

# IMPROVING POST-COLLISION RESPONSE AND EMERGENCY CARE IN EUROPE

## Case Study: Emergency corridors

ETSC's REVIVE project maps good practices in Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) across the EU28 and raises the profile of both EMS and FRS on the national and European political agendas. The REVIVE project aims at improving post-collision response and emergency care provided by EMS and FRS in order to mitigate the consequences of road collisions. It contributes to promoting the need for a coordinated, EU-wide action on tackling serious road traffic injuries.

In this case study, emergency corridors, sometimes also known as rescue lanes, are discussed.

- FACTFILE -

### EMERGENCY CORRIDOR



40%



MAKES POST-COLLISION RESPONSE FASTER AND CAN INCREASE THE CHANCE OF SURVIVAL BY UP TO 40 %



HAS TO BE AT LEAST 3 METRES WIDE TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR EMERGENCY VEHICLES TO PASS, ESPECIALLY AMBULANCE AND FIRE ENGINES

### TRAFFIC JAM



### EMERGENCY CORRIDOR



European Transport Safety Council

25

YEARS

1993-2018



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### ACCESSING A ROAD COLLISION WITH AN EMERGENCY VEHICLE

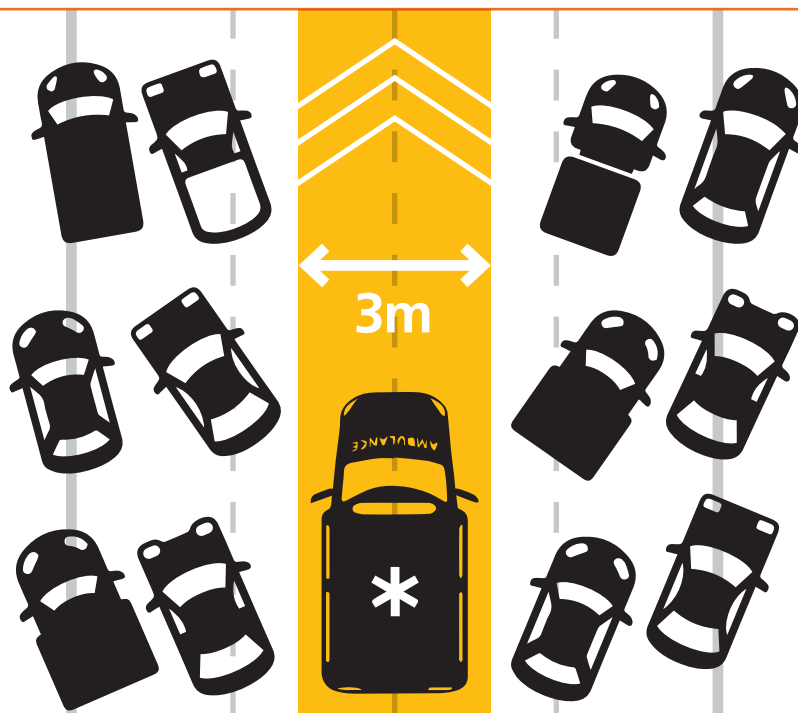
When a road collision occurs, access to the location of a collision site may be impeded by traffic congestion, making it difficult for emergency teams, especially ambulances and/or fire engines, to reach the incident site as quickly as possible. Some European countries have adopted laws on emergency corridors in order to oblige drivers to follow specific actions in such situations<sup>1</sup> whilst others do not specifically regulate, assuming road users comply with general traffic law and use common sense in emergency situations. Drivers in some EU Member States (Finland, France, Spain and the UK) have to give priority passage to emergency vehicles with their flashing lights and sirens on, however, how exactly they do that is up to them. In other Member States (Italy, Slovakia) a hard shoulder can be used by emergency vehicles in case of congestion.

### EMERGENCY CORRIDOR REQUIRED BY LAW

An emergency corridor (also known as a rescue lane) is a clear lane intended for priority vehicles. In some countries, it is compulsory for drivers of all types of vehicles to clear one lane, usually on motorways and expressways. Before the surrounding traffic has come to a standstill and/or when an emergency vehicle is approaching, drivers are obliged to clear the way in a systematic, organised way. The corridor has to be created on dual carriageway roads in the middle, or next to the leftmost or rightmost lane, depending on the number of lanes and country. The corridor should be at least three metres wide to allow emergency/rescue vehicles to pass on a possibly congested road and reach the road collision scene (or other time critical situation) without unnecessary delay.

The three-metre requirement is the absolute minimum; a fire brigade vehicle can easily be three metres wide. This measure is in place in only a handful of countries, such as Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Switzerland. According to a study conducted in Austria, an emergency corridor may speed up the arrival of EMS/FRS to the scene by up to four minutes and increase the chances of survival by 40%.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Switzerland.

<sup>2</sup> According to ASFINAG, an Austrian corporation responsible for toll motorways in Austria and operating under the Federal Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology. [goo.gl/oSUTAL](https://goo.gl/oSUTAL)

## HOW TO FORM AN EMERGENCY CORRIDOR

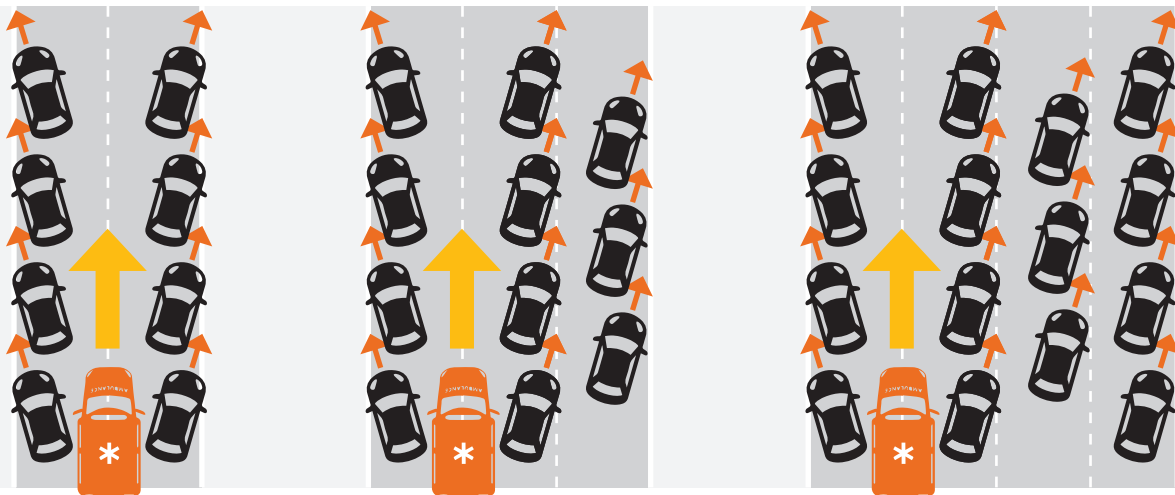
The rule is simple for dual carriageway roads with **two lanes** running in the same direction: road users should clear the way in the middle lane.

On roads with **more than two lanes**, drivers are required to form the corridor next to the leftmost or rightmost lane, depending on the country. In Austria, Germany, Hungary, Slovenia, and Switzerland, the corridor should be created next to the leftmost lane. This means vehicles in the far left lane are required to drive as close to the left as possible while vehicles in the other lanes drive as close to the right as possible, using the hard shoulder. However, there are ongoing debates in some countries such as Germany whether or not the hard shoulder should be used.

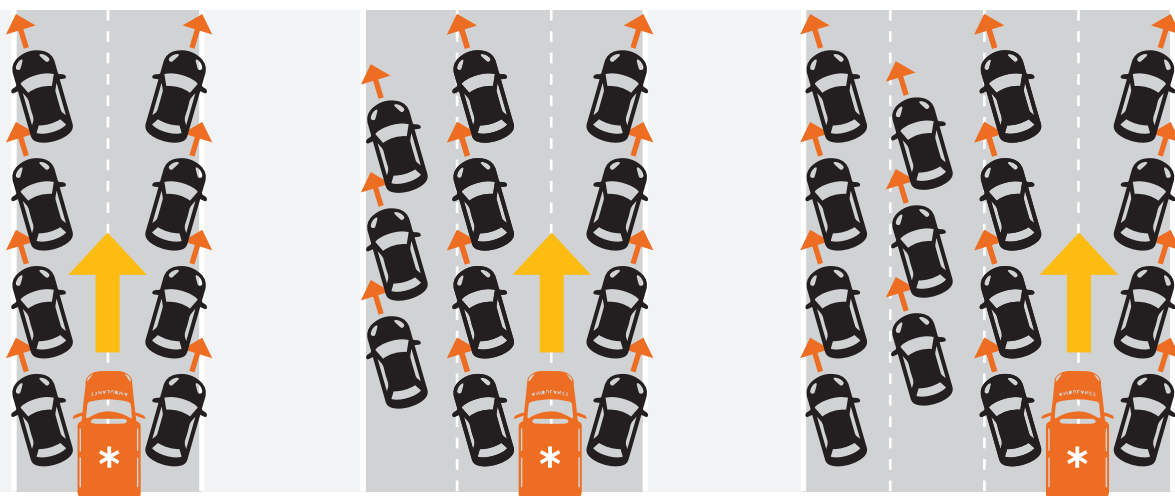
In the Czech Republic, drivers are required to form the emergency corridor next to the rightmost lane, using the same principle: all vehicles in the far right lane drive as close to the right as possible while vehicles in the other lanes drive as close to the left as possible. It has been argued that having the corridor on the right makes it easier for EMS/FRS vehicles to exit the motorway at any given moment. If the emergency vehicle is driving up the corridor that has been formed on the left side, taking a motorway exit (i.e. turning right) on a multilane congested road may be difficult for emergency vehicles.<sup>3</sup>

In other countries, where an emergency corridor is required next to the leftmost lane, it is argued that forming a corridor on the left may speed up the process. That is because large and heavy vehicles usually drive on the rightmost lane of the road and these vehicles are much more difficult to manoeuvre, especially after they have come to a standstill in traffic.

### AUSTRIA, GERMANY, HUNGARY, LUXEMBOURG, SLOVENIA, SWITZERLAND



### CZECH REPUBLIC



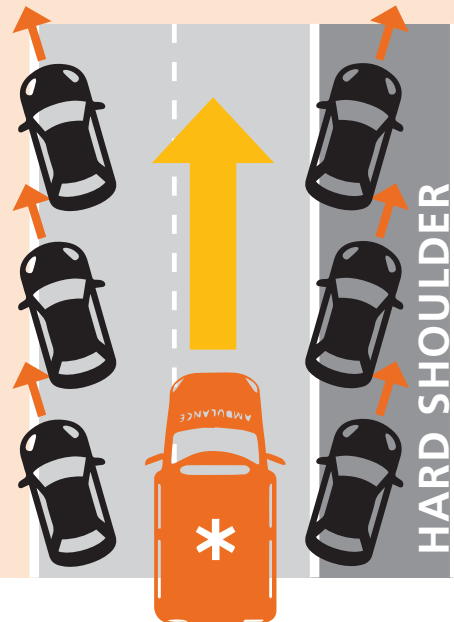
<sup>3</sup> This applies to countries that drive on the right only.

## WHY DO WE NEED IT?

It is a common misconception that a hard shoulder exists in order to allow emergency vehicles to pass. Although in some countries hard shoulders may be used by emergency vehicles, especially when bypassing a congested road, in normal usage, the hard shoulder is designed to serve as an emergency stopping lane that can be used by motorists in case of a technical problem on their vehicle or in other emergency situation.

It is beneficial for all road users to have drivers form an emergency corridor instead of leaving the hard shoulder as the only option for EMS/FRS vehicles when they need to reach a collision site. The width of the hard shoulder might not always be sufficient for a fire engine to pass. Since hard shoulders may serve as an area where drivers can pull out if their vehicle has broken down, use of the same hard shoulder by emergency vehicles may not be the best idea as it may get blocked easily. In addition to that, in some European regions the infrastructure may be different from what drivers expect - and it is possible that there may not be any hard shoulder at all in some cases. Therefore, it is important to have an alternative way of giving the emergency/rescue workers enough space for their passage, and the emergency corridor may be the solution, especially on narrow roads.

*It is a common misconception that a hard shoulder exists in order to allow emergency vehicles to pass.*



## AWARENESS RAISING

Before, during, and after the introduction of a law obliging drivers to form an emergency corridor, education and awareness-raising campaigns with leaflets and/or demonstrative video campaigns are recommended. The public should be made aware of what an emergency corridor is, what purpose it serves and how it should/should not be used.

For spreading all the necessary information about emergency corridors, how to form them and on which side of roads, information signs or billboards alongside motorways could be used. Once the level of consciousness among the general population increases, some drivers may give a lead to others thus multiplying the number of those who act correctly in congested traffic. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of the share of people who are aware of emergency corridors is recommended. An evaluation survey should be conducted amongst EMS/FRS drivers and based on results this measure can be further promoted and campaigns designed accordingly.

## ENFORCEMENT

Responsible and reasonable behaviour upstream of road collision sites as well as on congested roads is crucial and may save lives. In the EU countries where forming of emergency corridors is required by law, disobedience in crisis situations is enforced by police and drivers may receive both fines and penalty points on their driving licence, and penalties may vary significantly in different Member States. Considering people's lives can be put at risk, penalties in some EU countries are set at a high level.

Similarly, deliberate obstruction as well as misuse or abuse of the emergency corridor is punishable. In some cases, it may be tempting for drivers to follow an ambulance passing to the incident in an attempt to easily overtake a large number of other vehicles in a traffic jam. Nevertheless, the ambulance might not be the only emergency vehicle trying to reach the spot as more than one ambulance may be working its way to the incident, or a fire engine may follow, requiring an even wider corridor to get where it needs to intervene. Hence it is strictly forbidden to use the emergency corridor for private vehicles.

It is important that all drivers comply with the law as this particular measure is functional only if all drivers abide. Even one single vehicle can block the whole corridor, be it due to deliberate obstruction by the driver, lack of knowledge, or panic behaviour in a crisis situation. It is advised that drivers remain calm and try to do their best to clear the way for emergency workers and/or police vehicles.