

Safety fears over new motorway barriers

by Joe Saumarez Smith
Transport Correspondent

MOTORWAY drivers are at risk from dangerous new concrete crash barriers that will increase the number of deaths on the roads, experts fear.

The barriers, which are being fitted as replacements for traditional metal fences on motorway central reservations, are said to cause more damage to cars on collision, slow down crashing vehicles less quickly than their metal equivalent and increase the risk of cars being deflected back into the path of other cars and lorries.

The report, published in the latest edition of *Safety Quarterly*, the journal of the Freight Transport Association, says that while the barriers have some advantages they are potentially likely to cause serious injuries.

"A vehicle hitting the concrete is likely to suffer more damage and possibly be bounced back into the stream of traffic, rather than be retained by the soft energy-absorbing fence," it said.

The barriers are being fitted on sections of the M25 and the Highways Agency

says it plans to introduce them across the country.

Road planners have embraced the new barriers because they occupy far less space than traditional metal fences. Where planning applications to widen roads have been refused the new barriers allow outside lanes to be widened or new lanes created.

The concrete barriers, which cost about 50 per cent more than their metal equivalent, are said to be considerably better at preventing lorries from crossing over the central barriers, one of the most common causes of multiple motorway fatalities in recent years.

"It is a fact of life that you have to choose a design that you think will be best for overall safety and is most cost-effective," says Richard Turner, technical director of the FTA.

"The old-style barrier is without doubt the best way to slow cars down on the central reservation, but they

are no good at all at stopping a Land Rover or any vehicle larger than that from just careering on to the other side of the road."

A spokesman for the Highways Agency said that it was too early to decide if the barriers posed a safety threat.

"We have conducted a very rigorous series of tests over a period of six years which suggested they were more advanced than the old ones. Only time will tell," he said.

Matthew Joint, of the Automobile Association, said that it was considering looking at the safety implications. "The Government's Transport Research Laboratory has made various recommendations about barriers and we realise that a great deal of thought will have gone into their design, but it is important to find if these criticisms are justified.

"But I think a lot of people think that driving into one would be like driving into a brick wall when, in fact, we know they have been designed so it is not like that at all."

Sunday Telegraph 18/6/95

ent'

ised by
untry.
abour
id: "He
vidual,
rkable
it deal

eanor
l was
ubse-
rine
were
hter

YOU DON'T