

Press release: M3 gets first 'orange' smart motorway emergency area

The redesigned emergency area has a highly visible orange road surface and better signs to help improve its visibility make it more obvious to drivers on smart motorways. It is also hoped that it will encourage drivers to only use them in emergency situations.

image of the new style emergency area on the M3

The first of the new emergency areas went live on the M3 near Camberley this morning (Friday 14 July). More upgrades are planned should the trial be successful. This change is part of an ongoing review into the design and spacing of emergency areas on smart motorways that is due to report in the autumn.

Highways England Chief Executive Jim O'Sullivan said:

We know that smart motorways are safe. But we also recognise that drivers need to have confidence when using them and be clear about where they can stop in an emergency.

That is why we are trialling these highly visible new style emergency areas. The bright orange colouring will make them as easy as possible to spot and should also discourage drivers from using them in non-emergency situations.

This is just one of the ways we are helping drivers to understand smart motorways and their benefits. I hope it helps drivers feel more confident about using a smart motorway.

Smart motorways use variable speed limits to manage traffic and tackle frustrating stop-start congestion, new technology to give drivers better information on road conditions ahead and – in smart motorway upgrades delivered since 2004 – convert the hard shoulder into an extra traffic lane. Evidence shows that smart motorways are successfully adding extra capacity, improving journey times and are just as safe as conventional motorways.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

Our roads are some of the safest in the world but we are always looking at making them safer.

Smart motorways are adding extra lanes to our busiest motorways and – as recent evidence shows – reducing the rate of crashes.

We are making emergency refuge areas more visible to ensure

motorists in trouble can easily identify where to stop safely.

The redesigned emergency area supports Highways England's drive to improve awareness of smart motorway driving, including what to do in an emergency and when to use an emergency area. It sits alongside a national TV, radio and social media campaign covering key themes such as not driving in lanes closed by Red X signs, how to stop in an emergency and the importance of carrying out appropriate vehicle checks, like checking fuel levels, before setting out on a journey to avoid unnecessary breakdowns.

If the redesigned emergency areas are successful and drivers find the changes beneficial, more orange emergency areas will be introduced across England's network of smart motorways.

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.