

Response from Highways England

There are a number of factors which make the use of contraflow on the M6 J10a-13 scheme impractical.

Firstly, it is a requirement of Highways England that 3 lanes of traffic are maintained in each direction during the day to minimise disruption and delay. This is achieved by the introduction of narrow lanes which requires a 50mph speed restriction for safety reasons. The Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO) to allow the works to go ahead and the Traffic Management to be installed was allowed on the agreement of this. The hardshoulders are separated by cones and temporary barriers to allow construction of the smart motorway works.

Permanent contraflow would not be possible with work going on in hard shoulders as this would require reversing the flow in one or more lanes of a carriageway, thereby reducing the number of lanes available for daily traffic flows and thus not allowing the 3 lanes in both directions as agreed for the TTRO.

If we were to seek to introduce contraflow each night, it would be necessary to 'reverse' the direction of flow in lane 3 of one carriageway. This creates the initial problem that the narrow lane width (of lane 3) is not appropriate for larger vehicles. Reconfiguring the lanes would require removal of traffic management in the hardshoulder thereby delaying the smart motorway scheme as the works in the verge could not be continued.

Also, where there are opposing flows in a contraflow they must be separated by a line of cylinders and two rows of road studs (in this case between lanes 2 and 3) for safety. As it would take around three nights to install these between junctions 12 and 13, they would have to remain in place during the daytime when contraflow was not in operation. These layouts, both contraflow and single direction running on both sides of the cylinders, are less safe and create difficulties of access to broken down vehicles that may break down within these areas.

It has been suggested that we should keep one lane open to traffic on the carriageway that is being resurfaced. The large volume of plant and lorries involved in the resurfacing takes a great deal of space. This work could not be safely carried out over two lanes width as there would be insufficient working area and no safety margin for the workforce.

As Highways England we have to consider the potential disruption to all of our customers (120,000 vehicle journeys per day – 22% lorries/freight) and the continued provision of 3 lanes in both directions is required on this very important business and commercial route. The safety of both our workforce and the travelling public is of paramount importance to us and work practices that increase safety risk are not acceptable.

I apologise if this explanation seems technical and perhaps difficult to follow. The reasons why contraflow is not practicable are complex, the Project Team would be happy to meet with you and describe this more clearly.