

# News story: Welsh Secretary – “Now is the time to create our own Western Powerhouse”

The pooling of skills and expertise on both sides of the Severn estuary can create an all new economic region to rival the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine, Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns will say today at the first Severn Growth Summit in Newport (22 January).

At the end of 2018, one of the greatest economic barriers to Wales' prosperity will be consigned to history when the UK Government removes the tolls to cross the Severn Bridges.

It will also signal the beginning of a transformation of the economic and cultural prospects of the south Wales and south west England region, making it easier to do business, to increase inward investment and tourism and to create jobs.

Alun Cairns will address a sell-out audience of over 350 guests from business, education, cultural and digital sectors on either side of the Severn Crossings at the inaugural summit at the Celtic Manor Resort. In his keynote speech, he will sound a clarion call urging all sectors to “seize the new opportunities the end of the tolls creates and work together to grasp the potential of this great region.”

Companies on both sides of the border are already benefitting from the removal of VAT earlier this month. With the tolls set to be abolished later this year, the Summit has been convened to galvanise the many strengths of the economic region, to generate ideas, innovation and entrepreneurship to stimulate every part of our economy.

## **Alun Cairns will say:**

Today's Severn Growth Summit is set to spark the biggest commercial conversation for the west of the UK in a generation, but it will be nothing without the collaborative backing of business, communities and governments on both sides of the estuary.

One of the key drivers behind the Northern Powerhouse was the volume of people commuting between Liverpool and Manchester. However, there are more people commuting between Bristol and either Cardiff or Newport. This shows that this region has the huge potential to rival the Northern Powerhouse or Midlands Engine.

## **James Durie, Chief Executive Business West at Chambers of Commerce & Initiative said:**

In the past the Bristol City Region has largely tended to look east to London and the South East instead of also forging closer links with its close neighbours less than an hour's drive away.

Bristol and its wider city region and South Wales will have more in common than ever before and this is a great opportunity for the business community to make the most of those shared interests.

If we want to compete not just on the national stage, but also on the international stage, I believe we need to take full advantage of this once in a generation opportunity.

The sell-out event in Newport will feature talks and interactive sessions from senior representatives from sectors as diverse as transport, logistics, property, tech and finance. It will also provide an opportunity for business leaders to meet political decision makers face to face and hammer out a successful path for closer cross-border collaboration.

## **Alun Cairns added:**

I want this event to be the catalyst that forges new partnerships with innovators, inventors, job creators, local leaders, workers and consumers.

A collective voice is an effective voice and I believe such cross-border co-operation will transform the economies of south Wales and the south west of England.

For information and to hear from key stakeholders on what the end of the tolls means to them, visit our new [Cross Border Growth](#) blog page.