

Press release: Trial of improved smart motorway emergency areas continues

The new look emergency areas have bright orange road surfaces to help improve visibility so they are more obvious to drivers on smart motorways. It is also hoped that it will encourage drivers to only use them in emergency situations.

The first of the new emergency areas went live on the M3 near Camberley in Surrey last month. This change is part of a review into the design and spacing of emergency areas on smart motorways.

The first orange emergency area on the M25 is on the anti-clockwise side, between junctions 25 (Waltham Cross) and 24 (Potters Bar). The remaining 22 emergency areas on the M25 will have the distinctive orange colour added between junctions 23 (Hatfield) to 27 (for the M11) and junctions 5 (interchange with M26) and 7 (for the M23) if the trial is successful.

Highways England Chief Executive Jim O'Sullivan said:

We recognise the public concern about smart motorways and we also believe that changes such as these will help drivers have confidence when using them and be clear about where they can stop in an emergency.

That is why we are trialling these highly visible new style emergency areas. The bright orange colouring will make them as easy as possible to spot and should also discourage drivers from using them in non-emergency situations.

This is just one of the ways we are helping drivers to understand smart motorways and their benefits. I hope it helps drivers feel more confident about using a smart motorway. !!n Smart motorways use variable speed limits to manage traffic and tackle frustrating stop-start congestion, new technology to give drivers better information on road conditions ahead and – in smart motorway upgrades delivered since 2004 – convert the hard shoulder into an extra traffic lane. Evidence shows that smart motorways are successfully adding extra capacity, improving journey times and are just as safe as conventional motorways.

The redesigned emergency area supports Highways England's drive to improve awareness of smart motorway driving, including what to do in an emergency and when to use an emergency area. It sits alongside a national TV, radio and social media campaign covering key themes such as not driving in lanes closed by Red X signs, how to stop in an emergency and the importance of carrying out appropriate vehicle checks, like checking fuel levels, before setting out on a journey to avoid unnecessary breakdowns.

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

News story: Response to Daily Telegraph story on new GCSE grades

Today's Daily Telegraph (22 Aug) contains both inaccurate and misleading statements in relation to new GCSEs. The assessment of new GCSEs has been designed to support 9 to 1 grading and we have not 'warned' about their use as suggested. The Ofqual report cited is not a commentary on the new grades and the selected excerpts within the story are taken completely out of context.

Dr Michelle Meadows, Executive Director, Strategy, Risk and Research said: "New GCSEs have been designed from first principles to deliver better differentiation on the new 9 to 1 grading scale. The new GCSE exams and mark schemes have been created to support the increase in the number of grades, with better spread of grade boundaries and reliable assessment."

Press release: New victim and witness rooms to improve court experience

In many courts, traditionally victims and witnesses are asked to wait in sparse, unfriendly surroundings. So HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) has invested £80,000 in victim and witness waiting rooms in five courts across the country – making a number of changes including the addition of children's toys.

Research conducted with court users has shown that small changes such as these can make the court experience less intimidating for some of the 156,000 victims and witnesses who give evidence each year – particularly children and the vulnerable.

The model victim and witness waiting rooms have been established at Nottingham Justice Centre, Manchester Magistrates' Court, Newcastle Crown Court and Aldershot Justice Centre, with work ongoing at Liverpool Crown Court. They will provide a template for courts nationwide.

HMCTS worked closely with stakeholders including the Victim's Commissioner, the Witness Service and court users to identify areas across the estate to develop and analyse the best way to support victims and witnesses through the court process. This work informed how the rooms were developed, and they will now be used as models for further estate changes.

Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, Baroness Newlove:

I welcome HMCTS' initiative to enhance the victim and witness room facilities across the court estate. I am looking forward to seeing the pilot rooms and very much hope that they will set the standard for victims' facilities in all court rooms across the country. The court process can be a traumatic experience for victims and any attempt to make this environment less impersonal and more comfortable is most definitely a positive step.

I am looking forward to seeing how the remodelled rooms can provide a change for victims and hope they will assist victims and witnesses to have a better experience of the court process.

Gillian Guy, chief executive of Citizens Advice, said:

Giving evidence in court can be a difficult and stressful experience so it is crucial that witnesses are supported to perform their invaluable role.

It's our role as the Witness Service to provide information and support to help people feel as comfortable and confident as possible when giving evidence. We know all too well that even small changes to make waiting areas more comfortable can make big differences to a witness's experience – providing a welcoming space for child witnesses is particularly important.

This is on top of a range of measures the Government has put in place to help reduce the anxiety of attending court, including giving evidence behind a screen and the use of a registered intermediary. In criminal courts the government is driving the increased use of video links – meaning more vulnerable victims can give evidence away from the court room and without having to meet their attacker face to face.

HMCTS is also assessing criminal courts to ensure they are properly equipped for victims and witnesses, and monitoring individuals' experiences of the court system. This will provide a yardstick for key improvements across the estate. A range of work will be carried out in the coming months to improve the information available to victims and witnesses before coming to court – making the often painful process clearer and easier to understand.

The £1bn investment will ensure that HMCTS are providing targeted care to those who need it – by reducing unnecessary stress for victims and the most

vulnerable, and lessening the emotional turmoil experienced through crime. That £1bn is made up of £855 million to modernise and digitise the courts, and £240 million to deliver a fully connected criminal courtroom.

More modern and robust technology will be put in place in courts, such as Wi-Fi, modern telephony and screens for sharing evidence. This transformation of the estate will create a user-focused and modern justice system which supports the most vulnerable.

Press release: Leeds Festival advice for drivers

Drivers are advised that motorways and major A roads leading to the Leeds Festival site at Bramham Park are likely to be busy later this week (24 – 26 August) as music fans make their way to the site.

It is expected that the busiest day for festival traffic will be Thursday 24 August.

Emergency planning manager for Highways England in Yorkshire, Hayley Robson said:

Highways England will be doing all we can to alleviate congestion on the major routes to the event to keep traffic flowing, even so it will be busier than normal in this area over the festival weekend.

We have a lot of experience of handling events like this and have tried and tested systems in place. We work with our emergency service colleagues and the event organisers to ensure those heading for the events get there with minimum fuss and delays.

Drivers are advised to plan and check their travel routes in advance, and to keep up-to-date with the latest road conditions.

Traffic travelling northbound will access the festival site on the A1 for Leeds at junction 45, southbound traffic will be directed to use junction 44.

Increased levels of traffic are also expected on Monday 28 August as people leave the festival.

The A64 will be closed from 9pm on Sunday 27 August at the Bramham Interchange and the Fox and Grapes pub until mid-afternoon on Monday 28 August.

It will be completely closed eastbound at the Fox and Grapes pub and signed as closed westbound at Bramham Interchange.

Incoming traffic for pick up will use junction 44 of the A1(M) turning left onto the A64 towards Leeds. Non-festival traffic is advised to consider alternative routes or allow more time for their journey.

Highways England will use its electronic message signs on approaching motorways to give drivers information about any diversions and delays, and provide [up-to-the minute traffic information](#) via local radio and our website.

All routes to the festival will be well signed and information can be found on the [Leeds Festival website](#).

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[News story: New ePassport gates opened at Edinburgh Airport](#)

The 10 new ePassport gates at International Arrivals 2 were officially opened by Border Force Chief Operating Officer Emma Moore and Edinburgh Airport Chief Executive Gordon Dewar on Friday 18 August.

They are in addition to the existing 5 ePassport gates at International Arrivals 1.

The new ePassport gates provide EEA nationals, aged 18 and over, and who are travelling using a biometric or 'chipped' passport, an automated route through the UK Border. Those aged 12 to 18 years old, and who are accompanied by an adult, are also able to use them.

The gates use facial recognition technology to provide identity and security checks in a matter of seconds. The passenger's face is compared to the digital image recorded in their passport. Once complete the gate opens automatically to allow cleared passengers through the border. Border Force officers monitor the system and any travellers rejected by the gates are directed to the normal clearance desks to be seen by an officer.

Automated technology, such as ePassport gates, gives Border Force the ability to process a higher number of low risk passengers more quickly and using less resource. ePassport gates provide a faster route through the border while freeing up Border Force Officers to focus on other priority work such as cracking down on the smuggling of dangerous goods and identifying potential victims of trafficking.

Emma Moore, Chief Operating Officer of Border Force, said:

Increasing the use of digital technology at the border is part of Border Force's commitment to improve the passenger experience.

We must protect our borders, but we also want to encourage people who boost our economy through tourism and business to travel to the UK.

This means ensuring their arrival in the UK is dealt with as swiftly and efficiently as possible while maintaining the integrity and security of the UK's border.

Chief Executive of Edinburgh Airport Gordon Dewar said:

Edinburgh Airport is one of the most innovative in the UK and we are keen to use digital technology where we can to improve the passenger journey through our terminal.

We are Scotland's busiest airport handling more than 1.4 million passengers in July alone, and the introduction of these ePassport gates will mean visitors and returning passengers will enter into Scotland's capital safely and quickly.

ePassport gates not only benefit British and EEA travellers. Nationals from the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan who have successfully been accepted onto the Registered Traveller programme can now also use them.

[Registered Traveller allows regular travellers fast-tracked entry into the UK.](#) For a small fee, applicants undergo security checks in advance of travel meaning that, on arrival in the UK, they are able to use the EEA queues and eGates, bypassing queues for non-EEA passengers.

Airport staff are available to assist passengers using the new ePassport gates, while those without electronic passports and those from outside the EU will be able to proceed through manual desks as normal.