

# Highways Agency Traffic Officer Service

Keeping traffic moving in England

Traffic Officer Service



## Who are the Highways Agency traffic officers?

Traffic officers have been helping to keep traffic moving since 2004 and their distinctive yellow and black liveried vehicles are now a familiar sight on England's motorway network.

More than 1,500 traffic officers manage and patrol our network from seven regional control centres (RCC's) and 32 outstations across the country, working around the clock 365 days a year.

On-road traffic officers clear up incidents, which cause about a quarter of all congestion, to help keep traffic moving.

Control room staff co-ordinate the on-road patrols in each region, deal with calls from the emergency roadside telephones and give information to drivers.

Traffic officers also feed information to the National Traffic Control Centre (NTCC), which provides drivers with up-to-the-minute information using mobile, web, message signs and local and national radio broadcasts.



### Did you know?

Roadworks cause the least amount of congestion on our motorways and major roads at just 10%. Around two-thirds (65%) is caused simply by the volume of traffic and 25% is incident-related.

## Around the clock support

On the road, traffic officers patrol 365 days a year in yellow and black liveried 4x4s.

- Manage traffic and clear up after incidents to get everyone moving again as soon as possible.
- Support the emergency services in the case of major incidents. Once police have released a crime scene traffic officers will clear up and get traffic moving again – and make arrangements for any emergency repairs to the carriageway or safety barriers.
- Remove dangerous debris from the carriageway and arrange for the removal of damaged or abandoned vehicles.
- Check on anyone who has broken down, and whether they have adequate arrangements for breakdown assistance in place (but they are not a breakdown service).



In the control centres, traffic officers co-ordinate operations and respond to emergency calls from emergency roadside telephones. They:

- Monitor CCTV to keep a look out for any problems or any vehicles in trouble.
- Set signals and messages on overhead signs to inform drivers of delays or diversions.
- Liaise with emergency services.



## Helping you around England

Traffic Officers help make your journeys safe and reliable, and use overhead signs and signals to keep you informed about road conditions ahead.

They deal with around 870 incidents per day across England. Their aim is to clear an incident safely, often working with the emergency services, and to get you on your way again as soon as possible.



An incident can be a collision, a breakdown, debris in the road or even an animal on the loose – anything that can cause danger or delay.

We have seven RCCs and the NTCC working around the clock to provide drivers with real-time information. This is done through electronic signs and signals, the Highways Agency website ([www.highways.gov.uk](http://www.highways.gov.uk)), our own digital radio station Traffic Radio, and by updating the media and other websites for their traffic reports.



## Did you know?

Traffic officers currently patrol some 2,000 miles of motorways and selected major A roads.

You can be prosecuted for not following the directions of a traffic officer in the course of managing traffic. This could mean a fine and points on your licence.

There are almost 7,000 emergency roadside telephones, which are answered by one of our seven regional control centres. Traffic officers there can give advice and get help to you.

A rolling roadblock, where a traffic officer patrol slows vehicles down gradually, can create a gap in the traffic long enough for emergency action or the air ambulance to land, without the need to close the road completely.

More than half the incidents traffic officers deal with are breakdowns. Many of these can be avoided if drivers make sure their vehicle is well-maintained and they have enough fuel for their journey.

The Highways Agency has more than 2,500 electronic signs to give you information about the road ahead.



## Traffic officers in your area

## North East

RCC

at J39 of the M1

## North West

RCC

*between J22-23 of the M6*

## East Midlands

RCC

at J26 of the M1

## West Midlands

RCC

at J3 of the M5

East

RCC

at J23 of the M25

## South East

RCC

at J6 of the M25

## South West

RCC

at J18 of the M5

### Traffic officer responsibilities

## Motorway

**Major A road**

### Other Highways Agency road

### Regional Control Centres



\* The Transport for London area is not included in the RCC regions

Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO.  
© Crown copyright and database right 2009. All rights reserved.  
Ordnance Survey Licence number 100018928.



## Look out for these on Highways Agency roads

### Traffic officer vehicle:

Patrolling the network to keep traffic moving.



### Incident support unit (ISU):

To manage traffic and protect the area around an incident or at road works.



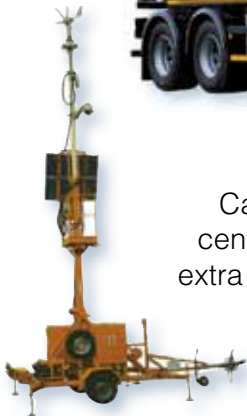
### Winter maintenance vehicle:

To salt or plough the roads in winter.



### Mobile CCTV:

Can be used to help the control centre monitor traffic and provide extra information around incidents.



**Look out for these on Highways Agency roads**

## Life in the fast lane:

These examples of how traffic officers manage incidents and the dangers they face are based on actual events:

### M4 Wiltshire, 16:25 Tuesday

A collision between a van and car blocks two lanes of the motorway. The incident is spotted on CCTV in the South West RCC. Within minutes electronic warning signs are set and traffic officers sent to the scene. Alerts are passed to websites and the media.

At the scene, traffic officers cone off the incident to allow emergency services to deal with the collision. They keep traffic moving safely by directing it along the remaining open lane. Later a rolling road block is used to create space for the air ambulance to land and take-off.

Once the incident is cleared, traffic officers make sure the carriageway is safe. They remove debris from the road and organise repairs to the crash barrier overnight, after the rush hour traffic has cleared.

### M11 Cambridgeshire, 16:35 Friday

Just before rush hour a car sheds its roof box scattering debris across the road and causing drivers to swerve and brake sharply.

Patrols are sent to the scene and message signs set by the East RCC to warn oncoming traffic. One traffic officer vehicle stages a rolling road block, allowing their colleague to clear the debris off the carriageway.

Unfortunately one driver decides to drive along the hard shoulder as a way of getting past the rolling road block. He is then seen to swerve around the woman and three children from the car that has shed its load and narrowly misses our traffic officer.

The driver is later convicted of disobeying traffic officer instructions and dangerous driving – receiving a £240 penalty and points on his licence.

## Frequently asked questions

### Can traffic officers stop me for speeding?

No. They have powers to stop and direct traffic. They will report incidents of dangerous driving or suspicious behaviour – which the police then act upon.

### Must I do what a traffic officer tells me?

Yes – where this is related to managing traffic. It is an offence not to obey a traffic officer's directions in this context. You can be fined and get penalty points on your licence.

### Will traffic officers help me if I break down?

Yes, but they are not a substitute for a breakdown service. They can help arrange recovery and give safety advice. If you break down in a 'live' traffic lane, they will clear your vehicle to the nearest place of safety, usually a hard shoulder or emergency refuge area.

### What kit do the patrol vehicles carry?

Traffic cones and warning signs, along with brushes, chemical spill blankets, torches and waterproof ponchos for drivers who need to wait away from the road. These are just some examples of the extensive kit in the specially-adapted 4x4 vehicles.

### Do traffic officers patrol A roads?

Some major A roads are already covered. The Highways Agency will be looking at resources in the coming years to see if this can be extended.

### Can I be a traffic officer?

The Highways Agency is an equal opportunities employer. We value diversity and positively encourage applications from all sections of the community. Go to [www.highways.gov.uk](http://www.highways.gov.uk) and click on careers.



## Planning your journey

Around three quarters of people set off without any planning, but just a little preparation can make your journey safer and more comfortable.

### Know where you are going.

Use a map, the Highways Agency's own journey planning website:

[www.highways.gov.uk/traffic](http://www.highways.gov.uk/traffic).



### Check traffic and weather

**conditions.** You can get live updates from the Highways Agency website (**highways.gov.uk**), telephone helplines (details on back page) and the media. Listen to local radio updates or Traffic Radio as you travel. Look out for information screens or check our mobile-friendly website when you stop for a break.

**Maintain your car.** Regular servicing will help prevent breakdowns. Check your wipers are clean, screenwash is topped up and tyre pressure is correct.

**Always have enough fuel.** If you run out it will cost you time and being stranded on the hard shoulder can be exceptionally dangerous. Several people are killed every year.

**Include rest breaks** in the time you allow for longer journeys and allow more time for traffic congestion in the rush hour.

**Carry drinking water** for everyone in your car; you never know if you are going to get stuck in congestion.

**Pack warm, waterproof clothing** in case you break down.



**Got a question or comment?**

**08457 50 40 30\***

email: **ha\_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk**

24 hours a day, 365 days a year

**Live traffic information**

**08700 660 115\***

**www.highways.gov.uk**

24 hours a day, 365 days a year

\*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.

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

### **Highways Agency Publications Code PR160/09**

Highways Agency Publications Group, Dorking S090197 © Crown copyright 2009.  
Printed on recycled paper containing 75% post consumer waste and 25% ECF Pulp

For wider motoring advice visit DirectGov

**www.direct.gov.uk/motoring**

**Directgov**

Public services all in one place