

## Moving off downhill

This routine is simpler than moving off uphill because the weight of the vehicle helps you to move away.

The aim is to prevent the vehicle from rolling forward down the hill while moving away.

- Press the clutch pedal down fully.
- Engage the appropriate gear for the steepness of the hill. (This could be second gear.)
- Apply the footbrake.
- Release the parking brake, keeping the footbrake applied.
- Check mirrors. Look round just before you move off to cover the blind spots.
- Signal if necessary.
- Only move away when you're sure it's safe to do so.
- Look round again if necessary.
- Release the footbrake and release the clutch pedal smoothly as the vehicle starts to move.

### REMEMBER

- Use the right gear for the steepness of the hill to give you more control.
- Drivers coming downhill will need more time to slow down or stop.  
Again, leave a large enough gap before pulling away.



## Section six → Traffic signs

### This section covers

- The purpose of traffic signs
- Signs giving orders
- Signs giving warning
- Signs giving directions and other information
- Waiting restrictions
- Road markings
- Traffic lights
- Traffic calming
- Level crossings

# ➡ The purpose of traffic signs

Signs are an essential part of any traffic system. They tell you about the rules you must obey and warn you about the hazards you may meet on the road ahead.

Signs can be in the form of words or symbols on panels, road markings, beacons, bollards or traffic lights.

To do its job, a sign must give its message clearly and early enough for you to see it, understand it and then act safely on it.

This section deals with the various types of traffic signs and their meaning. For more information, refer to **Know Your Traffic Signs**, which illustrates and explains the vast majority of traffic signs.

## Symbols

Symbols are used as much as possible because they're

- more easily recognised and understood
- mainly standardised, particularly throughout Europe.

What are the basic rules when it comes to recognising signs?

You'll recognise traffic signs more easily if you understand some basic rules. The shapes and colours of the main groups are:



**Circular signs** These give orders. Blue circles tell you what you **MUST** do, while signs with red rings tell you what you **MUST NOT** do.



**Triangular signs** These warn you of something, such as a junction.

	<b>Rectangular signs</b> These inform and give directions.
	<b>Road markings</b> These inform, give directions and give orders.
	<b>Other shapes</b> A few signs are a different shape altogether as they're very important and need to stand out.

# ➡ Signs giving orders

Signs that give orders can be

- mandatory signs: these tell you what you **MUST** do
- prohibitory signs: these tell you what you **MUST NOT** do.

## Mandatory signs

These signs are mostly circular, with white symbols and borders on a blue background; for example

- mini-roundabout
- keep left
- turn left.



In addition

- 'stop – children' sign (lollipop) carried by a school-crossing patrol. This is circular with black lettering on a yellow background
- 'stop' in white on a red background, often manually controlled at roadworks
- 'stop' and 'give way' signs appear at junctions and are very important for everyone's guidance and safety.



## 'Stop' signs

These are octagonal, with white lettering on a red background, and are usually found at a junction with a limited zone of vision. The design is deliberately unique so you can tell it apart from other signs. 'Stop' signs are always accompanied by a stop line marked on the road. The line tells you how far forward you should go before stopping to look, assess and decide whether it's safe to proceed.

### What you **MUST** do at 'stop' signs

- Stop (even if you can see the road is clear).
- Wait until you can enter the major road without causing other drivers to change speed or direction.



## 'Give way' signs

These are made up of

- a red triangle pointing downwards
- black lettering on a white background.

They're always accompanied by road markings. However, some junctions only have the 'give way' lines. This is usually where there's relatively little traffic.

'Give way' signs and/or road markings show you that traffic on the road you want to enter has priority.

The double broken lines across the road show you where to stop, if necessary, to take your final look.

### What you **MUST** do at 'give way' signs

- Give way to traffic already on the major road.
- Wait until you can enter the major road without causing any traffic already on the road to change speed or direction.

**REMEMBER** Look, assess, decide and act.



The 'give way' sign is unique, being the only sign that's a downwards-pointing triangle. This is to ensure that it can be recognised and obeyed, even if you can't see it fully.

## Prohibitory signs

These tell you what you **MUST NOT** do.

They're easy to recognise by their circular shape and red border. The message is given by symbols, words or figures, or a combination of these. The exceptions are

- 'no entry' sign (circular with white border and red background)
- 'bus lane' sign.

## Speed-limit signs

A red circle with a number on a white background shows the speed limit.

A white disc with a black diagonal line cancels the previous speed limit, but you mustn't exceed the national speed limit for the type of road you're on or the vehicle you're driving. If you're driving a light van of over 2 tonnes maximum laden weight, the national speed limit for goods vehicles of up to 7.5 tonnes maximum laden weight applies.

### Speed limits

Type of vehicle	Built-up areas*	Single carriage-ways	Dual carriage-ways	Motorways
	mph (km/h)	mph (km/h)	mph (km/h)	mph (km/h)
Cars and motorcycles (including car-derived vans up to 2 tonnes maximum laden weight)	<b>30</b> (48)	<b>60</b> (96)	<b>70</b> (112)	<b>70</b> (112)
Cars towing caravans or trailers (including car-derived vans and motorcycles)	<b>30</b> (48)	<b>50</b> (80)	<b>60</b> (96)	<b>60</b> (96)
Buses, coaches and minibuses (not exceeding 12 metres in overall length)	<b>30</b> (48)	<b>50</b> (80)	<b>60</b> (96)	<b>70</b> (112)
Goods vehicles (not exceeding 7.5 tonnes maximum laden weight)	<b>30</b> (48)	<b>50</b> (80)	<b>60</b> (96)	<b>70<sup>†</sup></b> (112)
Goods vehicles (exceeding 7.5 tonnes maximum laden weight) in England and Wales	<b>30</b> (48)	<b>50</b> (80)	<b>60</b> (96)	<b>60</b> (96)
Goods vehicles (exceeding 7.5 tonnes maximum laden weight) in Scotland	<b>30</b> (48)	<b>40</b> (64)	<b>50</b> (80)	<b>60</b> (96)

\*The 30 mph limit usually applies to all traffic on all roads with street lighting unless signs show otherwise.

<sup>†</sup>60 mph (96 km/h) if articulated or towing a trailer.

Be aware that large vehicles may have speed limiters – buses and coaches are restricted to 62 mph and large goods vehicles to 56 mph.

Repeater signs are a smaller form of the original speed-limit sign and are situated at intervals to remind you of the speed limit. In areas where there are regularly spaced street lights, you should assume that the 30 mph (48 km/h) speed limit normally applies, unless there are repeater signs showing a different speed limit.

Test your knowledge of signs by taking the quiz on the Safe Driving for Life website.

[safedrivingforlife.info/signsquiz](http://safedrivingforlife.info/signsquiz)



## → Signs giving warning

Usually, this type of sign is a red triangle pointing upwards, with a symbol or words on a white background. These warn you of a hazard you might not otherwise be able to recognise in time; for example, a bend, hill or hump bridge. The sign will make clear what the hazard is. You must decide what to do about it.



### Narrowing roads

These signs tell you from which side the road is narrowing (sometimes both sides), and should warn you against overtaking until you've had a chance to assess the hazard.

### Children

The warning here is: watch out for children, especially at school start and finish times. Plates may be used with the sign to give extra information, such as 'School', 'Playground' or 'Patrol'. As well as children, look out for school-crossing patrols and obey their signals.

### Low bridge sign

Even if you're not in a high vehicle, be aware that an oncoming vehicle might have to use the centre of the road to make use of any extra headroom there.

### Junctions

These tell you what type of junction is ahead: T-junction, crossroads, roundabout, staggered junction and so on. The priority through the junction is indicated by the broader line.

### Sharp change of direction

Chevrons or roadside posts with reflectors may be used where

- the road changes direction sharply enough to create a hazard
- to reinforce a warning sign on a particularly sharp bend.

### Other hazards

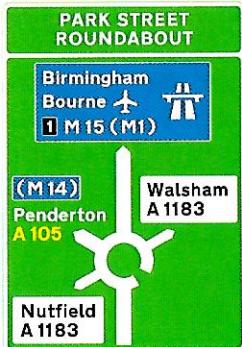
If there's no special sign for a particular hazard, a general hazard warning sign is used: a red triangle with an exclamation mark on a white background. There'll be a plate underneath it telling you what the hazard is – for example, a hidden dip.

## → Signs giving directions and other information

These help you find and follow the road you want. They can also direct you to the nearest railway station, car park, or other facility or attraction. The colours of these signs vary with the type of road. For example

- motorways – blue with white letters and border
- primary routes, except motorways – green with white letters and border, route numbers shown in yellow
- other routes – white with black letters and black border.

All these roads may also display tourist signs, which are brown with white letters and border.



## Signs giving directions on primary routes

### Advance direction signs

You'll see these before you reach the junction. They enable you to decide which direction to take and to prepare yourself.

### Direction signs at the junction

These show you the route to take as you reach the junction.

### Route confirmatory signs

Positioned after the junction, these confirm which road you're on. These signs also tell you places and distances on your route. If the route number is in brackets, it means that the road leads to that route.

### Information signs

These tell you where to find parking places, telephones, camping sites, etc, or give information about such things as no through roads.



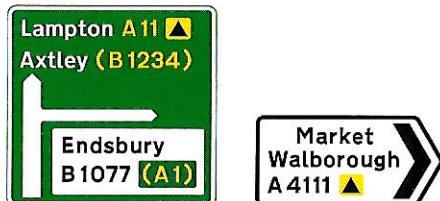
## Signs for traffic diversions

In an emergency, when it's necessary to close a section of motorway or other main road to traffic, a temporary sign may advise drivers to follow a diversion route. This route guides traffic around the closed section, bringing it back onto the same road further along its length.

To help drivers follow the route, black symbols on yellow patches may be permanently displayed on existing direction signs, including motorway signs. An initial sign will alert road users to the closure, then the symbol is shown alongside the route that drivers should follow.

A number of different symbols may be used, as in some places there may be more than one diversion operating. The range of symbols used is shown here.

Drivers and riders should follow signs showing the appropriate symbol. These may be displayed on separate signs, or included on direction signs, giving the number of the road to follow



## Waiting restrictions

These are indicated by signs and road markings. Yellow lines along the road parallel to the kerb indicate that restrictions apply.

Small yellow plates may be mounted on walls, posts or lampposts nearby. These give more precise details of the restriction that applies. If there are double yellow lines painted on the road but no plates nearby, there's no waiting at any time.

## Controlled parking zones

In controlled parking zones, the times of operation of the zone will be shown on the entry signs. Yellow lines show where waiting is prohibited or restricted, but yellow plates aren't normally provided in these zones.

White bay markings and upright signs indicate where parking is allowed.

## Clearways

Some areas and main roads are designated as 'no stopping' zones or clearways. This means no stopping on the main carriageway at any time, not even to pick up or set down passengers.

On urban clearways there's no stopping during the hours of operation except for as long as necessary to set down or pick up passengers.

## Loading and unloading

'Loading' is defined as when a vehicle stops briefly to load or unload goods that are so heavy or bulky it isn't easy to carry them any distance, and more than one trip may be involved. Picking up items that can be carried, such as shopping, doesn't constitute loading.



You may be allowed to load and unload in places where waiting is restricted. Yellow markings on the kerb show that loading and unloading is prohibited. The times when this is prohibited are shown on the nearby upright signs. There may also be special bays marked by broken white lines and the words 'Loading only' marked on the road and upright signs.

## Red Routes

On many roads in larger cities in the UK, Red Route signs and red road markings have been introduced to replace the yellow-line restrictions (see section 18). For more information on Red Routes, visit [tfl.gov.uk/redroutes](http://tfl.gov.uk/redroutes)

# Road markings

Markings on the road give information, orders or warnings. They can be used either with signs on posts or on their own.

Their advantages are

- they can often be seen when other signs are hidden by traffic
- they can give a continuing message as you drive along the road.

As a general rule, the more paint, the more important the message.

## Lines across the road

### 'Give way' lines

Double broken white lines across your half of the road show that traffic on the road you want to enter has priority. The lines show where you should stop, if necessary, to take your final look. These may also be found on a roundabout where traffic on the roundabout is required to give way to those joining.

A single broken line is normally found at the entrance to a roundabout. This tells you that traffic coming from your immediate right has priority and you **MUST** give way.

### Single 'stop' lines

A single continuous line across your half of the road shows where you **MUST** stop

- at junctions with 'stop' signs
- at junctions controlled by traffic lights
- at level crossings and emergency vehicle access points
- at swing bridges or ferries.

## Lines along the road

### Double white lines

Double white lines have rules for

- overtaking
- parking.

### Overtaking

When the line nearest you is continuous, you **MUST NOT** cross or straddle it except when the road is clear and you want to

- enter or leave a side road or entrance on the opposite side of the road
- pass a stationary vehicle
- overtake a pedal cycle, horse or road maintenance vehicle, if they're travelling at 10 mph (16 km/h) or less.

If there isn't room to leave enough space when passing, you should wait for a safe opportunity. Don't try to squeeze past.

If there's a broken white line on your side and a continuous white line on the other side, you may cross both lines to overtake, as long as it's safe to do so. Make sure you can complete the manoeuvre before reaching a solid line on your side.



Arrows on the road indicate the direction you should pass double white lines or hatch markings. Don't begin to overtake when you see them.

### Parking

You **MUST NOT** stop or park on a road marked with double white lines, even if one of the lines is broken, except to pick up or drop off passengers or to load or unload goods.

### Hatch markings

There are dangerous areas where it's necessary to separate the streams of traffic completely, such as a sharp bend or hump, or where traffic turning right needs protection. These areas are painted with white chevrons or diagonal stripes and the tarmac areas between them may also be a different colour (for example, red).

In addition, remember

- where the boundary line is solid, don't enter except in an emergency
- where the boundary line is broken, you shouldn't drive on the markings unless you can see that it's safe to do so.

### Single broken lines

Watch out for places where the single broken line down the centre of the road gets longer. This means that there's a hazard ahead.

### Lane dividers

Short broken white lines are used on wide carriageways to divide them into lanes. You should keep between them unless you're

- changing lanes
- overtaking
- turning right.



## Lanes for specific types of vehicle

Bus and cycle lanes are shown by signs and road markings. In some one-way streets these vehicles are permitted to travel against the normal flow of traffic. These are known as contraflow lanes.

### Bus lanes

Only vehicles shown on the sign may use the lane during the hours of operation, which are also shown on the sign. Outside those periods all vehicles can use the bus lane. Where there are no times shown, the bus lane is in operation for 24 hours a day. Don't park or drive in bus lanes under any circumstances when they're in operation.



### Cycle lanes

Don't drive or park in a cycle lane marked by a solid white line during the times of operation shown on the signs. If the cycle lane is marked by a broken line, don't drive or park in it unless it's unavoidable. If you park in a cycle lane at any time, you make it very dangerous for any cyclist who's using that lane.

## High-occupancy vehicle lanes

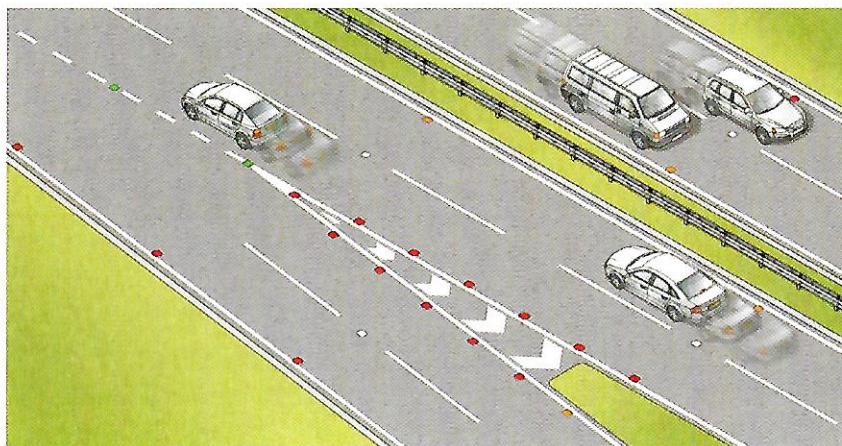
You **MUST NOT** drive in these lanes during their period of operation unless your vehicle contains the minimum number of people indicated on the sign.

## Reflective road studs

These may be used with white lines.

- Red studs mark the left-hand side of the road.
- White studs mark the lanes or middle of the road.
- Amber studs mark the right-hand edge of the carriageway on dual carriageways and motorways.
- Green studs mark the edge of the main carriageway at lay-bys and slip roads.

At roadworks, fluorescent green/yellow studs may be used to help identify the lanes in operation.



## Box junction markings

Yellow crisscross lines mark a box junction. Their purpose is to keep the junction clear by preventing traffic from stopping in the path of crossing traffic.

You **MUST NOT** enter a box junction unless your exit road is clear. But you can enter the box when you want to turn right and you're only prevented from doing so by oncoming traffic.

If there's a vehicle already on the junction waiting to turn right, you're free to enter behind it and wait to turn right – providing that you won't block any oncoming traffic wanting to turn right.

If there are several vehicles waiting to turn, it's unlikely you'll be able to proceed before the traffic signals change.



## Words on the road

Words painted on the road usually have a clear meaning, such as 'Stop', 'Slow' or 'Keep clear'.

When they show a part of the road is reserved for certain types of vehicle – for example, buses, taxis or ambulances – don't park there.



## Schools

Yellow zigzags are often marked on the road outside schools, along with the words 'School – keep clear'. Don't stop (even to set down or pick up children) or park there. The markings are to make sure that drivers who are passing the area and children who are crossing the road have a clear, unrestricted view of the crossing area.



## Destination markings

Near a busy junction, lanes sometimes have destination markings or road numbers painted on the road.

These enable drivers to get into the correct lane early, even if advance direction road signs are obscured by large vehicles.



## Lane arrows

These tell you which lane to take for the direction you want.

Where the road is wide enough, you may find one arrow pointing in each direction

- left in the left-hand lane
- straight ahead in the centre lane
- right in the right-hand lane.

Some arrows might be combined, depending on how busy the junction is. If the road is only wide enough for two lanes, arrows might have two directions combined

- straight ahead and left in the left-hand lane
- straight ahead and right in the right-hand lane.

Left- and right-turn arrows are placed well before a junction to help you get into the correct lane in good time. They don't indicate the exact point at which you should turn. It's especially important to remember this at right turns.

## Speed reduction lines

Raised yellow lines may be painted across the carriageway at the approach to

- roundabouts
- reduced speed limits
- particular hazards.

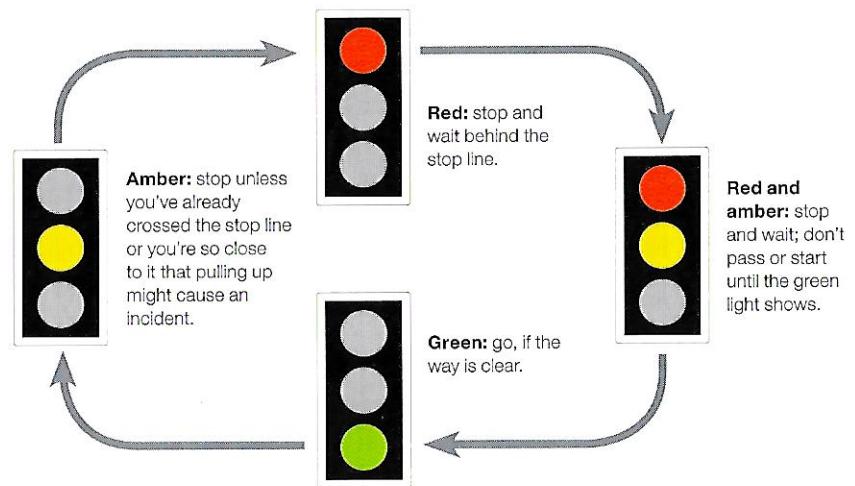


The purpose of these lines is to make drivers aware of their speed after a period of driving at higher speeds. Reduce your speed in good time.

# ➡ Traffic lights

Traffic lights have three lights – red, amber and green – that change in a set cycle

- red
- red and amber together
- green
- amber
- red.



## What the colours mean

- Red – stop and wait at the stop line.
- Red and amber – stop and wait. Don't go until green shows.
- Green – go if the way is clear.
- Amber – stop, unless
  - you've already crossed the line
  - you're so close to it that pulling up might cause an incident.

## Approaching traffic lights

Use the Mirrors – Signal – Manoeuvre (MSM) and Position – Speed – Look (PSL) routines as you approach the lights. Pay attention to lane markings and get into the correct lane in good time. Keep your speed down and be prepared to stop.

If the lights are showing green, don't speed up to 'beat the lights'. Be ready to stop, especially if the lights have been green for some time.

## Green filter arrow

A green arrow in a traffic light means you can filter in the direction the arrow is pointing, even if the main light isn't showing green.

Don't enter this lane unless you want to go in the direction shown by the arrow. When turning left or right at traffic lights, take special care and give way to pedestrians already crossing.



## If traffic lights fail

If the traffic lights fail, proceed with caution. Treat the situation as you would an unmarked junction.

## Advance stop lines

At some traffic lights there are advance stop lines to allow cyclists to position themselves ahead of other traffic.

When the lights are amber or red you should stop at the first white line and avoid the marked area, which is reserved for cyclists only. However, if you've crossed the first white line at the time that the signal changes to red, you must stop at the second white line even if you're in the marked area. Allow cyclists time and space to move off when the lights change to green.

In some areas there are bus advance areas. These should be treated in the same way as those provided for cyclists.



## Special traffic lights

These are often used to control traffic where low-flying aircraft pass over the road, or at swing or lifting bridges, or other special sites such as fire stations.

They may either be

- normal traffic lights (red, amber and green) – follow the normal rules
- double red flashing lights – stop when the red lights are flashing.

## School-crossing warning

At some busy locations, two amber lights flashing alternately warn traffic of a school-crossing point ahead.

Keep your speed down and proceed with great care.

## ➡ Traffic calming

Traffic-calming measures are used to encourage people to drive at a lower speed than they might otherwise do. They're used in particularly sensitive areas where it's considered that a reduction in speed would benefit the immediate community.

Various features can be provided to slow down traffic, such as

- road humps
- road narrowings, central islands and chicanes
- mini-roundabouts.

### 20 mph zones

Some traffic-calmed areas are indicated only by a 20 mph (32 km/h) speed-limit sign.

This speed-limit sign, in addition to advising the maximum speed, indicates that there may be traffic-calming features within the signed zone; these may not be individually signed.

You should drive at a steady speed within the speed limit, and avoid frequent acceleration and deceleration within these areas.

### Road humps

These may be round- or flat-topped humps laid across the carriageway. They may be used on roads where there's a speed limit of 30 mph (48 km/h) or less.

In some areas the humps are in the form of 'cushions', which cover only part of the lane and are designed so that larger vehicles, especially buses, can straddle them.



If road humps or cushions are provided outside 20 mph (32 km/h) zones, there will normally be

- warning signs at the beginning of the section of road where the hump or series of humps is installed
- triangle and edge line markings at each hump.

## Road narrowings

Roads may be narrowed by the use of 'build-outs' on one or both sides of the road.

If these are provided outside 20 mph (32 km/h) zones, there will normally be

- warning signs indicating on which side of the road the narrowing occurs
- 'give way' road markings on one side of the road, accompanied by signs advising priority for oncoming vehicles.



If these are on your side of the road, you **MUST** always give way to drivers approaching from the other direction.

If priority isn't given in either direction, then all drivers should ensure that they can pass through the narrowing without endangering vehicles approaching from the other direction. You shouldn't accelerate as you approach the narrowing, but be prepared to slow down or give way to approaching traffic.

Hold back and allow cyclists and motorcyclists room to pass through; don't try to squeeze through at the same time.

## Mini-roundabouts

Mini-roundabouts are often used as part of traffic-calming schemes to break up a long road into shorter sections and allow traffic to join from minor roads.

Methods of dealing with mini-roundabouts are given in section 8.

## Psychological traffic calming

Increasingly, urban planners are choosing to remove road furniture such as kerbs, traffic lights, signs, white lines and other road markings to create 'naked roads'. The theory is that removing the sense of security provided by road furniture causes the driver to exercise more caution. There's evidence that this approach reduces speed and accidents, and encourages drivers to be more considerate to pedestrians.

## → Level crossings



At a level crossing, the road crosses railway lines. Approach and cross with care. Never

- drive onto the crossing unless the road is clear on the other side, or drive over it 'nose to tail' with another vehicle
- stop on or just after the crossing
- park close to the crossing.

Most crossings have full or half barriers, although some have no gates or barriers. If you stop at a level crossing and your wait is likely to be more than a few minutes, consider switching off your engine, as this can save fuel and cut down on pollution.

## Railway telephones

If there's a telephone, you **MUST** use it to contact the signal operator to get permission to cross if you're

- driving a large or slow-moving vehicle, or one with limited ground clearance
- herding animals.

Remember to telephone the signal operator again once you're clear of the crossing.

## Automatic barriers

### Crossings with lights

A steady amber light followed by twin flashing red lights warns of an approaching train. An audible alarm to warn pedestrians will also sound once the lights show.

You **MUST** obey the lights' signals.

Don't

- move onto the crossing after the lights show
- zigzag round half barriers
- stop on the crossing if the amber light or audible alarm starts to operate – keep going if you're already on the crossing.

If the train goes by and the red lights continue to flash, or the audible alarm changes tone, you **MUST** wait because another train is approaching.

### Crossings without lights

At crossings with no lights, stop when the gates or barriers begin to close.

## Open crossings

The sign in the shape of a cross shown in the following image is used at all level crossings without either gates or barriers.

### Crossings with lights

Automatic open level crossings have flashing road traffic signals and audible warnings similar to those on crossings with barriers.



### Crossings without lights

At an open crossing with no gates, barriers, attendant or traffic signals, there will be a 'give way' sign.

Look both ways, listen and make sure there's no train coming before you cross.

## User-operated crossings

These crossings are normally private and should be used by authorised users and invited guests only.

### Crossings with signals

Some crossings with gates or barriers have 'stop' signs and small red and green lights. Don't cross when the red light is on because this means that a train is approaching. Cross only when the green light is on.

If you're crossing with a vehicle

- open the gates or barriers on both sides of the crossing
- check the green light is still on and cross promptly
- close the gates or barriers when you're clear of the crossing.

## Crossings without signals

Some crossings have gates but no signals. At these crossings, stop, look both ways, listen and make sure that no train is approaching.

If there's a railway telephone you **MUST** contact the signal operator to make sure it's safe to cross.

Open the gates on both sides of the crossing and check again that no train is coming before crossing promptly.

Once you've cleared the crossing, close both gates and, if there's a telephone, inform the signal operator.

Always give way to trains – they can't stop easily.

See the Network Rail guide to using level crossings safely.



[networkrail.co.uk/level-crossings](http://networkrail.co.uk/level-crossings)

## Incidents or breakdowns

If your vehicle breaks down, or you're involved in an incident on the crossing

- get everyone out of the vehicle and clear of the crossing
- if there's a railway telephone, use it **immediately** to inform the signal operator; follow any instructions you're given
- **if there's time** and if it's possible, move the vehicle clear of the crossing
- if the alarm sounds, or the amber light comes on, **get clear of the crossing at once – the train won't be able to stop.**

## Crossings for trams

Look for traffic signs that show where trams cross the road.

Treat them in the same way as normal railway crossings.

**REMEMBER**, modern trams move quietly. Take extra care and look both ways before crossing.



# Section seven → On the road

## This section covers

- Awareness and anticipation
- Road positioning
- Bends
- Stopping distance
- Separation distance
- Overtaking
- Obstructions
- Pedestrian crossings
- Driving on hills
- Tunnels
- Trams or LRT systems