

# My Way

Making the most of life on the road





## Welcome to My Way

This magazine aims to help you keep moving and stay safe, regardless of unexpected setbacks. With it you'll find an emergency card to keep in your vehicle. It should help at stressful times when all is not going to plan.

The advice published here has resulted from talking to you, individually and through your organisations. These discussions have also prompted several ongoing projects to improve facilities for you on our roads. You can keep up to date with them at [www.highways.gov.uk/disability](http://www.highways.gov.uk/disability)

The web page will also have a downloadable version of this magazine and emergency card, as well as a sign language film.

We hope you enjoy the read and wish you the happiest of travels.

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# BEAT THE BREAKDOWN BLUES

Helen Smith from Mobilise, a campaigning charity for Blue Badge holders, disabled motorists, wheelchair and scooter users, says always plan for the unexpected.

Whilst modern life makes us all rush about without much thought for what could happen along the way, it's common sense to plan any long journey in a vehicle and if you have a disability you may need to plan your route even more carefully.

My first piece of advice is to put in some research on your route; how long it should take you, alternatives in case of major hold-ups, where you can find an accessible loo and where you can get help to refuel your vehicle if you need it. There's a useful online journey planner at **[www.transportdirect.info](http://www.transportdirect.info)**

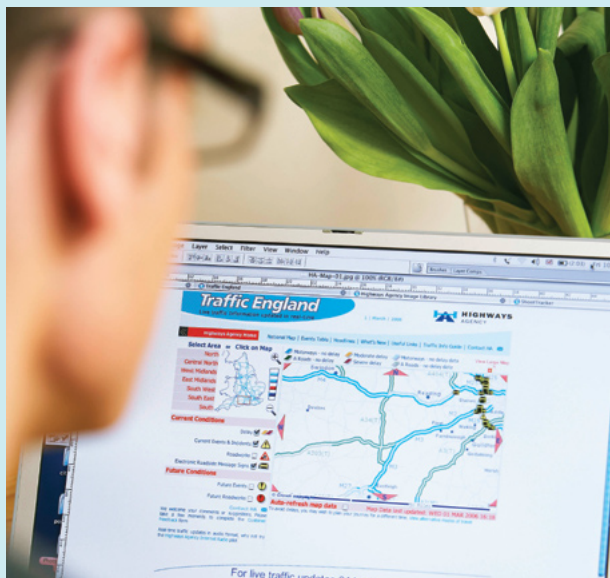
Before you go, check on traffic, weather and incidents or road closures. You can find this information through Ceefax, Teletext or online at

**[www.trafficradio.org.uk](http://www.trafficradio.org.uk)** or **[www.highways.gov.uk](http://www.highways.gov.uk)** - click on traffic information.

You can also ring the Highways Agency (HA) on **08700 660 115** for traffic information or **08457 50 40 30** for other enquiries. You can access both numbers via Typetalk. The HA is also developing a text service for mobile phones - find out more at their website above (see back cover for call and text charges).

It's a good idea if you are on medication to take extra with you in case you breakdown or get stuck in traffic. Similarly, it's sensible to take some extra clothing - will you be warm enough if you have to sit in your vehicle or on the grass verge for a long time? It's also advisable to have some food and drink.

Once on the way, traffic radio provides regular bulletins but you'll still need a good atlas to find alternative routes or places to stop if need be.



A mobile phone is essential, especially if you have difficulty getting out of your vehicle to summon help, so make sure it is charged and with you (a spare battery is also advisable).

Although nobody wants to think about having a collision, a flat tyre or breaking down you should consider what you would do if this happened. How will you be recovered and what practical limitations might there be to your rescue?

I can't recommend strongly enough that you have breakdown assistance. Whilst you can expect a HA Traffic Officer to find you if you're stranded on a motorway, they are not breakdown recovery agents or mechanics. Their primary role is to make sure you are safe while you await recovery. Off the motorways, the need for breakdown cover becomes greater. If you have a breakdown service that knows about your own or your passenger's disabilities, the whole rescue process is a lot simpler and quicker.

It is worth knowing what to expect if you do break down on the motorway, so here's a run-down of the various recovery scenarios, in order of preference (of course if it is a genuine emergency you should always call 999).

**If you have breakdown cover and they know about your own or your passenger's disabilities, it makes the whole rescue process run smoother.**

**I** Someone should get to an Emergency Roadside Telephone (ERT) if possible. This puts you straight through to a Highways Agency operator who will know where you are and can help summon your breakdown recovery service if you have one. If you don't have breakdown cover, the operator can put you in touch with a recovery service of your choice to join up.





# BEAT THE BREAKDOWN BLUES

If you don't want to join a company, you'll be offered a "facilitated recovery" at an immediate cost to you. The operator can also arrange for a Highways Agency patrol to come out and make sure you are safe while you wait to be recovered.

**2** If you can't get to an ERT, the Highway Code says you should dial 999 from your mobile but it may well speed up your rescue if you also call your breakdown recovery service.

**3** If you can't get to an ERT and you don't have breakdown cover, you'll need to call 999. This will place you in the hands of the emergency services who will assess your situation and decide on the response required.

In cases 2 and 3, you'll need to give them your exact location - look out for the distance marker posts and driver locations signs along the roadside (see page 6). The numbers on them will indicate where you are. On smaller roads, try to keep track of where you are - it's all too easy to just enjoy the scenery.

In all scenarios, make sure you tell the operator about any disabilities you or your passengers have, including relevant practical information such as how you get out of your vehicle.

If you are found at the roadside by a Highways Agency Traffic Officer, they can help you source a recovery company. If they have to, they will recover you but it will cost you.

All in all, it's by far the best to be a member of a breakdown recovery service and to keep their details to hand.



The Hard Choices for Hard Shoulders article later in this magazine examines the various breakdown scenarios in greater detail but here's a simple set of guidelines to help you to remember how to travel safely and without getting stranded:

- I** - **Information;** the more you know about your route the better.
- C** - **Communication;** make sure you have a means to get in touch if you have to.
- E** - **Emergency planning;** knowing what to do in an emergency will help you stay calm.

# MAINTAINING YOUR VEHICLE

Here is an easy-to-remember routine of checks you can regularly make yourself, based on the word **POWDER**. This will help to keep your vehicle ready for the road and reduce the chances of breaking down in the first place...

**Petrol:** (or diesel) Have you got enough fuel and do you know where you can conveniently fill up?

**Oil:** A quick check is always advisable but once a month should be enough for a well maintained modern car:

**Water:** Like oil, engine coolant and washer fluid need to be regularly checked and topped up. Some drinking water for the journey is a good idea too.

**Damage:** A quick once-around-the-vehicle will confirm nothing has been damaged or gone missing while you have been away from the vehicle.

**Electrics:** Are all lights, indicators and other electrical controls working as they should be?

**Rubber:** By that, we mean the tyres. They are your only contact with the road so keep a constant eye on pressure, tread depth and any signs of damage, such as nails or bubbling or rippling on the sidewalls.



# FOLLOW THE SIGNS

The infrastructure on major roads can look overwhelming, says HA Traffic Officer, Thomas Watkins, but it all plays a role in keeping you safe and moving.

One thing that comes home to us as we patrol the motorways is how quickly conditions on the roads can change - traffic, weather, accidents and spillages all play their part. As well as planning your journey, checking traffic and weather before you leave and using radio traffic broadcasts on the way, becoming familiar with the signs, emergency phones and refuge areas might just make your life less stressful if you do have a breakdown or incident.

The information displayed on the motorway is there to do three things: provide location information, advise road users of upcoming conditions (traffic management) and provide emergency support.



## DISTANCE AND LOCATION MARKERS

There are distance marker posts (above left) at 100 metre intervals along motorway hard shoulders. As well as a location reference, they point the way to the best emergency phone to use.

In addition, driver location signs (above centre) are being installed on the road every 500m. They provide a detailed location reference with the road number at the top, the distance (in Km) from the start of the road at the bottom and the letter in the middle denotes your direction. Use these signs to tell the emergency services where you are if you have, or witness, a breakdown or incident.

## VARIABLE MESSAGE SIGNS

Located on the central reservation, on the roadside, on overhead gantries and on slip roads, these tell you about road conditions ahead so you can make informed decisions en route. They range from fog warnings, speed limits and lane closures up to more detailed messages aimed at improving safety and minimising the impact of congestion, incidents or road restrictions, as well as information about journey times.

## MANAGED MOTORWAYS

Modern hi-tech communications and roadside cameras now enable the HA to take practical and safe measures to ease traffic flow when it's getting busy. As well as road signs, these include variable speed limits, hard-shoulder running and ramp metering (traffic lights on motorway entry slip roads to regulate the flow onto the main carriageway). For now these measures have only been introduced on certain motorways but watch this space for a national rollout over the next few years.



## EMERGENCY ROADSIDE TELEPHONES (ERTs)

The latest generation of phones allow motorists better access to make an emergency call. They have volume control and the handset contains an inductive coupler for users with a hearing aid, as well as a display to allow operators to communicate by text if need be. To use the ERT, open the door and pick up the receiver and you'll automatically be connected to the Highways Agency operator, who will know your location. After you have made the call, the operator can contact you again by using a light and an alarm sound on the phone. If you leave an ERT off the hook, the operator will assume you are in difficulty or deaf and prioritise a response. Instructions for using ERTs are found on the inside of the doors.



## EMERGENCY REFUGE AREAS (ERAs)

ERAs are additional refuges beyond the traditional hard shoulder. They provide a safer place to stop in an emergency and act as an additional stopping area if the hard shoulder is being used as an extra lane. Most have sensors and/or CCTV to alert the Highways Agency when vehicles enter. And don't fear if you are genuinely stranded; the motorway network is patrolled by HA Traffic Officers 24 hours a day. They will assist you, call your breakdown service or liaise with emergency services to get you safely off the highway.





# CREATING ACCESS FOR ALL

It's a big task, but the accessibility of the road network is improving for all, says Andy Redford of the Highways Agency.

The 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) placed a responsibility on all public authorities to ensure that the services they provide are accessible to disabled people. Having embraced the ethos behind the DDA, the Highways Agency is fully committed to improving accessibility for disabled people using the major road network. The aim is to enable disabled road users to travel independently, safely and with confidence.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Since 1995, a variety of innovations have been brought in to demonstrate that commitment. These include tactile paving, dropped kerbs and raised footways at bus stops in all new developments. However, as much of the road network was constructed many years ago, the Highways Agency has also started an ongoing programme to identify and tackle existing elements of the road infrastructure that present obstacles to mobility.

## LISTENING TO DISABLED ROAD USERS

One priority is to make sure this programme truly represents the interests of disabled road users, with their input helping direct investment, rather than a prescribed plan being presented to them. So, the Highways Agency employed a consultancy to contact and ask the opinions of organisations representing a diverse range of disabilities.

The consultation delivered a clear message. The organisations said that making pavements (and pedestrian crossings), bus stops and emergency roadside telephones more accessible would make a real difference for disabled people and help improve their independence and quality of life.

## THE ACTION PLAN

The Highways Agency DDA programme now reflects these priorities. The scale of the existing network and the range of facilities makes the task ahead a long-term one but by continuing the dialogue with disabled people, improvements can be made with their ongoing access needs in mind. This partnership approach should help realise the vision of equality for disabled people as they travel on the road network.





# HARD CHOICES FOR HARD SHOULDERS

Finding yourself broken down, crashed or with a flat tyre on a major road can be a daunting prospect. The Highways Agency's Julie Smith talks to Russell Fenwick from the Association of Chief Police Officers about how to stay calm, stay safe and get moving.

**JULIE** As we know, Russell, the best thing is to not break down in the first place so, we recommend vehicles are kept in good running order and with enough fuel.

**RUSSELL** Yes and we also strongly recommend a breakdown service that knows your needs.

**JULIE** But supposing the worst does happen and someone finds themselves stuck on the motorway, let's talk about the options.

**RUSSELL** Can I just get in a quick fact first - It's actually illegal to stop on a motorway hard shoulder except in an emergency. That means never stop there to read a map, go to the toilet or answer the phone. If you think you have a problem

and your vehicle is driveable, you will have to drive to the next services or get off the motorway, even if you have a warning light showing. The hard shoulder is a dangerous place so PLEASE only stop in an absolute emergency. Do not stop in the live carriageway either. You will put yourself and others in grave danger.

**JULIE** Quite right and the Highway Code confirms that advice, telling everyone to get off the motorway to somewhere safe and appropriate where we can get assistance.

**RUSSELL** Yes, and actually now's a good time to go through the full advice contained in the Highway Code. That is



# HARD CHOICES FOR HARD SHOULDERS

to pull onto the hard shoulder and park as far left as possible, near an emergency roadside telephone if you can, and turn on your vehicle's hazard warning lights. Then everyone should leave the vehicle through a left hand door, ie away from passing traffic, and get to a place of safety away from the motorway. Leave any animals in the vehicle, or keep them under proper control on the verge. Do not put out a warning triangle.

**JULIE** Great. And if anyone in the vehicle can get to an Emergency Roadside Telephone (ERT), that's definitely the best way to get help, as the phone itself pinpoints your location to the Highways Agency operator and they can facilitate the quickest response. However, if someone is really stuck in the vehicle, what then?

**RUSSELL** The Highway Code says you should stay in the vehicle, switch on your hazards - plus side lights if it's dark - and display a 'help' pennant if you have one. If you have a mobile phone you should then dial 999, tell the emergency services your location, the problem with your vehicle, the nature of any disabilities, and details of any breakdown recovery service you have.

**JULIE** Will the response be the same if they dial 999 as it is from an ERT?

**RUSSELL** Not necessarily. Going back to what I said earlier about the hard shoulder being dangerous, the first priority of any responder is the safety of the

people stuck there. The police operator will therefore assess the situation and decide the response required based on safety first - such as attendance by the police or a Highways Agency patrol - and then recovery.

**JULIE** OK. Now, if you have breakdown cover, the Highways Agency operator can contact them for you. Will you have to call them separately if you dial 999?

**RUSSELL** The police operator may be able to summon your breakdown recovery service but equally it may be agreed that the best solution is for the person with the cover to call them direct.

**JULIE** And if you don't have breakdown cover, the Highways Agency operator can put you in touch with a recovery agent. What about 999?





**RUSSELL** Just as I said before, if you don't have breakdown cover and you call 999 from your mobile, you'll be in the hands of the emergency services who will assess your situation and decide on the response required, based on safety first and recovery after.

**JULIE** OK, that's understandable. So, is there any other information the operator may need?

**RUSSELL** The fuller the picture the better really. So they will need to know any restrictions on movement and any medical requirements, as well as details of your vehicle and the suspected fault. That way, the HA, and recovery service, will come properly equipped to recover you.

**JULIE** Yes, great advice, but of course the worst case scenario is where someone is broken down, can't get out of the vehicle and has no mobile phone, or can't get a signal. What happens then?

**RUSSELL** Sit tight and wait for a Highways Agency Traffic Officer to come. As you know Julie, they patrol the

motorways in England all day and night. You may also be picked up on CCTV, which is being installed on more and more of the motorway network.

**JULIE** Yes, the Traffic Officer will first make sure everyone is in good health and safe while awaiting a recovery agent. They may also take whatever appropriate action is necessary to help the recovery, such as closing off lane one so that everyone can exit the vehicle safely.

OK, I think that has really clarified the various breakdown procedures. Are there any other good tips for the hard shoulder?

**RUSSELL** Yes; if you can't get out of your vehicle, there are a few ways to stay that bit safer on the hard shoulder. Turn your front wheels slightly towards the barrier; apply the handbrake, turn the engine off and keep your seatbelt on.

**JULIE** And just going back to the help pennant mentioned in the Highway Code; Are they compulsory?





# HARD CHOICES FOR HARD SHOULDERS

**RUSSELL** No, they are optional. Essentially, they are intended to alert other road users of your plight but concerns over personal security have made them less popular. And if you have followed the procedures outlined in this magazine, you really shouldn't need one on the motorway anyway.

**JULIE** Are you allowed to leave the engine running to keep warm?

**RUSSELL** Well, we're all getting more aware of the environment and the effects of leaving the engine running, but it's up to the individual. Bear in mind though that running the engine may make problems with the vehicle worse. The same goes for air con in hot weather and interior lights, which can

drain the battery. We always recommend carrying some additional warm clothing, food and drink, as well as a hi-visibility jacket. And this should be within easy reach and not in the boot.

**JULIE** So to sign off, problems do arise so plan ahead and take responsibility for getting yourself safely to your destination. And, at the risk of repeating myself, we strongly recommend breakdown cover from a company that knows your personal circumstances and can provide the best recovery service for you. And finally, do keep the emergency guidance card with this magazine in your car. It'll help you make the right decisions should the worst happen.



# FIT FOR PURPOSE?

Make sure both you and your vehicle are properly equipped for your journey, says Philip North, Occupational Therapist and Mobility Service Team Leader from William Merritt Disabled Living Centre & Mobility Service, Leeds



I work for one of the Forum of Mobility Centres ([www.mobility-centres.org.uk](http://www.mobility-centres.org.uk)), which are supported by funding from the Department for Transport. The Forum deals with all aspects of outdoor mobility.

As a Mobility Service Team Leader, it's my task to make sure disabled road users are safe and confident in their own ability and in their vehicle.

## YOUR OWN ABILITIES

If you have a medical condition that affects your fitness to drive, you have a legal obligation to inform the DVLA. Aside from that, I advise any driver with a disability to take an assessment to see what limitations there are to their driving and what driving aids are available to help them. The Forum of Mobility Centres are approved by the DVLA. They are there to support and advise drivers on their safe ability to drive.

## TYPES OF DRIVING ASSESSMENT

People with any medical condition can be offered a driving ability assessment. This includes an interview with the assessor who may be a clinician or a driving instructor. It may involve a physical check, including eyes (your ability to read a standard number plate from 20.5 metres away, plus a peripheral field check), cognitive assessment (looking at the way the brain processes information) and a practical on-road assessment.

If your medical condition results in a physical limitation, a vehicle adaptation assessment is usually





the next step. This includes a look at specific vehicle modifications that will help you control the car. Assessments can be carried out for disabled passengers as well as drivers so please just ask.

Some centres then offer general driving tuition and retraining, using approved driving instructors who have experience in teaching people with disabilities to drive.

To make the most of the assessment, please be honest to make sure it takes into account those times when you are at your least able, such as at the end of the day or when you feel tired. Tell the assessor as much as you can about your abilities and what type of vehicle you want.

## **ASSESSMENT RESULTS**

The assessment will result in a detailed report of your needs and together we can then work out what is best suited to you and give you the chance to see as many driver aids and specialist controls as you can. As well as your local Mobility Centre, I can recommend visiting the annual Mobility Roadshow as a good place to try different systems out.



The assessment report will also help you tell an adaptation specialist exactly what you need. The adaptation company will carry out some routine tests and discuss possibilities with you in any event and if they consider a medical opinion is needed they should tell you and advise you where to go to get it.

If you receive the higher rate mobility component of the disability allowance, you may qualify for a Motability grant towards any adaptations. For more information visit **[www.motability.co.uk](http://www.motability.co.uk)**

# LIFE'S A JOURNEY SO BE PREPARED

The victim of a horrific attack on a driving expedition, journalist Tom Dowling has used a wheelchair since he was 20. The creator of award-winning disability magazine *All Together Now!* still drives and remains philosophical about life on the road.

Thirty-five years on and the words of my Uncle Frank still ring loud in my head: "And be ready for a few breakdowns along the way," he said, tapping the bonnet of our old Bedford CA minibus. "They're inevitable but be prepared and stay calm."

Frank had been shot and paralysed, aged 20, in World War II and for 25 years had got around on callipers and crutches and in his specially adapted black Morris 1000, courtesy of the War Department.

He'd called round to wish me well on a driving expedition I was making with three friends to the Everest base camp. We knew little about vehicles and even less about risk! We threw caution to the wind, joined the AA and hoped that if the unmentionable did happen in the wilds of Afghanistan there would be a phone box nearby.

We didn't quite get to see Everest but we did reach Kathmandu - despite the engine blowing up in Turkey, wheels almost falling off in Iran, prop shaft shearing in the Kyhber Pass and doors and bumpers parting company with us in Pakistan.

Somehow we dealt with all those breakdowns but we had no answer to an attack by armed bandits at dawn on an Iranian roadside. Two of us were shot: one friend in the head - who miraculously fully recovered within weeks - and me; I got it between the shoulder blades and, like Uncle Frank, I was paralysed, aged 20.

At least I could still be a journalist and, with a story to tell, I could earn a living. I also learned to drive using hand controls and, inevitably, planned more road trips - starting with an 8,000-mile North American camping tour.

The mid-Seventies was a time without mobile phones, Blue Badges, Motability scheme, Disability Living Allowance, drop kerbs, discrimination laws and so on. You just got on with things, pointing your car in the direction you wanted to go and hoping for the best.

Breakdown recovery was around but you did have to devise ways of flagging down other drivers to go and make that phone call for you. Then, if you couldn't climb into the recovery vehicle you had to rely, like I did a few times, on the driver being strong and willing enough to give a helping hand or two!





I now get into cars from the passenger side, heaving myself across to the driving seat and dragging my folded wheelchair behind the front seats. It's relatively easy and I feel safer than opening the driver's door into the middle of the road but it does mean I'm always conscious about leaving sufficient space on the passenger side for my chair. It also restricts me to two-door cars with small or, better still, no centre consoles.

Of course, sticking to well-patrolled motorways is probably the best and safest option but even they are not guaranteed to be stress free.

Last winter, for example, our car suddenly cut out in lane 3 of the M5. Veering across the lanes, we stopped at the end of an entry slip road, put on the hazard lights and phoned the recovery services from the mobile.

While the rest of the family got out and stood at the rear of the vehicle (the embankment was too steep to climb and overgrown with thorny shrubs) I stayed inside, believing we were reasonably safe.

Not so, said the HA Traffic Officer who just happened to be passing: "This is a potentially dangerous situation. Motorists accelerating along the slip road are not expecting cars to be parked here. They are looking over their shoulders, checking oncoming traffic and will assume that you are also joining the motorway. Before you know it they will have ploughed right into the back of you."

His advice? Everyone able to do so should get out of the car and stay as far away from live traffic as it is safe to do so. And me? "It's a difficult call," he said.

Luckily, on this occasion it's a call I didn't have to make; the recovery vehicle was soon with us and, taking an arm and a leg each, the Traffic Officer, mechanic and two of my sons lifted me out of our car and safely into the back of the recovery truck. I'd lived to drive another day.

Uncle Frank was right. Breakdowns are just part and parcel of life. The key is to plan ahead, reduce the risks as much as you can, and above all else **STAY CALM**.

I hope this magazine helps you to do all of those and have years of happy motoring!



### **TOM'S TOP TIPS:**

1. Ensure your car is in top condition and you have breakdown cover

2. Think ahead and plan your journeys

3. Keep the following in reach in your car:

- Mobile phone and a spare battery
- Warm clothes
- High visibility vests
- Breakdown recovery details
- Maps
- Drink and snack
- Fire extinguisher
- Blue badge

For more information or to download your own copy please visit  
**[www.highways.gov.uk/disability](http://www.highways.gov.uk/disability)**

Got a question or comment? Please call: **08457 50 40 30\*** (direct or via RNID Typetalk) or email: **[ha\\_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ha_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk)**  
24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Live traffic information call: **08700 660 115\*** or visit  
**[www.highways.gov.uk/traffic](http://www.highways.gov.uk/traffic)** 24 hours a day, 365 days a year

For more route planning advice visit **[www.transportdirect.info](http://www.transportdirect.info)**



If you need help using this or any other  
Highways Agency Information, please  
call: **08457 50 40 30\*** and we will  
assist you.

\*Calls from landlines to 08457 and 08700 numbers can cost up to 8p per minute but are free from some landline providers; mobiles usually cost more. Please check costs with your service provider.

## Safety at roadworks



**The Highways Agency is working with the industry and road users to reduce the risks of working on the roads.**

For the safety of roadworkers and all road users, when you are approaching roadworks:

- Keep within the speed limit – it is there for your safety.
- Get into the correct lane in good time – don't keep switching.
- Concentrate on the road ahead, not 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 are there to help you.