



What are smart motorways?



Love ‘em, hate ‘em, think they’re dangerous or not – whilst debate rages on, smart motorways look set to stay in England in one form or another. But, over 20 years since controlled motorway sections were introduced, their benefits – and how they work – are still leaving motorists confused.

So, here at RoadHow we thought we’d find out more about these newer types of motorway.

What is a smart motorway?

Put simply, it’s a stretch of road which uses technology to control traffic flow and ease congestion.

National Highways [formerly Highways England] developed smart motorways to improve traffic management while avoiding the cost, time and environmental impact of building additional lanes.

What are the different types of smart motorway?

There are three main types:

1. Controlled: These have three or more lanes with variable speed limits, but they still have a hard shoulder which should only be used in an emergency, as with conventional motorways.
2. Dynamic: The hard shoulder is still in place, but it can be opened up as a lane for vehicles to use to help ease traffic levels. When it does open, the maximum speed limit is 60mph.
3. All-lane running: The hard shoulder has been permanently closed to become the inside lane. There are emergency 'laybys' for vehicles to use if they breakdown.

All three types of smart motorway use overhead gantries to signal to drivers if a lane is closed; if there's a hazard ahead; or if the speed limits have changed.

Are smart motorways dangerous?

This is a topical debate, with MPs calling for more investigations on risk, while the Department for Transport (DfT) is presenting data opposing their reasoning.

But it's the removal of the hard shoulder which is most contentious.

Almost 70% of people surveyed for the RAC Report on Motoring in 2019 said they felt safety was compromised without a hard shoulder. MPs are also unconvinced that the benefits of all-lane running motorways outweigh the safety risks.

What do I do if I break down?

National Highways gives a comprehensive list of guidance [<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-drive-on-a-smart-motorway#quick-tips>] for motorists who break down on a smart motorway.

In a nutshell, these tips are:

1. Move your vehicle to the left-hand lane, put your hazard lights on and call 999.
2. Exit at the next junction or services OR pull into the next emergency refuge area and call for help using the SOS phone.
3. Carry out basic checks on your vehicle before setting off on your journey.

With MPs making a stand against the DfT's proposal to turn all dynamic motorways into all-lane running, perhaps it's time to consider: are you risking your life every time you drive on the motorway?

Whatever your level of confidence with motorway driving, RoadHow is here to help improve your knowledge and, ultimately, keep you safer behind the wheel: <https://roadhow.co.uk/>.