

Accident And Delays On M5 Might Have Been Prevented

Sir – On Wednesday 18 April, a northbound lorry caused delays on the M5 between Exeter and Cullompton when it jack-knifed and crashed through the central reservation. Involving a panel van and Mini Cooper, it was amazing that no one was seriously injured. The two vehicles collided with the lorry after it crossed over to the southbound carriageway and ended up on its side. Both carriageways were blocked, with the northbound opening two lanes within an hour but the southbound carriageway remaining closed for several hours, causing traffic mayhem.

The queues and delays that ensued might have been prevented if slipformed concrete step barriers had been installed on the whole length of this motorway. Recognising their benefits, in January 2005 the Highways Agency announced an initiative to install high containment concrete barriers on all of England's motorways. On the M5, there have been three sections to date that have benefited from the new innovative barrier, one being between junctions 29 and 30. Perhaps if it had been installed a little farther up the road, this accident might have been prevented.

There are a shocking number of crossover incidents such as this every year; accidents that Britpave believes could be avoided if outdated steel barriers are replaced by the stronger and safer concrete step barrier.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. 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.

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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
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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