Smart motorways

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.

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

Speed limits and the law

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.

Advice for drivers

Stay within the speed limit

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
Motorways are becoming smarter to help you get to your destination on time. By understanding and following the signs, we’ll all be doing our bit to keep the traffic flowing.

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.

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.

All lane running – there is no hard shoulder

There is no hard shoulder on these sections of motorway. Obey variable speed limits and if you need to stop in an emergency, use an emergency refuge area, motorway service area or leave at the next junction.

Red ✗

A red ✗ symbol on a gantry sign over the motorway or a red ✗ sign on an gantry sign at the side of the motorway

We use a red ✗ 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 ✗ 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.