

Speech: Greg Hands speech on smart cities

I would like to thank Mark [Prisk] for inviting me here today, and take this opportunity to recognise the important work of the APPG on smart cities.

You are a vital voice in a necessary debate, and I look forward to working with you and your members in my role as Minister of State at the Department for International Trade.

As recently as 20 years ago, the term smart cities would not have registered with most people – myself included!

It would have been incredulous to think of a city where every person could access real time information on where there was a free car parking space; a city where refuse collectors know exactly when your recycling bins are full; and where urban parks are designed to promote biodiversity, reduce CO₂, and give you free wi-fi connection throughout.

But the pace of change has been astonishing.

This is all happening right now!

In London, Manchester, Milton Keynes, and other cities across the UK – services like these are becoming commonplace.

Though using data to understand and ultimately alleviate social problems is nothing new.

In the 19th Century, John Snow created the cholera maps, which located the source of London's cholera epidemic in Soho.

At a similar time, Charles Booth's surveys of working class life in London created the famous poverty maps which etched a street by street depiction of income levels across the capital.

We now live in a world where technology is ubiquitous and the ability to collect and access data is easier than ever before.

We also live in a world of finite resources, coupled with a population set to reach almost 10 billion by 2050, according to the UN.

This presents many challenges but also a golden opportunity to use technology to enhance economic development, sustainability and quality of life for people in urban environments from Manchester to Mumbai.

So, my commitment to you today is simple. The UK will seize this opportunity and this government will pull out all the stops to ensure British business leads the way in making the cities of the UK and the world smarter.

UK capability

There are 3 ways we will do this. First, we will continue building our domestic capability.

[Innovate UK](#) – the government’s innovation agency – has, over the last 5 years, invested nearly £100 million in projects to help our cities prepare for a sustainable future.

£32 million has been spent on the UK’s internet of things (IoT) programme, including [Cityverve](#) in Manchester – a smart city demonstrator that will help improve public services for local citizens, such as transport, energy, health and culture.

Bristol and Milton Keynes are internationally recognised as leaders in smart city technology. They are making use of sensors to monitor air pollution levels, energy usage, water consumption, and even living patterns at home to detect early signs of illness.

These examples are testament to the simple truth that open data requires open minds.

We must continue to see technology as a key that unlocks the potential of our cities – making them more responsive to their inhabitants.

Opportunities overseas

Whilst we build our domestic capability around smart cities, we must also be alive to the opportunity overseas, which brings me onto my second point.

Arup estimates that the global market for smart cities could be worth \$400 billion per year by 2020.

The UK has internationally recognised strengths in integrating city-wide systems around transport, energy and security networks; as well as in data and spatial analytics.

Our excellent engineering and architectural firms have already used their urban planning and design expertise to create smart cities around the world.

And standards set by the [British Standards Institute](#), on smart cities and the internet of things, are used the world over.

The possibilities are endless. These exportable capabilities can make the transport infrastructure of world cities more efficient, their healthcare providers more dedicated, and their emergency systems more responsive.

The Department for International Trade’s smart cities team will support UK companies in taking advantage of these overseas opportunities, as well as attracting inward investment for UK smart city projects.

The team and I will be in Barcelona for Mobile World Congress, where we will

be showcasing British expertise in cloud technology, sensors and artificial intelligence all on the UK stand.

British firms are already thriving abroad.

[Space Syntax](#), our sponsors this evening, are working with [AECOM](#) on designing the growth of Saudi Arabia's port city, Jeddah; over 30 countries have implemented Essex-based [Telensa's](#) smart street lighting technology; and Finnish telecoms giant Nokia is investing in the [Bristol is Open](#) smart city initiative, which is being led by the local council and the University of Bristol.

In November, I accompanied the Prime Minister on her visit to India, where she and Prime Minister Modi announced an Anglo-Indian Partnership on smart cities and urban development, which could unlock £2 billion worth of business.

Running parallel to the visit, my department led a trade mission of UK companies to the India Tech Summit, before taking them onto Pune and Kochi to see the smart city opportunities first hand.

India's ambition to create 100 smart cities provides UK firms with a huge opportunity.

In cities across Asia and Africa, smart cities aren't a 'nice to have', but a social necessity. With India's urban population expected to reach 590 million by 2030, the problems of resource depletion and demographic change are both immediate and acute.

This government will ensure our smart city capability is evolving to meet the needs of urban populations the world over.

Ways of working

My final point on how the UK can continue to lead the world in smart city capability, involves a change in how government and industry work together.

If individual UK companies are already garnering success overseas, imagine what we can achieve with greater levels of co-operation.

I would like to see our urban planners working with our security, transport and e-health specialist companies, so we can present a single UK smart city offer to the world.

This requires a step up in the co-operation between government and industry. A step we should look to take.

For if we are to lead the world in smart cities, our approach too has to be smart.

Conclusion

Before I close, I want to reiterate that the UK can be recognised as the global hub of smart city technology.

We should be bold in our thinking and use our already enviable capability in this area to make the world's cities more sustainable, responsive and smart.

Our aim should be to make people's lives easier and more enjoyable.

Indeed, it was Shakespeare who said, 'What is a city but the people?'

It is an exciting challenge. But one that the UK is more than ready to accept.

Thank you.