



Chair and Members of the Select Committee
Transport Committee,
House of Commons,
London, SW1A 0AA

By email only: transcom@parliament.uk

03 March 2021

Dear Chair and members of the Select Committee,

Re: All Lane Running (ALR) smart motorways

I write as the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire where the existence of a stretch of ALR smart motorway on the M1, with no hard shoulder, is causing real and growing anxiety. We do not believe we are being listened to or having our concerns adequately addressed by either the Department of Transport or Highways England. I write to you, therefore, to urge you and your committee to put yourselves in our shoes and hear what we are saying.

Our anxieties have increased following the comments of two coroners charged with conducting inquests into the deaths of three people whose vehicles were struck while stationary on the motorway. One coroner, as you will know, has concluded that the lack of a hard shoulder contributed towards the deaths of Jason Mercer and Alexandru Murgeanu and the other has asked South Yorkshire police to consider whether the death of Nardis Begum warrants corporate manslaughter charges being brought against Highways England. Whatever follows from these actions, the very fact that the coroners are saying these things causes us deep concerns.

We also note that despite the Department of Transport and Highways England assuring us that smart motorways are 'as safe as, if not safer than, conventional motorways', this is not because hard shoulders have been removed – that defies reason - but because ALR have overhead gantries and the ability to regulate traffic speed and flow. It is disingenuous to say or infer that it is because ALR have no hard shoulder that they have better safety records.

We note that despite the assurances about these motorways being as safe if not safer, the Department and Highways England still feel the need to do further remedial work – at some cost - to try to make them 'safer'. None of this inspires any confidence but rather adds to the concerns.

We also have to say that many drivers tell us that they feel on edge when they reach ALR sections. People need to feel safe as well as be safe, and by that test, ALR motorways also fail. They increase anxiety.

And finally, the sheer cost of education/marketing tells us that something is very wrong if we need such ongoing campaigns in the hope that this will reduce the anxiety and confusion that drivers often feel when they pass along ALR.

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It remains my view that if a vehicle, for whatever reason, stops in a live lane because there is no hard shoulder and a refuge is too far away, this is inherently dangerous. It builds danger into the motorway when we should be designing danger out.

I urge you and the committee to go behind the statistics and make the imaginative leap to understand why this type of motorway creates both deep anxieties and real dangers.

All good wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Alan Billings'.

Dr Alan Billings
South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner