

Press release: Welsh Secretary to outline his vision for a “Western Powerhouse”

The time has come to maximise the many strengths of a natural economic region that has been frustrated by tolling for over 50 years, Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns will say today when he delivers a speech on his vision for the “Western Powerhouse” concept at the Policy Forum Wales seminar in Newport.

Speaking to an audience of leaders from local government, education, private and academic sectors from both sides of the Severn Estuary, the Welsh Secretary will lay down the gauntlet and challenge the experts to come forward with their ideas on how to bolster existing relationships and develop new partnerships across the nations.

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 use the Severn Crossings.

Companies on both sides of the border are already benefitting from the removal of VAT on the tolls in January.

When the tolls are abolished completely, the UK Government wants to see businesses pool their expertise to deliver the ideas and projects that will not only benefit the cities of Swansea, Cardiff, Newport, Bristol and Bath but the wider South Wales and South West England regions as well.

Opening the Policy Forum for Wales seminar, Alun Cairns will say:

The cities on the western side of the UK are individually strong, but collectively, we are not strong enough.

We need to light the blue touch paper and make a real step change to the way businesses, people and industry from the cities and towns from both sides of the Severn work together when the tolls are removed.

And I’m not talking about one city taking the lead, but a collection of cities, of communities, of businesses, sufficiently close to each other that, combined, they can take on the world.

Able to provide jobs and opportunities to the many people who live in or are looking to invest in this region.

So we need to seize the opportunity to create an economic region on the Western side of the UK that can compete with the Northern Powerhouse, the Midlands Engine and with the economy of the South

East.

He will also lay down the challenge to business leaders to come forward with ideas on how the 'Western Powerhouse' can become a reality.

He will say;

This is not a marketing campaign or a one-off event. It's got to be a serious, long-term strategy to make this part of the UK greater than the sum of its parts.

For far too long, the physical barrier of the Severn tolls have prevented businesses and people in Wales and the South West from working together in a way that they could have been.

Whilst differences to our own cross-border region exist, it is clear that we can learn lessons and benefit from each others' experience.

This has got to be driven by you, the experts. It's got to be about your attitude and about your ideas.