APPENDIX D: Q&A FOR M6 JUNCTIONS 5-8 CONSULTATION ON BIRMINGHAM BOX PHASE 3 MANAGED MOTORWAYS

Q. What is happening?
A. The Birmingham Motorway Box comprises sections of the M42, M6 and M5 and provides a ‘ring road’ to the West Midlands conurbation. From Junctions 5 to 8 the M6 is a heavily congested section in the motorway network that carries strategic transport flows, including between 20% and 35% heavy goods vehicles, through the major conurbation of Birmingham in the West Midlands, linking the M1 and the North West of England. The AM and PM peak journey times between junctions 5 and J8 are between +55% and +65% greater than during free flow conditions. The resulting congestion increases business costs and reduces mobility. It is anticipated that the Managed Motorway Scheme will reduce congestion; provide more reliable journey times; reduce the number and severity of personal injury accidents; increase and improve the quality of information for road users.

Q. Why is the HA consulting?
A. This consultation will provide an opportunity for interested parties and individuals to comment on the legislative changes required to allow for the implementation of Variable Mandatory Speed Limits and Hard Shoulder Running on this section of the M6.

Q. Who can respond to this?
A. This consultation is available for anyone to respond to, including organisations that would be affected by the implementation of Variable Mandatory Speed Limits and Hard Shoulder Running. The consultation is aimed at any affected stakeholder groups and the general public.

Q. Is the introduction of Variable Mandatory Speed Limits and Hard Shoulder Running likely to be effective?
A. The introduction of Variable Mandatory Speed Limits and Hard Shoulder Running on sections of the M6 and M42 round Birmingham have shown a reduction in congestion and collisions and improved traffic flows resulting in more reliable journey times.

The M42 Managed Motorways Three-Year Safety Review, which looks at accident data before and after the scheme was delivered shows that personal injury accidents have reduced by more than half (56%) since Hard Shoulder Running was introduced. There was also an overall reduction in the severity of accidents with zero fatalities and fewer seriously injured.

Q. Why have a variable speed limit? Why not a fixed speed limit?
A. By varying the mandatory speed limit the Highways Agency can manage the flow of traffic more effectively. The speed limits displayed on the motorway will take account of prevailing traffic conditions with the aim of ensuring the smooth flow of traffic. It is part of introducing Managed Motorways - which is
about modernising the operation of our motorways and finding the best solution for different parts of the network.

Q. How does it work?
A. The Variable Mandatory Speed Limits and messages shown on the gantries are automatically displayed in response to the level of congestion. Sensors in the road surface detect the speed, volume and flow of traffic which then calculate the optimum speed to keep traffic moving, reducing the level of 'stop-start' traffic which leads to congestion – this is undertaken automatically at the roadside. Drivers see the current speed limit displayed on electronic signals on the overhead gantries.

When additional capacity is required, and the operator in the Highways Agency West Midlands Regional Control Centre has performed the necessary safety checks then the operator will open the hard shoulder as an additional running lane.

Q. When are the variable speed limits likely to become mandatory?
A. We are hoping to implement the Variable Mandatory Speed Limits and Hard Shoulder Running in early 2014.

Q. So what is the point of the consultation?
A. The Highways Agency is committed to effective consultation and complies with the Government’s Code of Practice on Consultation. Effective consultation with affected stakeholders and the general public brings to light valuable information which we are able to use to design effective solutions and mitigate any concerns.

Following the consultation period, responses will be issued where appropriate and a summary report compiled which will provide an analysis of the responses and provide justification for the selected option.

Enforcement Q&A

Q: Are Variable Mandatory Speed Limits linked to safety cameras?
A: Yes, and as the Variable Mandatory Speed Limits change, the safety cameras will be automatically adjusted to suit the currently signalled limits.

Q: How are you going to enforce the speed limits?
A: The speed limits are enforced by the Police.

There are cameras on the gantries for use in enforcement. As per the Highway Code, any sign in a red circle is mandatory so the speed limits are legally enforceable.

The system takes a spot speed of vehicles as they pass beneath a gantry which is showing the Variable Mandatory Speed Limit.
Q: How will the Variable Mandatory Speed Limits be enforced during normal motorway conditions?

A: Enforcement is a matter for the police, who will continue to enforce the national speed limits, as on all roads including motorways.

Q: What happens if I travel beneath a signal when it changes?

A: When the cameras are in operation there is a built in time delay from the switching of the signal/speed limit to when the cameras will actually enforce – once mandatory. When there is a change in the speed limit displayed on the speed limit sign and if the vehicle had passed that sign ten seconds earlier, then the speed limit applicable to the driver of the vehicle will be the speed limit displayed on that sign prior to it changing.

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