

Press release: Big changes to motorway upgrades set to improve drivers' journeys

Following feedback from road users, the government company is changing the timing of some of its roadworks. It means that work on projects to add extra lanes and better technology to the M56 near Manchester Airport and the M6 between Warrington and Wigan, which had been due to start this spring, will now start after current major motorway upgrades have been completed.

Highways England has also set out plans to improve how smart motorway projects are carried out on the North West's motorways in the future.

They include changes to the layout of roadworks to reduce the need for overnight diversions and finish schemes sooner. Temporary speed limits will also be increased to 60mph when it is safe for drivers and road workers, and three lanes will be maintained in each direction during the day throughout upgrades.

Mike Bull, Highways England's smart motorways programme manager for the North West, said:

Hundreds of thousands of people across the North West will benefit from a huge investment on the road network over the next few years and we're keen to help keep drivers moving while the upgrades take place.

We've listened to what people have been telling us about roadworks and have decided to reschedule two major schemes, benefitting drivers who use our roads to get to work and businesses who deliver goods across the region. We're committed to the upgrades; we are simply changing the timetable for projects on the M56 and M6.

We're also reviewing how we carry out major upgrades so that we can minimise disruption as much as possible and maintain connections for drivers using the road network.

Highways England is committed to carrying out the biggest upgrade of the North West's motorways in a generation and has already completed major schemes on the M62 and M60, as well as opening a new link road between the M56 and M6, since 2015.

The company has also completed almost half of a smart motorway upgrade on the M6 in Cheshire, opening a fourth lane on both carriageways between Holmes Chapel and Knutsford last month.

The temporary speed limit was increased to 60mph before Christmas while

testing took place on new technology, and variable speed limits have now been introduced up to 70mph to improve the flow of traffic. The entire 19-mile upgrade between Crewe and Knutsford is on schedule to be finished by the end of March.

Work on a major upgrade of the M62 near Warrington is also due to be completed by spring 2020, increasing capacity by a third. The scheme will benefit commuters who had previously faced average speeds as low as 36mph on their way home from work.

A project to upgrade a four-mile-stretch of the M56 near Manchester Airport will now start by spring 2020 after the M62 scheme has been completed, and work will begin as planned this autumn to upgrade another stretch of the M62 between Rochdale and Brighouse in West Yorkshire.

Other major motorway projects, including a scheme on the M6 between Warrington and Wigan, will be staggered to start between 2020 and 2025.

Contraflow roadworks layouts, where one lane is moved onto the opposite carriageway with a temporary barrier between traffic, will also be introduced where possible to cut the duration of schemes.

The change to the road layout will allow bigger construction areas to be created at the side of motorways so that more work can be carried out in one shift. Traffic will also be able to continue to travel in both directions on the motorway when one carriageway is closed for major construction work overnight, reducing the need for diversions.

Get more details on the [North West smart motorway upgrades](#).