

Press release: Highways England working with West Midlands Combined Authority to improve journeys

Traffic officers are to help combat congestion on roads surrounding the M5 Oldbury viaduct as Highways England and the West Midlands Combined Authority join forces to improve journeys.

The two organisations have signed a partnership agreement that involves closer communication and sharing working arrangements to provide better journeys and reduce congestion.

Meanwhile, the Highways England traffic officer service will, for the first time ever, provide additional support to motorists that encounter vehicle breakdowns on key roads near the M5 as part of a 13-month pilot scheme.

The service, which normally only patrols motorways and key trunk roads, will work closely with Sandwell Council as well as West Midlands Police to assist motorists and clear obstructions from incidents to keep traffic flowing in and around the Sandwell area.

Traffic officers will provide additional support to:

- motorists exiting at junction one and travelling northwest on the A41 towards Wednesbury
- motorists exiting at junction two and travelling northwest on A4123 towards the Dudley to Burnt Tree junction, which is six miles from the strategic road network
- motorists when necessary using the A4034, A457 and A4252

Highways England recently started using rapid assistance motorcycles carrying emergency fuel to combat breakdowns and ease congestion on the M5 at Oldbury, while the essential repairs take place. It is the first time fuel bikes have been used by Highways England.

The Oldbury scheme, valued at more than £100 million, includes concrete repairs and waterproofing on the ageing viaduct. It is the largest concrete repair project, by value, ever carried out in Britain.

The partnership agreement was signed by Highways England chief executive, Jim O'Sullivan and West Midlands Mayor, Andy Street.

Mr O'Sullivan said:

We want our customers to experience safer and better journeys.

Working more closely with our partners means our traffic officers can now support those who break down near the main motorway network

while the Oldbury viaduct repair scheme continues.

West Midlands Mayor, Andy Street, said: "It's important that people have confidence that every step is taken to minimise disruption when essential repairs and upgrades take place.

Firstly, this means closer working between the WMCA and Highways England around planning, so that we can ensure these works go as smoothly as possible.

And secondly, measures such as introducing traffic officers to local roads means we can act more quickly when there are breakdowns to clear the way and get traffic flowing.

A huge amount of investment is going into the network in the coming years. This needs to be planned, communicated and managed as well as possible to keep disruption to a minimum. This partnership agreement will help us achieve this.

Sandwell Council's cabinet member for highways and environment Councillor David Hosell, said:

I'm looking forward to seeing Highways England traffic officers on our roads. Anything that will help to keep the traffic moving while work is being done on the viaduct will help commuters and our residents.

To keep the M5 open, a contraflow system is in place with traffic currently using the northbound carriageway and two lanes operating in each direction, along with a 30mph speed limit.

Motorists are reminded to consider using alternative routes while the vital work takes place.

At the link between the M6 and the M5 southbound, one lane leads onto the M5, with three lanes continuing onto the M6, to encourage drivers to take the alternative route around Birmingham.

On the M5 northbound at junction 4a one lane continues onto the M5 through the junction while still providing two lanes to the M42.

The dynamic hard shoulder sections on either side of the M42 and on the M6 are currently being opened much earlier than usual and left on later to see if this helps traffic. The dynamic hard shoulder is used by traffic when the motorway is at its busiest.

Slip roads at junctions 1 and 2 on the M5 are being kept open, to ease effects on the local network.

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.