

# Transport Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 23 May 2020

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Good afternoon, and welcome to today's Downing Street press conference.

I'm pleased to be joined today by Dr Jenny Harries

## **Latest data**

Let me start by updating you on the latest information from the government's COBR data file.

As of today (23 May 2020):

3,348,507 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 116,580 tests yesterday.

257,154 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 2,959 cases since yesterday.

9,331 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus in the UK, down 11% since last week.

And tragically 36,675 people have now died. That's an increase of 282 fatalities since yesterday and that's across all settings.

Not just a list of statistics, but a devastating reminder of the cruelty of coronavirus.

Our thoughts are with the friends and families of the victims.

## **Transport context**

As we start to relax the restrictions, we must plan our route to recovery...

Allowing people to resume their lives where possible...

Getting businesses up and running again...

And building beyond coronavirus.

In the short term, we will need to bring back more public transport to keep families safe.

That process has already begun.

Rail and tube services increased at the beginning of this week – and they'll ramp up more next month.

And to ensure that more buses, trams and light-rail networks return to service today I can announce new investment of £283 million to start moving back to a full timetable.

However, I do want to stress this funding does not mean we can go back to using public transport whenever we like.

Remember...

Those who can should still work from home...

Those who can should still avoid all public transport.

Even a fully restored service will only be capable of carrying – at best – one fifth of normal capacity, once social distancing is taken into account.

So only if you need to travel, and you can't cycle, or walk or drive, should you take a bus, tram or train.

But please; avoid the rush hour.

## **Marshals**

We're managing the transport network to make it as safe as possible.

This week saw the deployment of nearly 3,500 British Transport Police, Network Rail and Transport for London employees.

These marshals worked with the public to prevent services from becoming overcrowded.

From 1 June at the earliest – as we move to Phase 2 of the unlock – we will start to deploy twice as many marshals with the assistance of groups like the charity – Volunteering Matters.

These Journey Makers will help provide reassurance, advice and friendly assistance to commuters.

The last time we did this, at the 2012 Olympics, it was a great success.

While these are altogether more serious times – if we show the same public-spirited concern for one another, it will go a long way towards helping transport and passengers cope.

## **ZipAbout**

As I have said, it's essential we stagger journeys and avoid the rush-hour.

That's why, at a recent roundtable, we asked the tech sector to come up with innovative proposals to help passengers avoid congestion.

One good example is 'Passenger Connect' from Birmingham start-up ZipAbout.

A personalised information service which tells rail users how disruption and crowding may affect their journey, while providing alternatives and helping people to maintain social distancing.

The service has been successfully piloted over the past 12 months and it will be rolled out soon.

## **Building for the future**

We're not just dealing with the immense challenges of the present.

We're building for the future too.

Transport is not just about how we get from place to place.

It also shapes the places; for good or bad...

Towns. Cities. Whole nations.

We now have an opportunity to use the power of transport to improve long-standing national weaknesses, and create something better.

## **Rebalancing the economy**

The UK's unbalanced economy is one such weakness.

Our mission is to level-up Britain.

The COVID-19 outbreak must be the catalyst to get it done.

Levelling up. And speeding up.

So, while roads and railways are less busy, we're accelerating vital projects.

Take the North, for example.

This bank holiday weekend, we're carrying out vital work to fix Leeds station.

Continuing to build a new platform...

... Installing new points and switches...

... And improving the track to Wakefield.

Just part of 490 separate engineering projects happening around the country this bank holiday weekend.

Work that would normally take months of weekend closures are much quicker on these quieter railways.

## Beeching cuts

And we're getting on with plans to reverse some of the so-called Beeching rail cuts too.

Dr Beeching wrote a report back in the 1960s which led to the closure of one-third of our railway network.

2,363 stations, 5,000 miles of track identified for closure.

Many of the places removed from the map never recovered.

That report was perhaps the origin of the 'left-behind town'.

But we're working to reverse Beeching.

The process has already started in Blyth in the North East and Fleetwood in the North West...

I visited in January, and also took the opportunity to visit Horden Peter Lee to see the building work.

There used to be a train station 200 yards away, but it was closed, and the town cut off by the Beeching axe.

This new station will connect a community of over 50,000 people, improving their quality of life.

And today, the [next 10 schemes to benefit are announced](#).

It's development funding...

... But if they stack up, then we're going to build them fast.

Amongst the many schemes is the reinstatement of the Ivanhoe line in the East Midlands, from Leicester to Burton, via Coalville and Ashby.

And branch lines on the Isle of Wight, and a new station at Wellington in Somerset.

## Roads

But no matter how great we make the railway of the future, millions will still rely on the car.

That's why today I'm publishing the [preferred route to complete the dual carriageway on the A66 from Scotch Corner to Penrith](#).

The first new all dual-carriageway across the Pennines in 50 years.

This is a £1 billion programme that will transform capacity by upgrading junctions and widening the road.

These road and rail schemes will be the first of many...

Binding our country together, and connecting people with jobs.

## **Towns and cities**

But it isn't just the balance between regions that we need to reshape.

It's hard to see millions who – until a few weeks ago – commuted by train into Manchester, London, Birmingham every day – immediately going back to the same old ways.

So we have to reshape our towns and cities too...

The Prime Minister once said:

Cities are where inspiration and innovation happens ... because people can bump into each other, spark off one another, compete, collaborate, invent and innovate. That's when we get the explosion, or flash of creativity and innovation.

And yet – with social distancing – it makes all that rather more difficult...

So we have to find new ways of making it happen.

Therefore – as conditions allow and not until July – we will be looking to support creative ways for businesses to reopen, whilst maintaining social distancing.

We know restaurants and bars will want to start trading again, and we will work with them so we can enjoy an outdoor summer in a safe and responsible environment.

## **Car parking**

For those who live too far to cycle and walk, and must drive to major conurbations, we will repurpose parking in places just outside town centres...

... so people can park on the outskirts and finish their journeys on foot or bike or even e-scooter.

Our aim with many of these measures is not merely to get through the lifting of restrictions, and then return to how things were...

... But to come out of this recovery stronger, by permanently changing the way we use transport.

## **Cycling**

Take the bike for example, previously we announced the introduction of a scheme to help bring bicycles back to a roadworthy condition...

... relieving the pressure on public transport, and improving the nation's health.

Today I can provide the detail of the new £50 bicycle maintenance voucher.

Available from next month, the scheme will help up to half-a-million people drag bikes out of retirement....

... Speeding up the cycling revolution...

... Helping individuals become fitter and healthier...

... And reducing air pollution, which remains a hidden killer.

Clean air should be as big a priority for us in the 21st century as clean water was to the Victorians in the 19th.

The measures discussed today will help...

... more passengers use trains, buses and trams safely...

... More commuters to take up active travel....

... And more people to benefit from infrastructure improvements in the Northern Powerhouse, and across the country.

They give us all an opportunity to harness the power of transport...

Not just to help us return to the lives in the post-COVID-19 world...

... But to make our economy more resilient.

Our population healthier.

And to change our nation for the better.

## **See also**

[Transport Secretary announces new measures to “keep passengers safe now and level up for the future”](#), news story, 23 May 2020

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## **[Route announced for £1 billion Trans-Pennine dualling transformation](#)**

The announcement reveals the list of improvements Highways England wants to now take into construction.

The A66 is both a nationally important road, linking the M6 at Penrith in Cumbria with the A1(M) at Scotch Corner in North Yorkshire, and a key regional route. As well as benefiting local people the upgrade will support tourism and freight traffic, improving connections between ports in Scotland and Northern Ireland and those in England at Hull and Felixstowe.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

As we gradually reopen our society, we want to ensure communities across the North are able to benefit from smoother, safe, better connected journeys.

Upgrading this vital national link will not only level up infrastructure in the region but will deliver benefits up and down the country – supporting tourism and movement between our key ports.

The proposals announced today are also the most popular options among people responding in last year's huge public consultation. They include five new bypasses, key junction improvements and an underpass at the congested Kemplay Bank roundabout near Penrith.

Highways England's senior project manager Matt Townsend said:

We are delighted more than 92 percent of people backed the idea of completing the dualling of the A66. Since the consultation ended ten months ago, we have carefully considered all the public responses. We have revisited issues such as the environmental impact of each option, how we can re-connect communities currently separated by the existing road and how to improve the route for pedestrians and cyclists.

The options we have revealed today are the ones we want to take forward into construction, but they were also the most popular among people who responded in the consultation.

We feel the proposals reflect ours and the Government's vision of a Northern Trans-Pennine route fit for the rest of the century. They also reflect the aspirations of the majority of people, including a diverse range of interest groups, who engaged with us in many months of discussion or gave us their views during the consultation.

As well as choosing the underpass instead of a fly-over at Kemplay Bank, Highways England is proposing the following options to bypass existing sections of the route or provide dualling alongside the existing single carriageway road:

- A northern bypass of a three-mile section between Penrith and Temple Sowerby
- The northern bypass option for Kirkby Thore
- The most northerly of two options bypassing Crackenthorpe
- Taking forward the single option to dual a five-mile section between Appleby and Brough alongside the existing section of single carriageway
- Similarly, converting a 1.9-mile section of the route north of Bowes – the current, single carriageway Bowes bypass – into a dual carriageway
- A bypass south of the Old Rectory between Cross Lane and Rokeby instead of a conversion which would have required demolishing buildings
- The most northerly of three bypass options linking sections of existing dual carriageway between Stephen Bank and Carkin Moor

The proposals also include significant improvements to the existing junctions between Barnard Castle and the A66 at Bowes and Rokeby. These will improve safety at the two junctions and make for safer, smoother journeys for HGVs.

All of the villages being bypassed will benefit from the removal of high volumes of traffic, including HGVs, from the existing road as well as improved community connectivity. Pedestrians, cyclists, and horse riders will also benefit from the upgrade which will reduce collisions, competition from other vehicles and associated congestion along one of the most important commercial routes in the north of the United Kingdom.

In every case, the chosen option was the most popular among the 857 respondents. The consultation involved more than a dozen events held along the route between May and July of last year and attended by 2,333 people. In all, almost 93 percent of people backed the overall dualling plan.

All the preferred options will now go into a period of further analysis, development and design before a second public consultation and scrutiny period next year.

Highways England also revealed today that the £45 million design contract for the project, put out to tender in October, had been awarded to Amey Consulting in collaboration with Arup.

Further information on the project can be found on the [project webpage](#)

## **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.

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# Charter flights from Caribbean Islands for British travellers to return to the UK

Over 900 British travellers will be able to return home from islands across the Caribbean on the latest charter flights organised by the UK government.

Three flights from Barbados will leave for London Heathrow from Grantley Adams International Airport on 3, 4 and 5 June.

Sweeper flights will take British travellers to Barbados for the transatlantic flight, from: Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the British Virgin Islands, Montserrat, and Trinidad and Tobago.

This follows help we have already provided to get people back on special flights from the Bahamas, Jamaica, Cuba, and Guyana. FCO teams across the Caribbean have also helped over 11,000 British travellers return to the UK via commercial routes.

Minister for the Caribbean and the Overseas Territories, Baroness Sugg said:

We recognise that many British travellers in the Caribbean are still trying to get home. That's why we are organising our most complex series of charter flights yet to bring up to 900 people back.

Our teams will keep doing everything they can to get as many as possible home to the UK and will be providing those not returning with the support they need.

Priority will be given to British travellers who are vulnerable. This includes those over 70 and others who have medical requirements, those travelling with young children, and those located in more remote or at-risk areas.

These flights are also seeking to help non-British nationals with Indefinite Leave to Remain where possible – so long as they have lived in the UK in the last year. The most vulnerable of these will be prioritised.

The UK government is working with the airline industry and host governments across the world to bring back British travellers to the UK as part of the plan announced by the Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab (30 March) – with up to £75 million available for special charter flights to priority countries.

## Background

- The charter flights are for short-term British travellers who normally reside in the UK, as well as their direct dependants. Non-British citizens with appropriate residency rights will be included if there is capacity.
- To register their details and interest in these flights, British travellers should check [FCO Travel Advice](#)
- British travellers who have registered their interest in returning to the UK on a chartered flight will be contacted by the British mission in their country or territory explaining how to book these flights. Anyone who has not yet registered their interest should contact the local High Commission or Embassy using the details in the FCO's country travel advice
- Those who are eligible to fly will be sent information on getting to airports and flight itineraries directly when their seat is confirmed
- Details regarding luggage allowance, flight costs and carriers will be available on the booking portal
- British Embassies and High Commissions across the Caribbean network continue to provide consular support to any British travellers who remain in the Caribbean
- See [guidance on how to book onto a government charter flight back to the UK](#)

## Further information

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# [UK aid supporting the fight against coronavirus in the Middle East](#)

The United Kingdom is working together with countries across the Middle East to tackle coronavirus and protect the most vulnerable, UK Minister for the Middle East James Cleverly said today (22 May) as Muslims around the world celebrate Eid al Fitr.

He called, at this time of celebration and reflection, to consider how we have come together to address the unprecedented global challenge of responding to coronavirus, and continue to work side-by-side.

The UK has to date dedicated £764 million to the global fight against coronavirus. It is also leading international efforts to develop a safe, workable coronavirus vaccine that will be available throughout the world, and is the biggest country donor to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) to find one.

No one country can respond to the devastating impact of this invisible killer, which means the UK's long-standing partnership with the Middle East is now even more important. We are grateful for the work by regional leaders to combat coronavirus, making generous bilateral pledges to the regional and global effort to support healthcare systems and find a vaccine.

Communities across the Middle East are in need of humanitarian assistance, particularly those affected by ongoing conflict in Syria and Yemen, and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Many people are also forced to celebrate Eid away from their homes whilst taking refuge in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and beyond.

The UK Government has pledged support of more than £30 million over the last few months to life-saving programmes across the region, providing essential medical equipment to treat critical care patients and train frontline medics. This is on top of the UK's funding to the many international agencies and charities providing direct support in this part of the world.

It will also tackle the wider impact of the virus and make sure people have safe access to water and sanitation, children can continue to receive an education and vulnerable families can buy essentials such as food and medicines.

Minister for the Middle East, James Cleverly, said:

"This has been one of the most challenging months of Ramadan the world has ever seen. I wish the Muslim community around the world Eid Mubarak. I am proud UK aid will provide life-saving support to people most in need across the Middle East and beyond.

"I am also grateful for the cooperation to-date with Gulf leaders to combat the coronavirus, making generous donations, responding to global appeals, and funding vaccine research. Working side by side is the only way to stop this virus. No one is safe until we are all safe.

"Our strong partnership with our allies allows us to share expertise and resources to better tackle this pandemic so together we can stop its spread and help stop future waves of infection."

To support the most vulnerable communities in the region in this crisis, UK aid in recent months includes £24 million to help people in Syria and £11.1 million the UK allocated earlier this month to help Iraq, Lebanon and the

Occupied Palestinian Territories to tackle the virus. If coronavirus is left to spread in developing countries, this could increase and prolong the spread of the virus globally.

At the Yemen pledging conference on 2 June, 2020, the UK is also expected to make a commitment. The 'High-level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen' will help to feed millions of Yemenis and reduce the impact of coronavirus.

The UK is also increasing the impact of its support through working with Gulf partners and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in the Islamic Development Bank's Lives and Livelihoods fund. The £1.3 million support to date will help the poorest Muslim nations in the world, which are particularly vulnerable to the effects of coronavirus.

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## [Letters on COVID-19 planning and coordination](#)

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