

[Press release: Zika virus, superbugs and arthritis targeted through £26 million fund](#)

Sixty seven projects will win a share of £26 million funding available through [Biomedical Catalyst 2016](#), which is run by Innovate UK and the [Medical Research Council](#), and aims to develop innovative healthcare technologies and processes.

For the first time, Scotland's economic development agency [Scottish Enterprise](#) have also invested in projects. They have provided additional funding to seven Scottish companies, securing local support for nationally competitive innovations.

Funded projects

- Glasgow-based [SAW DX](#) will create 'ultrasonic holograms' to diagnose sexually transmitted infections much quicker than the current tests allow.
- The [Native Antigen Company](#) from Oxford are developing a quick and easy test for Zika virus, which differentiates the virus from Dengue Fever and hopes to provide reassurance to millions of mothers-to-be who live in tropical countries.
- Cambridge based [Cell Guidance Systems](#) have developed a way to use protein from silk worms to heal cartilage and potentially reduce the need for joint replacement in people with osteoarthritis.
- [Micropharm](#), from Newcastle Emlyn in West Wales are using antibodies produced by sheep to develop a treatment for antibiotic resistant 'superbugs', such as *Chlostridium difficle*.

Supporting the announcements, Chief Executive of Innovate UK Dr Ruth McKernan said:

Our biosciences sector, supported by the Biomedical Catalyst, is a fantastic example of the UK's joined-up innovation ecosystem in action. Our excellent researchers develop new and novel treatments and procedures that are then commercialised by our world-class businesses.

By becoming a co-funder in the Biomedical Catalyst, Scottish

Enterprise will be helping to bring together Innovate UK's national expertise in innovation with their own specific local priorities to boost local and national economic growth.

Sir John Savill, Chief Executive of the Medical Research Council said:

The Biomedical Catalyst is an important collaboration between the Medical Research Council and Innovate UK and we are pleased with the impressive results from the initiative to date. This unique partnership is clearly valued by both academia and industry – as evidenced by this latest investment from Scottish Enterprise.

Julia Brown, Director of Life and Chemical Sciences at Scottish Enterprise added:

We're working hard to create more opportunities for Scottish businesses to secure business innovation funding. This first-of-its-kind partnership with Innovate UK and the Medical Research Council is just one way we're achieving this, while integrating our support with our partners to generate more impact for the Scottish economy.

I'm pleased to see seven Scottish life science companies winning funding to support their innovative healthcare products, which demonstrates Scotland's thriving life sciences industry and our long established reputation for creativity and business innovation.

The Biomedical Catalyst partnership between Innovate UK and the Medical Research Council has provided funding for 384 projects that have led to more than 60 first-in-human studies for innovative products. The programme has also helped bring more than £1 billion of additional investment into the UK bioscience sector.

In Autumn Statement 2016, the Chancellor Phillip Hammond announced £100 million of additional funding to extend and enhance the Biomedical Catalyst to support life science companies and translate cutting-edge medical technologies into commercial success.

[Volunteers help Chinese go home for New Year](#)

As millions of Chinese head home for Spring Festival, volunteers, charity

groups and railway companies are helping them on their way.

Spring Festival, or the Chinese Lunar New Year, is the most important occasion in the Chinese calendar. This year it falls on Jan. 28.

About 3 billion trips are expected to be made during "chunyun," the Spring Festival travel rush that lasts this year from Jan. 13 to Feb. 21, the National Development and Reform Commission said.

The travel rush puts enormous strain on the transport system, leaving tickets in short supply, but many companies and local youth leagues are helping out by providing free bus rides for migrant workers.

Cheetah Mobile, a tech firm in Beijing, asked people to submit online requests for a free bus ticket back home. On Tuesday, the company arranged for buses to take more than 450 Beijing migrant workers back home.

"In the past five years, the 'orange bus' project has reached 18 cities in China during the Spring Festival, and helped 5,500 families to get together," said Xu Xiaohui, vice chief of the company.

Last week, Ping'an Group, an insurance company, commissioned 200 long-distance coaches to carry 10,000 migrant workers during the festival period.

Volunteers have also tried to make the tedious journeys easier for travelers.

At Hangzhou east railway station, volunteers handed out fortune paintings to travelers. Chinese people put such paintings, along with couplets, on doors and windows for the lunar New Year celebration.

A number of rail lines, particularly those that are less busy, have improved services. For example, some trains now have play areas for children.

"Railway staff are actively pushing reform. We aim to provide efficient and heart-warming services, making tortuous hours on the train a nice experience," said Wang Feng, head of the Lanzhou Railway Bureau.

[Press release: Final phase of £192 million A556 dual carriageway work unveiled](#)

Drivers will shortly be able to use the new £192 million A556 Knutsford to Bowdon dual carriageway in Cheshire, with the final phase of work starting next month.

Highways England, which is building the new link road between junction 19 of

the M6 at Knutsford and junction 7 of the M56 at Bowdon, today detailed the final phase of road works for the project – paving the way for the new road to open in March , providing a faster and more reliable link between the 2 motorways.

View looking north from new A50 bridge – with finishing landscaping and carriageway works underway

Full weekend closures – of the existing A556, junction 19 of the M6 and junctions 7 and 8 of the M56 – are needed and are scheduled to start in mid-February. The closures will allow the old road to be sealed off from through traffic and the motorway junctions to be tied into the new dual carriageway.

Highways England project manager Paul Hampson said:

We are on course to open the new dual carriageway by the end of March, if not sooner. As well as starting work next month to connect the new dual carriageway to the M6 and M56 link roads, we'll be using the weekend closures to do some preparation along the existing A556 which will become a B road with much-improved facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.

We're working hard with partners and stakeholders like the emergency services and Manchester Airport to plan for these weekend closures and to make sure they'll be well-publicised once the full details are confirmed.

View from new A50 bridge looking south

Drivers are being advised the schedule for the final phase of work is dependent on the weather. The schedule currently involves:

- a full weekend closure of the existing A556 and associated M6 and M56 junctions between 9pm on Friday 17 February and 5am on Monday 20 February
- a full weekend closure of the existing A556 and associated M6 and M56 junctions from 9pm on Friday 3 March to 5am on Monday 6 March – with the new road opening to drivers that morning for the first time
- a final full weekend closure of the old A556 and new A556 between 9pm on Friday 10 March and 5am on Monday 13 March to finalise work to seal off the old road

Highways England is working with partners and stakeholders such as Manchester Airport, major football clubs and the police to plan for and publicise the road works so drivers can plan journeys affected by the weekend closures. More information and advice will be released nearer the time of the closures.

Alternative view looking north up the new A556

Construction of the new A556 link road, between the M56 and the M6, started in November 2014 and is part of a £15 billion government investment in

motorways and major A roads by 2021 which is being delivered by Highways England 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.

[Press release: Consultation starts on Tyne and Wear junction](#)

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Public are encouraged to take part in a consultation for the A19 Testos junction improvement scheme.

Local residents, businesses and road users are encouraged to take part in a 5 week statutory consultation into the A19 Testos junction improvement scheme in Tyne and Wear.

A preferred option was already selected for the junction back in 2014 but Highways England wishes to carry out a consultation update to make sure that nothing has changed and to allow people who have recently moved to the area to have their say. This is in accordance with the Planning Act 2008.

The scheme will improve journeys for drivers along the A19 who will no longer need to negotiate the current Testos roundabout. Work involves raising the A19 on a flyover and building new slip roads to connect it to the A184 via the Testos roundabout.

[A computer generated video showing the new junction has also been released and is available at](#)

Highways England project manager Paul Ahdal said:

This consultation is another opportunity for the people of Tyne and Wear to give us their thoughts on the proposed scheme and tell us about any changes locally.

This is an exciting scheme which will be delivered with the A19 Downhill Lane scheme which we consulted on late last year to keep disruption to a minimum.

The consultation begins on Monday 30 January and will run until Monday 6 March. Flyers have been sent to addresses in the area but brochures and questionnaires are available at local venues including Bunny Hill customer service centre and local libraries.

The information is also [available on the scheme website](#).

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CBI business optimism

Surveys of opinion can be unreliable. In July 2016 the CBI survey showed a dreadful minus 47, compared to a minus 4 in January 2016. At the time I thought it an odd reading predicting a downturn we would not experience, as time proved to be the case. Today's survey shows a surge to plus 15 for this January, implying good growth to come. It's a great turn round in sentiment from ultra pessimism last summer.

More reliable order book figures show plus 15 this January, compared to plus 5 last January. This is a better indicator of more growth to come. Why are some forecasters still expecting a big slowdown?