

Highways England
Get smart, know your motorways



Smart motorways

Speed limits and the law

Smart motorways use innovative technology to actively control traffic flows and improve your journey. By varying speed limits and using the hard shoulder as an extra lane during busy times, we can help you to avoid having to brake or be at a standstill so that you get to where you need to be on time.

Variable mandatory speed limits displayed in a red circle mean it is the law to follow the speed limit. They are a key feature of smart motorways and are used when traffic volumes increase. The monitoring sensors we use activate lower speed limits to smooth congestion and keep you moving.

We also use these speed limits, along with red  to indicate lane closures, to slow traffic while we manage incidents and to create as safe a working environment as possible for traffic officers and emergency services.

Red  are used when there are lane closures and speed limits help to keep traffic moving.



Advice for drivers

Watch your speed

Speed limits displayed in a red ring are mandatory and must be followed. We use 60, 50 and 40mph limits on all types of smart motorways. When no speed limit is shown the national speed limit of 70mph is in place and can be enforced by police.



On time journeys

You will get to where you need to be on time if you follow the displayed speed limits. They are there to keep the traffic flowing, keep you moving and make your journey more reliable.



Be safe

Millions of people use motorways every day. Make sure you consider how the decisions you make on your journey affect others.



Respect our road workers

Road workers rely on drivers following speed limits and other signs to help keep them safe. Speed limits in roadworks are also there for your own safety.



Don't risk it

All mandatory speed limits are enforced by police, as is the national speed limit of 70mph when no speeds are shown. If you break the speed limits you will be caught.



Visit us online at

www.highways.gov.uk/smartmotorways



Know your smart motorways

Controlled motorway – these use variable speed limits



Controlled motorways have three or more lanes with variable speed limits. The hard shoulder is separated from live lanes by a solid white line and should only be used in a genuine emergency.

All lane running – there is no hard shoulder



There is no hard shoulder on these sections of motorway. Obey variable speed limits and do **not** stop on the motorway. If you need to stop in an emergency, use an emergency refuge area, motorway service area or leave at the next junction.

Hard shoulder running – hard shoulder is open to traffic at busy times



The hard shoulder will be opened at busy times and the speed limit will be reduced. Do **not** use the hard shoulder unless overhead signs show that you can do so.

Red X

A red X symbol on a gantry sign over the motorway

or A red X sign on a gantry sign at the side of the motorway



We use a red X symbol to show that a lane is closed because of an incident or people working on the road. Driving in a lane with a red X symbol is dangerous and drivers must **not** use it.



If you need help accessing this or any other Highways England information, please call **0300 123 5000** and we will help you.

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