

M6 motorway delays could so easily be avoided

The M6 was closed yesterday when the second crossover incident within eight days occurred, this time between junctions 40 and 41 near Penrith. Last weeks accident happened between junctions 37 and 38. In yesterday's incident, a lorry jack-knifed through the central reservation, resulting in a closed motorway and hours of congestion to follow. It has been reported that no serious injuries have occurred as a result of the accident (News & Star – Online). Now drivers in the Penrith area of the M6 face congestion, estimated to last a week, while repairs to the barrier are carried out. The motorway officials have reduced the closure to two lanes, but Bank Holiday makers could still find themselves in unavoidable queues while they make their journey for the long weekend.

The accident, queues and delays might have been avoided had a new concrete barrier been installed on this stretch of motorway.

In Britain there are some 200 crossover accidents such as this every year; accidents that Britpave believes could be avoided if outdated steel barriers are replaced by the stronger and safer concrete barrier.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, welcoming the Highways Agency policy change.

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 due to its higher containment level. 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. 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. 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.

To date, the M6 has already seen some progress of concrete step barrier being built along its central reservation in Staffordshire and where concrete barrier is installed, no crossover incidents or fatalities have been recorded. Good news for a Bank Holiday.

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