



## Motorway Safety

Hundreds of thousands of vehicles of all shapes and sizes use our motorways every day without incident.

In general these roads are very safe and well managed, with lots of cameras and other unseen technology and staff to keep everyone safe and the traffic flowing smoothly.

At times however, motorways can be dangerous and scary places - knowing a few simple facts in advance could save you a lot of inconvenience and anxiety if you ever find yourself in an urgent situation such as an unexpected breakdown or RTC, (crash) this information may even save your life or that of a loved one you share this advice leaflet with.

This leaflet starts off by explaining the motorway basics and how to tell where you are, which is important if you need to give your location to the Police, Highways England a breakdown/recovery service, or anyone else. We then move on to what to do in an emergency, and more importantly what **not** to do in order to keep you and your family safe.

### Know where you are

With long journeys you can spend hours on a single motorway meaning you can lose track of where you are or which junction numbers you are between. All motorways (and some other trunk roads such as the A12) will have marker posts every 100m which look like this →



Every 500m (5 posts) there will usually be a clear larger sign like the one shown here which confirms what road you are on, followed by which direction you are going - this is usually **A** or **B** but around slip roads could also be J/K/L/M (don't worry about this as

Police and Highway England Traffic officers will know which bit of road you are referring to from the letter, just look for one). The same numbering system is then shown in larger easier to see numbers.

These numbers refer to how far (in KM) you are from the start of the motorway. These increase on the A track and decrease on the B track.

Usually the 'A' track of a road heads north or away from London and the 'B' South or back towards London. On the M25 the A track is Clockwise and the B anti-clockwise.

On the **edge** of every marker post is a sticker pointing the direction of the nearest emergency phone **however**



**only walk to it if you feel it is safe to do so**, staying as far away from the edge of the road as possible and frequently looking behind you as you walk whenever you aren't facing the flow of traffic (remembering the same as your return to your vehicle).

### Emergency phones

These are clearly visible with large orange stickers, located at regular points, and **completely free to use**.

Instructions are displayed however you simply pick up the handset and wait, it will then connect to the next available operator in the local Highways England control room (South Mimms at M25 J23 just over the border in Hertfordshire for us).

Explain what the problem is to the operator and they will do all they can to assist you - don't worry if you can't hear them properly due to the traffic noise, they are used to this and will already be watching you on camera and have one of their patrols on their way to assist you, they can also help call a breakdown service you may be a member of however unless exceptional circumstances apply they won't be able to wait with you and will instead ensure you are in a safe place with clear safety advice before they leave (see the important safety warning about staying well clear of the barrier on the back of this sheet).



### Is there a Hard Shoulder?

The hard shoulder is separated from the main driving lanes by a solid white line (usually with a rumble strip) and is provided for emergency use only - you should only stop on it if you cannot safely get off the road at the next junction or if directed to stop there by Police. **It is not for a rest, phone calls, refreshments, checking a map/traffic or to urinate etc. We will always issue a fine whenever we find this happening.**

Some sections of motorway are designated as 'All Lanes Running' (ALR) which means the hard shoulder has been converted to an extra driving lane to combat congestion. This means there is no hard shoulder and all lanes are in permanent use 24/7 (unless a red X sign above a lane indicates otherwise). You should not stop in it unless it is unpreventable (i.e. total breakdown) in which case you should activate your hazard lights and move as far left as possible (onto the grass or stones if you can) then get out using the left side of the vehicle if possible and over the barrier to safety. If you can't get out then keep your seatbelt on, activate your hazard lights and call 999 immediately (**before calling a recovery service**), preferably with a marker post number and letter as explained.

*continues on the rear →*



## Emergency Areas

Within sections of ALR there are Emergency Areas (EA) which are clearly marked laybys, again for **emergency use only**. There will always be an emergency phone within the area as well as clear marker posts and safety advice.



## Dynamic hard shoulder

This is where rather than ALR, a hard shoulder is marked with a solid white line separating it from the main driving lanes as normal, however it is temporarily authorised for use during peak periods of congestion such as rush hours. This will always be clearly signalled through the overhead lit matrix signs and vice-versa a red X lane closure sign will be displayed (often with the wording 'Hard Shoulder for emergency use only') above at all other times. We don't currently have any dynamic hard shoulders in Essex, all of the M11 and M25 have permanent hard shoulders except for the section of M25 from the M11 anti-clockwise into Hertfordshire which (with the exception of the Bell Common tunnel) is ALR with no hard shoulders and just intermittent EAs.



**For advice on motorway driving and which lanes to use see the 'Lane discipline' FAQ sheet.**

## Always pull over as far to the left as possible

This is a simple and really important action which is often overlooked by people who use it suddenly and unexpectedly.

By pulling to the far left of the hard shoulder, even a fairly wide BMW 530 (as shown here) can have the drivers door fully open without going into the live lane, which if stopped near to the middle it would do.

If you are able to go even further to the left and onto the drain or even verge then this can leave an even larger gap as shown here, allowing you to get out relatively safely.



## Unexpected breakdowns

If you breakdown, the first thing to consider is whether or not you can still get completely off the motorway under your own power as this will **always be the safest option**. If your car is in 'limp mode' (reduced power and speed due to an engine issue) you should still be able to get to lane one and use hazard lights to warn approaching vehicles of your reduced speed as you make your way to the next exit. If you can't

continue then you need to get over to the hard shoulder or EA and **stop as far over to the left as possible**. You then need to get out (using only the left doors if possible and practical) and onto the verge, as far away from passing traffic as you can.

Always look before stepping over the barrier, especially at night, as their could be a steep slope downwards. If the barrier changes and increases in height so you would need to climb rather than step over it (like the examples here) it means there's a **steep drop or other hazard below**

Once over the barrier you should walk a little way back towards the oncoming traffic so that if someone collides with your empty vehicle it happens downstream of (after) your position meaning you are safe from any resulting debris thrown up and around the area.

If you can't get out then **keep your seatbelt on**, activate your hazard lights and call 999 immediately (**before calling any recovery service**), preferably with a marker post details (see the front of this sheet) or other landmark to help us find you.



## **NEVER SIT ON OR LEAN AGAINST THE BARRIER**

Crash barriers are designed to flex and absorb some of the impact away from vehicles colliding with them as well as also prevent vehicles rolling, going over or rebounding back into the live lanes. This means it could bend inwards, **seriously injuring you if you are sitting on or against it** at the time. The white broken line in the image here shows where the barrier was before the impact.



## **...of course the best thing is to avoid all of this by:**

- ✓ Ensuring you always have sufficient fuel for your journey - lots of cars at risk on the hard shoulder are only there because they ran out of fuel.
- ✓ Keep a good look ahead and observe what's going on in front of you - seeing the brake lights 8-10 cars ahead will mean you can brake earlier than only realising when the vehicle in front brakes.
- ✓ Observe the 2 second rule to help maintain enough space to react - watch as the vehicle ahead passes a mark in the road surface - you should be able to count to 2 before you pass over the same point.
- ✓ Keep your car in a good condition by frequently checking your tyres, wipers & screen wash etc.
- ✓ Take a break if you're tired, listen to your body.
- ✓ Leave early to allow for any unforeseen delays.



**You can call the Highways England control room on 0300 123 5000 - in an emergency always call 999**

