Welcome to our second edition of the M6 junction 2 to 4 smart motorway scheme newsletter.

We’re improving the busy 13.6 mile (22km) stretch of the M6 between junction 2 at Coventry and junction 4 near Coleshill by upgrading it to an all-lane running smart motorway.

This scheme aims to:
- reduce congestion by smoothing the flow of traffic to improve journey times and make them more reliable
- facilitate economic growth within the region by providing much needed capacity on the motorway
- maintain safety on the motorway while maximising capacity.

Our team began advance works on the project in early 2018 and the main construction works started in March 2018. The scheme is currently due to be open to traffic by the end of March 2020.
What is a smart motorway?

A smart motorway is an upgraded section of motorway that has technology installed to monitor and manage traffic flow. Smart motorways involve converting the hard shoulder into a live traffic lane to provide the additional capacity required on some of our busiest roads.

As well as the additional capacity from the extra lane, the technology manages traffic using variable speed limits which smooths traffic, reducing frustrating stop-start flow, and improves journey reliability. The technology is used to support the response to incidents, using the signs and signals to close any lane in advance of the incident scene.
Working together

Customers are at the heart of what we do and we’re working hard to minimise the disruption caused by our improvement works to road users and local communities. We’re collaborating with other infrastructure schemes along the M6 and M1 corridors and sending out information every week to all our stakeholders about upcoming road closures. We hope this helps motorists to plan their journeys in advance.
Our scheme has progressed very well since it began in March 2018 and we’re now 75% through our programme.

Work started in the verges on either side of the carriageway and involved the installation of our traffic management. We put in place three narrow lanes in both directions, with a temporary safety barrier to separate the works area and the live lanes of traffic.

We recognise narrow lanes create a different driving experience. So we introduced a reduced speed limit throughout our works of 50mph, which helps to keep road users and our workforce safe. Due to the layout of our working zone we also provide a free recovery service for motorists who break down within our roadworks.

We continued our work by carrying out various activities in the verge. We began by removing the existing technology and gantries from the M6 to make way for the new and improved systems. We then installed new and refurbished gantries to house the technology which will monitor and manage traffic flow, upgraded the existing drainage, replaced the environmental barrier and resurfaced the carriageway.

Once we’d completed the first phase of our programme, we moved our work into the central reserve.

To establish a safe working area within the centre of the motorway, we carried out a number of traffic management switches. These switches involved pushing the three narrow lanes towards the verges of the motorway.

All our traffic management switches were scheduled to take place between April and October 2019. We identified an opportunity to minimise disruption to the travelling public and keep our construction programme on track by decreasing the section of road each switch covered and increasing the total number of switches.

We’ve now successfully completed all 11 switches and all traffic is travelling along the newly constructed lane one in both directions.

**What’s next**

We’re planning several overnight full carriageway closures to help us carry out our remaining works. During these closures we’ll:
- install drainage channels
- resurface the carriageway
- install the technology which will support the smart motorway
- carry out earthwork activities

We’ll minimise disruption to road users by coordinating different work activities which can take place at the same time, so we make the most of every full road closure. All road closure information will be communicated through Traffic England and our weekly traffic management bulletin. If you’d like to receive our weekly updates, please email us at M6.j2-4@highwaysengland.co.uk
Supporting the community

Our M6 J2-J4 team has continued to support the local community throughout the duration of our scheme. We’ve carried out more than a dozen school visits, at both primary and secondary schools, and reached over 1,300 students in local communities. We’ve led varied STEM based activities with pupils, including design, construction, and environmental focused workshops.

We’ve also delivered career talks and shared information with students about the different career gateways and pathways available within the construction industry.

Our visits have received positive feedback from both students and teachers and we’ve often been asked to come back again! We’ve also actively supported people entering the world of work by hosting a number of work and work experience placements, apprenticeships and graduate schemes.

We’ve worked collaboratively with other contractors to encourage our workforce to take part in volunteering activities. We’ve partnered with two different companies and completed 152 hours of volunteering in the local area.

We’ve also raised £7,854 during our project, which has been shared with charities, including the West Midlands Air Ambulance.

Pictured from top to bottom: School presentation about waste and the environment; a sea turtle made from plastic bottles and a power station made from waste materials.

Pictured at the bottom: Presentation of a cheque to the Midlands Air Ambulance charity. (Left to right) Nick Cuming, Richard Turnbull - BBV Project Director, Jon Cottrell - from Midlands Air Ambulance Charity, John Gill and Joanne Leese.
Project news and awards

In addition to the Highways England Blue Stars award, our scheme has been shortlisted for a number of other industry leading awards, covering Health, Safety and Wellbeing, environmental initiatives and technological innovations.

On 11 July, the project team picked up the Construction News Award for Health, Safety and Wellbeing Project of the Year. The scheme was commended for implementing health, safety and wellbeing innovations into everyday tasks, with the Judges commenting that the project “showed really strong leadership and there was extensive evidence of innovation throughout. They followed the criteria and exceeded the client requirements for proactive health and safety risk management.”

The project was also awarded a Green Apple Award for Environmental Best Practice. We won the award for using forward thinking initiatives, such as repurposing timber from site to heat a local swimming pool which teaches youngsters how to swim.

The project team has also been recognised for our forward thinking technology led innovations. The team has used virtual reality to help improve safety on site by using the technology to educate workers about safety zones on site while participants remain in a safe training environment.

And finally...

Throughout the delivery of our scheme, we’ve worked hard to keep the disruption caused to both road users and residents to a minimum. We use a variety of communication tools and channels to share the latest information with stakeholders and educate drivers about smart motorways and how they work.

So far we’ve distributed letters, emails and leaflets, and hosted engagement events and meetings with local stakeholders. We hope this activity keeps you up-to-date with our works and helps you plan your journeys.

Winter campaign launched

Highways England launched its 2019 winter campaign on 1 October. The aim of our campaign is to remind all road users of the actions we can all take to prepare for the worst that the weather can throw at us. We’re also reminding motorists how to manage conditions such as snow and ice, heavy rain, high winds, fog and freezing rain.

During severe winter weather drivers are urged to follow this advice:

In snow and ice: Stick to the main roads where you can and only travel if necessary. Make sure you have a winter kit in your vehicle, including an ice scraper and de-icer, warm clothes, food, water, boots, a fully charged mobile phone, a torch and a shovel for snow.

In high winds: Slow down and avoid using exposed sections of road if possible. Lorries, caravans and motorbikes are at particular risk.

In heavy rain: Keep well back from the vehicle in front. Gradually ease off the accelerator if the steering becomes unresponsive and slow down if the rain and spray from vehicles makes it difficult to see and be seen.

In fog: Switch on your fog lights and don’t use lights on full beam as the fog will reflect the light back. If you really can’t see, consider stopping until it’s safe to continue.
**In freezing rain:** Keep your distance and reduce your speed – black ice is difficult to see, so even when conditions seem normal, it can be slippery leading to very dangerous driving conditions.

In turn, Highways England is prepared for the winter season and has:

- 535 gritters
- 127 depots based at strategic points across the network
- 25 snow blowers which can remove between 1,200 and 2,500 tonnes of snow per hour
- More than 280,000 tonnes of salt, which can cover 610,000 lane-miles of motorway

For advice about driving on motorways visit [https://www.highwaysengland.co.uk/motorways/](https://www.highwaysengland.co.uk/motorways/)
If you need help accessing this or any other Highways England information, please call 0300 123 5000 and we will help you.

Contact us

If you have any questions or would like to know more about our work, please email: M6.j2-4@highwaysengland.co.uk

Alternatively, you can call the Highways England Information Line on 0300 123 5000. If you would like to receive our weekly Traffic Management Bulletin, which details all planned closures for smart motorway work on the M6 between junctions 2 and 19, please email us at the above address and we’ll add you to our information distribution list.