

Press release: Trial of improved smart motorway emergency areas continues

The new look emergency areas have bright orange road surfaces to help improve visibility so they are more obvious to drivers on smart motorways. It is also hoped that it will encourage drivers to only use them in emergency situations.

The first of the new emergency areas went live on the M3 near Camberley in Surrey last month. This change is part of a review into the design and spacing of emergency areas on smart motorways.

The first orange emergency area on the M25 is on the anti-clockwise side, between junctions 25 (Waltham Cross) and 24 (Potters Bar). The remaining 22 emergency areas on the M25 will have the distinctive orange colour added between junctions 23 (Hatfield) to 27 (for the M11) and junctions 5 (interchange with M26) and 7 (for the M23) if the trial is successful.

Highways England Chief Executive Jim O'Sullivan said:

We recognise the public concern about smart motorways and we also believe that changes such as these will help drivers 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.

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.

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.