

Letter from National Highways

Please find below the letter that I recently received from National Highways:

15 December 2023

Dear John Redwood

National emergency area retrofit – M4 junctions J10-12

I am writing today to update you on the delivery of additional emergency areas on existing smart motorways, and to explain what this means for the stretch of the M4 in Berkshire.

In April, the Prime Minister announced the cancellation of new smart motorway schemes and confirmed the government and National Highways would continue to invest £900 million in further safety improvements on existing smart motorways. This includes continued delivery of our commitments made in response to the recommendations of Parliament's Transport Select Committee report [*The roll out and safety of smart motorways*](#).

While our motorways are among the safest in the world, we recognise that some people have concerns about being able to find a safe place to stop in an emergency

on all lane running (ALR) motorways where the hard shoulder has been converted to a running lane, such as the stretch of the M4 between Heston and Reading. We have listened to those concerns and have been developing a £390 million programme to roll out more emergency areas on ALR motorways, in operation and construction.

Emergency areas provide a place to stop in an emergency if drivers cannot exit the motorway or stop at a motorway service area. They are marked by blue signs featuring an orange SOS telephone symbol. Each is coloured orange and is around the same length as a football pitch. They are positioned at regular intervals and have phones linked directly to our control rooms.

In comparison to January 2022, our emergency area retrofit programme will see around 50% more emergency areas across the entire all lane running network, giving drivers added reassurance. It's a programme we'll be working on in phases, with the M4 having new areas added in the coming months. We published this information to our website today

<https://nationalhighways.co.uk/emergency-areas>.

We will write to you again before we start work on the M4, to clarify how we will manage the works, particularly in light of other work nearby, and how we will be briefing those living near to the works.

Beyond the M4, our current retrofit programme will see more emergency areas added on the M25, M5, M3, M20, M27 and the M1. Retrofitting more emergency areas across the remainder of ALR motorways, is being considered as part of

formulating the third road investment strategy. This will be based on evidence of the benefits of introducing them at initial locations across the network, and whether the additional emergency areas help drivers to feel safer.

This investment in new emergency areas, along with extra technology like stopped vehicle detection, better and more signposting of emergency areas, our public awareness campaigns promoting more information about smart motorways, the updated Highway Code and more breakdown and safety advice such as <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/road-safety/breakdowns> all aims to help road users feel safe and be even safer on our roads.

Through all the work we are doing we are determined to further reduce the number of casualties on our high-speed road network, to improve public confidence in driving on our motorways, and to continue to build and operate one of the safest and best performing road networks in the world.

The safety and confidence of people travelling on England's motorways and major A-roads is National Highways' highest priority. We are determined that everyone using England's motorways continues to benefit from one of the safest and best performing road networks in the world.

I hope this is a helpful update. If you have any questions at all please do not hesitate to contact me, my colleague Felicity Clayton who is leading on the retrofit project

(felicity.clayton@nationalhighways.co.uk) or the project team on EAretrofit@nationalhighways.co.uk

Yours sincerely

Christine Allen

Operations Regional Director for the South East,

National Highways