

Safer roads

A number of people have written to me urging greater road safety. I agree, and have lobbied Ministers with proposals that could help reduce the deaths and serious injuries on our roads. At my recent meeting with the Roads Minister I was impressed by the work she and her department are doing to drive fatalities down further.

In the year to end June 2019 1752 people died on our roads. The figure was considerably reduced by 14% in 2020, but this owes much to the fact that most of us were prevented from driving for pleasure or work for several months of that year. The motorways are the safest roads by far, followed by national strategic routes with dual carriageway capacity and grade separated interchanges. You were 3.5 times more likely to die on an A road than on a motorway. 9 out of the 1752 deaths in 2019 occurred on smart motorways.

The death rate was much lower for car drivers than for most other categories of road user. Car drivers experienced 195 deaths per billion vehicle miles, motorcyclists 5051 deaths, pedestrians 1640 and cyclists 4891 deaths.

Some argue that the new smart motorways are less safe than the older motorways they replace. The Minister assured us the data shows that the smart motorways are one third safer in terms of death rate than the standard motorway. They have far fewer deaths on the hard shoulder or pull ins, which occur on other motorways to a few of the many people who stop for their own comfort or convenience when the hard shoulder is only meant for emergency use. Smart motorways have more capacity which reduces density of traffic and scope for hitting another vehicle. They provide more driver information to warn of motorway conditions to allow reduction of speed where needed. Smart motorways are the safest roads we have, so the more they are rolled out the safer the overall network becomes.

Ministers have agreed to put in more Emergency pull ins in response to public demand, and to improve surveillance to allow early warning of any stopped vehicle. I support more smart motorway capacity to relieve the strains on much less safe A and B roads for through traffic. I will look at A and B roads in a later piece. The M4 one is nearing completion to complement the section of the M3 also converted.