

“In their own words”

Introducing the Highways Agency’s Traffic Officer Service

Welcome

Thank you for your interest in the Highways Agency’s Traffic Officer Service.

This short guide has been produced to show you more about the new service, and in particular to help you decide whether you think you can be part of this new national team. To give you some flavour of the work, we asked people who are currently doing the job to tell you what it is like - “*In their own words.*”

About the Highways Agency

The Highways Agency manages, maintains and improves the motorways and key trunk roads (strategic road network) in England. It is an Executive Agency of the Department for Transport.

The Highways Agency Traffic Officer Service

This is a new nationwide service which is being developed to help ease congestion on England’s motorways and strategic road network. The service consists of two complementary parts – on-road Traffic Officers and staff in Regional Control Centres who direct and co-ordinate regional responses.

Why are they needed?

Congestion on the Highways Agency’s roads costs us all around £3 billion every year and a quarter of this congestion is caused by collisions. Traffic Officers will help the police manage the traffic around accidents to reduce this congestion.

Traffic Officers

Highways Agency Traffic Officers are highly trained people who patrol the motorways. Their aim is to keep traffic moving around collisions and make road users’ journey as safe and reliable as possible. Their role has been developed with the police, freeing them up to help reduce crime. Key responsibilities:

- **Stopping and directing traffic**

In order to remove debris or safeguard drivers and passengers Traffic Officers can temporarily close roads and stop and direct traffic.

- **Supporting Police**

Traffic Officers support police in their traffic duties, such as applying temporary road closures if there is a major accident, to allow police to investigate. The police retain responsibility for serious accidents and enforcing road traffic offences.

- **Clearing-up**

Managing the safe clear up after road traffic collisions. Clearing debris such as shredded tyres or large items of rubbish that could damage vehicles or cause an accident.

- **Removing vehicles**

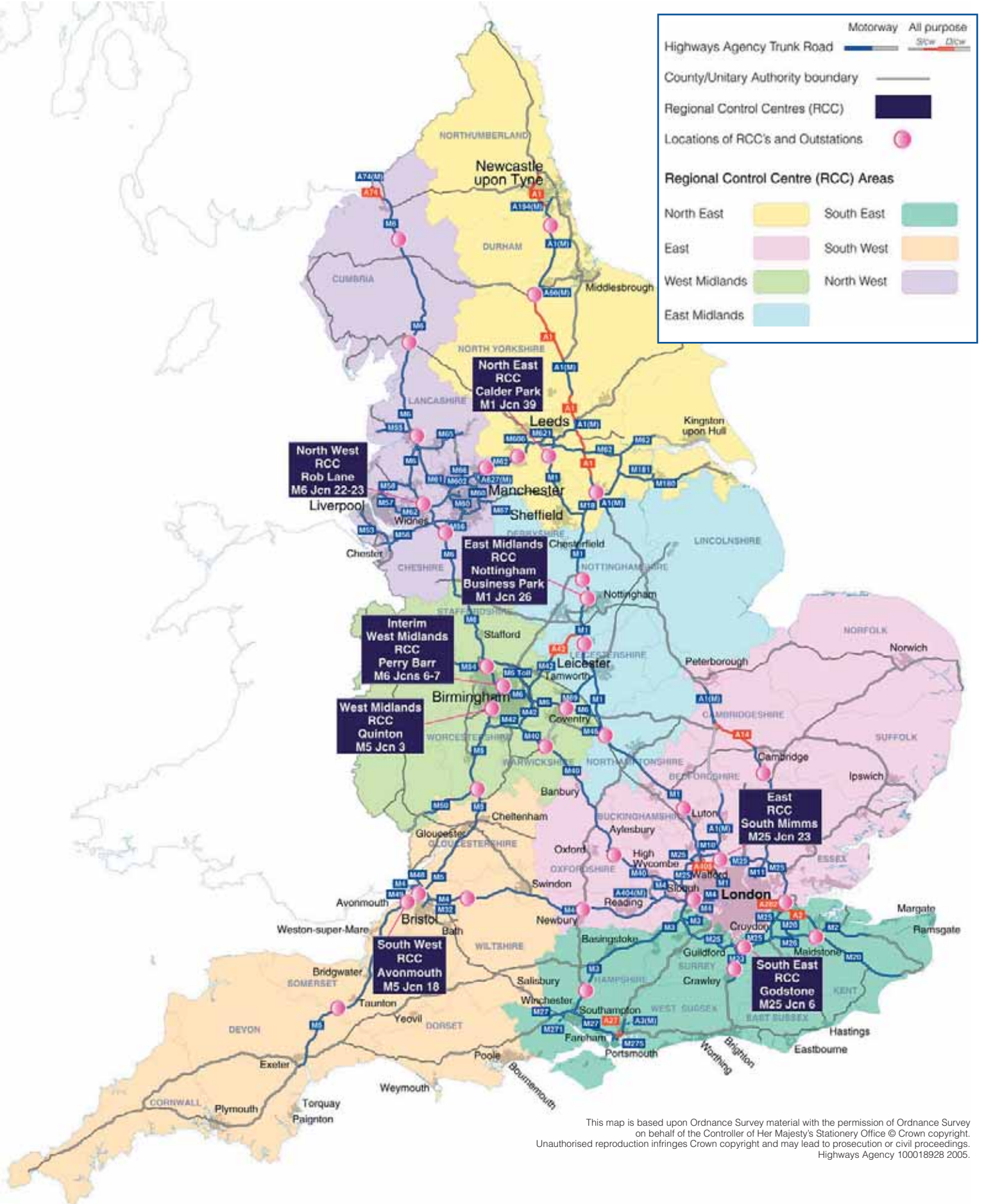
Arranging for the removal of damaged and abandoned vehicles that could danger or hinder road-users’ journeys.

- **Patrolling**

Traffic Officers go on high-visibility patrols on specific routes looking or being directed to problems such as debris in the carriageway that could affect road-users’ safety and journeys.

Traffic Officer Service

Network coverage when at full capacity including Regional Control Centre areas and outstation locations



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Regional Control Centres

Traffic Officers will be supported by seven Regional Control Centres covering England, jointly staffed by the police and the Highways Agency. They each cover the motorways across a number of police forces. Regional Control Centres will:

- Send Traffic Officers to incidents
- Coordinate the responses of emergency services and other service providers
- Manage and monitor traffic conditions, for example by using CCTV
- Provide early warning and respond to incidents
- Put information messages on the electronic signs over the road
- Answer all emergency roadside telephone calls in their region

Working with the police

The Traffic Officer role has been developed jointly with the police. The police will continue to deal with the enforcement of road traffic offences, the investigation of crime, and will retain overall responsibility for serious incidents.

Over the next few pages you can read more information about the different roles from those who are currently doing the job in the West Midlands: *“In their own words.”*

INTERVIEW WITH A TRAFFIC OFFICER

Name	Richard Hill
Age	49
Position	Traffic Officer
Location	Strensham, Worcestershire

Richard joined the Highways Agency in March 2004 from a manufacturing and service industries background, most recently as a driver transporting prisoners.

One of 80 on-road Traffic Officers in the West Midlands, he works 8½ hour shifts between 6am and 10pm, on a nine-day pattern, including six days on and then three days off. (*Shift patterns may vary to cover 24 hour a day service*).

Duties include patrolling parts of the M5, M40 and M42 motorways, removing debris from the carriageway, assisting stranded motorists and supporting the police in managing major motorway incidents.

Richard explains more: ***“My job is to act as the eyes and ears of the Highways Agency on my patrol route on the West Midlands motorways.”***

“It’s a great job. My patrol partner and I experience something new every time we go out on patrol. Our customers are everyone who uses the motorways, from motorcyclists to heavy goods vehicle drivers. You have to have good communications skills and be able to adapt to an ever-changing and sometimes unpleasant, even dangerous environment.

“It’s extremely rewarding knowing that you have made a difference to someone’s day. This can range from offering practical safety advice on the hard shoulder to making sure that a customer’s recovery company is on the way.

“The reality of the job is that you could be picking up a piece of debris from the hard-shoulder at six in the morning with the rain pouring down. But that’s part of the job, and contributes to providing safer roads and more reliable journeys for the travelling public.

“I have especially enjoyed talking to members of the public. Because we are a new service I explain who we are, what we do and how we are working closely with the police, freeing up their time so they can catch more criminals on the roads.”

Richard’s advice to people considering applying to be a Traffic Officer:

“This job does have an element of risk, because you are dealing with unknown variables, which include people and vehicles travelling at high speeds very close to where you are working.

“Traffic Officers help to manage the motorways, and are able to offer assistance in a number of different ways. We have some legal powers to stop and direct traffic but do not have any enforcement powers, as we are not police

officers. If you like helping people and want a great degree of job satisfaction, along with good career prospects, then becoming a Traffic Officer could be for you.”

INTERVIEW WITH A TRAFFIC OFFICER SUPERVISOR

Name **Dee Innis**
Age **38**
Position **Traffic Officer Supervisor**
Location **Longbridge, Birmingham**

Dee joined the Highways Agency after many years as a claims manager and specialist corporate investigator. She now works as one of 12 Traffic Officer Supervisors in the West Midlands, on 8½ hour shifts between 6am and 10pm, managing up to eight on-road Traffic Officers. *(Shift patterns may vary to cover 24 hour a day service).*

In addition to her on-road duties patrolling the motorways, as a Supervisor her role includes managing a team, their workload and various administrative duties at one of four outstations in the West Midlands region.

“My responsibilities as an on-road Traffic Officer Supervisor start as soon as I arrive at my outstation” says Dee. “I check that all the vehicles and radios are booked in from the previous shift and all the equipment, from radios to cones, is in full working order.

“I then conduct a shift de-brief with each two-person crew from the outgoing shift and then deliver the information gathered to my shift, before issuing vehicles and equipment, and ensuring all staff have the correct uniform. If I’m on patrol I need to do additional vehicle checks myself to ensure all safety standards are adhered to before I drive on the motorway.

“In an average week I will spend half my time on-road looking out for any incidents or activities on the roads at which we can assist. The other half of my time is spent at the outstation; monitoring the radio and assisting Traffic Officers who are out on patrol, completing paperwork and attending meetings, along with responding to emails and dealing with any issues staff may have.”

“Many drivers are surprised to see a female Traffic Officer. For women drivers who have the misfortune of breaking-down, it is particularly reassuring to be given safety advice by a woman.”

Dee’s advice to people considering applying to be a Traffic Officer Supervisor:

“Make sure you know what the Highways Agency wants to achieve through this service, to provide safe roads, reliable journeys and informed travellers.

“You can’t afford to be shy, you need good driving, observation and customer service skills, and you need to be prepared to politely answer questions wherever you’re in a Traffic Officer uniform.”

INTERVIEW WITH A CONTROL CENTRE OPERATOR

Name **Shaneela Majid**
Age **25**
Position **Regional Control Centre Operator**
Location **West Midlands Regional Control Centre, Birmingham**

Shaneela joined the Highways Agency in March 2004, having previously worked in a call centre environment for the Inland Revenue, National Express, recovery and mobile phone companies.

She now works as one of 22 Control Centre Operators in the West Midlands, working one of three 8½ hour shifts over a twenty-four hour period. *(Shift patterns may vary to cover 24 hour a day service).*

Her main responsibilities include operating communications equipment to keep in radio contact with on-road Traffic Officers, and answering emergency roadside telephone calls from motorists who experience a breakdown or emergency on the motorway.

“The role of a Control Centre Operator for the Highways Agency is far removed from a traditional call-centre operator,” says Shaneela.

“At the start of the shift our team is given a briefing by the shift supervisor to explain if any incidents from the outgoing shift are still being managed, and what we can do to help clear the problem.

“We are then either assigned to the radio desk or the emergency roadside phone desk, and very quickly we start to receive calls. If I’m on radio duty I give and receive information and then contact crews on the road and despatch the nearest available unit to an incident.

“Sometimes this means talking to and managing multiple crews at the same time, inputting and reading information on five different monitors on my desk, and viewing closed circuit television footage of the motorway at the same time. You cannot be daunted by technology in this job. On occasion you may also have to view some horrific images on the cameras while directing crews at the scene of an accident.

“If I am answering the emergency roadside telephones there is no way of knowing what to expect on the end of the line. Calls range from people wanting directions to distressed motorists who have broken down or have a medical emergency.

“The important thing is to keep these people talking, reassure them that help is on the way, offer safety advice and take as much information as possible to locate their position and find out exactly what support they need.”

Shaneela’s advice to people considering applying to be a Control Centre Operator:

“To work in this environment you need to be able to multi-task, not panic under pressure and assess a lot of different information quickly. Any mistake could jeopardise someone’s life.

“If you like a challenge and think you can manage people when a major incident takes place on the motorway, then this is the ideal job. The work you do is impossible to predict, sometimes it’s exciting and it really stretches your communication skills.”

INTERVIEW WITH A CONTROL CENTRE OPERATOR SUPERVISOR

Name	Dave Milligan
Age	27
Position	Regional Control Centre Supervisor
Location	West Midlands Regional Control Centre, Birmingham

Dave joined the Highways Agency after spending four years as a recruitment consultant. He now works as one of six Regional Control Centre Supervisors in the West Midlands. Based at the Regional Control Centre, which is open 24-hours a day, he manages a team of up to five Control Centre Operators on an 8½ hour shift. (*Shift patterns may vary to cover 24 hour a day service*).

His primary duties include managing the workload of on-road Traffic Officers and working with the police to manage incidents on the motorways in the West Midlands.

“The role of a Control Centre Supervisor involves a great degree of responsibility,” explains Dave. **“The decisions you make on a daily basis are safety critical and have a direct effect on people’s lives.** Work can be hard as you are in a stressful environment; as a Supervisor you are expected to make quick and correct decisions regarding incidents throughout the motorway network.

“My typical day starts by arriving early to check if any incidents have occurred on the network in the previous shift. I then receive a briefing from the previous shift supervisor and the Police Sergeant on duty.

“I then brief my team, and allocate them to their area of work; answering radios for our on-road Traffic Officers or answering the emergency roadside telephones.

“Once the shift then starts I am then responsible for constantly monitoring the motorways, through closed circuit television and computer screens. I also need to ensure that my staff are doing their job properly, and being supported as necessary.

“Supervisors manage Traffic Officers’ attendance at incidents, and take the lead in setting the display signals on the motorway, giving drivers vital information about incidents and diversions ahead.”

Dave’s advice to people considering applying to be a Control Centre Supervisor:

“My advice is to thoroughly research the role and the environment you will be working in. Not only will you be working 8½ hour shifts that cover every hour of the day, you are also responsible for making decisions that impact on other people’s lives.

“Computer handling skills are extremely useful as you can have up to seven separate screens to manage, but you do get used to it quite quickly. The work is tough but very rewarding.”

INTERESTED?

If you think you would like to be part of this new Traffic Officer Service contact us for more information and details of current vacancies.

For opportunities in the north of England, telephone: **020 7562 1653**

For opportunities in the south of England, telephone: **0800 917 4441**

www.betterhighways.co.uk

Driving through roadworks



If you do have to drive through roadworks, please take extra care.

- Keep to the speed limit – it’s there for your safety
- Get into the correct lane in good time – don’t keep switching
- Concentrate on the road ahead, not on the roadworks
- Be alert for works traffic leaving or entering roadworks
- Keep a safe distance – there could be queues in front
- Observe all signs – they’re there to help you

Remember that tiredness can kill. Take regular breaks from driving.

For further information on the Highways Agency call our information line: 08457 50 40 30