

Iconic Spaghetti Junction turns 50 and shows how to pasta test of time

The junction – known as Gravelly Hill Interchange – carries more than 200,000 vehicles each day and forms part of the M6 travelling through the West Midlands. It also links traffic travelling in and out of Birmingham city centre thanks to its seamless connection with the A38.

Originally designed for around 70,000 vehicles per day when the roads were much quieter, the elevated structure, maintained by National Highways, is a vital piece of infrastructure for the UK economy and continues to play a major part in helping freight and logistics companies move goods around the country.

The road is used by almost 26,000 lorries every day with more than 31,000 light good vehicles also using the junction and M6 for journeys.

National Highways Customer Services Director Melanie Clarke said:

Spaghetti Junction is a special part of England's motorway network. It's something to be proud of in Birmingham because it's known all around the world – quite rightly – as a feat of engineering.

When it was designed 50 years ago, nobody could have predicted that Gravelly Hill Interchange would carry around 200,000 vehicles every day.

As traffic levels have increased, so have our maintenance and safety regimes which play a vital role in helping keep the road safe for the tens of thousands of motorists that use our network every day. We know that it's used by nearly 26,000 hauliers every single day which goes to show the strategic importance of the route for businesses around the country.

It's also incredibly fitting that the 50th anniversary of the road opening coincides with Birmingham this year playing host to the 2022 Commonwealth Games. Spaghetti Junction will be pivotal in helping to connect athletes, sports enthusiasts and tourists with the city during the event.

Roads minister Baroness Vere said:

The Spaghetti Junction is both an iconic landmark and indispensable to the UK economy, providing essential links to the Midlands and beyond. Its longevity over the past 50 years is testament to all those who work to maintain it.

Head of Public Policy at Logistics UK Michelle Gardner said:

The Spaghetti Junction is a vital part of the strategic road network, helping logistics businesses to move goods efficiently throughout the West Midlands and beyond. The logistics industry relies on effective road infrastructure to support the UK economy and society; we are pleased to join National Highways in celebrating the 50-year anniversary of this crucial junction.

Mayor of the West Midlands Andy Street said:

Spaghetti Junction has become an iconic Brummie landmark so it's only right that we celebrate its 50th anniversary.

At the time of its inception, it was actually considered a real engineering feat. So much so that my grandfather used to take me to visit whilst it was being built.

Over the years, it has played an important role in enabling goods, people and business to flow in and out of the region and will no doubt continue to do so for many years to come – not least in the year we play host to the Commonwealth Games.

The sprawling structure is known as the Gravelly Hill Interchange.

As part of the 50th anniversary celebrations, National Highways has teamed up with Glenn Howells Architects in Birmingham to restore the original architect's model which was built in the 1960s.

The project has been a labour of love for the practice's modelmakers who have painstakingly repaired the structure, upgraded with landscaping and greenery and enclosed it into a conference table.

National Highways plans to take the model to various education establishments to help encourage youngsters to think about the world of engineering.

The refurbished model of Spaghetti Junction will be used as part of a school's engagement programme to encourage young people to think about engineering

Glenn Howells Architects Head of Modelshop Pierre Greenway said:

We didn't want to change the model so much as you wouldn't see the original any longer. We wanted the viewer to be able to see the original model while updating it to the modern day.

The model shows the sheer scale of the structure and it's wonderful to be able to play a part in restoring this piece of work for the future and encourage youngsters to think about the world of engineering and construction.

To mark the occasion, Heinz has also created a limited edition set of 500 tins commemorating Spaghetti Junction.

Did you know?

- It is the interchange of the M6, A38, A38 (M) connecting Birmingham and the M6.
- The sprawling design of Spaghetti Junction means there are more than 250 spans, crossbeams and expansion joints, more than 600 columns and more than 3,000 bridge bearings.
- The slip roads are around 2.5 miles long with the M6 itself less than a mile at the structure.
- The Birmingham Evening Mail described the road as a “cross between a plate of spaghetti and an unsuccessful attempt at a Staffordshire knot” coining the phrase ‘Spaghetti Junction’.
- It costs around £7m every year to maintain the structure and keep it in a safe and serviceable condition
- It was designed by engineer Sir Evan Owen Williams.
- Work started to build the road in 1968.
- It took four years to complete and is subject to regular maintenance programmes, many of which take place underneath the road.
- The highest point of the structure is circa 80ft in the air.
- The site covers around 30 acres with teams walking an average of 12-15 miles a day during inspections
- Spaghetti Junction continues to hold international acclaim having formed the backdrop for filming for Ready Player One, with some scenes filmed underneath the structure. The towering concrete columns formed the ideal backdrop to the film, which was in cinemas in 2018.
- For the filming, special templates featuring graffiti were stuck to the concrete structures and various props added into the set, including cars and tyres, with a ‘camp’ constructed for the new film.
- The film crew took considerable effort to protect the structure and ensure nothing was damaged during filming.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the National Highways customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the National Highways press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.