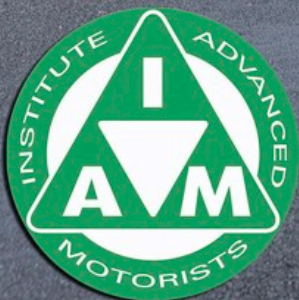


The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



April 2023





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The Newsletter of the North Down Advanced Motorists Group (Group 8199)

Helping to Improve the Standard of Driving on the Roads in Northern Ireland and the advancement of road safety

April 2023

<http://www.amni.org.uk/>

Vol 23.4

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthDownGroupIAM>

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New Members

This month we welcome new members Guy Taylor (car) and Anatolie Iordache (bike). We hope you not only gain from being members of our Group but will also enjoy the friendship and camaraderie of our get-togethers.

Test passes

No test passes this month but good luck and safe driving and riding to any Associates approaching their test.

March Cover Picture

This was the approach into Crawfordsburn village from Bangor. Congratulations, in order of receipt, to Angela Bell, Ivan Greenfield, Davie Hall, David Harcourt and Norman Shearer.

A special mention and an apology must go to our esteemed and observant Chairman David Harcourt who correctly guessed the February cover picture but didn't get credited with it. I hope he is satisfied now that an official apology has been issued 😊.

Do you know where this month's cover is? No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, a mention in the next Road Observer. Submit your answers to: leslie.ashe.LA@googlemail.com

Dates for your diary

All dates relate to the Groomsport Boathouse at 7.15 pm unless otherwise stated

25 April -	STAC session 6
2 May -	STAC Session 7
9 May -	Group Night - Table quiz
23 May -	STAC session 8
30 May -	Test preparation and driving practice
6 June -	Additional driving practice
13 June -	Group night- Visit to Bangor inshore lifeboat station
21 June -	(Wednesday) Return visit to the Transport Museum storage facility

STAC - Short Term Associate Course for drivers. Car Associate Members should ensure that you are familiar with the relevant section of the "Associate Handbook" before each STAC night so that you can get the most benefit from the theory session as well as your observed drive.

SMART Motorways



In some respects with regard to road building and improvements we are fortunate that Northern Ireland did not introduce so called Smart motorways.

Following a number of fatalities which occurred after drivers stopped on a hard shoulder converted to a running lane (permanently or at times of congestion), inquests which attributed smart motorways as part of the cause of fatalities and a vigorous campaign against them, the Government has announced:

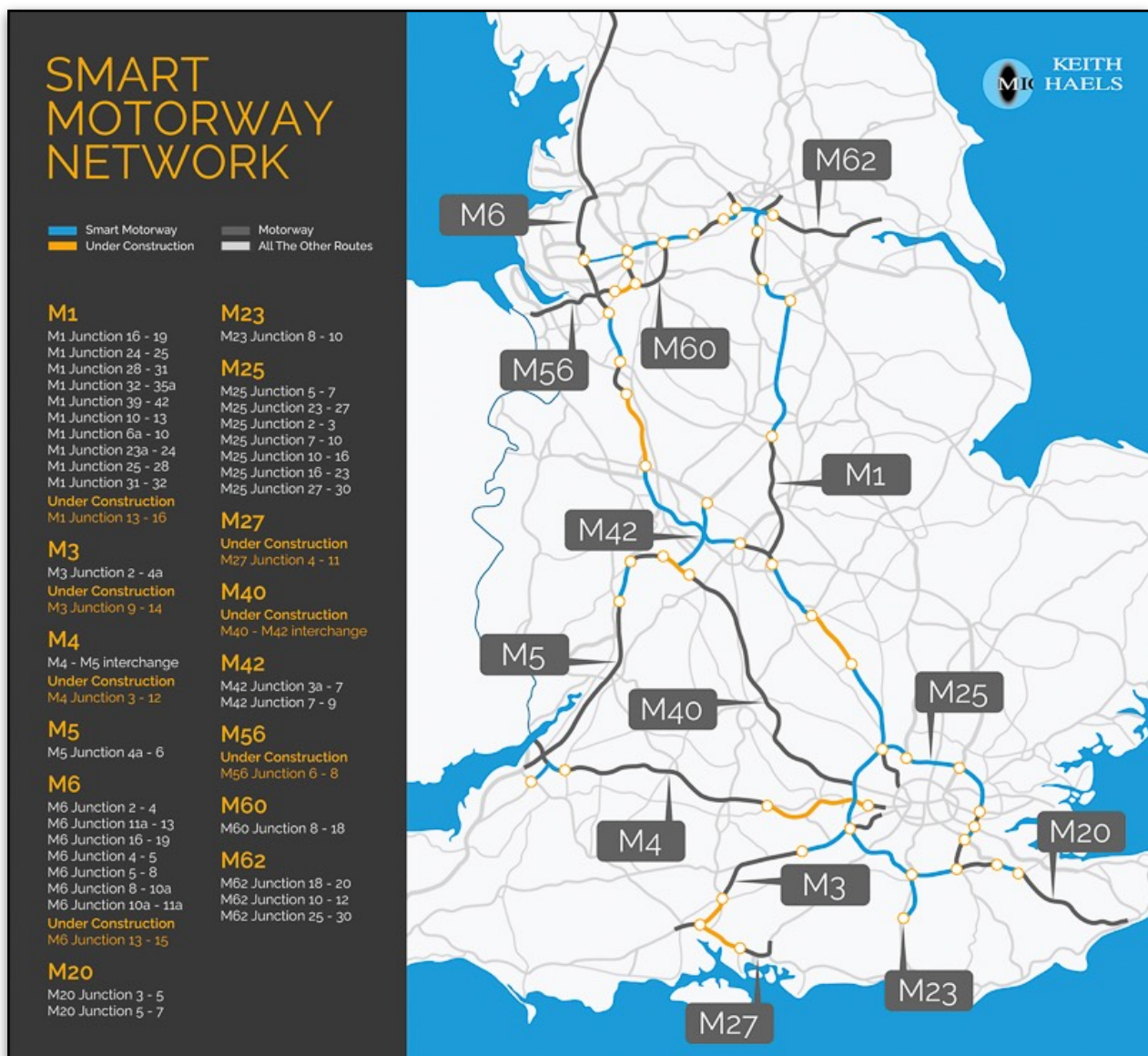
- plans for new smart motorways will be cancelled in recognition of the current lack of public confidence felt by drivers and cost pressures
- smart motorways earmarked for construction during the third Road Investment Strategy (2025 to 2030) and previously paused schemes will now not go ahead

- existing smart motorways will continue to benefit from £900 million safety improvements. The government and National Highways continue to invest £900 million in further safety improvements on existing smart motorways.

The £900m includes progressing plans on installing 150 extra emergency areas across the network as well as further improving the performance of stopped vehicle detection technology on every all lane running smart motorway. The government will also continue to give motorists clear advice when using existing smart motorways.

While no new stretches of road will be converted into smart motorways, the M56 J6-8 and M6 J21a-26 will be completed given they are already over three quarters constructed.

If you are planning on travelling through England by road here is a map of where you will encounter smart motorways:



A larger version which can be downloaded is available by clicking on the following link: <https://www.keithmichaels.co.uk/car-insurance/info/smart-motorway-map/#mappy>

IAM RoadSmart advice for driving on smart motorways

Never drive in a lane closed by a red X

A red X sign indicates that a lane is closed to traffic. You must stay out of that lane as there may be an incident, people working ahead, or the lane needs to be clear for maintenance or emergency services.

It's illegal to drive in a lane closed by a red X sign. If you're caught, you could receive a fixed penalty of up to £100 and three points on your licence. In some cases, more severe penalties or a court appearance could be issued.

Keep to the speed limits shown on the signs

Variable speed limits on certain sections of motorway help to steady the flow of traffic and reduce 'stop-start' traffic jams. These limits can be set at busy times, in conjunction with a red X sign or to manage a hazard or incident. A speed limit displayed inside a red circle is legally enforceable. If you go over the speed limit, you're breaking the law and could receive a fine.

If no speed limits are displayed, then the national speed limit applies. When speed limits are displayed, they remain in place until you are notified that they have ended. Or a different speed limit is displayed.

Always drive to a safe speed according to the conditions and be aware of your stopping distances.

Hard shoulder use and emergency areas

A hard shoulder is always clearly identified with a solid white unbroken line.

On some busier sections of our motorways, the hard shoulder is open to traffic temporarily. If the hard shoulder is open for use, you'll see a speed limit displayed above it. If there's nothing displayed above it, or a red X is displayed, then you should only use the hard shoulder in an emergency.

On sections of the motorway where the hard shoulder has been converted into a permanent extra lane, this is marked with a broken white line. In this case, emergency areas are spaced regularly. They are also clearly marked with blue signs featuring an orange SOS telephone symbol.



If possible, always try to get to an emergency area, even if the hard shoulder is not open to traffic. Emergency areas are set back from the carriageway and provide better protection than the hard shoulder.

Breaking down on a motorway

If your vehicle has a problem on a motorway with no hard shoulder:

- Move into the left-hand lane and put your hazard lights on.

- Exit at the next junction/services. Alternatively, follow the orange SOS signs to an emergency area and call for help using the free telephone.

If you can't get off the motorway or to an emergency area:

- Move your vehicle as close as possible to the left-hand verge, boundary or slip road.
- If you feel you can get out safely, exit your vehicle via the left-hand door. After, wait behind the safety barrier if there is one and it is safe to do so.
- Call 999 immediately

If your car stops unexpectedly in any lane and it is not safe to get out:

- Keep your seatbelts and hazard lights on
- Call 999 immediately
- The lane will be closed, and help will be sent.



A6 opening



As of 6 April 18.6 miles of a new dual carriageway between Dungiven and Londonderry (including the Dungiven by-pass) was opened to traffic. This will reduce journey times, particularly the bypass around Dungiven, and, possibly more importantly, it will reduce the potential for the frustration often found on the old road when you are stuck behind a tractor or other slow moving vehicle and faced with a steady stream of oncoming traffic. Looking forward to using it. Is this an excuse to visit the North-West or Donegal?

Some bad news, however, for the motor-cycling fraternity is that the barrier in the central reservation is the wire rope type commonly referred to as the "cheese cutter" because of the injuries it can inflict on a motorcyclist.

A female motorcyclist from Londonderry challenged this design and in response a DFI spokesperson said “The Department recognises the concerns that motorcyclists have with wire rope barriers. Whilst it is recognised that the installation of all safety barriers involves an inherent element of risk, this needs to be considered against the benefits in mitigating the severity and implications of collisions for all road users.

“In January 2021, design standards across the UK were updated to require high containment barriers with a 50 year design life, normally concrete, in the central reserve of dual carriageways with



daily traffic flows exceeding 25,000. This requirement was previously focussed solely on motorway type roads.

“The A6 scheme specifications and design requirements were set over five years ago. Traffic flows on the A6 are also below the 25,000 threshold and therefore the design remains compliant with current standards.”

Money before lives?

Country Roads



The following article from IAM RoadSmart is primarily aimed at motorcyclists many of the points made apply equally to cars.

“Rural roads are major and minor roads outside our towns and cities, and at times they can be difficult to navigate. Many of them are narrow, with blind bends and limited safe places to pass, and have no pavement or cycle paths.

Our country roads can often seem intimidating. You may find pedestrians on the road, horse riders, slow-moving farm vehicles, and cyclists, so it’s important to always be aware of your surroundings.

IAM RoadSmart, the UK’s leading road safety charity, has some helpful tips to help you navigate those long and winding roads. Speed limits

Most rural roads in the UK have a 60-mph limit, however this doesn’t mean you should drive at this speed. These winding, narrow carriageways pose high risks so ride at a speed you are comfortable with and confident with. Be prepared to slow down or stop to allow larger vehicles coming the other way to pass.

Bends

When you approach a sharp bend take it slow even if the limit is 60 mph. Use your horn when approaching blind bends to alert other drivers to your presence. At night you can flash your lights to give a similar warning. Look out for high hedges or other foliage that may interfere with your line-of-sight and always stick to the left-hand side of the road.

Farm vehicles and other slow-moving traffic

Farm vehicles such as tractors and combine harvesters are large and complex machines to navigate; so, the driver will appreciate your patience and understanding. A fully loaded tractor and trailer might make it more difficult for the driver to see – remember all vehicles do not have the same view or manoeuvring capabilities as you.

Animals

Keep an eye out for signs indicating cattle or wildlife and be extra alert when you’re riding in those areas. When approaching horses and other animals, you should reduce your speed. Don’t rev your engine too much as you may spook them. Alan Hiscox, Director for Safety at The British Horse Society: “Unfortunately, the number of incidents involving horses on Britain’s roads remain far too high and it is evident that more needs to be done to ensure riders feel safe on the roads. For motorcyclists, it is important to understand that horses can easily be frightened by motorcycles and the noise they emit.



In line with the Highway Code and in order to reduce horse fatalities, we are encouraging motorcyclists to adhere to our Dead Slow campaign messages. This includes passing horses and horse drawn vehicles at speeds under 10mph and allowing at least 2 metres space of distance. Motorcyclists are also urged to wait behind the horse rider and only overtake or pass if it is safe to do so. Whether you are a motorcyclist, horse riders, motorist or any other user group, we encourage all road users to be courteous and patient with one another whilst sharing the roads. With a bit of understanding and consideration on all sides, there’s room for everyone to use the roads in harmony and safety.”

The weather

The unpredictable weather is a hot topic of conversation, but it's always worth keeping an eye on the conditions before you leave. If there's bad weather, avoid country roads where possible. Main roads and motorways are more likely to be gritted, while country roads may be flooded, covered in snow or mud, or have fallen trees.

Suit up

Wear your leathers; they are they to protect you. Riding in shorts, and flip-flops is a no-no, even on a hot, sunny day. Your leathers can prevent you from suffering serious injury. Even if you aren't involved in a crash with another vehicle, you could simply lose control of your bike.

Remember, country roads can throw up all kinds of problems. However, these tips should help you stay safe. Just remember to take it slow, be aware and be careful of any potential hazards."



And finally.....

Do you fancy touring with one of these? Apparently they known as micro-caravans /Go-pods



The views expressed in the "Road Observer" are not necessarily those of the Editor, the North Down Advanced Motorists Group or IAM RoadSmart