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

**Why is the work needed?**
The M6, between junctions 2 and 4, is a very busy section of the motorway network. Road users often face delays due to the high volume of traffic which leads to congestion and unreliable journey times. So, we’re upgrading the M6 between junction 2 for Coventry and junction 4 for Coleshill into a smart motorway.

The scheme will see the busy 13.6 mile stretch of the motorway improved by adding an additional lane for traffic to increase capacity and improve journey time reliability.

Advance works began on the project in early 2018, with main construction works starting in March 2018. The scheme is currently due to be open to traffic by the end of March 2020.
Update on our work

Works have progressed very well since the scheme began and we are now approximately halfway through our programme.

Work began in the verges on either side of the carriageway in March 2018, and involved the installation of our traffic management. The traffic management includes three narrow lanes in both directions, with a temporary safety barrier to separate the works area and the live lanes of traffic. There’s a reduced speed limit in place throughout the works of 50mph. This is for the safety of road users and our workforce, as we recognise narrow lanes create a different driving experience.

We’ve carried out various activities in the verge, which began by removing the existing technology and gantries from the M6 to make way for the new and improved technology being installed.

Since then, we’ve 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 motorway.

We’re now approaching the end of the first phase of our programme, with most of our work in the verge now complete. This means we’ll soon be moving onto the next phase of our works, which will take place within the central reservation of the M6.

To provide a safe working area within the centre of the motorway, we’ll need to carry out a traffic management switch, pushing the three narrow lanes towards the verges of the motorway. Our traffic management switches will be sequenced between April and July 2019.

Due to the nature of traffic management switches, we’ll need to close the motorway overnight for the safety of our road workers. All closure information will be communicated via Traffic England and our weekly traffic management bulletin. You can find details of how to sign up to receive this bulletin at the end of this newsletter.

The works required within the central reservation include:

- removing the existing steel barrier
- improving the drainage
- installing a new, stronger concrete barrier
**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.

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**We’re not just building roads**

When we moved into our site office in Coleshill, we made a commitment to contribute to the community while we’re here.

Since the project began, we’ve reached out to many local schools and have held a number of events with school children. These sessions have been designed to promote careers in construction and educate students on the importance of road safety. We’ve worked with both primary and secondary schools, reaching a total of 200 pupils. The students told us they found our events to be fun and very engaging,
and they learnt a lot about career paths within the construction industry. We’re currently planning further visits with other schools in the area of our project, as we hope to continue to inspire the next generation of engineers.

A number of our project team members have also taken time out to volunteer locally. We’ve worked with a local care home to freshen up their chapel and we’ve also raised money for many different charities through various fundraising activities. To date, we’ve raised over £5,500.

We’re working hard to keep the disruption caused by our works to an absolute minimum, for both road users and local communities. So we can share details of our work as widely as possible, we’ve set up different communication channels. These channels help us make sure everyone receives the latest information in the best way for them.

So far we’ve shared information by letter drops, email distributions, public information events, parish council meetings and community engagement events using the Highways England Mobile Engagement Vehicle. Our ambition is to help members of the public better understand smart motorways and the works we’re carrying out. And, we want to provide an open forum which is accessible to all our customers so we can quickly address concerns and answer questions.

If you have any questions, you can find our contact details at the end of this newsletter.
Environment news

We often find many different animals living within the vegetation on motorway verges. While we’ve been working on the M6, we’ve identified a number of protected species including badgers, great crested newts and bats.

A very busy worksite such as ours must be carefully controlled to ensure we look after legally protected species and their habitats. As a team, we’ve made a strong commitment to protect, and where possible enhance the life of species within our works area. Some of our key environmental work includes:

- creating an artificial badger sett to relocate badgers out of our works area and away from the motorway
- safely moving 433 great crested newts out of our works area
- installing 5.5 km of great crested newt fencing to keep newts out of our works area
- relocating 777 other protected animals
- installing 60 bat boxes and 40 bird nest boxes

When it comes to waste management, we have an ambitious target to divert 99% of our waste material from landfill. Right now, we’re diverting 99.9% of our waste from landfill.

To help us meet our target, we send our construction waste (plastic, timber, concrete etc.) to a local waste transfer station based in Birmingham. 100% of the waste is reused with none being sent to landfill. It’s good to know that, for example, once our wood chippings are collected, they’re shredded and used to feed a biomass boiler which heats a swimming pool used by children at a local nursery, so they can learn to swim.
Project news and awards

Safety is our number one imperative. So we've invested in a new, engaging and interactive site induction which educates our workforce and makes them aware of hazards and risks.

Using virtual reality equipment, our inductions place a person in a construction scenario. Thanks to the immersive experience, by the end of the session the participant is able to highlight the danger zones and the safe / correct methods of travelling through site.

On 21 March 2019, this new site induction package earned us the very highly commended award for “Best Innovation Project 2019” by the Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation.

Within the first eight months of construction, we were also awarded five Highways England Blue Star awards for exceptional performance and our commitment to implement new initiatives. This has had a very positive impact on our workforce. We've been awarded the stars for the following initiatives:

- Setting out robot – we were the first Highways England project to use a robot which sets out the work area on the motorway, reducing the amount of people required on site.
- Virtual Reality site inductions- we’re running virtual site inductions and training for all staff to identify the dangerous zones on site ahead of leaving the site office.
- Overhead bridge signage – we’ve installed banners on all overhead bridges so our operatives can identify that they’re in the correct area for their works. In the event of a road traffic incident, the location can be pinpointed and reported more accurately for the benefit of all emergency services.
- Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome avoidance – we’ve introduced a drill which is wheeled into place and can be operated through a lever, without the need for the operator to touch the equipment.
- Overhead protection – we’re protecting against overhead strikes (by over-height vehicles, plant or other equipment) within our works area by using a beam that will break just before the strike and activate a warning that the vehicle or equipment is too high to pass.
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 on the above address and we’ll add you to our closure information distribution list.