

Are motorway services meeting road safety and consumer needs - IAM Trust calls for inquiry

IAM Motoring Trust wants the Government to hold an inquiry into motorway service areas (MSAs) to see whether they are supporting their road safety objectives and serving consumers' interests. The last inquiry took place in 1978.

In letters to the then Department for Trade and Industry, the Office of Fair Trading and the National Consumer Council (notes to editors 1), the IAM Trust pointed to the road safety implications of high prices at motorway service, which could tempt drivers to put off taking important safety breaks. An IAM Trust Survey (notes to editors 2) showed that motorists paid much more at MSAs than at off-motorway sites. The widest margins were:

- Petrol 9 pence or up to 4.50 a fill-up (50 litres)
- Diesel 7 pence or up to 3.50 per fill-up (50 litres)
- Bottled water 46 pence
- Crisps 46 pence
- Polo mints 16 pence

With the summer holiday motoring season under way, drivers and their families may be avoiding breaks, or driving on unfamiliar roads near motorways to find cheaper fuel and refreshments, says Neil Greig, IAM Trust Director. Encouraging drivers to take regular breaks is the Government's critical objective for motorway services. This objective is not served if high prices encourage drivers to press on rather than stop. (See notes to editors 3)

Nearly 30 years ago, an official inquiry found that motorists faced high prices and poor consumer value at MSAs. In 2007, drivers and passengers still suffer from a lack of competition between the big operators, or between services on the same motorway. A review of whether motorway services are doing their best in terms of safety and consumer value is long overdue.

In support of its case, the IAM Trust is asking:

- Whether those who do buy something at MSAs should continue to subsidise, through high prices, those who buy nothing
- How MSAs should operate: open 24/7; free parking for lorries and cars and free toilet facilities criteria that were set when the UK's first motorway opened in 1958
- For an investigation into the cost of accidents involving drivers who put off stopping and drive tired and for too long without a break or leave the motorway for less safe routes to find cheaper prices (see note to editors 3)

In its recent [submission](#) to the Highways Agency's own review of motorway service areas (notes to editors 4), the IAM Trust suggests:

- a national strategic plan for service areas based on user needs
- a trial of fuel-only services that also sell a small range of snacks and goods
- installing signs showing the price of fuel at the next two service areas (proposed by the 1978 committee of inquiry)
- the scrapping of archaic rules restricting what users may or may not buy at service areas, except for alcohol
- introduction of independent inspections for quality and value
- park-and-ride facilities at service areas to support regional transport plans

ends

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Notes to Editors

1. In June 2007, the IAM Trust wrote to the Trade and Industry Secretary, to the Chief Executive of the Office of Fair Trading, and to the Chairman of the National Consumer Council setting out its case for an Inquiry into motorway services www.iamtrust.org.uk (**link to letter**).
2. IAM Trust staff carried out the survey in February 2007. They compared the prices of a basket of goods bought at 44 motorway services with goods bought at nearby off-motorway services.
3. The Department for Transport (DfT) recommends drivers take a break every two hours. However, previous research by the IAM showed more than half of drivers habitually drive for more than two hours without taking a break, and that an alarming 25 per cent of drivers are prepared to drive for four hours non-stop.
4. The Highways Agency is carrying out its own review of motorway service areas and the IAM Trust has put forward a number of ideas for consideration. (http://www.iam.org.uk/motoringtrust/reports/consultation_documents/).
5. The 1978 inquiry was convened by the secretaries of state for transport, and for prices and consumer protection. The report complained of high prices and poor value and quality, *it is a cause of much public concern that motorway fuel prices are in fact higher than the average off-motorway price* . *The Committee believes that the public should not have to pay more on average for petrol on the motorway than off them. So long as the present situation continues, motorists will drive off motorways on to less safe roads to buy petrol.*
6. There are nearly 80 MSAs in the UK, regulated by the Department for Transport.
7. *Motorway services road safety or rip-off (as web link)* is the lead feature of the summer edition of the IAM s members magazine, *Advanced Driving* and can be downloaded from www.iamtrust.org.uk.

The IAM Motoring Trust is the research and advocacy arm of the IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists).