DriveTech
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Smart Motorways

Latest design motorways are know as SMART motorways - but are the drivers using them correctly?

The Facts

- A smart motorway is a section of motorway that uses active traffic management (ATM) techniques to increase capacity by use of variable speed limits and hard shoulder running at busy times
- Highways England started using the term, 'smart motorway', to describe a range of different designs of actively controlled motorways
- There are different types of 'smart motorway':
  - Controlled motorway – multiple lanes, variable speed limits and a hard shoulder for use in emergencies only. (eg: western section of M25)
  - Dynamic Hard Shoulder Running – variable speed limits and a hard shoulder that can be opened as a running lane at busy times. Overhead signs tell you when you may drive on the 'hard shoulder' (eg: M42 J7-9, M4 J19-20, M5 J15-17)
  - All lanes running – variable speed limits, no hard shoulder, and emergency refuge areas every 2.5km. (eg: M25 J23-27, M25 J5-6/7)
- Regional control centres use CCTV, Detection Technology and variable message signs to manage smart motorways.
- Depending on the type of motorway, speed restrictions can be set and lanes closed if there's an incident or congestion.
- Overhead and large nearside information signs are used to warn you about queuing traffic and speed limits as well as to close lanes and divert traffic in the event of an incident
- New digital speed cameras are widely used to enforce variable speed limits across all four lanes
- On a smart motorway you'll find 'Emergency Refuge Areas' (ERA) at regular intervals. Covered by cameras but not always by detection technology

The Advice

- Education is key – make sure you learn more about this new motorway phenomenon – it is critical to understand the do's and don't's. See more - https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-drive-on-a-smart-motorway
- Variable speed limits (70, 60, 50, 40) are used to keep traffic flowing at peak times or for safety reasons – anything from a breakdown or crash to staff working at the roadside, debris in the road, or to allow a vehicle to re-join lane 1 from an Emergency Refuge Area (ERA)
- Some incidents will be cleared very quickly so you may come across a lower speed limit but see no obvious reason for it
- 'Places of relative safety' include Emergency Refuge Areas, motorway service areas and short stretches of hard shoulder on exit slips
- If you have to stop, you'll see signs in the ERA telling you to contact the Regional Control Centre (using the SOS phone) when you stop and before you leave. Operators can monitor your vehicle using CCTV
- ERA's are only short lay-bys, not long enough to allow you to build up sufficient speed before re-joining the motorway, so before leaving you must contact the Regional Control Centre. They'll either dispatch a Highways England Traffic Officer and/or set signs and signals (red X) to assist your safe exit
- Always put your hazard warning lights on to alert other motorway users of your breakdown, and exit the vehicle to safety away from direct traffic flow (eg: behind a safety barrier)
- If you're driving and a red X appears above lane 1 it could simply be to let a slow-moving vehicle re-join the motorway from an ERA. Whatever the circumstance, a red X means the lane is closed
- Be particularly conscious of safety if you breakdown at night with a full electrical failure and cannot make it to the emergency refuge as this would be a high risk situation

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