



Expanding choice and cutting congestion on our motorways

Although our national motorway network accounts for only around 1% of total road length, it carries nearly 20% of all traffic.

Adding new lanes on the network will continue to be part of the solution. But the Hard Shoulder Running pilot on the M42 has given us valuable, practical experience of a new approach to managing the flow of motorway traffic.

Through a mix of managing speeds and opening the hard shoulder as a running lane, the M42 has shown that it is possible to smooth traffic flow and improve journey reliability on a notoriously congested route. And it has done so safely.

Our recent [feasibility study](#) reported how hard shoulder running could be used more widely across the road network. It shows how a package of measures could take us toward a network of "managed motorways" - offering smoother flow and more predictable journeys at significantly lower cost than motorway widening, with fewer damaging environmental effects.

It highlights which routes might benefit soonest from hard shoulder running - including some that had been earmarked for widening, for example on the M1 running north from the East Midlands up to Leeds, and others that hadn't, such as the M27 around Southampton.

We are also thinking about the way we manage lane capacity. Where new lanes come on stream they can be used in a variety of ways. We have already opened a car-share lane - such lanes have been used for some time in the US. In order to get maximum benefit, access to car-share lanes is limited to vehicles carrying passengers, or in some cases drivers willing to pay a toll.

The Department will be exploring the scope for taking a similar approach wherever we are adding new capacity.

Allowing motorists to enter a reserved lane if they are carrying passengers or willing to pay a toll gives them a real choice without having to change their route. More capacity comes on line, but instead of immediately filling up, we can manage demand over time, adapting to circumstances, maintaining traffic flow, and improving the reliability of motorway travel.

The Department will therefore be undertaking a programme of design work over the next 9 months, to analyse these proposals in detail - drawing up designs for specific stretches of road.

For related documents, pages and internet links, see the column on the right.