

Summary: Motorway Rules

Motorway driving requires **heightened awareness, discipline, and preparation**, as vehicles travel at high speeds and conditions can change rapidly. When **joining a motorway**, drivers must always **give way** to traffic already on it, using the **slip road** to build up speed and merge smoothly without disrupting the traffic flow.

The **left-hand lane** is the normal driving lane, while the **middle and right-hand lanes** should be used **only for overtaking**.

Once overtaking is complete, drivers must return to the left-hand lane when it is safe to do so. Remaining in the middle or right-hand lane unnecessarily is discouraged.

When **leaving the motorway**, drivers should move to the left-hand lane well in advance and use the **countdown markers** to judge the distance to the exit.



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



Countdown markers indicate the distance to the start of the deceleration lane. Each bar represents about 100 yards. These signs may also be used on the approach to a roundabout or crossroads. On non-primary routes, the bars are black on a white background

Speed should be reduced on the **slip road**, not on the carriageway.

Motorways are fitted with **reflective studs** that help identify lane boundaries, especially at night or in poor visibility.

White studs separate lanes, **red studs** mark the hard shoulder, **green studs** indicate slip roads, **amber studs** mark the central reservation, and **green/yellow studs** are used temporarily at **roadworks** or **contraflow systems**.

Road studs



Central reservation

Coloured road studs help drivers at night, especially on wet roads, or in poor visibility. White studs mark traffic lanes or the centre of the road. The left-hand side of the carriageway is marked by red studs, and the edge of the central reservation of a motorway or dual carriageway road by amber studs. Green studs are used to mark lay-bys and the entrances to, and exits from, slip roads.

Certain road users are **not permitted** on motorways, including **pedestrians, cyclists, motorcycles under 50cc, mobility scooters, and slow-moving vehicles** without permission.

Because motorway traffic moves quickly, drivers must **look further ahead** and plan their actions earlier to maintain safety and control.

Vehicles towing trailers or caravans are limited to **60 mph** and may not use the **right-hand lane** on motorways with three or more lanes, **except when lanes are closed**. Towing requires careful handling, as strong winds and turbulence from larger vehicles can cause instability.

When driving near **large or slow-moving vehicles**, drivers should maintain **safe distances** and exercise **patience**. On steep gradients, **crawler lanes** may be provided for slow vehicles to allow faster traffic to pass safely.

At junctions or roundabouts, long vehicles may need to swing wide; drivers should never attempt to pass them on the inside.

At **roadworks** or in **contraflow systems, mandatory speed limits** are usually in place, often enforced by cameras. Drivers must obey these limits, keep safe distances, and avoid unnecessary lane changes.

On **smart motorways**, **variable speed limits** displayed on overhead gantries are also **mandatory**. A **red cross** above a lane means it is **closed**, and a red cross over all lanes means drivers must **stop and wait**.

If the **hard shoulder** is used as a running lane, it will be indicated by a displayed speed limit.

If you need to stop in an emergency on a **motorway with a hard shoulder**, pull into an emergency area or move left onto a **hard shoulder** and try to stop near an emergency telephone.



Keep well away from your vehicle and moving traffic

A **red cross** above the hard shoulder means it is closed and should be used only in emergencies. If a vehicle **breaks down**, the driver must stop on the **hard shoulder** or in an **emergency area**, activate **hazard warning lights**, and use the **emergency telephone** to contact the control centre, as it provides precise location information. Occupants should leave the vehicle via the **nearside door** and wait behind a **safety barrier**. Simple re-pairs must not be attempted on the hard shoulder.

To **rejoin the motorway**, drivers should use the emergency telephone to request assistance if needed, as lanes may need to be temporarily closed to allow safe re-entry. **If a driver feels tired**, they should stop at a **service area** or leave the motorway to find a safe resting place. Stopping on the hard shoulder to rest is strictly prohibited unless in an emergency.

Motorway driving also requires correct **use of lights**. In poor **visibility**, drivers must use **dipped headlights**, and **hazard warning lights** may be used briefly to alert following traffic to a hazard ahead.

The **national speed limit** on motorways is **70 mph** for cars and motorcycles, and **60 mph** for vehicles towing trailers.

Before setting out, drivers must ensure their vehicle is **road-worthy** and ready for high-speed travel, checking **fuel, oil, water, tyres, and lights**.

Journeys should be planned with **regular breaks** to reduce fatigue. If an exit is missed, the driver must continue to the **next junction**; reversing or turning against traffic is extremely dangerous and illegal.

For **new drivers**, motorway driving can be challenging. Learners may only drive on motorways with an **approved instructor** in a **dual-controlled car**. After passing the test, drivers are encouraged to **take Pass Plus** or additional motorway lessons to build skill and confidence.

Overall, safe motorway driving depends on **awareness, planning, lane discipline, and adherence to speed limits and signals**. By following these principles, drivers can help ensure smooth, efficient, and safe travel for everyone on the motorway network.