Speech: Funding for smart parking and traffic management schemes

Good morning everyone.

I'd like to start by thanking Councillor David Harvey for the introduction and opportunity for me to speak today.

I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to see for myself, the potential benefit for motorists – and to the wider economy – of this excellent smart parking project, which has attracted £200,000 government grant funding, and which the Department for Transport is taking forward in partnership with Westminster City Council and other key stakeholders.

This work further demonstrates this government's commitment to working alongside industry to promote technology and innovation, and to maintain the UK's position at the forefront of the digital revolution.

And on that, I am also pleased to announce today that we are funding 19 smart traffic management schemes including smart parking demonstrator schemes in Coventry, Luton, Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire – as well as a partnership project between Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Westminster, which looks to improve electric vehicle parking by combining parking sensors with electric vehicle charging points to give drivers real-time information on available spaces where they can recharge.

The way we travel continues to change, and technology has a valuable role to play through co-operative intelligent transport systems.

By enabling communication between vehicles, traffic signals, roadside sensors – as well as with other vehicles – the resulting information can bring increasing benefits, both to road operators, in terms of improved network management, and to road users, through the information they need, in real-time, to make the most of their journey.

Cities face a common challenge of accommodating significant rising demand for transport over the next 20 years, boosted by continued population growth, while meeting challenging carbon reduction targets and delivering customer expectations of transport that is safer, cleaner and greener, less congested and more reliable.

Technology and information have huge potential to generate innovative solutions in these urban areas, and deliver more joined up and seamless multi-modal solutions which make better use of customer time.

Effective use of technology is crucial to delivering this, but this is not an end in itself – and it needs to be used to address specific policy challenges. This project is an excellent example of just that.

While there is no definitive evidence on the percentage, at any one time, of

traffic circling while looking for a parking space, the knock on effects on congestion and emissions are obvious, not to mention the added stress this can cause. We've all been there.

Improving the parking experience can help to improve public acceptance of, and compliance with, parking restrictions that are so necessary to keep traffic flowing.

Having real-time mapping to direct us to an available parking space within a mobile app, that allows 'one-click' electronic payment, that activates when we arrive, and stops when we leave, could not have been imagined not so long ago.

And I am pleased to have seen the project go further by extending this case to taxi drivers, who face the similar problem of finding available taxi ranks. It follows that a smarter distribution of available taxis can only benefit pedestrians looking for a taxi.

Although 'big data' is the lifeblood of digital traffic management solutions, data gathering is, in itself, of little use. What matters is how this data is interpreted and used to gain a better understanding of travel patterns and behaviours.

I am therefore delighted to be able to present a prize this morning to the winners of Westminster's Parking Hackathon which took place last week. This event has already yielded valuable lessons to enable a better understanding of parking use which will further inform policy on parking.

With the high level of parking demand on their road network, I commend Westminster City Council for rising to the challenge and placing itself at the forefront of parking technology in the UK.

I wish you a successful session this afternoon, sharing this good work with local authorities from around the country, and I wish you continued success with this project.

I've seen today that technology really does have the potential to 'make parking better'.

Thank you.