

Press release: Official opening for A556 Knutsford to Bowdon link road

Highways England chief executive Jim O'Sullivan and Tatton MP George Osborne, chair of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, marked the project's completion – on time and on budget – by planting a tree on the innovative Green Bridge which crosses the road south of the A50 at Mere and is a key feature of the new road's environmental mitigation measures.

The 4 mile new road, which opened on Monday 6 March, bypasses the old A556 and the villages of Mere, Bucklow Hill and Over Tabley – providing a quicker and more reliable link between junction 19 of the M6 and junction 7 of the M56 for the 50,000 vehicles, including 7,000 lorries, which rely on the motorway to motorway connection every day.

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

The A556 is a key strategic route linking the West Midlands and Cheshire to Greater Manchester and Manchester International Airport. The old road was heavily congested and compromised by busy crossroads. This new road, built to modern standards, will provide faster and more reliable journeys between the 2 motorways – benefiting commerce and commuters alike.

We would like to thank local people and road users for their patience and support over nearly two and a half years while we have worked to deliver this new road on time and on budget.

The new road is the first major North West project to be delivered in the Government's £15 billion investment in the strategic road network up to 2021. With the new dual carriageway now open, work will focus on converting the old A556 to the B5569 – with a new single carriageway road for local communities alongside a segregated green corridor for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. Once this work is completed the new B road will be handed over to Cheshire East Council.

Work will also be taking place over the next few weeks to complete the unique Green Bridge – providing connectivity over the new road for farm animals but also for wild mammals, birds and other animals. The Green Bridge is one of 7 bridges provided to either carry key local roads such as the A50 over the new road or provide a link to the new dual carriageway for local communities.

In the last 28 months the project has also involved:

- digging out 1 million cubic metres of earth – all of it recycled to other parts of the project such as embankment and noise bund construction – enough to fill the Manchester Arena 3 times
- pouring 7,500 cubic metres (18,000 tonnes) of concrete for the 7 bridges

and underpass and other structures – enough to fill 3 Olympics-size swimming pools

- rolling out over 200,000 square metres of blacktop for the new road surface, enough to cover 30 football pitches
- making 100s of pre-cast manholes off-site and building an on-site concrete batching site to reduce ready-mix concrete deliveries and cut down lorry movements
- installing more than 30 kilometres of new drainage pipes along the route
- providing 4 large attenuation ponds to store water run-off from the new road to prevent flooding
- delivering 9 new habitats for legally-protected Great Crested plus a variety of other measures to enhance or protect wildlife including man-made badger setts, replacement bat roosts and ‘hop-overs’ to help the bats fly over the new road, a network of 21 ponds to provide new habitats for amphibians and small mammals, new barn owl boxes, and mammal tunnels to provide safe crossings for badgers, hedgehogs, voles and amphibians
- carrying out extensive landscape planting, which will also help support animal and bird habitats, including new species-rich grass, 280 semi-mature trees, around 60,000 whips and saplings, almost 117,000 square metres of shrubs (enough to fill more than 17 football pitches) and more than 7,000 metres of hedgerow with oak, birch, rowan, alder, cherry, crab apple and elm among the species planted
- securing work for around 4,000 people – including 14 apprentices – across a variety of engineering and project management disciplines
- hosting or supporting 100s of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematic days, giving students an insight into engineering
- registering 1.7 million accident-free working hours

The new road, which has already scooped a number of environmental and considerate constructor awards – including a gold award earlier this week – has been delivered as part of the Northern Powerhouse initiative.

General enquiries

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

Media enquiries

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