

Construction milestone for M56 upgrade

The four-mile section of motorway between junction 6 at Hale and junction 8 at Bowdon is one of the busiest in the North West – carrying 100,000 vehicles a day as part of the important corridor between Manchester and Manchester Airport and the Midlands.

As part of the project, an extra running lane will be added to both the westbound and eastbound carriageways to tackle congestion and provide more reliable journeys for city centre commuters and businesses as well as tourists and workers using the airport. Technology will also be installed to manage vehicles through the upgraded motorway – providing smoother journeys – and four emergency areas will provide refuge in the event of break downs or other emergencies.

Highways England's preparations for the £85 million upgrade started in the spring but the main construction work will get underway at the end of the month with traffic management along the motorway for the first time. A contraflow system will be in operation from the start – helping to reduce the number of carriageway or full motorway closures needed during construction.

Highways England project manager Clare Bond said:

The start of the main construction work is a significant milestone for this project which will ease congestion and make journeys more reliable once it opens to drivers in 2022.

This is one of the busiest sections of motorway in the North West but using the contraflow system during construction will allow us to keep all the motorway lanes open during the day with occasional overnight lane and carriageway closures.

The eastbound hard shoulder will be converted into a running lane first with work switching to the westbound hard shoulder late next spring, followed by construction of a concrete central reservation barrier between the three junctions from September. Systems installation and testing after that should see the smart motorway to open to traffic by spring 2022 at the latest.

In detail, the work involves:

- Providing new electronic information signs, signals and CCTV cameras on overhead gantries. These will show variable mandatory speed limits and manage traffic flow and incidents
- Installing remotely-operated temporary traffic management signs along the entire route to aid traffic management during carriageway closures due to incidents or routine maintenance
- Constructing four new emergency areas to provide drivers with safety and rescue areas following an incident or breakdown
- Erecting new emergency roadside telephones in each emergency area to

provide a direct, location-pinpointing connection to the regional operations centre near Warrington

- Replacing the steel safety barrier in the central reservation with a new concrete barrier to help increase safety
- Resurfacing lanes with new low-noise surfacing.

Highways England is working closely colleagues on other projects in the area such as the M6 Junction 19 roundabout scheme and M62 junction 10 to 12 upgrade, as well as with key stakeholders like the Manchester Airport Group (MAG), local football clubs and shopping centres, to coordinate and plan the overnight closures and other traffic management.

To install the contraflow there will be one full, 10pm to 6am, closure of the eastbound carriageway on Friday 13 November. This will be followed on Monday 23 November by a single overnight closure of the westbound carriageway. The outside lane of the eastbound carriageway will operate in lane three of the westbound carriageway – with westbound traffic using the remaining two westbound lanes and hard shoulder. A speed limit of 50mph will operate through the roadworks backed by average speed cameras.

Major motorway upgrades in the region are supporting the Northern Powerhouse agenda to improve connectivity and provide the infrastructure to support future jobs and housing.

As well as tackling current congestion, the upgrade will help support future homes and jobs in the area – including the Airport City project bordering the motorway. It will also complement other major improvements along the important Midland to Manchester corridor including motorway upgrades along the M6 in Staffordshire and Cheshire, the M6 junction 19 roundabout improvement and the new A556 Knutsford to Bowdon bypass.

More information, including an option to sign up for regular project updates by email, is available on the [M56 project website](#).

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.