

A184 motorists could have been saved further misery

Road users of the A184 dual carriageway of the Felling Bypass have been experiencing roadwork misery since January 28, as part of a road scheme installing a third lane for buses meant that motorists were down to a single lane, causing delays and frustration for those driving to Gateshead and Newcastle.

Now work is due to start along the central reservation where new street lighting and a safety barrier are to be installed, causing more havoc and congestion. Whilst the delays in installing such safety medians are unavoidable, the choice of barrier could mean the world of difference to these long suffering road users.

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 concrete step barrier is designed to be repair and maintenance free for the entirety of its 50-year life. The barrier prevents crossover accidents by successfully restraining vehicles and stopping them from crossing over into the path of oncoming traffic. By contrast, steel barriers, with a design life of only 20 years, would not only have to be replaced three times during this period but would also need regular tensioning and maintenance. Furthermore, unlike steel barriers, which usually need to be replaced following vehicular impact, concrete barriers are robust enough to withstand vehicular impact. Lane closures for the ongoing replacement and maintenance of steel barriers are a major factor in the delays and congestion that is experienced on Britain's roads.

The concrete step barrier doesn't have to be restricted to motorways. Given the degree of its benefits, it's a shame the opportunity wasn't taken to install the concrete step barrier during this road scheme.

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

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

- It has a 50 year life span and is maintenance free, which means no lane closures and therefore no congestion and delays
- Its higher containment level of 13 tonnes, compared to the steel barrier of 1.5 tonnes, means that crossover incidents will be virtually eliminated
- In the event of an accident, 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

- 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
- As it is maintenance free, no longer will barrier repair teams risk their lives to carry out work on site in dangerous conditions