

LIFE SAVING CENTRAL RESERVATION BARRIERS

In a recent press release from Britpave, the transport infrastructure group, it was claimed that accidents such as the disastrous crossover incident on the A14 'Road to Hell' back in March could have been prevented, as would the exhaustive traffic jams that followed it.

It is correct that the middle of the road has seen some improvements in the last decade or so, however further improvements can and are being made that will save lives, money, accidents and injuries through the innovative concrete step barrier.

There are a shocking number of crossover incidents every year; accidents that Britpave believes could be avoided if outdated steel barriers are replaced by the stronger and safer slip-formed concrete barrier. "The superior strength of concrete step barriers can help prevent crossover accidents. On the sections of UK roads where concrete barriers have been installed no vehicles have ever crashed through them", said David Jones, Director of Britpave.

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 which puts the lives of the repair team at risk. Furthermore, unlike steel barriers, which usually need to be replaced following vehicular impact, concrete barriers are robust enough to withstand the collision. 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.

A report from the Transport Research Laboratory concluded that between 1st January 2002 and 31st December 2002, there were 70% fewer reported incidents on the M25 where vehicles collided with concrete barrier as opposed to steel barriers. This is an excellent indication of how robust the concrete barrier is and its success level at keeping traffic moving, as it is specifically designed to enable the vehicle to be directed along the face of the barrier in the direction of the traffic flow.

In 2005, the Highways Agency announced an initiative to install high containment concrete barriers on all of England's motorways.

HGV driver, James Askew, has first hand experience of the benefits of the concrete barrier. James was driving down the M25 when his lorry blew a tyre. He lost control of the lorry and it veered into the central barrier and continued for another 200 yards. Instead of rebounding off the barrier, it was guided along it, in the same direction as it was travelling, until it came to a complete stop. "If it had been steel, the lorry would have just gone straight through into the path of the oncoming traffic. It just doesn't bare thinking about," says James.

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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 its 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
- 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
- It has a 50 year life span and is maintenance free, which means no lane closures and therefore no congestion and delays
- As it is maintenance free, no longer will barrier repair teams risk their lives to carry out work on site in dangerous conditions