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west midlands
police and crime
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Rt Hon John Hayes MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

21 December 2016

Dear 

As indicated in my previous letter dated 18th November 2016, yesterday (20th December 2016) I hosted a public follow-up hearing to review the recommendations made to partners at my original M6 Inquiry held in March of this year. As you will be aware, on 4th February 2016 there was a collision on the M6 in which a young man tragically lost his life.

The focus of the original Inquiry was the aftermath rather than the incident itself, as the motorway was not fully reopened for 24 hours. There were huge delays to commuters, damage to the economy, risks to people's welfare, a total lack of co-ordination between partners and overall an unacceptable response to the public. As such, I brought partners together and settled on eleven key recommendations to improve practice, learn lessons and drive better collaboration going forward. I took these recommendations to the Minister with responsibility for Highways England at the time, Andrew Jones MP.

I am pleased to report that yesterday's follow-up hearing evidenced that co-ordination and collaboration are much improved in the West Midlands and at a wider level. We have heard of a real step-change within Highways England, whose officers told us that their learning from the M6 Inquiry has made a substantial difference to their practices nationally.

Some notable improvements since February have included:

- Increased information provided on police logs for all agencies to use.
- Highways England now has earlier supervised access to crash sites to assess the carriageway and traffic management needs.
- More training for the Central Motorway Police Group and Highways England officers.
- Highways England now mobilises repair materials to incidents immediately.
- Major incident training workshops led by Highways England.
- Highways England now has a major incident hotline where its partners can reach it straight away.
- Highways England is working to improve its social media output so it can connect with drivers quicker. The police has also boosted real-time information on its social media feeds.
- Improved communication and collaboration between all agencies.
- Damaged road surfaces are now planed down, allowing traffic to get moving again quicker.
- A fact-finding visit to London's traffic control centre, which managed the Olympic Games traffic issues, has been organised to learn lessons about how they deal with major incidents and events.

West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) were involved in the meeting through a presentation from their relevant department, Transport for West Midlands (TfWM). The WMCA Chair, Cllr Bob Sleigh, also joined me to assist in questioning. With the introduction of a West Midlands mayor in May 2017, the WMCA will play an increasingly significant role in co-ordinating incident responses and strategic planning for the transport network in the region. Government decisions around devolution in the West Midlands will be crucial to facilitating further progress.

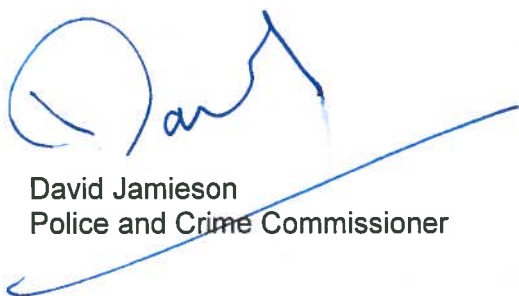
We have come a long way since February 2016, but there is clearly a lot more to be done. The most significant contextual pressure in coming years is undoubtedly HS2, which I recognise has the potential to bring huge economic benefits to the West Midlands. However, the construction stage of the project also has the capacity to put a severe strain on traffic flow and, if not managed properly, risks bringing the West Midlands to a standstill. With that in mind, three key challenges require our attention over the coming years, particularly around strengthening network resilience:

- 1) Ensuring the road network is running efficiently now, with effective responses to all incidents.
- 2) Mitigating the disruption caused by HS2 during its construction phase.
- 3) Ensuring the road network is fit for purpose when HS2 is functioning in 2026.

In regard to these challenges and the ongoing work associated with the M6 Inquiry, I request a meeting with yourself and officials at the earliest opportunity to further discuss these issues. I hope to have a concise report of yesterday's hearing and related activities produced in the near future, which I will provide to you ahead of any meeting.

I will be doing everything in my power to ensure West Midlands Police are working well with Highways England, Transport for West Midlands and the local authorities of the region. I hope to discuss with you how we can get all partners sharing ownership of concerns and issues on the road network. As part of this, we have identified potential issues related to the protocol of authorisation for Operation Freeway in the event of a major incident. It would be helpful to explore this issue further with you.

Yours sincerely



David Jamieson
Police and Crime Commissioner