

Written evidence submitted by Christine and Mike Edwards (RSM0040)

We live close to junction 28 of the M1 and have family and friends in Leeds near junction 42. This is a route with which we are very familiar, having used the motorway regularly for work and social visits for over twenty-five years. We are very concerned about the collisions, deaths and injuries that have occurred on the Smart Motorway network and in particular this stretch of the M1. We have written to the Police and Crime Commissioner for Derbyshire and also to our MP, Mark Fletcher, who notified us of this opportunity to submit our views to this committee.

The safety of smart motorways, the adequacy of safety measures in place and how safety could be improved:

All Lane Running is dangerous. It is often impossible to reach a refuge, for example we had a blow out on the motorway just days before it became ALR and fortunately were able to stop on the hard shoulder to await recovery, which would not later have been possible.

The rollout of smart motorways has led to a “concerning” rise in major accidents, with one stretch of road in the West Midlands reporting six times as many serious collisions per year.

An investigation of Highways England reports reveals that incidents had worsened within a year of upgrades for half of the sections of road analysed.

Highways England defines a serious collision as “one in which at least one person is seriously injured but no person (other than a confirmed suicide) is killed”.

On the M1 between junctions 39 and 42, there was previously an average of 1.3 serious crashes per year, but this increased to 5.0 in the 12 months after a smart motorway upgrade.

RAC July 2020

RAC advice is that those stranded in a live lane should exit their vehicle by the passenger door. My husband is disabled and unable to climb across from the driver's seat. To get out of our car he needs to open the driver's door fully. Having a prosthetic limb, he is not able to move nimbly and quickly. Given the speed and

volume of traffic in the neighbouring lanes he would have to remain in the car awaiting rescue, which increases the risk of being hurt or killed in a collision. This arrangement disadvantages people with mobility and sensory difficulties and disabilities.

Several people have been killed or injured when they have broken down on stretches of road where there is literally nowhere to go, such as motorway bridges.

Even where there is stationary vehicle radar detection technology, this will not prevent collisions. The reality is that at any given time, many drivers are not concentrating and it only takes a momentary lapse to impact a stationary vehicle. Poor visibility due to adverse weather conditions adds to the risk and vehicles are often travelling far too quickly and too close to stop, given weather and traffic volume.

We understand that traffic controllers are often responsible for monitoring many cameras and they can be slow to detect hazards.

Emergency vehicles have traditionally used the hard shoulder to access incidents and also to funnel traffic away from hazardous areas. Clearly, with all lane running, this is impracticable and it is much more difficult for emergency services to reach the scene.

It has been deemed too dangerous for rescue vehicles to stop and help stranded vehicles and HGV/commercial vehicle recovery firms have considered boycotting smart motorways.

The only safe option, in our humble opinion, would be to virtually reinstate the hard shoulder by switching off the nearside lane (formerly hard shoulder) and allocating it for emergency use only and managing traffic flow through the existing infrastructure. (We are not in favour of road-widening schemes due to the extra land and infrastructure required and the cost involved.)

Public confidence in using smart motorways and how this could be improved; • the impact of smart motorways on the usage and safety of other roads in the strategic road network:

We have no confidence whatsoever in using smart motorways. We make occasional short journeys on the M1 with great trepidation. I will no longer drive from Alfreton to Leeds to visit my family as it feels like engaging in a game of chance with potentially life ending or life changing consequences, given the collisions and near misses we have observed.

In our opinion this system cannot be made sufficiently safe and should be scrapped altogether.

We would feel more confident using the motorway if the former hard shoulder was reinstated as described above.

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