

[News story: Six areas to pilot UK's fastest broadband as part of £200 million project](#)

The first stage of a £200 million scheme to help bring the UK's fastest and most reliable broadband to businesses, schools and hospitals kicks off today (Sunday 3 September) with the launch of six local pilots.

The projects will get around £10 million to test innovative ways of connecting offices and public sector buildings with the next generation of broadband – full fibre networks that run fibre connections straight to the doors of customers' homes or businesses.

The result is an incredibly reliable connection that can offer speeds of 1 Gigabit or 1,000 Mb/Sec. The multimillion-pound investment means test projects will now go ahead in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, West Sussex, Coventry and Warwickshire, Bristol and Bath & North East Somerset, West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester.

Today's announcement is the first step in a £200 million programme. Unveiled by the Chancellor, Philip Hammond, at [Spring Budget](#), it is part of the government's four-year plan to stimulate the market and encourage the growth of full fibre up and down the country.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, Andrew Jones MP, said:

How we live and work today is directly affected by how good our broadband connection is. Reliable connections enable new industries to flourish, help create jobs and give people flexibility in how and where they work.

For our economy to thrive, it is vital we make smart investments to ensure our digital infrastructure is world class and fit for the future.

Full fibre connections are the gold standard and we are proud to announce today the next step to get Britain better connected.

Minister of State for Digital, Matt Hancock MP, said:

We want to see more commercial investment in the gold standard connectivity that full fibre provides, and these innovative pilots will help create the right environment for this to happen. To keep Britain as the digital world leader that it is, we need to have the right infrastructure in place to allow us to keep up with the rapid advances in technology now and in the future.

The cutting-edge technology will make internet access more secure and enable more people to work remotely without disruption, as well as equipping the UK's homes, businesses and public services for applications of the future.

Full fibre broadband could potentially allow:

- hospitals to share HD quality graphics of medical scans in seconds to improve diagnosis speeds
- businesses to reach ever more customers online, increasing transactions by uploading even the largest files quickly and easily
- school classrooms to see a vast increase the number of pupils who can stream educational videos at the same time

This comes hot on the heels of the [Digital Infrastructure Investment Fund](#) announced in July, as well as new legislation to enable business rates relief for new fibre. Unlocking more than £1 billion for full fibre broadband, the fund has ignited interest from private finance to invest in the sector.

Notes to editors:

The remaining £190 million will be spent by 2020-21.

This programme comes as part of the government's £23 billion [National Productivity Investment Fund](#) aimed at improving productivity, which is key to raising living standards. This fund has already earmarked £740 million specifically for improving Britain's digital infrastructure, ensuring the UK is match-fit for the future.

Further information

[Press release: Domestic Abuse survivors given a voice to vote.](#)

Under existing legislation, domestic abuse survivors must provide a court order or have their application supported by a senior independent witness, such as a police superintendent, in order to appear anonymously on the electoral register.

These strict requirements have deterred many from registering at all – prompting a campaign by charities and survivors to make it more accessible.

The Government's changes will increase the number of people who can act as witnesses, including medical and healthcare professionals and refuge workers, and expand the type of evidence which can be put forward.

Chris Skidmore, Minister for the Constitution, said:

Ensuring every eligible person is able to vote is a matter of social justice. Every voice matters and this Government will continue to encourage our record levels of democratic participation by ensuring we have a democracy that works for everyone.

Women's Aid estimates that up to 12,000 women are receiving support in their refuges at any one time.

The changes are expected to be of particular benefit to these women or those who have left a refuge but continue to be in hiding from their perpetrators.

Welcoming the move, Katie Ghose, Chief Executive of Women's Aid, said:

The changes announced today will help survivors of domestic abuse to regain their voices. For too long these women have been silenced because it was too dangerous for them to sign up to an electoral register, which would reveal their location, and too difficult for them to register anonymously.

We are proud to have worked in partnership with the courageous Mehala Osborne and other partners to bring this issue onto the political agenda. We also want to thank the Government for their decisive action on this. The new measures send out a clear message to all survivors of domestic abuse: that their voices matter, and their right to vote should never be taken away.

To complement the legislative changes, the Cabinet Office will launch further research to identify and explain other barriers to electoral registration faced by survivors of domestic abuse. This research will be critical in shaping new policies, projects and future engagement.

It forms part of ongoing work across Government to tackle domestic violence and abuse and violence against women and girls.

Sarah Newton, Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability said:

Domestic abuse has a devastating and often lifelong impact on victims, their children, family and friends.

These changes come at a time when the Government is bringing forward a landmark Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill which will protect and support victims, recognise the devastating impact domestic abuse can have on young people, and ensure agencies

respond effectively.

Press release: UK statement on Venezuelan decision to bar human rights activist from travelling

The UK regrets that the Venezuelan authorities have today prevented Lilian Tintori, the human rights activist and wife of Leopoldo Lopez, from leaving the country. We condemn the timing of this decision. Ms Tintori was due to visit London this week for a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss human rights, as part of an important initiative to update European governments on the situation in Venezuela. The UK hopes that Ms Tintori will be permitted to travel soon.

The UK calls on all parties in Venezuela to come together to negotiate concrete actions to put the country on a path that respects the Venezuelan people's human rights and democratic aspirations. In particular, it is the responsibility of the Venezuelan government to avoid further steps that increase tension and take Venezuela away from democracy.

Press release: Foreign Secretary calls on an end to violence in Rakhine

The Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, said:

Aung Sang Suu Kyi is rightly regarded as one of the most inspiring figures of our age but the treatment of the Rohingya is alas besmirching the reputation of Burma. She faces huge challenges in modernising her country. I hope she can now use all her remarkable qualities to unite her country, to stop the violence and to end the prejudice that afflicts both muslims and other communities in Rakhine. It is vital that she receives the support of the Burmese military, and that her attempts at peacemaking are not frustrated. She and all in Burma will have our full support in this.

Notes to Editors

- The UK has provided nearly £8 million to address the humanitarian suffering of Rohingya refugees and the vulnerable Bangladeshi communities that host them.
- Earlier this week, the UK raised the situation in Rakhine in the UN Security Council. Our immediate priority is to make sure food and medical assistance can be provided to displaced civilians from all communities. We are also urging the Government of Burma to address the underlying issues in Rakhine.

Further information

[News story: New government proposals to cut congestion on our busiest roads](#)

Delays to motorists caused by utility companies digging up busy roads could be halved under new proposals announced by Transport Secretary Chris Grayling.

The proposals would allow local authorities to charge utility companies by the hour to carry out works on selected routes, encouraging them to avoid busy roads and peak times, and incentivising them to join together when they do need to dig up congested routes.

The 2.5 million roadworks currently carried out each year cost the economy £4 billion because people are unable to get to work on time or deliveries are delayed, resulting in higher costs for business. The proposals outlined today could improve journey-times for drivers at the same time as delivering a boost to the economy.

Successful trials in London and Kent have already seen severe congestion caused by utility works fall by more than half.

Firms could avoid the charges by carrying out works during evenings and weekends or coordinating their plans. In London, utility companies have worked together more than 600 times since the trials began, up from just 100 beforehand.

The schemes also act as an incentive for companies to avoid congested routes and peak times where possible.

Giving councils more options in how they can manage roadworks will help support the delivery of national infrastructure projects such as the rollout of broadband fibre.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

Delays caused by roadworks can be the bane of drivers' lives – especially when they take place at rush hour on busy routes.

These proposals would give councils greater powers to ensure utility companies avoid carrying out works at the busiest times and on the most popular routes. This would not only improve journeys and cut congestion but also save businesses from the increased costs they incur as a result of traffic on our roads.

The Department for Transport are consulting on a series of options to minimise the disruption of works for road users and businesses, and to make schemes more efficient for utility companies carrying out necessary works.

Currently, most local authorities use permit schemes to monitor roadworks, but lane rental would give them additional powers to manage works on the busiest roads at the busiest times.

Leon Daniels, Managing Director of Surface Transport for Transport for London, said:

We're delighted about these plans to extend the lane rental scheme nationally. It has been a resounding success in the capital, with the amount of severe disruption caused by badly-managed or poorly-timed roadworks more than halved. This has helped improve journey times for bus passengers, drivers and cyclists, while also helping to tackle emissions.

We are [consulting on options for such schemes and this consultation closes in 8 weeks](#). We could introduce changes by 2019.