

News story: Real time information to transform bus travel in England

Bus passengers up and down the country are set to benefit from easier journeys with up-to-the-minute information under plans to be announced today (Thursday 5 July 2018) by the Buses Minister.

Nusrat Ghani will visit Reading Buses to launch a [consultation on legally requiring bus operators to share their data so that passengers can get real time information on bus routes](#), timetables and fares at their fingertips.

It will also look at [making companies provide audio and visual information on buses, ensuring disabled people and the elderly are able to travel confidently](#).

Together, the 2 initiatives will ensure that passengers have the information they need, when they need it, regardless of their location and the company running the service.

Buses Minister Nusrat Ghani said:

Nobody enjoys waiting at a bus stop for 20 minutes not knowing when the next bus is going to turn up, only for 2 to then pull up at the same time.

By requiring bus operators to share their data, we can make sure that passengers have the information they need to catch the bus with ease, equipped with the right information about the time and cost.

This move will also open up opportunities for innovation within the industry, support local services where demand is falling and help increase bus usage across the country.

Requiring bus companies to share their data would pave the way for improved information across all modes of transport, meaning quicker, easier journeys for passengers travelling on more than one form of transport.

Reading Buses is already using open data to improve bus journeys for people in the area. Through a number of initiatives to make information more easily available, the company has seen a 48% increase in passenger numbers since 2009.

During her visit the minister will travel on a Reading bus which includes accessibility features such as next stop screens, voice announcements and 2 wheelchair spaces.

John Bickerton, Reading Buses' Head of Engineering and Innovation said:

We are delighted that the Department for Transport is highlighting the importance of open data for the bus industry. Here at Reading Buses, we have long been advocates of giving customers more information to help them on their journey – and importantly to help them decide to travel with us in the first place.

We have long had a commitment to on-board audio and visual next stop announcements and have put information literally in our customers' hands with the Reading Buses app, which not only shows when buses are due, but can also show the buses moving in real time on a map of the route.

James White, senior campaigns manager at the charity Guide Dogs said:

Accessible information on board buses is absolutely vital to help people with sight loss travel with confidence.

We welcome this consultation as an important step towards a comprehensive and much needed network of talking buses.

Transport data is already widely shared within the rail industry and across modes in the biggest cities, with apps such as Trainline and City Mapper helping passengers make informed choices about their method of travel.

[Press release: Lord Chancellor announces new panel to boost Law Tech industry](#)

- Government-backed industry-led delivery panel to boost new legal technologies
- Industry experts to provide advice and support
- Builds on Government strategy to drive business innovation

In a speech at the Lord Mayor's Dinner for HM Judges at Mansion House on Wednesday evening, the Lord Chancellor unveiled plans for a panel of industry professionals to support and accelerate the development and adoption of innovative new legal technologies.

Chaired by The Law Society's incoming President Christina Blacklaws, the group will provide direction to the legal sector and help foster an environment in which new technology can thrive.

The Government recognises the importance of embracing cutting-edge

initiatives to ensure the UK's £24 billion legal services sector continues to grow and retain its world-leading reputation.

The legal sector is already adapting to harness the power of these emerging technologies – with the Serious Fraud Office introducing a document review system, backed up by artificial intelligence, that can review 2,000 documents a day and law firms embracing automated digital contracts that allow for on-going monitoring of contract terms.

Lord Chancellor David Gauke said:

I am determined to ensure our world-leading legal services sector continues to thrive and that the UK remains the primary choice for international business.

The Lawtech industry is experiencing rapid growth and cutting-edge initiatives are already underway across the country.

It is of paramount importance that, working together, we foster an environment in which these new technologies are embraced and take advantage of every opportunity created.

The UK is the ideal place for LawTech to thrive – with its progressive regulation, world-leading professionals and financial services sector and huge tech talent pool.

Today's announcement builds on the Government's work to boost innovation and emerging technologies and create a thriving service industry.

In April of this year, the Prime Minister announced a £20 million fund to encourage work between businesses and researchers and help the service industry, including the legal sector, take advantage of new technologies.

The Home Office has also announced the launch of start-up visas for entrepreneurs looking to come to the UK.

Notes to editors:

More information on the Home Office's start-up visa programme is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-start-up-visa-route-announced-by-the-home-secretary>

More information on the Government's £20 million industrial strategy can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/industrial-strategy-challenge-fund-joint-research-and-innovation>

Press release: Western Balkans Summit begins with Economy Ministers Meeting in Vienna

The Western Balkans Summit began today with a meeting of Economy Ministers in Vienna. Held at the British Ambassador to Austria's Residence and chaired by FCO Permanent Under Secretary Sir Simon McDonald and Austrian Minister of Economy Margarete Schramböck, the meeting brought together Ministers and representatives from the 14 Berlin Process countries, the European Commission, international financial institutions (IFIs), and regional and international organisations.

The meeting marked the start of the UK's hosting of the fifth annual Western Balkans Summit convened under the Berlin Process launched by Chancellor Merkel in 2014. The Process encourages cooperation between the Western Balkans six – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia – and likeminded European nations; Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, with Bulgaria joining this year because of the Sofia Summit they hosted in May 2018.

Discussions in Vienna focused on how the Berlin Process could best support economic growth in the region, including through the implementation of the Western Balkans Multi-Annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area Plan – a proposal agreed at the 2017 Berlin Process Summit to allow for the unobstructed flow of goods, services, capital and highly-skilled labour across the region, so as to promote investment and trade.

The meeting also discussed how the Berlin Process could support a digitalised future for the Western Balkan economies, including by addressing skills gaps; and the role that European financial hubs like London and IFIs can play in improving access to finance for small enterprises and start-ups in the region. The latter will be delivered through new funding – including from the European Investment Bank and the European Commission.

Speaking after the Summit, Sir Simon said:

It's great to kick-off this year's Western Balkans Summit alongside our Austrian partners here in Vienna. Our joint hosting of today's Economy Ministers Meeting demonstrates how closely aligned UK-Austrian thinking and policies are towards the Western Balkans.

Collectively, with a wide range of partners we've made important steps today towards the promotion of growth and economic stability in the region. The Prime Minister and Chancellor Kurz, and other Berlin Process leaders, will now take up the baton of making further progress at the London Summit.

The Western Balkans Summit will continue next week in London with Interior Ministers and Foreign Ministers meeting on 9 July and leaders meeting on 10 July.

[News story: Penny Mordaunt is first minister to use sign language in Parliament](#)

The International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt has become the first minister in British history to use sign language from the despatch box in Parliament.

[Penny Mordaunt using sign language in Parliament](#)

She was highlighting the fact that the UK will Global Disability Summit will co-host its first ever Global Disability Summit with the International Disability Alliance and the Government of Kenya on 24 July 2018.

The summit will take place at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London and will bring together more than 700 delegates from governments, donors, private sector organisations, charities and organisations of persons with disabilities.

[Find out more about the Disability Summit](#)

[Press release: Government injects £7.5 million into council digital agenda with launch of new sector pledge](#)

A new “digital pledge” backed by £7.5 million of government funding has been launched today (4 July 2018) to help councils transform their online services.

[Speaking at the Local Government Association Annual Conference](#) in Birmingham, Local Government Minister Rishi Sunak said the new initiative would change the way councils invest in technology, share expertise and ensure members of the public are receiving the best quality digital services.

Over 50 local authorities, government departments and partner organisations have already signed up to the pledge, called the [Local Digital Declaration](#), agreeing a common vision for the future of local services.

They are now calling on the wider sector to also make the public commitment.

Local Government Minister, Rishi Sunak MP, said:

Whether it's an app to report fly-tipping, or slick online services to pay your Council Tax, many local authorities are at the forefront of digital innovation.

But there's much more to do. Digital doesn't belong in the basement, it belongs in the boardroom.

I want councils and partners across the country to sign up to this declaration. By supporting each other and building on each other's work we can revolutionise services for our residents.

While many councils already have excellent online offerings, the digital declaration is about sharing the best innovation across the public sector to benefit people.

For example, the school nursing service in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland worked with young people to help them get health advice by text – Chat Health. It's engaging them in ways that suit their lives and preferences and has worked so well it's now been rolled out to 30 areas and a million people.

As part of the initiative, local authorities across the country will also be able to bid for a share of a new £7.5 million innovation fund to help develop common solutions to their shared challenges.

The pioneering new approach will also see a new course developed to train senior local authority staff in digital leadership skills.

Alongside this, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will establish a new team to work with councils to help them deliver on their declaration commitments.