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for Transport

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From the Minister of State
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Dear Louise

Smart Motorways All Lane Running: Emergency Refuge Areas Reviews Progress update

The Government made a number of commitments in its response to the Transport Select Committee's Inquiry on All Lane Running (ALR) published in December 2016 (HC 858), one of which was an offer to meet with you early in the New Year to update you on progress. The proposed meeting would be part of the step-change in this Government's and Highways England's communication and engagement with the Committee as work on the ALR Emergency Refuge Areas (ERAs) reviews is taken forward. I will write to you again in a few weeks' time to propose the arrangements for the meeting.

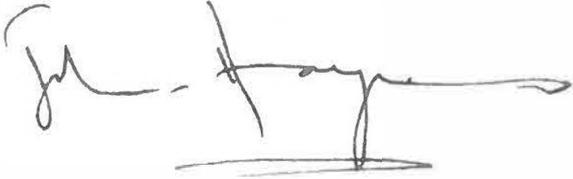
In advance of a meeting, I thought it would be helpful to share some details of the work so far and next steps. Highways England has made good progress on the three aspects of the ERA reviews – spacing, size and signing. Work on compliance with Red X signals, the roll-out of stopped vehicle detection and work to step-up communication and engagement has also moved forward at pace. A summary of this work is provided in the attached note with this letter which I hope you find informative.

On 23 February, Highways England and the Institute of Vehicle Recovery are set to continue this work by looking at the current recovery procedures and the size of ERAs, to identify potential design and operational improvements. This will involve the recreation of a full-scale ERA at the Fire Service College in Moreton-in-Marsh, to carry out a technical demonstration. The demonstration will see representatives from groups such as SURVIVE, the AA and RAC in attendance. The findings from this exercise will be discussed with motoring groups in March.

At our forthcoming meeting, Committee members will have the opportunity to hear directly from Highways England about the findings of the review of ERA size and to see the filmed demonstration.

I hope this update goes some way to reassure the Committee of our intention to keep it informed as this work is progressed.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Hayes', with a horizontal line underneath.

THE RT. HON. JOHN HAYES CBE MP

All Lane Running: Government actions in response to the Transport Select Committee's recommendations

Progress update January 2017

This update provides details on the Government's and Highways England's progress in delivering the commitments made to the Transport Select Committee (TSC) on smart motorways All Lane Running (ALR).

Emergency Refuge Areas (ERAs)

Highways England's review into ERAs on ALR schemes is well underway. It focusses on three key aspects namely their spacing, size and signing strategy.

i. Spacing

Highways England is in the process of reviewing evidence from smart motorways schemes with differing ERA spacing, to better understand the linkages between spacing of refuge areas, live-lane stopping rates and collision rates. Work also focusses on understanding whether there are any breakdown hotspots across smart motorways schemes. The emerging findings from this work will be discussed with motoring groups¹ in February and March 2017. The recommendations on ERA spacing are planned to be made in March 2017.

ii. Size

Highways England has been working in collaboration with the Institute of Vehicle Recovery and SURVIVE since autumn 2016, to plan a technical demonstration using a full-scale ERA at the Fire Service College, Moreton-in-Marsh. The purpose of the event is to review and test the current recovery operational procedures, a range of recovery scenarios and the size of ERAs. The demonstration is scheduled for 23 February 2017.

Highways England and the Government are keen for the TSC to have the opportunity to see the evidence from the event. It is proposed that a briefing session be arranged for the TSC to present the filmed demonstration and to discuss the outcomes. The filmed demonstration will also be used to produce a best practice video guide for safe recovery operations that will be shared across the vehicle recovery industry.

The findings from the demonstration session will be discussed with motoring groups in March 2017.

iii. Signing

A programme of customer insight is being undertaken with a variety of road users to test a range of potential new ERA signs. The aim of the signing review is to enhance customer confidence and understanding of ERAs across three key areas:

¹ Organisations such as AA, RAC, RHA, FTA and SURVIVE

- **What ERAs are for** – visualisation of safe place to stop in an emergency;
- **Where ERAs are located** - how far away the next ERA is; and
- **When to use an ERA** – strong visual link to ‘emergency’.

In December 2016, Highways England held six stakeholder focus groups made of drivers of HGVs, cars, vans and motorcyclists (both frequent and infrequent drivers) in London, Birmingham and Manchester and undertook five in-depth interviews with Polish lorry drivers to gain valuable insight into their experiences of ERAs. This research found that:

- there was a good understanding of the term SOS;
- coloured surfacing in the ERA arose spontaneously as an idea in all regular motorist groups; and
- there was confusion around the current term ‘refuge’.

Stage 2 of the customer testing will conclude in early February after the testing of sign comprehension and road user satisfaction via online simulator and surveys for a range of new signing options. See the appendix for details of proposed replacement ERA signing being tested.

The outcomes of the customer testing will be discussed with motoring groups in March, which will help shape the recommended signing strategy. Should the results from this comprehensive customer testing overwhelmingly indicate that the new proposals represents a marked improvement and a low-risk change, there may be a case to expedite a full roll-out on ALR smart motorways, rather than undertake further testing on-road.

Compliance

The Government continues to progress the amendment to the Road Traffic Offenders Act on the Red X legislation and aims to complete this by spring 2017.

Highways England continue to monitor levels of non-compliance with Red X in particular. A sample of lane closure events were studied on the two M25 ALR schemes during their second year of operations. Both schemes appear to show an improvement in the level of Red X compliance compared with the first year of operations, with non-compliance levels on M25 J23-27 falling from 7% to 4%. Additional monitoring will continue to track the levels of compliance with Red X signals, particularly as new compliance measures are introduced.

Highways England has commenced implementation of a programme to issue warning letters to drivers who contravene Red X signals or misuse dynamic hard shoulders on sections of the M1, M4, M5, M6, M25 and M62 motorways. The programme is being implemented in conjunction with the police and road safety partnerships. The issuing of warning letters is a key milestone prior to the commencement of any potential enforcement measures.

Stopped vehicle detection (SVD)

As previously stated in our response to the TSC in December 2016, the programme for the roll-out of the SVD radar based technology onto operational ALR sections of

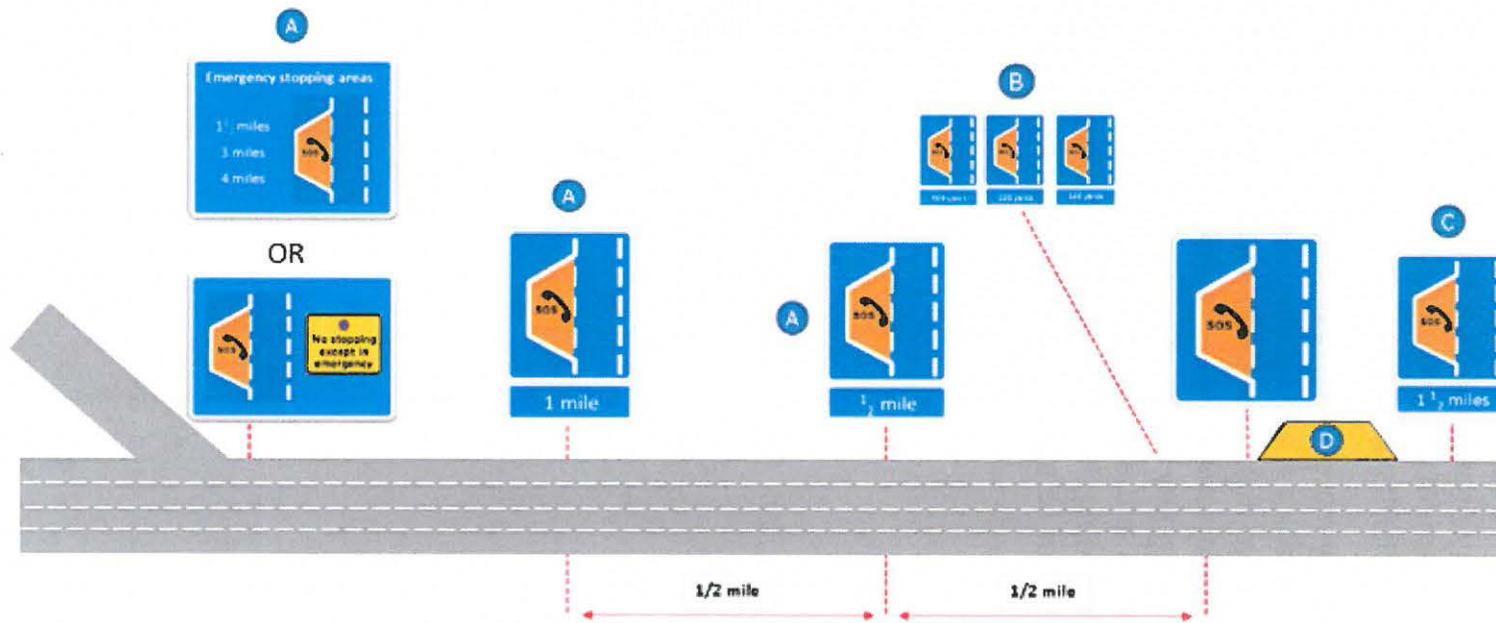
smart motorways will begin this spring, starting in the south east with the M25 J23-J27. The roll-out of this technology will further reduce the risk to broken down vehicles and will be in addition to any mitigation measures that the ERA reviews recommends.

Communication and engagement

This Government is keen to ensure there is a noticeable step-change in the communication and engagement with the public to ensure greater reach, awareness and understanding about smart motorways.

There has been significantly more investment made by Highways England in order to enhance its delivery of its regional and national awareness campaigns and the mechanisms used to achieve this. Last December, Highways England ran a Christmas getaway press ad campaign, and a month-long national radio campaign (the latter ended in early January 2017). The campaigns continues the momentum to improve ERA awareness and education and Red X compliance. Highways England is currently developing the next phase of its campaigns and continually monitors the effectiveness of campaigns to measure their impact and inform future strategies.

Proposed replacement ERA signing



- A** Entry point signing, 1 mile and 1/2 mile signs are in existing locations with new sign faces
- B** 300, 200 and 100 yard signs are being tested
- C** New sign location 1 1/2 mile upstream of next ERA

D New high friction ERA surfacing. Orange colour proposed to match sign and create a greater visual identity of the bay differentiating it from its surroundings

