

Update on M4 Junctions 3 to 12 Motorway Upgrade

I have received the enclosed update from National Highways:

Dear Sir John,

M4 Junctions 3 to 12 motorway upgrade update

I am writing to update you on progress on the M4 Junctions 3 to 12 motorway upgrade project, part of which runs through your constituency, and to outline a recent milestone in the delivery of the scheme.

Since July 2018, we have been constructing four lanes in each direction between junctions 3 and 12 of the M4 motorway, with upgraded technology to make journeys more reliable.

Between Junctions 8/9 (Maidenhead) and 12 (Theale) all temporary restrictions have now been removed and this section of the M4 motorway upgrade is finished.

The key changes drivers will see are as follows:

- The M4 between junctions 8/9 and 12 is now operating at the national speed limit.
- There will be variable speed limits at certain times to smooth out traffic and tackle frustrating stop-start congestion.
- The hard shoulder has been converted to a new fourth traffic lane in each direction, boosting capacity by a third on this vital route between London, the south west and Wales.
- Between junctions 8/9 and 12, if drivers get into difficulty, they will be able to use one of 29 places to stop in an emergency, which include emergency areas.

The new radar Stopped Vehicle Detection (SVD) technology identifies a stopped vehicle, typically within 20 seconds, and provides an alert to our control room. At the same time, it can also automatically display a 'report of obstruction' message to warn oncoming drivers of a stopped vehicle ahead. Our operators then set a Red X sign to close one or more lanes, adjust speed limits and deploy traffic officers.

When the entire upgrade project between junction 3 and 12 is fully completed, there will be places to stop in an emergency approximately every 1.3 miles.

In October 2019, the Secretary of State for Transport asked the Department to carry out an evidence stocktake to gather the facts on the safety of smart motorways and make recommendations. A wide range of data was considered, and conclusions drawn on what the evidence told us about the safety of this type of motorway. This work is set out in the 2020 Evidence Stocktake and Action

Plan:

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

We've been working with the Department for Transport to implement the actions from the stocktake, and in April of this year we published the Smart Motorways Stocktake first year progress report, setting out our progress in delivering the 2020 Action Plan, the latest evidence on the safety of smart motorways, and commitments we have made to accelerate measures.

On 2 November 2021 the Transport Select Committee (TSC) published the findings of its inquiry into the rollout and safety of smart motorways. We are absolutely committed to making smart motorways as safe as possible and we welcome the TSC's scrutiny. We are considering the inquiry's findings and recommendations in detail and working with the DfT to support them in the response that they will be making to the report.

Activity is continuing between junctions 3 and 8/9. Inevitably, a scheme of this size and complexity does have an impact on local residents and road users and we do our utmost to minimise this. We have a community relations team that deals with correspondence from residents and we liaise regularly with the local authority to discuss any issues of concern.

We continue to engage with local communities through parish councils, site visits, letters, newsletters and email updates. This will include notifications and dissemination of information on forthcoming work and the motorway closures. The latest information can be found on the project website at: <https://www.nationalhighways.co.uk/m4j3to12>.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Grant

Delivery Director, M4 Junctions 3 to 12 motorway upgrade

Why I will vote against the government's CV 19 law

I was glad to see the government yesterday reported cases in hospital and deaths from CV19 have been falling. It seems that Plan A, persuade most people to get the vaccine, is working. So why the need for some new measures?

The Secretary of State told us that though there are only a few hundred Omicron cases in the U.K. they guess there are in practice 10,000 already. If that is so then the lower hospital cases is even more significant. They say Omicron cases are doubling quickly, but most people with it are not seriously ill or have no symptoms.

I disagree that people should have to show vaccination proof to go to an event or a night club. I disagree with people being told to work from home. People now have three options to manage their risk of catching covid. They can take a vaccine which greatly cuts the chances of getting a serious version of it. They can decide to avoid crowded places and observe prudent distancing in what they do. They can agree homeworking with their employer where that works for both parties. They can decide to take the risk, as we do for most other diseases that we can catch from other people.

It is time to move on from worry about the virus. Trust people to make their own decisions about how to handle the risk.

[Saving lives in the Channel](#)

The government wants to stop people trafficking and smuggling from France. Its Border Force has been unable to carry out the Home Secretary's wishes and deter or turn back the small boats. The government is now legislating to strengthen its powers to send people back who do not qualify as asylum seekers.

I sponsored Bill Cash's amendment to the Bill. We were worried that U.K. courts might refuse to implement the law, claiming that European Human Rights or the UN migrant Convention prevented them from doing so. We proposed a simple amendment to clarify that the U.K. law means what it says notwithstanding any ECHR or UN interpretations.

The government refused to accept the amendment and Opposition parties were against it. The government promised to bring forward proposals to amend the Human Rights laws urgently, implying they agreed with our fears concerning this Bill.

It is a pity they did not just accept the amendment. The danger now is the courts will seek to undermine government borders policy yet again.

[My question to the Minister at Justice and the Home Office querying how the Government's Nationality and Borders](#)

Bill, unamended, would tackle people smuggling.

John Redwood:

If the legislation is carried in the way the [Minister](#) wishes, what impact will it have on the awful, vile trade through small boats? Will it stop it? Is there a danger that the UK courts will overturn the intent?

Tom Pursglove, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Ministry of Justice and Home Office):

The measures in the Bill are significant. We have recognised—the Home Secretary has consistently recognised this and I recognise it as the [Minister](#) responsible for tackling illegal immigration—that the asylum system in this country is currently broken. The length of time it takes to process claims is unacceptable and we need to improve the situation. The Government's intention is clearly stated: to improve the way we process claims. We expect individuals who seek to claim asylum in this country to comply with the requirements, but of course safety nets are in place, for good reasons, so that it will be taken appropriately into account if people cannot meet the deadlines. We believe that progressing on the basis of processing claims more quickly and removing those with no right to be here will make quite a significant difference. Importantly, it is also about the work that we do not just with our nearest neighbours in, for example, France and Belgium—that collaboration is important and is delivering results, and we want to secure a returns agreement that will help to build on that—but further upstream in removing those with no right to be here back to source countries.

My Question to the Minister for Health asking what reassessment he has made of the cost of the reorganisation of clinical commissioning groups

John Redwood:

To ask the [Secretary of State](#) for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the cost of the reorganisation of clinical commissioning groups.

Edward Argar, Minister of State (Department of Health and Social Care):

There has been no specific assessment. [NHS England](#) and [NHS Improvement](#) are providing guidance and support during the abolition of clinical commissioning groups and the establishment of integrated care boards. NHS England and NHS Improvement are managing changes required to adapt software and processes managed by third-party suppliers and we expect these costs to be absorbed within NHS England's budgets.