

Motorway signs, signals and road markings

Most motorway signs have a blue background with white lettering, numbers and borders, although tourist destination signs, as on other roads, have brown backgrounds (see page 84).



Start of motorway regulations

Special traffic regulations govern the use of motorways. These include no stopping (except, in an emergency, on the hard shoulder or verge), no U-turns and no reversing. Goods vehicles and buses (where a bus is a vehicle constructed to

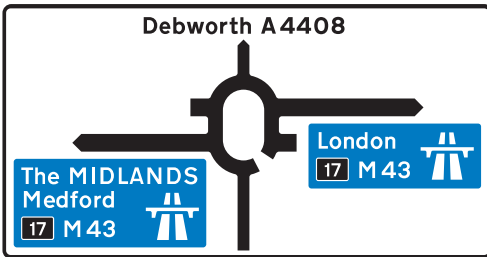
carry more than eight seated passengers) with a maximum laden weight of more than 7.5 tonnes, vehicles drawing trailers, and vehicles required to be fitted with a speed limiter, must not use the right-hand lane of a motorway that has three or more lanes. Motorways must not be used by certain classes of traffic: learner drivers other than HGV, invalid carriages of less than 254 kg unladen weight, pedal cycles, motorcycles under 50 cc capacity, agricultural vehicles and vehicles incapable of attaining a speed of 25 mph on the level when unladen and not drawing a trailer. Pedestrians and animals are also prohibited.

To ensure that direction signs are absolutely clear to drivers travelling at motorway speeds, it is necessary to limit the number of destinations shown. Your destination might not appear on the motorway signs: when planning a journey, it is advisable before setting off to check the junction number of the exit you require. Junctions can be identified by the number shown on a black background in the bottom left-hand or top left-hand corner of motorway signs (or, in the case of overhead signs, in a separate panel also indicating the distance to the junction). Junction numbers are usually shown on road maps, so it is easy to check these before starting your journey. On the motorway, these numbers can be used as a guide to your location. However, not all junctions have an exit in both directions, so numbers may not be consecutive. Where new junctions have been constructed, the number may be followed by a letter (e.g. junction 23A).

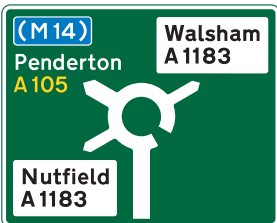
A road other than a motorway is called an "all-purpose road". At the point where you join a motorway, a special symbol is used to indicate the start of motorway regulations. A direction sign on an all-purpose road will normally use this symbol to indicate a motorway slip road or the beginning of a motorway. Where a sign shows a motorway route number on a blue background without the symbol, the route indicated will normally be an all-purpose road that you should follow to reach the motorway.



Blue direction signs, with the motorway symbol and large route numbers, indicate that a motorway or motorway slip road leads directly from a junction with an all-purpose road. The motorway junction number, shown on the black background, may not always be included



On the approach to a junction with a motorway, a direction sign on an all-purpose road has blue panels that include the motorway symbol. The panels may include the junction number on a black background. The name in capital letters is a regional destination



This sign, with the motorway number in brackets on a blue background, but without the motorway symbol, indicates the route to take from a junction ahead in order to reach the motorway. The motorway is not accessed directly from this junction

Signs for junctions on the motorway

On the approach to a junction, direction signs are usually located 1 mile and 1/2 mile in advance, and at the exit point. Where junctions are close together, these distances may be reduced, normally to 2/3 mile and 1/3 mile respectively. The signs may be mounted at the side of the road or overhead.

Signs located at the side of the motorway. These are used where there is a deceleration lane. The number of lanes through the junction remains the same



The first two signs on the approach to a junction show the destination and the route number for the exit only. The distance shown (usually 1 mile or 1/2 mile) is the distance to the exit (start of the deceleration lane). The junction number is shown on the black background



This sign is located at the start of the deceleration lane and includes destinations reached by staying on the motorway



A final route direction sign is usually located where the exit slip road separates from the main carriageway



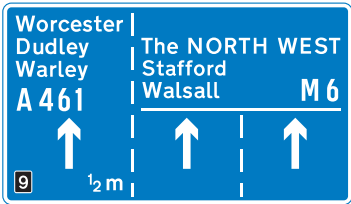
Countdown markers indicate the distance to the start of the deceleration lane. Each bar represents about 100 yards

Overhead sign for junctions with deceleration lanes, where the number of lanes through the junction remains the same

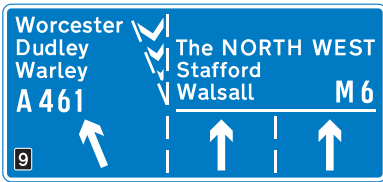


This sign is used on the approach to the junction (usually 1 mile and 1/2 mile in advance) and at the start of the deceleration lane. Destinations and route numbers are shown for both the exit and the motorway ahead. Countdown markers are normally provided for the deceleration lane

Signs located at the side of the motorway where one or more lanes leave the main carriageway to become the exit slip road. This type of junction is known as a lane drop



This sign is normally located 1 mile and 1/2 mile before the junction and shows the appropriate lanes to use for various destinations. In this example, the left-hand lane leads directly to the exit slip road; the centre and right-hand lanes continue through the junction



This sign, with the inclined arrow, is normally located just before the left-hand lane leaves the main carriageway

Overhead signs for a lane-drop junction



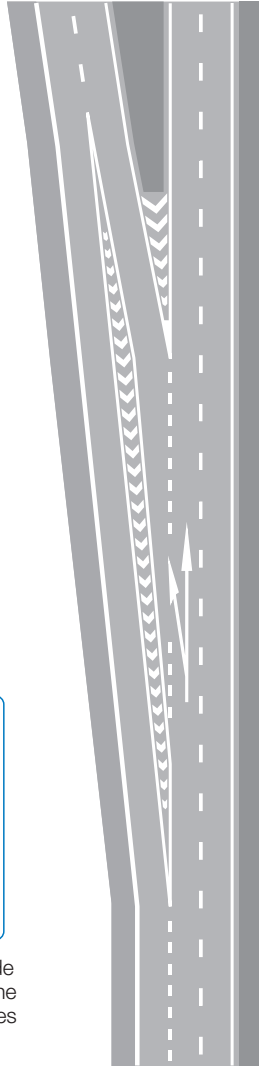
This sign is used both in advance and at the junction



A confirmatory sign may be provided just after the point where the slip road has separated from the main carriageway. It is used where signs on the approach to the junction are either overhead or located at the side of the motorway

Lane-drop junctions do not use the countdown markers shown on page 79, as there is no deceleration lane for drivers to move into. A special road marking is used at lane drops (see pages 65 and 81) between the main carriageway and the lane that leads to the exit slip road. This marking usually commences at the 1/2 mile advance sign.

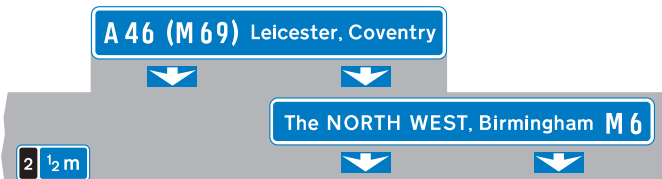
Some junction layouts may be more complex and designed to allow a heavier flow of traffic to leave the motorway. A traffic lane may be shared by traffic both continuing ahead and leaving the motorway. This shared lane has a deceleration lane separated from a lane drop by chevron road markings. In the example, the left-hand lane is used for the exit slip road only, the centre lane is the shared lane, and the right-hand lane is for ahead traffic only. A sign mounted at the side of the motorway shows the road layout. An overhead sign shows the appropriate lanes to use for each destination.



Central reservation



A sign mounted at the side of the motorway shows the arrangement of traffic lanes



Overhead sign showing appropriate lanes for the different destinations

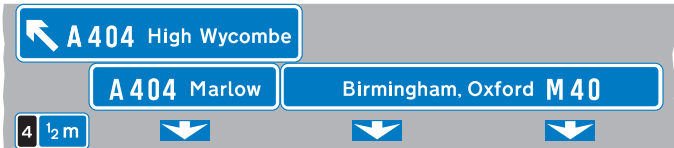
Other types of sign in advance of junctions



Where the junction ahead is with another motorway, additional signs may be provided prior to the 1 mile advance sign



Where two junctions are very close, they may both be shown on the same sign, together with the distances and junction numbers. The sign that is located where the deceleration lane starts for the first exit (see page 79) will normally show the second exit place names and route number with the ahead destinations



This overhead sign indicates a junction that has two exits. The first exit has a deceleration lane and is indicated by the upper part of the sign. The second exit is a lane drop. Traffic continuing along the motorway should use the centre and right-hand lanes

Signs showing lanes that join the main carriageway at junctions



Sign for drivers on slip road



Sign for drivers on main carriageway

The slip road joins the main carriageway as a lane gain to increase the number of lanes from two to three. A distance panel may be added



Sign for drivers on slip road



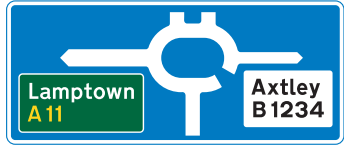
Sign for drivers on main carriageway

The right-hand lane of the slip road joins the main carriageway as a merge with an acceleration lane. This is followed by the left-hand lane which joins the main carriageway as a lane gain. Chevron road markings normally separate the two lanes on the slip road. The distance may be omitted

Direction signs on exit slip roads (the green panels indicate a primary route; the white panels indicate a non-primary route)



Directions from junction ahead, usually controlled by traffic signals or a "give way" sign



Directions from a roundabout ahead



Motorway-to-motorway junction with a roundabout (motorway regulations continue to apply)



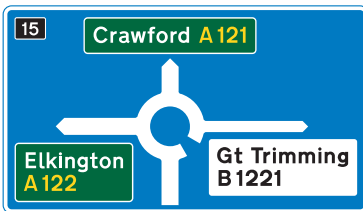
Appropriate lanes to use on the approach to the junction (sign located at the side of the slip road)



Appropriate lanes to use on the approach to the junction (overhead sign over the slip road)



Appropriate lanes for turning movements at junction ahead



Direction signs where the main carriageway of a motorway ends at a roundabout

Motorway ends at a junction with an all-purpose road



Motorway ends at a junction with another motorway

Signs for tourist destinations

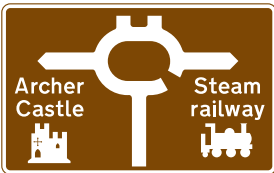
Tourist destinations are shown on signs with brown backgrounds. On the main carriageway of a motorway, these are separate from the main direction signs and are usually sited $\frac{3}{4}$ mile and $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from the junction (although they do not show the distance to the junction). On exit slip roads and where the motorway ends at a roundabout, the main direction signs may show tourist destinations on a brown panel, in the same way that they show other destinations on green and white panels (see page 83). However, separate brown signs are likely to be used at these locations to avoid putting too much information on a single sign. See pages 100 to 102 for more information about tourist signs.



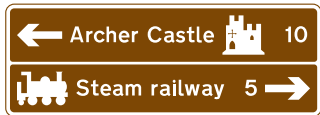
Sign at the side of the main carriageway. There will usually be two of these in advance of the junction



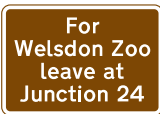
Sign indicating a place with several tourist attractions. It is located at the side of the main carriageway on the approach to a junction



Sign on exit slip road indicating directions to tourist attractions from a roundabout ahead



Sign on exit slip road indicating directions to tourist attractions from a junction ahead



Where it is not practicable to provide tourist destination signs within 1 mile of a junction or there are more destinations than can be accommodated on the signs, this sign may be used in advance of the main 1 mile direction sign for the junction. It may also be used when the junction layout is complex (such as that shown on page 81); "leave at Junction 24" is then varied to "follow" plus a destination

Signs for motorway service areas

On most motorways, service areas are provided at intervals of not more than 30 miles, half an hour at normal motorway driving speeds. These service areas are open 24 hours a day, every day of the year, and provide fuel, free parking (up to 2 hours), refreshments, toilets and disabled access. Other facilities, including telephones, motels and tourist information, may also be provided. Some motorway service areas are accessed directly from the main carriageway, others via junctions with other roads, where they will also be available to non-motorway traffic.



After each junction, a sign may show the distance to the next motorway service area



This sign may be used when there is a junction with another motorway before the next service area



About 1 mile in advance of a service area, a sign may inform drivers of the availability of services ahead, including the names of the operators. It will normally show the next two services, and include services on other motorways if the junctions with those motorways are reached before the second service area. Where the first services are located at a junction, this sign is likely to be used about 2 miles in advance; the word "Services" may be added to the junction direction signs as an exit destination



About 1/2 mile before the service area (further if the services are at a junction), a sign informs drivers of the facilities available, and may include both the name of the operator and the geographical name. The price of fuel, if shown, is usually for a litre of unleaded petrol, indicated by the green pump symbol. The "LPG" symbol means that LPG fuel is available; the "i" symbol refers to an information point; the bed symbol indicates overnight accommodation



Sign located at start of the deceleration lane for a service area with direct access from the motorway



Alternative signs indicating the entrance to a service area accessed directly from a motorway. May be used to indicate the direction to a motorway service area located on an all-purpose road



Where a motorway service area is situated on an all-purpose road, the signs off the motorway, indicating the services, should have a blue background (older signs may have a green or white background). The geographical name of the services may be shown on these signs, but not the operator's name (this is shown only on the signs on the motorway). The word "Services" may be incorporated into other direction signs, including the sign on the exit slip road from the motorway. Where these signs have a green or white background, the word "Services" (with or without a geographical name) will normally be placed on a blue panel.



Motorway service area ahead on an all-purpose road (sign located off the motorway)



Direction or entrance to a motorway service area located on an all-purpose road (alternative signs)

Signs may be provided to indicate that services are not available on the motorway.



Sign on motorway indicating that no services are available ahead. Drivers should leave the motorway if service facilities are required



Sign on all-purpose road indicating that no services are available on motorway ahead. The motorway number may include a compass point (e.g. "M41(N)") if services are available in one direction but not the other

Other signs on motorways



A route confirmatory sign is provided after most junctions. This shows the motorway number and the distances to the main destinations ahead



Where there are more destinations than can be accommodated on the direction signs at a junction, a sign such as this may be used in advance of the 1 mile direction sign. It advises drivers of the route to be followed (or junction to leave at) for destinations that cannot be accommodated on the main junction sign



This sign indicates a slip road that leads to a maintenance compound and is not available to the general public



Where a motorway has been widened but the original bridges retained, there may be no hard shoulder under or over the bridge. Where this occurs, signs will indicate the distance over which this applies. There will be hatched markings on the hard shoulder at the point where it comes to an end



Observation platforms are sometimes provided at the back of the hard shoulder. These are reserved for authorised vehicles, such as those of the Highways Agency's Traffic Officers or the police



County boundary sign (may be varied to show the name of a river)



Marker posts, located at the back of the hard shoulder at 100 metre intervals, show the direction to the nearest emergency telephone (housed in an orange box). You can use the telephone to contact the control centre in case of an emergency or breakdown

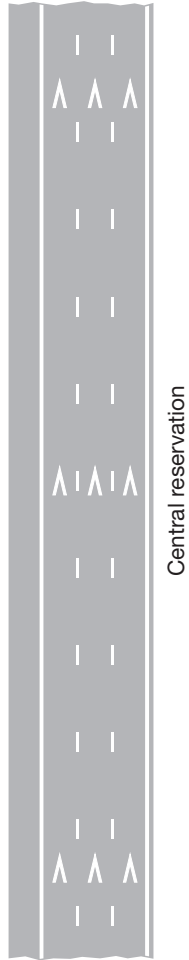
Keep your distance

Some motorways may have special chevron markings in the centre of the traffic lanes. These are spaced 40 metres apart, and keeping two marks between your vehicle and the one in front will provide a safe driving distance at 70mph. There will be signs advising you to check your distance, keep two chevrons apart and keep your distance.

Keep apart 2 chevrons



Check your distance



Direction signs for drivers of goods vehicles



Direction of route recommended for goods vehicles



This sign is located before the 1 mile advance sign for a junction ahead. It is used where it is not practicable to sign a goods vehicle route at the junction itself

Signs indicating the end of motorway regulations



Sign located at the entrance to a service area accessed directly from the motorway, or a maintenance compound



Sign located on main carriageway to indicate the distance to the end of the motorway



Sign located where the motorway ends on either the main carriageway or exit slip road

Motorway signals and variable signs

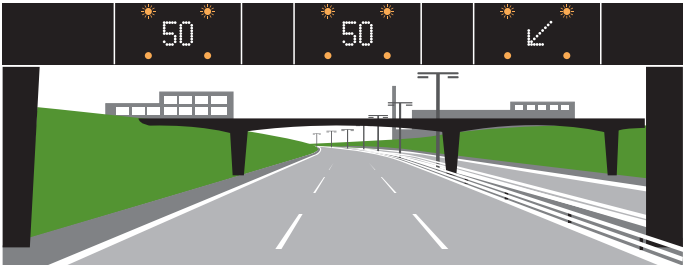
These advise of abnormal traffic conditions ahead (e.g. lane closures or fog) and may indicate a speed limit. See Active Traffic Management on page 91 for signs where the hard shoulder is sometimes used as a traffic lane. Where variable speed limit signs are mounted over individual lanes and the speed limit is shown in a red ring (see page 20), the limit is mandatory. Speed limits that do not include the red ring are the maximum speeds advised for the prevailing conditions.

Signals and variable signs may apply to individual lanes when mounted overhead or, when located on the central reservation or at the side of the motorway, to the whole carriageway. They are normally blank, but when they indicate a restriction the reason may not always be obvious. There may have been an accident ahead, so take no chances and obey the signals. When red lamps are flashing above your lane, you **MUST STOP** unless you can move safely to a lane where red signals are not showing.



Red lamps flashing from side to side in pairs, together with a red cross, mean "do not proceed in the traffic lane directly below". These signals are mounted above the carriageway: there is a signal for each traffic lane. A previous signal may direct you into an adjacent lane (see page 90). More than one lane may be closed to traffic

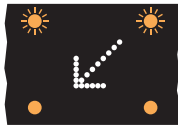
Signals and variable signs above each lane of the motorway



Each lane has its own signal; each signal has two pairs of amber lamps that flash from top to bottom. You should obey the signal for your lane



Temporary maximum speed advised for prevailing traffic conditions



Move to adjacent lane (arrow may point downwards to the right)



Leave motorway at next exit



Risk of fog ahead



Risk of ice ahead



End of temporary restrictions

Signals and variable signs at the side of the motorway

These apply to the carriageway as a whole and are either located on the central reservation or mounted above the hard shoulder in combination with variable signs that display information about road works, congestion and diversions ahead. The amber lamps flash in pairs from top to bottom



Various lane closures (signs for carriageways with four, three or two lanes)



Temporary maximum speed advised



Leave motorway at next exit



Risk of fog ahead

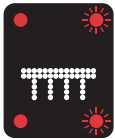


Risk of ice ahead



End of temporary restrictions

Signals and variable signs at the entrance to a motorway



All lanes closed (signs for carriageways with four, three or two lanes). Do not enter the motorway when the red lamps are flashing in pairs from side to side

Older type of motorway signal



On some motorways, particularly in Scotland, you may encounter this type of signal mounted at the side of the carriageway. Flashing amber lamps indicate that there is a hazard ahead. You should not exceed a speed of 30mph until you have passed this hazard

Active Traffic Management



Start of Active Traffic Management

A scheme has been introduced on part of the M42 motorway, between the M6 and M40 near Birmingham, to allow traffic to use the hard shoulder as a traffic lane during times of heavy congestion or when there has been an incident that blocks one or more lanes. This is known as "Active Traffic Management".

Refuge areas for emergency use only

Sign indicating presence of emergency refuge areas ahead



This sign is located at each emergency refuge area

Lay-bys, with emergency telephones, have been constructed at the back of the hard shoulder. These are known as "emergency refuge areas" and should be used in the same way as a normal hard shoulder. Even if the hard shoulder is not being used as a traffic lane, in the event of a breakdown or emergency you should use the refuge areas whenever possible. They are provided at intervals of approximately 500 metres (550 yards). Emergency refuge areas may be provided elsewhere on the motorway network at locations where there are no hard shoulders.

Each lane, including the hard shoulder, has overhead signals and signs similar to those described on pages 89 and 90. Before the hard shoulder is made available to traffic, a speed limit will be applied to the main carriageway. This will be the same for all lanes and will usually be 50 mph. The speed limit shown over each lane will be in a red ring (see page 20) with no signals. There will be a red cross, with no signals, above the hard shoulder to indicate that it is closed. When the hard shoulder is in use as a traffic lane, the red cross will change to a speed limit (the same as for the other lanes). Should it be necessary to close any lane, including the hard shoulder when it is in use as a traffic lane, a red cross with red lamps flashing in vertical pairs will be shown above that lane (see page 89). The previous signal will show an arrow, inclined downwards to the left or to the right, indicating that you should move into the adjacent lane (see page 90).

A variable message sign, located above the hard shoulder, will give worded messages such as "Congestion Stay in lane" and "Congestion Use hard shoulder".

Hard shoulder ENDS

At intermediate junctions, the hard shoulder becomes the exit lane leading directly to the slip road. A sign indicates where this change of use takes place. If the hard shoulder is not already in

use as a traffic lane, you can move across to leave the motorway when you have passed the sign. When the hard shoulder is in use as a traffic lane, it should normally be used only by traffic leaving at the next junction, as it becomes a lane drop at the junction (i.e. the lane becomes the exit slip road). The overhead direction signs are slightly different from those on other motorways. Signs in advance of the junction showing the exit destinations and those showing the ahead destinations are usually mounted overhead at separate locations.



Destination reached by leaving the motorway at the next junction



Destinations reached by staying on the motorway at the next junction



The end of Active Traffic Management is indicated by a sign, and the overhead variable signs indicate the resumption of the national speed limit (see page 20).

Visit www.highways.gov.uk/atm for further information on Active Traffic Management.

More information on Directgov

You can find related information on roads and traffic on Directgov. Click on the link or use the web address underneath.

www.direct.gov.uk/highwaycodemotorways

www.direct.gov.uk/managedmotorways