

DfT injects £348 million into boosting local roads quality

- Department for Transport announces the opening of £348 million funding competition to help improve local roads over the next 4 years
- funding will be available for local authorities to bid for, allowing them to work on major maintenance projects, as well as on projects that will ease congestion on our busiest roads
- announcement follows £6.6 billion investment in local road maintenance in the last 5 years

The Department for Transport has today (20 July 2019) announced nearly £350 million is being made available for councils to improve local roads up and down the country.

Two sets of funding, totalling £348 million across 4 years, will be available for local authorities to bid for in an effort to tackle issues on major local roads, from easing congestion through to sorting out potholes.

The first pot of investment, the Challenge Fund, will be available for this year and the next, with just under £200 million on offer. Councils will be able to bid for projects that will improve the quality of roads and surrounding infrastructure, including structures such as bridges and viaducts if necessary, to benefit the local economy and make driving safer. In particular, the funding could be put toward sorting major pothole repairs.

The second set of funding, the Pinch Point Fund, will be available in 2021/22 and 2022/23 and totals £150 million. It will go towards council projects designed to help ease congestion on some of their busiest roads. Previous examples of projects funded through Pinch Point include improving the links between the A12 and A143 to open up housing and commercial development land, new roads helping buses bypass single lane roads, and new roads to link main roads with new housing developments.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

Local roads are the backbone of the transport network for drivers up and down the country, but we know that some aren't up to the standard they need to be. Whether it's congestion or quality, we need to empower local authorities to invest in these roads and make journeys safer and stress-free.

That's exactly what this funding will do – over 4 years we're providing more than a third of a billion pounds to make sure local authorities have the cash they need to make this a reality.

Today's announcement is the latest in a string of funding injections the

department has made into making sure roads are fit for purpose. The department is investing over £6.6 billion between 2015 and 2021, including the £198 million funding announced today, to improve the condition of the local highway networks.

[DfT to revolutionise data on traffic works to improve road journeys](#)

- Department for Transport announces consultation on improving access to data on road works from 2020
- data will be on one online source, allowing apps and organisations to give real time updates on where roadworks are taking place
- move will mean drivers know the areas to avoid – improving journeys and cutting congestion

The Department for Transport has today (20 July 2019) launched a consultation on changing the law so that councils and utility companies have to share roadworks data on a new website – meaning work is co-ordinated and drivers know where to look.

The consultation will seek views on making it the law from next April (2020) for local authorities and utility companies to have to use a new digital platform, named Street Manager, to plan and manage roadworks. This will mean up to date information on live and planned works across England will be available under one source, making it easier than ever before for tech companies to map where and when road work are happening.

On top of this, the service – which the department will invest £10 million in – will require those feeding in information to provide updates within 2 hours of road works beginning and ending. This will help third parties like Waze to use data to provide real time journey updates for road users through travel apps, significantly improving travel times for people across the country.

It will also mean drivers can find out which areas to avoid due to roadworks before they leave home. It is hoped the new system will be used in this way to reduce congestion as a result of roadworks.

[Street Manager](#)

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

Everyone has experienced the annoyance of travel that is disrupted by roadworks, but the systems we currently use to help companies communicate this aren't fit for purpose, and need changing.

Street Manager will do just that, making it easier for companies to use data on roadworks to inform people of where to avoid when travelling, helping to boost the experiences for people travelling up and down the country.

The consultation will also look at removing temporary traffic lights as soon as possible after the completion of works, and a new national condition requiring companies to place roadworks underneath pavements to reduce the impact on traffic. Pilots have already been running with a small group of utility companies and councils since May (2019), with the full roll out of the new data source set for next April (2020).

[DfT to embrace artificial intelligence technology in plans for local roads health-check](#)

- Department for Transport (DfT) announces a national examination of road markings to help improve road safety
- assessment will give an insight into the current condition of local road markings, sections of the National Cycle Network and the country's footways

Innovative artificial intelligence (AI) technology will be used to help improve the condition of local roads, thanks to DfT funding announced today (20 July 2019).

As part of a wider £350 million funding package for improving the quality of local roads, the department has awarded £2 million to develop the most thorough understanding ever of Britain's road markings.

By having analysis on the quality of near 100,000 miles of road, the department will have a clearer-than-ever picture of where investment is needed. Through this understanding, the department will be able to advise local councils where they could invest in areas that may need it most, improving road user safety on some of our busiest local roads.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

Road markings play a vital role in keeping everyone who is using the road safe, so making sure they're up to standard is imperative.

This funding will allow for advanced AI learning technology to assess the condition of the markings to improve the safety of our

roads for all users.

DfT will undertake the health-check in close partnership with the Local Condition Roads Innovation Group (LCRIG). LCRIG, will in turn use the services of Gaist, a small SME based in North Yorkshire, to use machine learning AI technology that will review close to 150 million high definition (HD) images of our roads. The analysis will provide a clear assessment of where investment by councils could be utilised.

Poor road markings pose an issue for all road users, from cyclists to motorists. Poor road marking quality can make it difficult for road users to distinguish whether they can park on the side of the road, overtake or know how wide a lane is. This means road user safety can be put at risk due to a lack of clarity. By having a stronger road map of where markings need improvement, these issues can be rectified.

Paula Clayton-Smith, Managing Director, Gaist, said:

We are using over 146 million HD road images from our national databank and cutting-edge AI technology to assess over 96,000 miles of classified roads as part of this project. This is the largest exercise in assessing road marking readiness ever undertaken in England. Gaist are proud to have the AI capability that puts an SME UK business at the forefront of technological advances.

The funding will also go towards a survey of councils around pavement and footway conditions, which will help outline where funding could be targeted.

The department is also planning to assess sections of the [National Cycle Network](#), building on the audit undertaken by cycling and walking charity Sustrans, to better understand the condition of the network. This will help continue our commitment to promote walking and cycling and improve our public spaces. All three stocktakes combined underline the department's commitment to making roads and cycleways safer for their users, and to improve the quality of local roads up and down the country.

The funding announcement comes on the same day that bids open over the next 4 year for £348 million of worth of funding to improve our local roads, through the Challenge Fund and Pinch Point fund.

[Reflections on the Security Council](#)

visit to Colombia

Briefing by Ambassador Jonathan Allen, UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, at the Security Council briefing on the Security Council visit to Colombia

Thank you very much, Mr President. Let me continue where you left off with Day Two of the visit to the Security Council.

So on the 13th of July, the Council traveled to Caldoño in Cauca, an area just been highly affected by conflict over the last five or more decades. Our first meeting there was with community leaders from Caldoño and the surrounding region. Those leaders represented diverse stakeholders, including local indigenous authorities and civil guards, women's groups, Afro-Colombian groups, human rights defenders, cooperatives of rural workers and the Church. These stakeholders expressed their concerns regarding several challenges which were hindering their work: a lack of channel for democratic participation at the local level; slow pace of implementation of the transitional justice and crop substitution aspects of the peace agreement; polarization of the national political discourse; and killings and threats against community leaders and human rights defenders. And on this last point, I'd like to note with concern that one woman community leader decided not to attend the meeting with the Security Council due to threats that she had received the night before. And I think all of us would hope that no further threats are made against her or against her colleagues who were able to attend the meeting with us.

This meeting was an important opportunity for Council members to hear firsthand from those whose daily work focuses on building peace at the local level in Colombia. The discussion with them brought to life many of the challenges outlined in the Secretary-General's report. We commend their ongoing commitment to their work.

From Caldoña, the Council travelled to the Santa Rosa territorial area for training and reincorporation, where we met government representatives, including Foreign Minister Holmes Trujillo, who we see here today, and Presidential Adviser Archilla, local authorities and ex-combatant residents. We also toured a productive project where ex-combatants and community members were growing tree tomatoes for sale in local and external markets. And we heard about other such projects. In meeting, our open meeting, the government representatives outlined the efforts the government has been taking to roll out the development plan with a territorial focus in Cauca in concert with local indigenous authorities. We also heard about government-led reintegration programmes in the surrounding area.

Regional and local government representatives reaffirmed their commitment to peace. Local indigenous authorities called on the national government to accelerate implementation of the peace agreement and expressed their concern about the killings of community leaders and overall insecurity in the region.

FARC leaders and former combatants called for the consolidation of peace, the acceleration of implementation of the peace agreement and increased efforts to ensure political reintegration – especially ahead of local elections in October – alongside an increased state presence in areas previously occupied by the FARC-EP, where other illegal armed groups now threatened to increase their activity.

The visit to the tree tomato productive project allowed the Council to see how agriculture plays a central role in the reintegration of former combatants and to hear from them about their collective efforts and commitment to reintegrate into civilian life. The former combatants were proud of the results their project has shown over the six months since it began and were now looking to expand past the local market and sell directly to national and international supermarkets and distribution channels. Members of the Security Council showed their appreciation for the quality of the tree tomato product in their personal consumption, and without wishing to name names, I would simply suggest to those stakeholders that if they are looking for an external export market, they might start with Russia. This visit to the field was an important complement to our day in Bogota, and we are grateful to the verification mission, the government, the FARC, the former combatants, the community leaders and all other stakeholders who were involved in the organisation of the visit and the discussions we held. And we welcome very much the commitment of all whom we met to building and sustaining peace in Colombia.

Thank you, Mr President.

Statement by Ambassador Jonathan Allen, UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, at the Security Council briefing on the Security Council visit to Colombia

Thank you, Mr President and for the second time today, welcome.

We have just spoken in the previous session about our visit, but I think it was truly invaluable for all of us to see for ourselves the situation. And I believe, we have all returned with stronger understanding as a result. And lastly, may I thank Carlos Ruiz Massieu for his briefing to the Council and through him to his colleagues on the ground and all the hard work they are doing.

We share the Secretary-General's report's assessment that now is a critical moment for the peace process in Colombia, because almost three years on Mr President, the Colombian Peace Accords continue to set a positive example to the rest of the world. And in that light, we welcome the commitment of President Duque and his government to the peace process, which he reaffirmed, and members of his government reaffirmed, repeatedly during the Security Council's visit last week. We particularly welcomed President Duque's request in consultation with FARC members that the Security Council should extend the United Nations Verification Mission's mandate by one year. We look forward to giving this request due consideration with our Council colleagues in the coming months.

We are pleased to see that the Truth Commission, the Commission for the Disappeared, and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace have all started their work. And we also welcome the government's efforts to clearly set out a plan for ending threats and attacks against community leaders, social leaders and human rights defenders.

So Mr President, we will continue to work with the Colombian Government as it builds on these successes to ensure a lasting peace in the country. And we see three key areas of focus for this work:

First, it is clearly crucial that rural reform efforts be accelerated as this is one of the interlocking sets of commitments of the Peace Agreement. This goes hand in hand with rural development. The Government has drawn up many promising plans for development over the past year and has approved a number of projects. But the Government itself says that the time has now come for concrete action. And while we recognize the significant political hurdles the Government faces, we fully support President Duque's efforts to build consensus. We hope that progress on the Development Plans with a Territorial Focus, land ownership and registration processes, and crop substitution initiatives can help Colombia build confidence in its commitment to peace. Now, we know it will not happen overnight, but we know too, that the government is committed to results soon, which we think is essential for the ongoing peace process implementation.

Secondly, the Colombian government should give full political and financial support to the institutions which work for peace. We welcome the signing of the law governing the Special Jurisdiction for Peace as well as the beginning of work by the Commissions for Truth and the Disappeared. I think it's fair to say, Mr President, we had an inspiring meeting with representatives of those three bodies. They face a huge task, but they are hugely impressive people. But to inspire confidence among the Colombian people, these institutions must be well resourced and given public support by the Government.

Thirdly, the intimidation and killing of social leaders, community leaders, and human rights defenders continues to damage confidence in the perceived commitment of the government to the Peace Agreement. Now, I think we all recognise the difficulties and complexities after our visit in particular seen situation on the ground. But we believe the Colombian government must continue its efforts to enforce the rule of law in rural areas, to prevent attacks against community leaders, and bring those responsible to justice. In many regions of Colombia, insecurity is increasing the risk that citizens might lose faith in the state's ability to provide safety. The risk is not only to this, but to future peace processes.

Let me take this opportunity again to commend our SRSG and the Verification Mission for their valuable work, where they have a crucial role in supporting the government in its work to build a lasting and sustaining peace. And again, let me welcome the Government's plans, activities, commitment, and achievements to date.

Mr President, we said many times on our visit how important it is that there

is an inclusive Colombian peace process supported by all sections of Colombian society. The Colombian peace process is a bright spot on this Council's agenda and a shining example to the world. And I thank all Colombians for their determination to ensure a sustained peace.

Thank you, Mr President

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad address to the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom

Thank you. Good afternoon. It's an honour to be amongst such a distinguished group of world leaders all committed to the freedom of religion or belief. And may I say I'm grateful to the United States for bringing us together but particularly to Secretary Pompeo and to you Ambassador Brownback.

Sam, if I may. Your partnership, your friendship is of incredible value and we look forward to strengthening that further. Your Excellencies it is said in the innocence of a child we find our most profound answers. My little boy Mansoor who is studying at a Jesuit Catholic school asked me recently, "Daddy, what kind of Muslim am I?"

I, being a politician, turned it around and asked Mansoor, "What kind of Muslim do you think you are?"

He paused for a moment and with a great poignancy, he said "Daddy, a Christian Muslim?"

Freedom of religion or belief has long been at the heart of UK foreign policy and diplomacy. That innocent remark of my own son demonstrates the strength of the country that I am proud to represent, the strength of building relationships between communities of all faiths.

In Sudan this year, we hosted a Religious Freedom Conference in January. I am grateful to both our colleagues and friends from the United States and Canada which ensured that we saw the Hatoun term government drop restrictions on the opening of Christian schools.

We have also seen progress in Algeria over the past year. Our ambassador has hosted meetings between Christians and Muslim leaders and the space, the religious space for Christians and indeed Ahmadi Muslims has become slightly better, but more needs to be done.

Whilst we take pride in our achievements there is so much more that needs to be done, if real change is to be affected and that is why our foreign

secretary commissioned an independent review of the situation of persecuted Christians and I am pleased to announce today that we have fully accepted the review's ambitious recommendations in full.

These include making religious literacy compulsory for all our relevant diplomats a personal priority for me. We will also work with parties to agree a Security Council resolution calling on governments in the Middle East and North Africa to ensure the protection and security of Christians and all faith minorities.

In conclusion, your Excellencies, as champions of freedom of religion or belief, all of us here recognise that it is a right that should be enjoyed by everyone everywhere.

Now is the time to be the voice to the voiceless millions of persecuted religious minority. Now is the moment, right here, right now, for our collective commitment to build that world free of religious bigotry and hate.

Now is the time to act. For our biggest challenge, your Excellencies is not when we stand up for our own rights and beliefs. The real test is when we stand up for the rights and beliefs of others.

Thank you.