The M6 Smart Motorway
The Risk Manager’s View

Risk Manager Daniella James-Daniels
Project M6 Junctions 16 to 19 Smart Motorway
Client Highways England
Location Sandbach, Cheshire East

Project overview
This section of the M6 currently suffers from excessive congestion and unreliable journey times. We are improving a 20-mile stretch of the motorway between Junction 16 (Crewe) and Junction 19 (Knutsford) by converting the existing motorway into an ‘all lane running’ smart motorway. This is a motorway where four lanes are open to traffic, with refuge areas available for emergency use in place of a hard shoulder. The latest technology is used to monitor the traffic and set speed limits to maintain a constant flow.

WSP’s role on the project
Commercial assurance, which includes risk management.

Project challenges
The project is part of Highways England’s wider smart motorways programme, and WSP is involved in all aspects of the risk management lifecycle. We facilitate collaborative risk workshops, ensuring that all key stakeholders are involved in the identification and management of project-level risks. These are later escalated to programme level, where relevant. There are a number of challenges with smart motorways, in particular, some of the infrastructure works can be challenging given their required maintenance and the need to keep all lanes open. As risk managers, we have worked with the team to develop risk response solutions, including alternative design solutions within agreed risk levels to the scope of the works.

Project innovation
Whilst we operate under Highways England’s governance procedures, we have additionally developed innovative risk analysis tools to improve our service. We have also been involved in a pilot for the introduction of a central risk management database, which will be rolled out to wider Highways England projects. The database will make an enormous difference as it will bring all risk data into central storage, providing Highways England with a single ‘point of truth’ that will ensure consistency across all projects.

Extending risk management experience on the job
Having previously worked on rail, power and renewable energy projects, this is my first highways project, and it has really given me great insight into a new industry.