulder at 40mph, with emergency refuges spaced at 500m. This is quite different to the current model of permanent all-lane running at 70mph with wider spacing of emergency refuges.

We note the statements by Highways England chief executive Jim O’Sullivan to the Transport Select Committee that smart motorways are as safe, if not safer, than conventional motorways. We have no reason to doubt his word. One of the important findings of the smart motorway programme is just how many stops occur on the hard shoulder of conventional motorways for non-emergency reasons and often they result in a collision or worse. However, this is not something readily understood by the public who must also feel safe – statistics do not reassure them. Moreover, it is not acceptable to place some road users in significantly more danger even if there are overall safety benefits.

Evaluating safety can be a complex matter. We welcome the review of Highways England’s data by your Department. Unlike UK rail and aviation, there is no independent safety regulator for the road network or Highways England.

PACTS supports Highways England’s vision that no one should be harmed while traveling or working on the strategic road network. Every death is tragic and should be prevented wherever possible. For smart motorways we wish to see:

- More frequent spacing of emergency refuges
- Rapid introduction of stopped vehicle detection
- More education for drivers on the operation of smart motorways, red-X signals and what to do in the event of a breakdown or collision
- Better enforcement of red-X signals
- More education for drivers on the hazards of stopping on the hard shoulder.

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There has been considerable speculation that you will shortly announce additional safety requirements for smart motorways, probably including the measures that we state above. This would be welcomed by PACTS. It is vital, however, that these are funded by additional government support or from the RIS major schemes funding and not from Highways England's safety budgets. Motorways, while not safe enough, are our safest roads and funds for smart motorways must not be diverted from schemes on other parts of the SRN which have much higher casualty rates.

We support the recommendation from Highways England not to implement schemes with dynamic (i.e. part-time) use of the hard shoulder. This is evidently confusing for drivers and likely to lead to collisions. I believe you support this too.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David G Davies', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David G Davies
Executive Director
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