

Written evidence submitted by Mr Newenham (RSM0037)

No Hard Shoulder?

I was unfortunate to breakdown on the M1 close to junction 25. It was about 02:30 in the morning and the road was relatively quiet. My cars charging light came on and very quickly my car lost all power and stopped. Because the M1 was undergoing extensive works to create a "smart" motorway there was no hard shoulder.

As we coasted to a halt, I pulled as far to the left as possible. We were very scarred of being hit from behind as we had very dim lights as the battery was nearly dead. After a couple of near misses, from articulated lorries, there was a gap in the traffic and so we exited the car. For my passenger this meant climbing over to the drivers side and falling onto the road as the car was so close to the Armco the door couldn't open. We jumped over the barrier and rang 999.

The call centre put us through to Highways England who then dispatched the lorry with a big arrow sign on it and the recovery vehicle. Unfortunately this did not stop the traffic in the nearside lane for a while. I ran up by the side of the motorway, grabbed a cone and used it to point to all the traffic in the hope they would be aware of the hazard ahead and move across lanes. At least two lorries nearly hit my car as they struggled to move over in time due to other traffic blocking them.

I have no doubt my actions stopped a crash. The fact it was 02:30 in the morning prevented an accident. We could not have left the car if the traffic was busier and we would have been hit very quickly possibly causing a mass pileup.

This was the most scarred I have been in my adult life.

My observations are this

1. We could not have reached a breakdown area as my car stopped quickly.
2. There was too much time between calling 999 and having the breakdown truck protecting us. It only came from one junction away.

3. If we had no mobile phone the delay would have been a great deal longer
4. If we were disabled we could not have left our car.
5. The fact that the traffic was light saved an accident.

Conclusion

None of these dangers would have occurred if there was a hard shoulder. I strongly feel the adoption of "smart motorways" will result in many lives being lost for economic reasons. This is a backwards step and puts at risk all the people using these roads and particularly disabled and older, less agile, users. This directive goes against all other targets of making our roads safer. I will never use these roads again.

March 2021