



Freeway phobia

There are many reasons why some people don't like driving on freeways (also known as expressways).

They may feel intimidated by multiple lanes of fast-moving traffic. They could feel trapped and believe they can't stop or get off the road. Merging into traffic and changing lanes can also seem challenging for some drivers.

It's important to understand that freeways are designed to be safe. Opposing traffic is physically separated and roadside hazards are minimised.

Feeling comfortable travelling on freeways can take time. By taking small steps, a driver can gradually build up their confidence.

Here we look at some strategies to help overcome the anxieties associated with freeway driving.

Before leaving

1. Plan ahead

Planning your trip can help you feel more confident. By knowing where you'll exit, you can make sure you're in the correct lane well before leaving the freeway. Listening to traffic reports will provide an idea of road conditions, traffic volumes and hazards.

If possible, avoid busy periods, travelling at night, bad weather and poor visibility. At these times headlights and reflective road signs can be dazzling, other vehicles appear to be travelling faster, and it's more difficult to see finer detail.

Plan a break. This will allow you to refresh before continuing your trip.

2. Prepare for night driving

If you must drive at night, ensure that all your car's lights are clean and working properly, and make sure you know how to operate the high beam lights. Fog lights are better than standard headlights in low visibility situations, such as rainstorms, dust clouds, falling snow and, of course, fog. They're designed to illuminate the road beneath these hazards, while headlights have a higher beam, which can cause reflective glare.

By law, fog lights can only be used in hazardous weather conditions that cause reduced visibility. They must be capable of being used independently of headlights and high beam.

Ensure your windscreen is clean and remove any objects that obstruct your view.

3. Take a passenger

An experienced driver familiar with freeway travel can provide support and advice and act as a navigator.

Freeway driving tips

1. Maintain speed and distance

Subject to traffic and weather conditions, try to maintain the posted speed limit. This will ensure you're moving with the flow of traffic. Driving exceptionally slowly can result in a fine for obstructing the path of another driver.

If your vehicle is unable to maintain the speed limit on steep grades, make sure you stay in the left-hand lane.

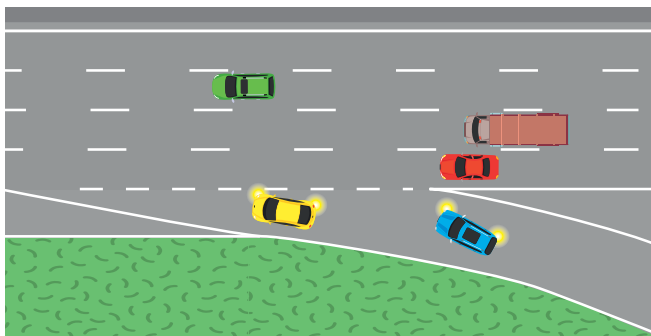
Don't exceed the speed limit, and keep an eye out for signs that indicate a reduced speed limit due to congestion, roadworks or changes in road conditions. Speeding is one of the main causes of vehicle collisions on freeways.

Allow at least eight to nine car lengths (about three seconds) between your vehicle and the vehicle in front. This will give you enough time to brake to avoid a collision. You should increase the distance and time gap when the road is wet or visibility is reduced.

2. Merge with caution

Merging can be one of the most anxiety-inducing elements of driving, especially on a freeway. However, maintaining a three-second gap will contribute to safe merging and provide enough space if you need to brake.

When merging, you must give way to traffic already on the freeway. While many drivers will assist merging traffic by moving into the right-hand lane, this isn't always possible. So, merging drivers must be prepared to slow down or stop, and wait for a gap in the traffic.



Be prepared to slow down or stop when merging.

It's important to adjust your speed for safe merging. You may need to accelerate quickly to enter the flow of traffic safely.

3. Use the lanes correctly

The far-left lane is typically for slower vehicles, such as trucks, and vehicles entering and exiting the freeway.

On a three-lane freeway, the far-right lane is for overtaking. You might see vehicles driving in this lane for an extended period, which can be frustrating when you're trying to overtake vehicles in the other two lanes.

In South Australia, if the speed limit on a multi-laned road is higher than 80km/h, or there's a "keep left unless overtaking" sign, you must drive in the left lane unless you're:

- overtaking a slower vehicle, or
- avoiding an obstruction or congestion.

4. Avoid frequent lane changes

To reduce stress, only change lanes when necessary. Before changing lanes, check your blind spot (see point 6 below), and be sure to use your indicators so other drivers know your intentions.

The external mirrors on most modern vehicles make objects look further away than they really are. So, before changing lanes, also check your interior mirror to ensure you don't cut off any vehicles in the adjacent lane.

5. Scan ahead

While it's important to pay attention to the vehicle immediately in front, you should also scan the road well ahead for any potential hazards, such as traffic coming to a stop. Check your rear-view mirrors regularly to see what's happening behind you.

6. Be aware of blind spots

The structure of a vehicle creates blind spots where other vehicles and objects can't be seen in your mirrors. To check blind spots, quickly look over your shoulders.

Keep in mind that other drivers also have blind spots, and be prepared to react if a driver doesn't see you and moves towards your lane.

7. Remove distractions

Maintain your concentration by reducing distractions. Turn the radio down or off and put your phone on silent. This will enable you to focus on signposts, the traffic around you, and any instructions from an accompanying passenger.

8. Know when to pull over

If an emergency occurs while you're driving, pull over to the emergency stopping lane on the road shoulder. If there's no emergency stopping lane, take the nearest exit before stopping your car.

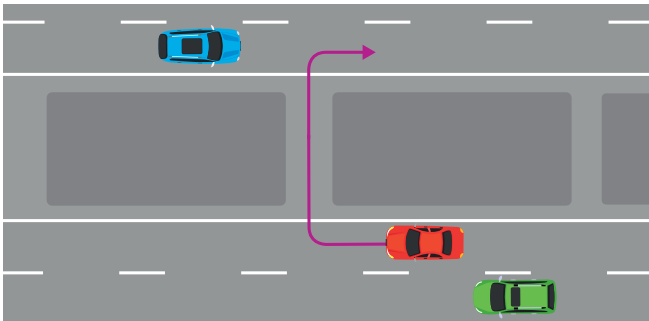
You mustn't stop your vehicle in the middle of a freeway. It will endanger yourself, your passengers and other road users.

Once you've pulled into an emergency stopping lane, immediately turn on your hazard lights so other vehicles can see you've pulled over and stopped. This is especially important at night.

You mustn't drive or stop in an emergency stopping lane unless there's an emergency or you're avoiding an obstruction or collision.

9. Never reverse or make a U-turn

If you miss your exit, you mustn't reverse your vehicle to the exit or make a U-turn. Not only is it illegal, but it could cause a collision with vehicles travelling at high speed. The safest option is to continue to the next exit.



Never make a U-turn on a freeway.

10. Prepare for roundabouts

Some freeways have a roundabout immediately after the exit, so it's important to follow the posted freeway exit speed and prepare to enter the roundabout safely.

Remember to indicate if you're going around the roundabout and make sure you choose the correct lane for exiting. You must also indicate before exiting, unless the roundabout is too small for this to be practicable.

Motorists must give way to vehicles already on the roundabout.

Negotiating a freeway can be stressful, but common sense, good planning, driving to the conditions, and a sound knowledge of the road rules will help you overcome these fears. If you drive on a freeway at least once a week, even for a short time, your skills should improve and you're likely to become more confident.

We're here to help

Call our Road Safety team on 8202 4517,
or visit our website
raa.com.au/roadsafety