Motorway Madness? Turning hard shoulders into running lanes is a dangerous idea...

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Author: Kim Henson

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MPs want the brakes applied to Government plans for motorway hard shoulders to be

turned into regular lanes.

The concept has been suggested as a quick way of increasing motorway capacity but it has attracted criticism from motoring and road safety organisations.

RAC chief engineer David Bizley, “Whilst supporting smart motorways as a cost effective and relatively rapid way of increasing motorway capacity, the RAC has repeatedly expressed concerns about the latest design which turns the hard shoulder on motorways into a permanent running lane. These concerns are widely shared by other industry groups, as well as by our members and others who regularly use motorways.

“We therefore welcome the Select Committee report and are pleased that this influential group of MPs has concluded that the decision to adopt ‘all lane running’ on all future smart motorways may be premature.

“The safety of motorists must come first and therefore new designs need to be trialled for sufficiently long to demonstrate their safety before they are introduced more widely. This was precisely the approach adopted by the Highways Agency, now Highways England, when a smart motorway with a dynamic hard shoulder was first introduced on the M42.

Wheels-Alive comments, “We have been very seriously concerned for a long time about so-called ‘Upgrades to smart motorways’ (which in fact are nothing of the sort) that involve doing away with the hard shoulder which is there for safety reasons. If a vehicle breaks down and comes to a halt in a section of motorway where there is no hard shoulder, so in effect there is nowhere to escape to, this represents a serious accident (or many) just waiting to happen. In addition, in the event of an accident or breakdown in a section without a hard shoulder, long queues are inevitable as the vehicle(s) involved cannot be moved off the carriageway in the short term, and indeed this makes life difficult for emergency services trying to reach the scene of an incident. Let’s hope that more thought is given to this, on safety grounds.”