

Motorway delays could so easily be avoided

Cheshire residents are not yet getting the full benefit of the central reservation Concrete Step Barrier, as specified by the Highways Agency for its motorway central reserves. What they are often faced with is hours of unnecessary congestion due to barrier repairs following an accident, as was the case on Monday 19 March on the M6 near junction 21 when a lorry crashed through the central reservation. Several lanes were closed on both carriageways for several hours.

The queues and delays that ensued were avoidable had a new life saving central reservation been installed on this stretch of motorway.

In Britain there are some 400 crossover accidents such as this every year; accidents that Britpave believes could be avoided if outdated steel barriers are replaced by the stronger and safer concrete barrier. "The superior strength of concrete step barriers can help prevent crossover accidents. On the sections of UK motorways where concrete barriers have been installed no vehicles have ever crashed through them", said David Jones, Director of Britpave, the transport infrastructure group.

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 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 Jones.

The concrete step barrier helps prevent crossover accidents by successfully restraining vehicles and stopping them from crossing over into the path of oncoming traffic. The barrier is designed to be repair and maintenance free for the entirety of its 50-year life. 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 roads.

"Despite the Highway Agency's decision, only a small quantity of concrete barrier has so far been built on Britain's roads. This is disappointing given the concrete barrier's unrivalled safety, performance and long-term cost benefits", said Jones. The rate of installation for concrete barriers needs to be increased if accidents such as Monday's on the M6 are to be prevented."

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

- 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

- It has a 50 year life span and is maintenance free, which means no lane closures and therefore no congestion and delays
- 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