



Department
for Transport

From the Secretary of State
The Rt. Hon. Grant Shapps

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR



Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

D J Urpeth Esq
HM Senior Coroner
South Yorkshire (West)
The Medico-Legal Centre
Watery Street
Sheffield
S3 7ES

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Thank you for your letter of 19 January enclosing a copy of your Regulation 28 report also sent to Highways England, following the Inquest into the deaths of Alexandru Murgeanu and Jason Mercer.

Firstly, I would like to place on record my sincere condolences for the deaths of Mr Mercer and Mr Murgeanu. It is a tragedy when any person dies on our roads and despite Great Britain having some of the safest roads in the world I remain concerned about the 1752 who were killed on our roads last year.¹ I note that your Inquest found the primary cause of the fatal accident was the driving of a third-party driver and that this driver pleaded guilty to causing death by careless or inconsiderate driving.

I take the safety of our roads very seriously. The Government and Highways England continually work hard to improve road safety.

Smart Motorways were originally introduced under former Secretary of State John Prescott in 2001. Although per hundred million miles driven there appear to be fewer deaths on Smart Motorways than conventional ones², I have shared the public's unease about whether Smart Motorways could be made safer still. As a result, one of my earliest actions as Secretary of State for Transport in Autumn 2019 was to commission a review into Smart Motorways.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-annual-report-2019>

Road deaths per million inhabitants is lower in the UK than the majority of countries within Europe
<https://etsc.eu/14th-annual-road-safety-performance-index-pin-report/>

² Page 15 para 1.14 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/smart-motorway-evidence-stocktake-and-action-plan>

The *Smart Motorway Safety Evidence Stocktake and Action Plan* report ('2020 Action Plan'), which was published in March 2020. One year on, I have received a progress report on existing actions and I am pressing Highways England to accelerate safety measures recommended in the 2020 Action Plan where possible to ensure that all lane running (ALR) motorways are the safest roads in the country. Highways England will publish this report shortly.

The safety improvements in the 2020 Action Plan consisted of a package of 18 measures, costing £500 million, including the rollout of a radar-based stopped vehicle detection (SVD) system across the ALR motorway network and an increase in the number of Highways England traffic officers to reduce the attendance time from an average of 17 minutes to 10 minutes.

Furthermore, we have changed the law to enable automatic detection of Red X violations. Highways England is upgrading cameras across the smart motorway network to enable automatic detection of Red X violations which can then be enforced by the police.

Moreover, I believe that a lack of consistency on different types of smart motorways might cause confusion and we have already committed to abolishing the "dynamic hard shoulder" (DHS) motorways, where the hard shoulder operates only part-time and is a live running lane the rest of the time. Highways England is converting all DHS smart motorways into all lane running to provide a less confusing environment for motorists.

The stocktake also recognised the importance of raising awareness about what to do in the event of a breakdown and Highways England launched a £5m national campaign to remind road users to 'Go Left' last month. Highways England is also updating The Highway Code with new and improved safety information for users of motorways and other high-speed roads, with and without a hard shoulder, and the national consultation on this closed on 29 March 2021.

You will have noted that the House of Commons Transport Select Committee announced on 26 February 2021 a new Inquiry into the roll-out and safety of Smart Motorways. My Department will be providing written evidence to help the inquiry in its work too.

I understand that Highways England is addressing the points you raise in further detail.



Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT