Press release: Red X warning for North West's motorway drivers

Highways England statistics show that around one in 10 drivers in the North West do not take notice when red Xs are used to close lanes, with many waiting until they reach an incident before changing lanes.

Red Xs are displayed on overhead signs to close lanes for several reasons, including an accident or breakdown, debris in the carriageway, or because of a person or animal on the road. Lanes are also closed to help emergency services get through or to provide a safe space for road workers.

Highways England has released new CCTV footage which shows a car narrowly avoiding a collision with a lorry as the driver changes lanes on the M60 near Whitefield.

The vehicle had been travelling along a lane closed by a red X and moved over just seconds before reaching two Highways England traffic officers who were helping the driver of a broken-down car by the central reservation.

Driver risks lorry collision after ignoring Red X

Traffic officer Ben Cookson, 24, is based a Highways England's Milnrow depot and was one of the officers who responded to the incident. He said:

> We'd done everything we could to keep everyone safe by stopping behind the broken-down car with our emergency lights flashing, putting out an incident sign and displaying red Xs to close the lane but there were still drivers leaving it until the last few seconds before pulling in.
>
> It does make you bite your nails when you see something like that and you always have to have one eye on what's going on behind you to stay safe while you're trying to deal with an incident.
>
> My job is to keep the roads moving safely, so I'd urge any drivers who don't take notice of red X signs to think about the impact it would have on their own and other people's lives if they were involved in a collision. Red Xs are always displayed for a reason so it's just not worth the risk of ignoring them.

Ben Cookson – Highways England Traffic Officer

The footage of the driver ignoring a lane closure on the M60, risking a collision with two traffic officers and a stranded driver, was filmed using a CCTV camera inside a Highways England traffic officer vehicle.

It is illegal to ignore a red X sign and the police could issue drivers with

a £100 fine and three points if they are observed driving in a closed lane.

Tips on staying safe on motorways are available on the smart motorways web page.

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.

Press release: Partnership to enable development of derelict Birmingham site

- Homes England has agreed a £7.45million loan from the government's Home Building Fund for the development of 77 homes by Urban Splash and Places for People
- The loan will support the development of the first of 1,150 homes at Port Loop on the edge of Birmingham City Centre
- The longstanding venture of Urban Splash and Places for People has already delivered over 3,000 homes and will deliver phase 1 at Port Loop

The first phase of the Icknield Port Loop scheme, a half mile canal loop within walking distance of the City Centre, will provide a mix of 77 modular, factory built and traditionally constructed homes on this large brownfield site.

The funding will support the partnership Homes England, the government's housing accelerator, has formed with developers Urban Splash and Places for People, to deliver regeneration and create a new community on this key site in Birmingham.

Both partners have extensive experience and a strong focus on building community and are part of the partnership involved in the masterplan for 1,150 new homes across the whole site together with Birmingham City Council and the Canal and Rivers Trust.

Phase 1 of the development will include a new park, improved canal towpath and 77 homes built around shared gardens. In addition to the 37 traditionally built properties, there will be 40 modular homes, which can be customised by

customers. Once constructed, the homes will be craned into place on site, minimising construction time on site and speeding up the build process.

The wider scheme is being coordinated by Urban Splash and Places for People, whose joint venture is working in partnership with the original landowners, Birmingham City Council and Canal & Rivers Trust.

The Communities Secretary, Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, said:

“This Government is committed to making the dream of home ownership a reality for a new generation as we power through to delivering 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s.

“Birmingham’s Port Loop is a great example of how our £4.5 billion Home Building Fund is helping to meet the triple challenge of delivering more, better, faster home construction, as well as revving a strong and prosperous Midlands Engine.”

Ian Martin, Head of Investment in the Midlands for Homes England said:

“The sheer scale of the scheme provides the opportunity to build a whole new community and will be one of the largest regeneration schemes in the Midlands. This will provide a much needed boost to the region’s housing stock, which is exactly what the Home Building Fund was established to do.”

Adam Willetts, speaking on behalf of the partnership, said:

“Port Loop is one of the most exciting regeneration developments in the country and we are delighted to be delivering the first of many homes there. We are also on site creating new public realm space in the form of a one-acre park, as well as progressing our plans for the broader area. We are delighted to receive the support of Homes England for our plans.”

ENDS

For more information contact Kate Hall, Communications Officer at Homes England 0115 852 6900 or 07967 782252 kate.hall@homesengland.gov.uk

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Speech: We must tackle the serious ethical challenges of DNA analysis

I’m here at the Royal Society, perhaps the greatest institution of Enlightenment values in the world.

The Royal Society has supported progressive human endeavour for 350 years, from Wren, through Newton to Einstein and Hawking.

Today, we address a new scientific breakthrough: genomics.

And celebrate the world-leading achievement of the 100,000 Genomes Project.

100,000 whole genomes that have been sequenced to help diagnose and treat rare diseases.

So many families closer to a cure or a treatment.

And I know some of those families are here this morning. Renewed hope. Not feeling alone, but part of a community.

With the knowledge their genetic data has helped others.

That impulse to help others: someone we've never met before, someone we're probably never likely to meet, caring about the fate of a stranger.

That inspires me.

I talk a lot, as Health Secretary, about the need to harness technology to improve and save lives.

This past week, that's been brought directly home to me.

Last week I took part in a different genomic exercise – a predictive polygenic risk test.

I wanted to find out whether I was at high risk of any diseases, and how it would make me feel.

I was really looking forward to it. The process was simple and easy: spit in a tube, send it off. I waited a couple of weeks while my sample was analysed by a team at Oxford University.

On Friday, I got the results. And I have to admit, I started to feel pretty nervous.

It struck me that I was about to find out how likely I am to get 16 serious diseases.

I'd already chosen only to get tested for diseases I could do something about.

Even so, it's a big moment.

First, they told me the good news. For most of the diseases, my risk was below average.

I'm particularly lucky with heart disease.

I'm in the 3% of the population with the lowest genetic risk. Maybe that's why Grannie lived to 103.

Then the bad news. The test also showed that, despite no family history, I'm

in the worst 20% for prostate cancer.

I have around a 50% higher risk than average.

I was obviously worried when I was first told this.

But while it’s not good news, it’s good news to have.

Death from prostate cancer is more treatable if diagnosed early.

But prostate cancer can be a silent killer, and tragically, so many men don’t find out until it’s too late.

But it doesn’t have to be.

It may sound weird but I’m now absolutely delighted.

Thank God for genomics!

I’ve already booked a blood test, and obviously I’ll be on alert as I get older.

I’m going to make certain I don’t miss any screening appointments in the future.

I also found out an important lesson: it really matters how the results are presented.

You need an expert to help you make sense of the data, and you need a clinician to tell you what it means medically.

And the reason it’s so important is that predictive genomics is not about absolutes. It’s about risk factors. And your genes are only one part, and usually not even the biggest part, of the risk.

Even more important, we’ve got to be crystal clear about the different role, different science and different ethics between predictive, polygenic tests like this and diagnostic whole genome sequencing.

I believe both have a huge role to play in the future of healthcare, but they are very different.

Predictive testing has big implications for screening: genomics can make cancer screening more targeted and more effective.

By using predictive testing we can help people at higher risk earlier.

I see it as a game-changer for cancer screening in the NHS, and I’m determined that we harness this technology to save lives.

So for me, it’s personal that we’re writing the first National Genomics Healthcare Strategy, which my brilliant Lords Minister, Baroness Blackwood, is developing.

I’m delighted Nicola has consented to my sharing her story.

Because Nicola’s life has been changed by genomics too, in a different way to mine.

Nicola has the rare disease Ehlers Danlos. But she wasn’t diagnosed for 30 years, going through test after invasive test from childhood into adulthood, being referred to doctors who each tried to do their best, but without much success.

Until finally, she was referred to a neurologist, with experience of EDS, who recognised the symptoms and was able to diagnose her.

Today, with whole genome sequencing Nicola could have been diagnosed within a couple of weeks.

Her story shows the power of the other type of genomics.

For rare diseases, whole genome sequencing is life-changing because it is a diagnostic test of absolute certainty, and early diagnosis can have a massive, immediate impact on improving someone’s chances.

So many people have felt there’s no way forward if they have a rare disease. That’s why whole genome sequencing has been so revolutionary – and it holds the key to unlock new cures and treatments.

Whole genome sequencing raises other, new ethical questions.

Imagine you discover you have a single gene disease that can be inherited.

Imagine the impact not just on that person but their children.

The positive potential on people’s lives is massive.

But the sensitivity of that information is so acute.

To make all this happen, there are 3 areas I want to address today, each vital to success.

First, rolling out the science.

I’m very proud we lead the world in genome technology.

This year we’ve started our Genomic Medicine Service within the NHS, and we have a new ambition of sequencing one million whole genomes, and 5 million partial genome tests like the one I’ve had done.

Our science budgets are growing, and rightly so.

And we’ve got to get the data rules right.

After all, genomic sequencing is really just revolutionary amounts of data.

It’s why I’m so frustrated at data blockage.

We can’t currently test for all cancers, because too often, the data is locked away.

Sometimes there are good ethical or scientific reasons, and strong privacy rules are vital.

But it’s outrageous that too often, anonymised data, paid for by taxpayers, donated by the public, can’t be used for research.

We will unlock that data because we know it saves lives.

Second, getting the ethics right.

Understanding the human genome raises profound new ethical questions, and we need to get the ethical rules right, both for diagnostic and predictive genomics, and even more so when it comes to the emerging science of editing the human genome.

Understanding our genetic code also raises issues around privacy and consent.

We’ve already made some progress here, when in October we updated the Code on Genetic Testing and Insurance to ensure people don’t wrongly have to disclose their genomic data when they take out life insurance.

For diagnostic genomics, the area most in need of ethical rules is how, and with whom, information is shared.

When it comes to editing the human genome, that raises major new ethical questions.

I don’t believe in a blanket ban on genome editing research.

Not when it offers the hope of tackling terrible genetic diseases.

But I fully understand, and recognise the real and genuine concerns and fears, that people have, and we must put in place an ethical framework to govern it.

These are just some of the vital ethical questions that we need to address together as a society.

After all, the reason we care about the science is so we can improve and save lives.

Science is founded on the noble Enlightenment principle of progress driven by rational inquiry and objective reality.

But we need to take people with us.

Proving something scientifically true is not the same as proving to people that it’s a good thing.

We must listen to concerns.

Understand rational, and sometimes irrational, fears.

We need a clear framework so that we, as a society, can make active choices over how the science is used.

I think our ability to do that in this country is one of our hidden strengths.

We often talk about how we are world-leading because of our universities, our open, outward-looking culture, our environment for enterprise.

But we are also world-leading in developing the ethical framework within which science can be applied with confidence.

And we build the institutions that make it real.

We reject the laissez-faire approach of some, and the authoritarian instincts of others.

Instead, we apply liberal values: open, enquiring yet sceptical, and with a firm focus on the benefit of mankind.

For Britain, ethics is a competitive advantage.

That is how Britain has forged our leadership role in so many areas of innovative science over the years, and we must do so once again.

The third thing we need to get right is operational.

I'm delighted we are taking up genomics in the NHS. The new Genomic Medicine Service is a world first.

And I'm very excited that the new £100 million children's hospital we're building in Cambridge will mean we can do even more to identify and treat children with rare diseases through whole genome sequencing.

But there's more to do.

How do we train up doctors and nurses so they understand genetic data, including these new predictive tests, and are able to explain it in a way that helps people make the best decisions?

And we can't just ignore it.

After all, thousands of people are already taking predictive tests, and many are now turning up at their GP surgery with their results in hand.

We need to harness the power of this new technology to diagnose and prevent illness, and that means using it right.

Some people say we shouldn't encourage the 'worried well'.

I feel that's the wrong response.

We need to understand that people will have genuine concerns and we must give them the help and support they need to make sense of their genetic data.

Of course, that also means supporting our GPs and frontline clinical staff. We must get the right numbers in place – we now have record numbers of GPs in training, and we're putting in the biggest rise in primary and community care in a generation.

If we encourage people to take better care of themselves, that means patients and clinicians, together, can prevent problems from arising.

This will save the NHS time and money in the long term.

It's as Sir Nilesh Samani said:

> Genomic medicine is set to revolutionise the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of many of the UK's most devastating diseases…
>
> Identifying someone's genetic risk could lead to more personalised treatments that might stop a disease ever developing.

And I feel that very strongly, because I've now personally seen the potential benefits.

And this isn't just about physical health, but mental health. For some people there will be a big psychological impact from finding out news they weren't prepared for.

We already provide support and counselling to people, but we must ensure that provision keeps pace with the expansion of predictive testing.

Get all this right and I'm certain we can build consent and trust, and put genomic science on the strongest possible footing.

One of your esteemed Royal Society fellows, Bertrand Russell, once said:

> To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom.

Fear is the enemy of progress.

The Enlightenment – science and reason, allied with a mission to help people – led to the biggest ever leap forward for humanity.

We need to renew that spirit of progress.

And I believe we can defeat fear by building trust.

Listening, learning, improving.

Always wanting to make things better.

Progress that puts people first.

Caring about technology, because we care about people.

A noble mission for us all.

Press release: Mayor and Chair: HS2 foundation stone for northern rail

Allan Cook, Chairman of HS2 Ltd, said:

> HS2 creates the foundations for Northern Powerhouse Rail to spread prosperity across the whole of the North. Together they will make it easier for people to move between towns and cities across the North and the Midlands. Commuters will experience more comfortable and less stressful journeys, and businesses will benefit from better connections with each other and their customers.
>
> So it's not a question of either or, we need both. Having Northern Powerhouse Rail without HS2 is like having the M62 without the M6 and the M1.

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, said:

> The North has huge economic potential but we have been held back because our transport infrastructure is simply not good enough, with a lack of capacity to support fast and frequent connections for routes serving our towns and cities. HS2, linked with Northern Powerhouse Rail, can act as a catalyst for local growth and supporting UK plc. Together, both could support a doubling of the economic output of Greater Manchester to around £132 billion by 2050, contributing at least 40,000 new jobs and 13,000 new homes to the local economy.
>
> The North needs to come to the front of the queue for transport investment and HS2 would be the catalyst for making that happen over the coming decades.

The news comes as Allan Cook visits Manchester for the first time as Chair of the company constructing Britain's new high speed railway. His meeting with the Mayor is a clear sign of commitment from the two to see both projects delivered in unison for the betterment of the North.

Northern Powerhouse Rail is the proposed railway upgrade programme that will link towns and cities across the north, delivering radical changes and much improved services and journey times. HS2 is the new high speed train line that will link over 25 towns and cities from Scotland through to the South East, joining up nearly half of the UK population, and is set to deliver £92 billion of benefits to the UK economy.

Across the country HS2 station sites have been preparing for the arrival of the new railway by drawing up economic plans to take advantage of better connections across the country. The redevelopment plans for Manchester have the potential to deliver 40,000 new jobs for the city with both HS2 and NPR working together. This prize will be put at risk if both schemes aren't delivered.

HS2 is key to unlocking the Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) network, and will provide the foundation on which NPR ambitions can be realised. By utilising the spare capacity released on the northern sections of the HS2 network to enable future NPR services, the two projects work seamlessly to maximise the benefits of the UK's investment in future rail.

There are key corridors that are dependent on infrastructure delivered by HS2 in order for NPR to operate, including:

- Manchester – Liverpool (via Warrington): NPR services could use HS2 infrastructure, including the 13 kilometre Manchester tunnel, to serve HS2 stations at Manchester Airport and Manchester Piccadilly. Therefore, it would be possible to deliver NPR's ambitions for a 30 minute journey between Manchester and Liverpool
- Sheffield – Leeds: NPR services could use HS2 infrastructure north of Clayton Junction to serve Leeds HS2 station
- Leeds – Newcastle via the HS2 junction: this would enable trains from Manchester, Sheffield and the Midlands to travel via Leeds and on to York and the North East. This could also release capacity for more local and commuter services east of Leeds
- Sheffield – Manchester: NPR services could benefit from investment by the HS2 electrification programme on the Midland Main Line

HS2 is scheduled to be completed by 2033, and proposals put forward by Transport for the North, including Northern Powerhouse Rail, are scheduled for completion in the next 30 years.

Works on the first phase of HS2 from the South East to the Midlands are already underway on over 250 locations. Over 7,000 jobs and 250 apprentices are working on the programme, and around 2,000 business have delivered work on HS2.

Press release: Beavers arrive in Essex to play their part in flood prevention

The mixed pair of beavers are now getting to know their new home – a fenced enclosure covering 4 hectares of woodland on the Spains Hall estate in Finchingfield, near Braintree.

It is hoped the beavers, sourced from an established fenced colony in Devon, will help reduce the risk of flooding in the village by building dams along the brook flowing through the enclosure.

The beavers are expected to get to work quickly, but the results of their labour may take a few months to be felt downstream.

Their enterprising activities are being complemented by a man-made natural flood management scheme on a second strand of Finchingfield Brook, which features a 'leaky dam' approach. This consists of securing tree branches or trunks across a watercourse, which helps slow the flow after heavy rain. The scheme should also create wetland that will release water in drier periods.

Eventually, using data collected by Environment Agency equipment stationed along the watercourses and other sensors installed around individual leaky dams and the beaver enclosure, scientists will be able to establish if this approach is more successful than more conventional flood prevention methods.

The beavers will have plenty of trees to get their teeth stuck into and a boundary fence helping to keep them safe.

Beavers have not been found in Essex for 400 years since they were hunted to extinction, although they have been reintroduced in small numbers in other parts of the country in recent years.

The project is being led by Archie Ruggles-Brise, whose family has lived on the estate for 250 years, and has been supported by the Environment Agency, Essex Wildlife Trust and Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust and local councillors. The project was enabled thanks to locally raised funding from the Anglian Eastern Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC).

Archie said:

> We are delighted to welcome beavers back to the estate, and to East Anglia, for the first time in almost half a millennium.
>
> It's especially exciting to be able to utilise their unique skills to deliver flood risk reduction and biodiversity benefits locally.
>
> It will be fascinating to see how the beavers perform alongside the man-made natural flood management dams and we are fortunate to have lots of high-tech devices and expert support in place to record the

changes.

As a farming estate this is an unusual venture for us but by working with others we are confident the beavers and the wider project will bring benefits to everyone locally. Once the beavers have settled in we will be offering tours and photographic opportunities so people can get up close to these magical animals.

Environment Agency Area Director Dr Charles Beardall said:

We are extremely pleased we have been able to support the first release of beavers back in to East Anglia after many years absence.

It will be fascinating to watch how they progress and to see the benefits they will provide for improving water quality and natural flood protection.

A spokesperson for the Essex & Suffolk Rivers Trust said:

We welcome the opportunity to support Spains Hall Estate and other partners with this project, which aims to reduce the flood risk to Finchingfield and support the development of flood alleviation projects that use natural processes.

We are also excited to see what benefits the introduction of beavers will have, not only to reducing flood risk but to the biodiversity of the local area. This is a great opportunity to see how this species can shape the water environment.

The beavers were officially released by popular TV ecologist and BBC One’s The One Show wildlife reporter, Mike Dilger.