



## **RAC representation to APPG on roadside rescue and recovery**

**This response has been written by Nicholas Lyes, RAC Public Affairs Manager, on behalf of RAC Motoring Services**

### **About the RAC**

With more than eight million members, the RAC is the oldest and one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists. As such, it is committed to making driving easier, safer, more affordable and more enjoyable for all road users.

The RAC, which employs more than 1,600 patrols, provides roadside assistance across the entire UK road network and as a result has significant insight into how the country's road networks are managed and maintained.

The RAC is separate from the RAC Foundation which is a transport policy and research organisation which explores the economic, mobility, safety and environmental issues relating to roads and their users.

The RAC website can be found at [www.rac.co.uk](http://www.rac.co.uk).

In September 2018, the RAC published its latest [Report on Motoring](#).

### **RAC Response**

Reflecting on the views of those you represent:

#### **1. Have casualties, 'near misses' and wider safety concerns affected the businesses and groups you represent? If so, how?**

Over the last few years there has been a number of reported fatalities involving colleagues working in the recovery industry. One of these fatalities was one of our own orange patrols who was killed last June but we have also lost colleagues who work for our partners and there have been some shocking near misses and terrible collisions involving patrols and members at the roadside. The general feeling within the industry and what is being fed back via the main safety focus groups is that road systems are getting busier and busier and risk levels are increasing for the recovery sector when required to operate in a number of roadside situations. The same conditions make it increasingly dangerous for drivers and their passengers when they break down in high speed locations.

The industry feeling is that the roadside recovery industry is not provided with the same level of protection and focus as other areas that also work in the roadside environment (Emergency services, roadworkers etc). It is also an increasing worry that our current methods of protection are not adequate for current roadside conditions with a strong concern on the diminishing effectiveness of amber safety lighting as the primary recovery warning system. The wider use of amber lights by a high number of other roadside groups is believed to be diminishing their effectiveness when seen by other road users.

#### **2. What is the scale of safety incidents and near misses within the industry?**

It is believed that there is an increase in overall incidents involving recovery industry but there are currently no documented measures of this. The RAC's statistics indicate an

increase in roadside incidents and near misses over the last three years but further analysis would be required to give exact numbers.

**3. What safety measures, if any, would you recommend to address safety concerns and why?**

We believe there is an issue with driver awareness and understanding of the dangers involved for roadside workers. It is believed that most of the incidents that occur are related to the working vehicle or roadside technician not being seen by other road users (who may be distracted when driving).

The RAC believes that training and competence are key to safe working at roadside for technicians and that certain standards dictated by PAS43 or similar standards should be minimum levels required of all roadside workers.

In addition to this, we believe roadside safety could be aided with the following:

- **Communications campaign:** In autumn 2018, the RAC wrote to the Transport Minister Jesse Norman to express our concerns about the safety of our patrols when working on or by high-speed routes. This was a joint letter signed by the RAC, the AA and Green Flag. We asked the Minister to work with Highways England to promote the message of 'slow down, move over when safe to do so' for motorists that see a patrol attending a breakdown. This could be done, for example, via VMS signs. But more specifically, we would like to see a specific change to the Highway Code which takes into consideration 'slow down, move over when safe to do so'. As of March 2019, we have received no further word from Government despite assurances to look into this.
- **Scene protection:** We are concerned that a lack of police and Highways England resources are reducing their ability to attend an incident to provide support and protection to the stranded motorist and to the patrol or recovery operator. This has been raised by members of the SURVIVE group, of which the RAC are members.
- **Expressways:** We await further indication from Highways England on the design of new expressways. It appears Expressways will operate to a design standard somewhere between an All Lane Running smart motorway and a dual carriage A-road. We hope that these new routes will be present an opportunity to design in safety features which will improve the experience of drivers who break down and that of roadside technicians who attend to assist them in the event of a break down. We understand that this will include Emergency Refuge Areas (ERAs) and technology used on smart motorways including MIDAS.
- **Red X compliance on smart motorways:** The RAC remains concerned by the level of non-compliance with Red X signals on smart motorways, which is a risk to roadside patrols and other workers. While Highways England's three-year pilot report on the M25 ALR stretches suggests Red X compliance runs at about 94%<sup>1</sup>, we believe that this figure is not high enough and without extra measures (such as an additional lane closed or enforcement), there is a significant risk to roadside patrols when attending. Most recent research conducted by the RAC in January 2019 found that a fifth of

---

1

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/725599/M25\\_J23-27\\_SMALR\\_Monitoring\\_3\\_Year\\_Report\\_v2.0.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/725599/M25_J23-27_SMALR_Monitoring_3_Year_Report_v2.0.pdf)



Public Affairs

drivers had disobeyed the Red X over the past year. We are concerned by the lack of progress on pushing through legislation to enforce Red X signal compliance, which would include type approval of equipment used.

**4. What effect, if any, has the Government's roll-out of All Lane Running 'Smart' motorways had on the safety on the groups you represent?**

The RAC's policy on attending breakdowns on smart motorways is as follows:

<b>Conventional 3L + HS</b>	Our patrols attend to motorists broken down on the hard shoulder
<b>Dynamic Hard Shoulder</b>	In the same way as conventional motorway, once the hard shoulder is closed to running traffic
<b>All Lane Running Smart Motorway</b>	<p>We recommend our patrols only give assistance when there is the physical presence of Highways England traffic officers if the car is in a live running lane alongside crash impact protection vehicles and that the lane is fully closed. We ideally prefer a second lane closed, though this is not always possible because of congestion. This is an increased measure over and above a standard three-lane motorway, implemented to take account of people potentially ignoring the red X and still driving in lane two. However, we understand the pressure Highways England is under to keep traffic moving.</p> <p>Where possible HE has committed to move the stricken vehicle to a place of safety (ERA, services etc) themselves.</p>

As mentioned in our response to question three, one of the key areas on ALR is the adherence to Red X signs. Without extra measures (such as an additional lane closed and enforcement), there is a significant risk to roadside patrols when attending.

**5. What measures could be taken to address any safety concerns with All Lane Running motorways?**

The RAC has long-held a preference for the design of the original M42 smart motorway (with dynamic hard shoulder) to be the template for future smart motorway design. The evidence based upon Highways England's own impact assessment suggests this is the design that will bring the biggest safety benefits for motorists and those working on the motorway. Emergency refuge areas were spaced far more closely in the event of an incident in the hard shoulder while it was operating as a running lane.

However, both the DfT and Highways England have said that the Dynamic Hard Shoulder design will be phased out and ALR will be the preferred option. The RAC had significant concerns about the initial designs and did not support the practice of placing emergency refuge areas up to every 2.5kms apart, which we felt was an inadequate spacing standard. Alongside this, there was limited signage and visibility of ERAs. After submitting and giving evidence to the Transport Select Committee in 2017, we were pleased the final report urged Highways England to go back to the drawing board with new designs and closer spacing of ERAs.



Public Affairs

Following discussions with officials, it was agreed that ERAs areas would be coloured orange to make them more visible and increased signage would be used. More significantly, future designs of ALR would have ERAs spaced at no greater than one mile apart. Retrofitting would also be worked into existing designs. This is a more positive step, however concerns remain about the robustness of ALR when incidents occur, the ability for emergency services and vehicle patrols to attend quickly, and the risks to vehicles if they break down in a live lane. We would like to see the following addressed as a priority:

- **Enforcement of Red X violations:** Lane closures and drivers ignoring Red X signs blocks access and puts lives at risk. Currently, Highways England can send warning letters to drivers who ignore these signs, but equipment to fully enforce (with a penalty) has not yet been type approved by the Home Office. We would encourage this to happen more quickly, and we would like to see a system which issues a warning letter to drivers in the first instance, and a penalty for any further infringements.
- **Retrofitting of existing ALR schemes:** We have had little clarity from Highways England on when work to retrofit existing ALR schemes will commence. One of the busiest stretches of motorway in the UK (M25 between J23-27) has ERAs spaced in places at every 2.5kms.
- **Better communication of what to do in a breakdown:** The conversion of hard shoulders into a live running lane is a significant change in the way we build and use our motorways. The Transport Select Committee criticised the Government's approach of saying the change was 'evolutionary'. We believe that there is a significant job to do to communicate to drivers about the differences of driving on an all lane running scheme and to improve understanding of what to do in the event of an accident or a break down. This must be an ongoing process and must use appropriate channels to reach all drivers as for many their first experience of driving on a smart motorway may well be on an annual family holiday while for others travelling on a smart motorway may be part of their daily commute.

**Please address any comments or further contact to:**

Nicholas Lyes, RAC Public Affairs Manager  
Pete Williams, RAC Head of External Affairs

[nlyes@rac.co.uk](mailto:nlyes@rac.co.uk)  
[pete.williams@rac.co.uk](mailto:pete.williams@rac.co.uk)

Date of submission: 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019