



## Smart Motorways

### QSD on 13 February 2020

On 13 February 2020, Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Conservative) is due to ask Her Majesty's Government "what assessment they have made of the safety of smart motorways and what plans they have to review their policy towards them".

#### Summary

- A '[smart motorway](#)' is a section of motorway that uses traffic management methods to increase capacity and reduce congestion in busy areas. For example, smart motorways use technology to: change the speed limit to smooth traffic flow; activate warning signs to alert drivers to traffic jams and hazards; and close lanes, for example, to allow emergency vehicles access. The first smart motorway opened on the M42 motorway in 2006.
- Highways England has estimated that congestion on the motorway and the major road network in England [costs](#) £2 billion every year, with 25 percent of congestion resulting from incidents.
- In October 2019, the Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps, [announced](#) that the Government would be conducting a review into smart motorway safety, amid concerns that people were dying on them. He stated that the Department for Transport would lead the review, which would include a stocktake of [stopped vehicle detection systems](#). These systems alert operators to vehicles that have stopped on any stretch of road.
- In January 2020, a freedom of information request by BBC Panorama to Highways England [revealed](#) that 38 people had died on smart motorways in the last five years. The figures also revealed that on one section of the M25 motorway, the number of near-misses had increased since the hard shoulder was removed in April 2014 from 72 in 2014 to 1,485 in 2019.
- On 30 January 2020, in response to an oral question, Grant Shapps [stated](#) that the M20 and other stretches of road will not be opened as smart motorways as planned until the Government knows the outcome of the department's review.
- In the same month, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Roadside Rescue and Recovery published a report into all lane running motorways; a type of smart motorway that permanently removes the hard shoulder and converts it into a running lane. The group concluded that the roll-out of these smart motorways should be halted until safety measures are put in place on all existing stretches of all lane running motorways. This includes retrofitting smart motorways with stopped vehicle detection systems.

Eren Waitzman | 6 February 2020

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## Further Information

- Highways England, '[Smart Motorways: Our Current Position](#)', 29 January 2020; and '[Safety on Smart Motorways](#)', 3 September 2019

*Statement outlining Highways England's position on smart motorways, following recent commentary by the media on the subject; and a statement about the safety performance of smart motorways.*

- Department for Transport, '[The Road Safety Statement 2019: A Lifetime of Road Safety](#)', 19 July 2019, pp 49–50

*Excerpt from the department's two-year action plan for addressing road safety issues. In the action plan, the department announces that Highways England will be installing additional emergency areas on the M25; and from 2020, reducing the maximum spacing of emergency areas on smart motorways from 1.5 miles to 1 mile.*

- Highways England, '[Smart Motorways](#)', accessed 5 February 2020; and '[How to Drive on a Smart Motorway](#)', updated 24 July 2019

*Summary of the benefits of smart motorways in England; and guidance for drivers detailing how to safely drive on a smart motorway. It includes information on what to do in an emergency situation.*

- All-Party Parliamentary Group for Roadside Rescue and Recovery, *All Lane Running Inquiry*, January 2020, pp 3–6

*Conclusions and recommendations from a report into all lane running motorways. Recommendations include halting the roll-out of smart motorways until additional emergency refuge areas are retrofitted.*

- House of Commons Transport Committee, *All Lane Running*, 30 June 2016, HC 63 of session 2016–17, p 3 and pp 26–8; and *Government Response*, 29 September 2016, HC 654 of session 2016–17, pp 6–17

*Summary, conclusions, and recommendations from a report examining all lane running motorways. In its conclusions, the committee contended that there were safety concerns regarding these motorways. It called on the then Government to immediately halt the roll-out of such schemes and replace them with schemes that incorporate the temporary use of the hard shoulder, amongst other measures. In its response, the Government stated that it did not agree with this recommendation. It also noted that Highways England had committed to review emergency refuge area spacing as part of a strategy to reduce the frequency and risks associated with live lane stops.*

## Parliamentary Debate and Questions

- [Oral Question on 'Road Safety'](#), HC Hansard, 30 January 2020, cols 905–7
- [Debate on 'All-Lane Running Motorways'](#), HC Hansard, 22 January 2020, cols 106–14WH
- A selection of written questions from both Houses: [HL563](#) (28 January 2020); [5402](#) (27 January 2020); [3774](#) (30 October 2019); [992](#) (25 October 2019); [1677](#) (25 October 2019); and [HL17715](#) (9 September 2019).

## Press Articles and Comment

- Steve Bird, '[The Tragedies That Forced the Government to Act on Smart Motorways](#)', *Telegraph* (£), 1 February 2020
- Rob Davies, '[Rollout of Smart Motorways Put on Hold Amid Safety Concerns](#)', *Guardian*, 30 January 2020
- BBC News, '[38 Killed on Smart Motorways in Last Five Years](#)', 26 January 2020
- BBC News, '[MP Sarah Champion Calls For End of 'Smart Motorways'](#)', 22 January 2020
- RAC, '[68 Percent of Drivers Say Smart Motorways Compromise Safety](#)', 29 November 2019
- Ben Quinn, '[AA Sounds Safety Warning Over Smart Motorways](#)', *Guardian*, 8 April 2019