

Press release: West Midlands to become UK's first large-scale 5G testbed

The West Midlands has been selected to become the innovative home to the UK's first multi-city 5G test bed. The multi million pound trial of new high speed connectivity will pave the way for the future rollout of 5G across the UK, making the region the first in the UK ready to trial new 5G applications and services at scale.

The Urban Connected Communities Project, the next step in the Government's 5G Testbed and Trials Programme, will develop a large-scale, 5G pilot across the region, with hubs in Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton.

Up to £50m is currently available for the project, subject to further development and approval of the business plan. This includes £25m from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and a further £25m match funding from regional partners. An additional £25m may be made available at a later stage.

Minister for Digital, Margot James said:

5G has the potential to dramatically transform the way we go about our daily lives, and we want the citizens of the UK to be amongst the first to experience all the opportunities and benefits this new technology will bring. The West Midlands Testbed, which is the first of its kind anywhere in the world, will be instrumental in helping us realise this ambition.

Following its selection through open competition, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) will now work with the 5G Testbeds and Trials Team at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and industry partners on preparing the formal business case for approval, with the first of a series of projects expected to go live early next year.

The West Midlands Combined Authorities bid has an initial focus on the health, construction and automotive sectors, with its overarching ambition to help drive economic growth and benefit people's lives through participation in new digital technologies and digitally transformed public services.

Subject to formal approval, initial plans include:

- Hospital outpatient appointments and emergency consultations carried out remotely by video link not subject to dropage or latency barriers. As well as being more convenient for patients, this means they can play back their appointment at a later date or share it securely with a family member or carer to help inform their care.
- "Connected Ambulances" – Paramedic crews at an incident could access specialist advice while they are at the scene, eg video conferencing

with consultants or other clinical specialists. Live streaming of patient data from ambulance en route to hospital would help inform the immediate care patients receive on arrival.

- Live streaming of CCTV footage from public transport buses, enabling immediate action against anti-social behaviour. “Intelligent cameras” using artificial intelligence (AI) to identify incidents could provide the opportunity for far greater coverage than is possible at present.

Autonomous vehicles will transform the way we travel, preventing major accidents, improving traffic flow and reducing energy consumption. The WMCA will partner with Jaguar Land Rover to facilitate real world testing of driverless cars.

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands, said:

This announcement is game-changing for the West Midlands economy. This will be the backbone of our future economy and society.

We have been working to put the foundations in place to grow the industries which will create the jobs of the future, particularly around driverless vehicles and life sciences where we have a genuine advantage. To deliver the future of these industries we need the power of 5g.

The potential of this technology is endless – and we will enjoy the benefits first. From monitoring the health of babies and the elderly, to the way out people are linked to the economy of the future, the way companies do business, the way we deliver public services, the experience of travellers on public transport and the way we deliver City of Culture and the Commonwealth Games – everything can be made better thanks to the power of this technology.

DCMS funding for the project will come from the £200 million government has assigned to develop 5G technologies as part of more than £1bn of investment in next-generation digital infrastructure, including via the £31bn National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF).

The 5G Testbeds and Trials Programme forms part of the Government’s Industrial Strategy, aimed at continually driving the UK’s connectivity, telecommunications and digital sectors, and investing in the skills, industries and infrastructure of the future.

Notes to Editors

1. The NPIF is designed to bolster UK productivity, which is crucial to raising living standards. Through the NPIF, the Government is investing in the vital infrastructure needed to make it easier for people to connect with others, and work remotely and flexibly.
2. West Midlands Combined Authority have committed an initial £25m of funding to the Urban Connected Communities Project, which Government

will match. This will be subject to approval of the project's business plan. Further public funding will be subject to the development of the project and the parameters of the business case. The total investment made from public funding for the entire project will be matched by commercial funding.

3. In the next phase of the Urban Connected Communities project West Midlands Combined Authority will be looking to develop partnerships with the mobile sector to design and deliver the project.