

How safe are your roads?

Suffolk residents are not yet getting the full benefit of the central reservation Concrete Step Barrier, specified by the Highways Agency as the mandatory median on all motorways.

On Wednesday 7 March, a red Citroen Saxo collided with the central reservation, resulting in the Seven Hills bound carriageway being partially blocked. Though no one was injured, the incident caused motorists to face unnecessary congestion whilst the road was cleared and more congestion is inevitable as repairs are carried out on the damaged barrier.

Had this new, life saving central reservation been installed on this stretch of road, following the Highways Agency example of safety median, the queues and delays that many motorists experienced could have been avoided as concrete does not need repairing after being hit by such a vehicle.

In 2005, the Highways Agency announced an initiative to install high containment concrete barriers on all of England's motorways. Concrete barrier will improve safety on the motorway and reduce maintenance related congestion. "The superior strength and long-term performance of concrete barriers compared to steel means an end of the traffic congestion caused by ongoing steel maintenance and replacement programmes", said David Jones, Director of Britpave, the transport infrastructure group.

The Highway Agency's decision to install concrete barrier on our motorways was based on the following benefits:

- With a 50 year life span of virtually no maintenance, this means no lane closures, ergo no congestion and delays
- The concrete step barrier is specifically designed to enable the vehicle to be directed along the face of the barrier in the direction of the traffic flow in the event of an accident
- Its higher containment level of 13 tonnes, compared to the steel barrier of 1.5 tonnes, means that crossover incidents are virtually eliminated
- No longer will barrier repair teams risk their lives to carry out work on site in dangerous conditions
- The smooth angle of the barrier face will cause fewer and less serious injuries to motorcyclists than steel barriers with protruding bolts, nuts and joints that can and do inflict severe damage

"There are a number of advantages to us for using the Concrete Step Barrier for the central reservation of motorways and the first one is really about road user safety", says Brian Barton of the Highways Agency.

Notes

- Britpave, the British In-situ Concrete Paving Association, was formed in 1991 to promote better and greater use of concrete. For further information please contact David Jones, Director, on 01276 33160 or at djones@britpave.org
- For photography contact Jaime Norris at jnorris@britpave.org.uk
- For more information, visit <http://www.brake.org.uk/index.php?p=585> and <http://www.highways.gov.uk/knowledge/11569.aspx>