

Highways England keeping a watchful eye on motorway upgrade

The use of a drone means Highways England can view progress in 3D quality across a much larger area. This approach reduces the amount of lane closures that teams carrying out upgrade work usually require, in turn reducing disruption to motorists.

Once footage is downloaded, specialists can use the imagery to see detailed progress on gantries, foundations and other structures. This information can then be used to inform decisions around planned closures and to help plan future work and equipment required.

The technology is currently in use on the multi-million pound upgrade of the M6 between junctions 2 and 4 near Coventry and has also been used on the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon upgrade taking place in the East of England.

Highways England Drone Footage

Highways England Smart Motorway sponsor Peter Smith said:

Safety is our top priority and we constantly pioneer ways of using new technology to keep people safe while we do this work.

The drone is a fantastic piece of kit that provides us with detailed insight into scheme progress across a large area of the works in a much quicker and efficient way.

It surveys up to 10km in a single day and then creates an accurate 3D model of the works in just one hour. Ordinarily, inspections by road workers require lane closures for safety reasons and can take up to several days. By using the drone we are able to reduce lane closures because we can scan a much larger area in a quicker period of time.

Teams working on the M6 upgrade are making good progress and have so far notched up more than 1.1 million hours.

A new concrete central reservation barrier is currently being installed that prevents traffic from crossing to the opposite side of the carriageway.

Once complete, the new-look stretch of the M6 will feature:

- three controlled motorway lanes, retaining the hard shoulder from junctions 3a to 4 where the motorway will tie into the existing controlled motorway
- a four-lane smart motorway between junctions 2 to 3a with a hard shoulder next to the current 'climbing lane' travelling eastbound

- installation of new electronic information signs and signals, radar detection and CCTV cameras – these will be used to vary speed limits which allow management of traffic flow and incidents
- nine emergency areas to use in place of the hard shoulder
- improved central reserve barrier made of concrete to improve safety
- two new noise barriers at Potter's Green and Goodyers End and low noise surfacing on the road

Elsewhere, Highways England has recently completed a £265 million project to add extra lanes and new technology to a 19-mile stretch of the motorway between Crewe and Knutsford – the most significant change since the M6 first opened in Cheshire in 1963.

A fourth lane has been introduced in each direction and a total of 258 electronic signs, 104 traffic sensors and 70 CCTV cameras will help tackle congestion and improve journey times for around 120,000 drivers every day.

The upgrade is the first of four smart motorway schemes to be finished that will increase the M6's capacity by a third on 60 miles of the motorway between Coventry and Wigan.

And there's also good news for motorists in North Tyneside with more than 80,000 drivers a day are experiencing safer and smoother journeys thanks to the opening of the North East's first ever triple decker junction.

The £75 million Highways England Coast Road scheme has been opened on time and traffic is now able to use the new section of road. This means that drivers will no longer have to negotiate the roundabout and can continue straight on along the A19.

All pilots are CAA approved and operate with legal guidelines.

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.