

SMART MOTORWAYS

NOT SO SMART WITHOUT SVD

SO, I closed off my last editorial by encouraging you the independent recovery operator to join PROF, making reference to the past few months of Professional Recovery magazines and how PROF is fighting for the future of this industry. Well apart from securing a meeting with Sadiq Khan London Mayor, or his Deputy Rajesh Agrawal to discuss ULEZ exemptions, PROF has been constantly campaigning for a safer road infrastructure, in particular safer motorways and forcing a review into 'Smart Motorways'.

If you remember back in May 2016, big industry news, the recovery industry independent operator network had representation within the House of Commons. Our late friend Dave Gregory and Richard Goddard was selected to give oral evidence on behalf of ERRI and the recovery industry, on 'All Lane Running Motorways', and if I say myself what a great job they did. This was defiantly the catalyst of a much longer journey that has most certainly highlighted the dangers of cost cutting from the M42 'Smart Motorways' scheme with the later scheme rollouts.

So why is the subject of

'Smart Motorways' so prominent today? Most certainly a main contributor is the headline news when stranded motorists get needlessly killed waiting to be rescued after breaking down in a 'Live Lane'. But in reality, it is the continuous lobbying to the most influential people, government ministers, civil servants and alike, lobbying by PROF, that is what has put Smart Motorways at the forefront of people's minds and has started to make the difference.

Lobbying

The past 10 months, that is since the official launch of PROF we have seen the formation of the APPG for Roadside Rescue and Recovery and also the campaign for safer roadside rescue and recovery (CSRRR). Call for written evidence on the safety of smart motorways, the then follow-on oral evidence session held within the House of Commons chaired by Sir Mike Penning, all of that does not include the separate lobbying for the use of red warning lights and to be treated fairly where clean air zones are being introduced.

Then last October Highways England (HE) Chief Executive - Jim O'Sullivan, HE Executive Director of Strategy and Planning - Elliot

Smart Motorways, good or bad? It's headline news in the national press and a hot topic for discussion as **Derek Firminger** finds out..



Shaw, Chief Highways Engineer - Mike Wilson, were all called back to the House of Commons to answer questions and give evidence on their corrective actions following the 2016 Transport Select Committee session. As I've previously reported that didn't go very well, at least for Highways England it didn't, however I do think it had the positive affect our lobbying process set out to achieve. To highlight the deficiencies within smart motorways and to force a rethink and full review, the term being used by HE is 'Asset - Stocktake'. The findings of the report we will report on soon.

I don't need to go on, all of this has focused the spotlight on the inherent dangers of 'Smart Motorways' and the dangers your staff are faced with every day. It's all the more encouraging our message has reach the household names within journalism, BBC1 Panorama documentary, 'Britain's Killer Motorways?' and Radio 2 Jeromy

Vine today show and the newspapers with headlines in the Sunday Telegraph, 'The transport agency is already facing a criminal investigation after the widow of a motorist killed on a smart motorway made formal allegations of corporate manslaughter'.

Shock audience

We all know that these documentary's and radio chat shows are designed to shock its audience, the Jeromy Vine Today show aired at midday and BBC1 Panorama at 20:30, both on the 27 January with both programmes featured a call recording of a stranded motorist on the M6 at Knutsford. The caller stated he was in the inside lane heading North, with his family of five in the car, no sooner the breakdown call handler said 'Five people in the car - don't worry sir' then the caller said 'Oh Shit' as we heard a truck plough straight into the back of him. Luckily on this occasion no one was

killed or injured, as he and his family narrowly avoided adding to the 38 killed in the past five years.

Both the Jeromy Vine Today Show and the BBC1 Panorama documentary used some of the same evidence, of course the documentary had the opportunity to demonstrate more evidence as to why it is wrong to continue with the smart motorway rollout in its current form. Facts emerged, such as the 38 killed on the smart motorway network within the last five years. Incidentally when we asked for a Killed or Seriously Injured (KSI) statistic for smart motorway, we were initially told this was not available because the numbers were not counted by motorway type. We have also asked for a breakdown of the KSI numbers for how many were roadside workers killed or seriously injured, for now were have also been told they are not available, as believe it or not they are counted as 'Pedestrians'. Why I hear you ask? Because they were not in a car, we will get this information 'eventually'.

Successful trial

Sir Mike Penning representing the CSRRR spoke out as a former roads minister, explaining how the rollout was approved based upon the successful trial, using all the technology available and spacing the refuge areas at 600 metres apart, and not some 2.5 miles. The following TV clip showed the refuse area with the inherent problem, a truck broken down in it with the recovery vehicle parked behind it, because there was no space to pull in front, a problem we consistently highlight yet its constantly ignored.

The BBC reporter Richard Bilton makes reference to the APPG for Roadside Rescue and Recovery by saying he had been given a report produced by a group of MP's saying within its conclusion: 'There should be no further rollout to smart motorways until more research has been done and they are made fundamentally safe'. He further reports on the comments made by Sir Mike Penning, as one of the MP's working on the CSRRR document, saying smart motorways are

dangerous without ERA bays at least 800m apart and Sir Mike concluding they do not do as it says on the tin 'there NOT smart'.

Startling evidence

More startling evidence came out, one that might not surprise you readers, it certainly surprised me, there are 19,000 breakdowns attended to on smart motorways per year. Further that it takes an average of 17 minutes for a broken-down vehicle to be reported to the HE control room, it then takes an average of three minutes to action a red 'X' lane closure and a further 17 minute average before assistance arrives, so 37 minutes in total, sat in your car praying you don't get hit! How many cars pass under the gantry in those three minutes before the red 'X' is illuminated? How many trucks pass under the same sign? Just one car at 70 mph that equates to 100ft per second and a truck at 56 mph that generates a force of nearly 1,000 tonnes! Enough said.

I guess most readers have heard of the Radar Stop Vehicle Detection (SVD), well if you haven't, I think I'm safe to say this was meant to form part of the Smart Motorway rollout and yes it does what it says on the tin, it detects a vehicle when 'Stopped'.

This system is developed by a company called ClearWay. Now ClearWay state stopped vehicle detection technology is vital for safety on smart motorways. They make this statement because of the statistics I've already mentioned. Traditionally, it can take up to 17 minutes for a control room to be notified about an incident on the road, in this case smart motorway. 'ClearWay Radar Stop Vehicle Detection System' detects a stopped vehicle and sends an alert of the exact location within 10 seconds, yes 10 seconds, and in all weather and lighting conditions. The system covers all lanes in both directions simultaneously and works when other systems may fail.

The big problem and perhaps one of the fundamental failings of Smart Motorways

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is that SVD was trialed on the M25. As we know the M25 encircling London is Europe's second-longest orbital road at nearly 200km in length. With Highways England introducing smart motorways to the M25 they aimed to maintain traffic flow by using (SVD) and reliably detecting stationary vehicles. This radar-based stationary vehicle detection (SVD) technology offered a cost-effective way to enhance safety by improving detection rates and times, as well as reducing response times.

ClearWay trial

Highways England chose to trial ClearWay SVD system, installing 27 radars between junction's 5-7 on the M25 to provide some 97% SVD coverage. According to the Highways England annual report, since the deployment of the SVD system on junctions 5-7, there has been a 42% improvement in fatal weighted injury (FWI) rate. Fatal weighted injury (FWI), there's another phrase we

need to get used to, I guess that's somewhere between a near miss, a near hit and a fatality. Perhaps we'll look at that another day.

Fundamental floor

The point here is ClearWay stated, stopped vehicle detection technology is vital for safety on smart motorways, yet following the successful trial on the M25 and the Transport Select Committee recommendations back in 2016 Highways England have not fitted the 'vital' SVD systems in the other Smart Motorway rollouts, sounds like a fundamental floor to me.

As good and informative both programmes were; the real focus was on the plight of the stranded motorist. Yes, the BBC chose to use one of the industries household

names to evidence the dangers the general public face when they breakdown, but very little about the increased vulnerability of the recovery operator. So that household name may well have made a bold statement, not on either programme I must add, but a statement via social media the week proceeding both programmes, that they will not attend any breakdowns on the smart motorway network. No, they advise their stranded member to call 999 and report an emergency, agreed it is an emergency, but who will recover it, yes you got it, 'an independent operator', hopefully with the correct protection from Highways England.

Good or bad?

I could go on, but Smart

Motorways, good or bad? Dangerous or safe? Necessity or unnecessary? Whatever! There here to stay, in one form or another we 'Recovery Operators' that is, have to continue to rescue stranded motorists from them, so do you just carry on as you are, or should our industry make a stand? I say support the good and vital work PROF is doing as clearly this good work is having an impact.

I'd like to finish questioning the use of the use of the word SMART. It's an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time Bound. Are these smart motorways any of these? I don't think so.

Derek Firminger
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VISIT THESE WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION;

- www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000drew
- www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000dtqv/panorama-britains-killer-motorways
- www.csrrr.co.uk/
- www.profeduk.com/



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