News story: Corridor announced to unlock full potential of England's economic heartland

A plan to link together fast-growing technology hotspots took a further step closer to fruition today (12 September 2018) as Roads Minister Jesse Norman announced the chosen central corridor for the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway.

After detailed scrutiny and review by Highways England, of the 3 options A, B and C, Corridor B was judged to offer greater benefits to the region – outperforming the other options by providing better links to jobs, education, leisure and health services.

The expressway, with options to pass either west or east of Oxford, is also expected to take up to 40 minutes off the journey between the A34 south of Oxford and the M1.

Building the new link close to the east/west rail link will also offer more options for the commercial development of up to 1 million new homes, in line with proposals by the National Infrastructure Commission, and encourage more people to travel by train rather than by cars.

Roads Minister Jesse Norman said:

> The government is taking the big decisions on infrastructure, working to maximise growth and productivity across the UK.
>
> England's economic heartland, as it has been called, already plays a crucial role in powering the UK's growth, science and innovation, but there is no single route to connect Oxford and Cambridge.
>
> This expressway will enhance both transport connectivity and growth across the region for the benefit of the UK as a whole.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, Robert Jenrick, said:

> The Oxford to Cambridge arc is one of the greatest opportunities for economic growth in Europe. We want to realise that potential by investing in the new infrastructure the area needs and the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway is an important part of our plan.
>
> The Expressway will provide a link between 2 of the country's intellectual powerhouses and open up vital jobs, skills and housing opportunities to transform the region's economy.

> We are investing record amounts in the UK's infrastructure, including funding the largest road-building programme since the 1970s.

A full public consultation will be held next year, in which residents and businesses in and around the corridor will have their say on more detailed designs for the route.

News story: Future electric vehicles: new Faraday battery challenge funding

A £25 million funding competition will offer grants to innovative businesses with projects to develop batteries for future electric vehicles.

Funding is provided by UK Research and Innovation and delivered by Innovate UK.

A growing demand and global market

There is growing global demand for fully electric and zero emission vehicles, with the market estimated to be worth £5 billion in the UK and £50 billion in Europe by 2025.

The Faraday battery challenge is a £246 million investment to bring forward the next generation of electric vehicles. These will be powered by high-performance batteries that are cost-effective, lightweight, durable and safe, and can be recycled.

Clean tech start up, Brill Power is leading a project to receive funding under a previous Faraday battery challenge competition. Its battery control and management technology could extend the life of lithium-ion batteries by 60%, managing individual cells in a battery pack and allowing these to be replaced as needed.

ISCF winners. Faraday Battery Challenge – Brill Power

It is part of the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, which brings together the research base and businesses to tackle the biggest industrial and societal challenges.

This latest competition follows an announcement by the Prime Minister, Theresa May of an additional £106 million package for research and development in cleaner battery, vehicle and refuelling technology.

Scale up development and build the supply chain

This competition is to support business-led research and development to improve batteries for automotive applications.

There are 2 opportunities to apply, depending on the stage of your project, which are:

- up to £23 million for industrial research and development
- up to £2 million for feasibility studies

In both opportunities projects should aim to:

- make it easier to scale up battery production and use
- build the UK supply chain

Projects should address technical and commercial challenges, including:

- reducing costs at the cell and pack level, and minimising manufacturing costs
- increasing the energy density per cell
- increasing the power density per pack
- eliminating thermal runaway risks to enhance safety
- lengthening the cell and pack life in first-life applications
- broadening the temperature ranges that a pack can efficiently operate at
- creating new models to predict range and battery health
- improving recyclability, including design, reuse and recycling, towards 95% pack recyclability

Ideas that bring new investment and businesses to the UK and have the potential to increase productivity, competitiveness and growth are particularly encouraged.

Industrial research and development competition information

- the competition opens on 17 September 2018 and the deadline for applications is midday on 12 December 2018
- to lead a project you must be a UK-based business or research and technology organisation. You can collaborate with other businesses, academic organisations, charities, public sector or research and technology organisations
- projects can have total costs of between £500,000 and £15 million and last between 3 and 18 months
- businesses could get up to 70% of their eligible project costs
- if your application meets a quality threshold you will be invited to an interview panel between 4 to 12 February
- you can register to attend one of the briefing events taking place during September 2018 to find out more about the competition, how to make an application and meet potential partners

Feasibility studies competition information

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- projects can have total costs of up to £500,000 and last between 3 and 12 months
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News story: Route announced to unlock full potential of England's economic heartland

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A full public consultation will be held next year, in which residents and businesses in and around the corridor will have their say on more detailed designs for the route.

Statement to Parliament: Oxford to Cambridge Expressway: road scheme update

England’s road network is a huge national asset and a cornerstone of our present and future economic prosperity. Across the country the government is investing in this network, in order to open up new opportunities, improve productivity and connect people and businesses.

As part of this, after considerable consultation and review, the government is announcing today (12 September 2018) the preferred corridor for the new Oxford-Cambridge Expressway, accepting the recommendations of Highways England.

The expressway, which fills a major gap in the national road network, will work together with the proposed East West Rail link to revolutionise east-west connectivity. In so doing, it will help unlock the commercial

development of up to one million new homes.

The expressway is projected to take up to 40 minutes off the journey between the A34 south of Oxford and the M1, so that hundreds of thousands of people will be brought within reach of high quality jobs in centres of rapid growth such as Oxford Science Park. The preferred corridor identified today runs alongside the planned route of East West Rail, so that consumers have a variety of road and rail travel options.

This decision determines the broad area within which the road will be developed: the process of designing a specific route will now get under way, involving extensive further consultation with local people to find the best available options. Members of the public will be able to comment on the full set of front-running designs in a public consultation next year, and the road is on schedule to be open to traffic by 2030.

The choice of this corridor means that the government has ruled out construction in the area of the Otmoor nature reserve, underlining its desire to protect the natural environment.

The government also recognises that no one corridor can support every proposed development across the area. It is therefore commissioning England's economic heartland to carry out a study of how to provide better connectivity across the wider area, so that places outside of the preferred corridor enjoy the benefits of growth as far as possible.

Between 2015 and 2021 the government is investing £15 billion to improve the UK's busiest roads. Already, it has opened the first all-motorway link from Newcastle to London; and after 45 years without change the Department for Transport is working with Transport for the North to develop 3 upgrades to capacity across the Pennines.

The government is also spending billions to transform connectivity in the south west with the dualling of the A303 and A30, and to create better access to and from our ports and airports through projects such as the Lower Thames Crossing and upgrade of the A14 link between the Midlands and Felixstowe.

The common theme linking all these projects is the need to create and upgrade the UK's infrastructure. So too it is here with the new Oxford-Cambridge expressway.

News story: Safety incident at Bagillt user worked crossing

At around 11:56 hrs on Friday 17 August, a passenger train passed over a user worked level crossing, near Bagillt, North Wales, shortly after a user with a

heavy good vehicle had completed using the crossing. The train, the 09:53 Manchester Piccadilly to Holyhead service, was travelling at around 75 mph (121 km/h). The private level crossing, which gives access to industrial premises, is only used by vehicles which are too tall to pass under a nearby bridge. The route over the crossing goes over two widely spaced tracks, and the crossing gates are 25 metres apart. The gates are kept locked. The crossing is fitted with telephones for users to contact the signaller and request permission to cross. To use this crossing, vehicle drivers must unlock and open both gates on foot, drive their vehicle over and reclose and lock both gates on foot.

The user requested permission to cross the railway with a ‘wagon’, and the signaller, based at the Wales Railway Operations Centre in Cardiff, granted it.

There had been similar previous occurrences at this crossing, on 31 October 2017 and 10 December 2014. At those times the level crossing was supervised by signallers based locally at Holywell Junction signal box. Our investigation will determine the sequence of events. It will also include consideration of:

- the actions of those involved
- the rules and guidance for signallers relating to factors which need to be considered when giving permission for the crossing to be used
- the information and guidance provided to users of private level crossings
- the management of safety risk at this crossing
- any relevant underlying management factors

Our investigation is independent of any investigation by the railway industry or by the industry’s regulator, the Office of Rail and Road.

We will publish our findings, including any recommendations to improve safety, at the conclusion of our investigation. This report will be available on our website.

You can subscribe to automated emails notifying you when we publish our reports.