

Government funds 93 new gritters as it bolsters transport network for winter amidst COVID-19 pandemic

- minister calls on local authorities to stock-up on salt and grit to keep key routes open
- comes as Highways England rolls out 93 state-of-the-art new gritters as part of the 535-strong winter fleet
- flood risk reduction programme also underway whilst rail network implements winter resilience plans

Roads Minister Baroness Vere has called upon local authorities across the country to ensure key transport routes to COVID-19 test centres are kept open and running smoothly this winter.

Baroness Vere has [written to councils](#) urging them to ensure their supplies of salt and grit are topped up so that essential routes, such as those to hospitals and COVID-19 testing stations, are well maintained as the country prepares for the potential challenge of severe weather alongside COVID-19.

Alongside councils' stocks, Highways England maintains a salt stock of 270,000 tonnes for use on its roads network, with a further 357,000 tonnes held in a national salt reserve. Salt producers, through the Salt Association, have confirmed that production is at sufficient levels to protect road users over the coming months.

The government has also invested over £16 million to help Highways England roll out 93 brand new gritters for use this winter, ensuring traffic can continue to move smoothly on Britain's motorways and major A-roads. The new gritters join a 535-strong winter fleet, including 23 snow blowers capable of removing up to 2,500 tonnes of snow per hour. A further £40 million will be invested by Highways England to help over 250 replacement winter vehicles join the fleet. Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps, said:

We have worked tirelessly with the country's highways teams to make sure our transport networks are kept open and running in whatever weather we encounter. This year, it is more important than ever that Britain is prepared for the winter as we continue to tackle the pandemic. Through this work, we'll ensure key routes to COVID-19 test centres remain open in the coming months.

Jim O'Sullivan, Chief Executive of Highways England, said:

Our winter fleet will be out treating our roads around the clock whenever ice or snow is forecast, but it is still important that

drivers plan their journeys, make sure they are prepared for the winter weather and drive safely in all conditions.

The UK's rail network is also prepared for the more challenging weather conditions, with contingency plans put together so essential workers can rely on the railways. Network Rail and train operators are implementing a range of measures, from deploying specialist cold-weather vehicles such as de-icers at strategic locations, to using inflatable flood defence measures, as well as special timetables ready to implement if needed.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs continues to work to reduce the risk of flooding across England, with a £120 million programme of repairs for flood defences following last winter's extreme weather on top of £2.6 billion invested in the construction of new flood and coastal defences since 2015. The Environment Agency is ready to respond to flooding this winter with 250 high volume pumps available and 6,500 trained staff across the country. People can also [check their flood risk](#) and sign up to flood warnings online.