

# [Government response: Confirmation of UK Government agreement to extend Article 50](#)

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## [News story: More service stations to become fully accessible as government fund opens](#)

- motorway service stations invited to apply for a share of £2 million in funding for fully accessible toilets
- Department for Transport partnering with Muscular Dystrophy UK to fund new facilities, making travel easier on the roads for disabled people
- investment is a key commitment in the government's Inclusive Transport Strategy

More service stations in England are to become fully accessible for disabled passengers with the launch of a £2 million government fund.

The Department for Transport is partnering with Muscular Dystrophy UK (MDUK) to award the money for Changing Places toilets, which are expected to be ready by the early 2020s.

More than a quarter of a million people across the UK cannot use standard accessible toilets, meaning that they are forced to go for long journeys without a bathroom break, be changed by their carers on toilet floors, or have to stay at home.

By providing more space and specialised equipment, including adult-sized changing benches and hoists, Changing Places facilities allow people with

conditions like muscular dystrophy and cerebral palsy to use the bathroom safely and comfortably, removing some of the difficulties faced by disabled people travelling on the roads.

Transport Accessibility Minister Nusrat Ghani said:

Today marks the next step towards our ambition of delivering a fully inclusive transport network.

It is unacceptable that, despite welcome investment in some areas, our roadside services are not more accessible for over a quarter of a million people, and I am determined to do more.

Our partnership with MDUK will help ensure that everyone, disabled or not, can use our roads and I encourage as many operators as possible to apply for funding.

MDUK will work with DfT to allocate funding based on detailed proposals by the operators of motorway services areas which will set out how they propose to fulfil the eligibility criteria. This includes the equipment provided within the Changing Places toilet, the total budget, and the individual operator's broader accessibility measures, such as disabled parking spaces and other accessible facilities within the service station.

The department's [partnership with MDUK was announced last November](#) to bring Changing Places toilets to the majority of motorway service areas, as part of the government's [Inclusive Transport Strategy](#) which aims to provide equal access to the transport network by 2030.

Catherine Woodhead, Chief Executive of Muscular Dystrophy UK, said:

Individuals and families living with a disability often tell us that travelling by car is the easiest way for them to get from A to B.

Building Changing Places toilets at motorway service stations will make it easier for more than a quarter of a million people and their families to visit friends, go on holiday, or simply enjoy a day out somewhere – activities the rest of us take for granted.

We're delighted the Department for Transport has recognised this need, and look forward to working together on delivering this transformational project.

The Inclusive Transport Strategy set out key commitments to improve disabled people's access across all modes of transport by 2030, which included:

- £300 million to make railway stations more accessible through the [Access for All](#) scheme

- £2 million for audio and visual equipment on buses, so that passengers know where and when to alight
- a £2 million passenger awareness campaign to increase disability awareness and reduce hate crime on our network
- an accreditation scheme for transport operators to receive formal recognition for positive work to improve disabled passengers' experiences, such as training frontline staff and senior management on disability awareness
- measures to ensure future technology is designed inclusively from the outset, with opportunities sought to harness innovation

The Changing Places application portal will be open for 3 months with successful applicants announced in September.

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## **Press release: Communities bid to make their high streets for the future**

More than 300 local authorities across the country have bid for a share of the £675 million Future High Street Fund to transform their local high streets into modern vibrant community hubs, High Streets Minister Jake Berry MP has today confirmed (10 April 2019).

Minister Berry welcomed the positive response to the Future High Street Fund as evidence of the appetite across the country to re imagine and reinvent our town centres and high streets.

Launched in December 2018 as part of the Government's Plan for the High Street, the £675 million Future High Streets Fund will help local leaders implement bold new visions to transform their town centres and make them fit for the future with co-funding to consolidate properties on the high street, improve transport and access into town centres and convert retail units into new homes.

High Streets Minister Jake Berry MP said:

More than 300 bids to the Future High Street Fund is a fantastic response and shows the passion across the country to meet the challenges facing our high streets head-on.

The Government has the power to set the direction but those on the ground know best.

I look forward to reviewing the innovative proposals from local leaders to transform our high streets and town centres and make them fit for the future.

We're determined to ensure high streets continue sit at the heart of our communities for generations to come. Our Future High Streets Fund will sit front and centre of our Plan for the High Street as we work to achieve this aim.

Up to £55 million of the Fund has also been allocated to support the regeneration of heritage high streets. Bids will help to restore historic high street properties for new work spaces or cultural venues. More details of this will be announced in due course.

Eight ways the Government is backing the Great British high street:

- The Budget saw business rates relief cut small retailers' bills by a third, building on over £10 billion of business rates support since 2016.
- The Government appointed an independent expert panel, headed by Sir John Timpson to diagnose and respond to the challenges facing the high street.
- In response to recommendations from the expert panel, the Government has announced a £675 million Future High Streets Fund to help improve infrastructure and access to high streets, put historic buildings back to use and make town centres fit for the future.
- We have also announced a Town Centre Task Force to give local leaders expert advice and support in implementing their plans to revitalise their local high streets.
- The Open Doors scheme will see empty shops being opened up to community groups offering services to the most vulnerable in our communities. This week we announced the first trial areas.
- The Great British High Street Awards 2018 was a hotly contested competition to find Britain's best high street, and the huge response highlighted retailers and community groups across the country working in innovative ways keep town centres vibrant and strong. The competition is returning later this year.
- We have published a planning consultation to help support change on the high street. This will aim to make it easier for high streets to adapt for the future, with a wider range of retail, residential and other uses.
- We are empowering businesses to contribute to the success of their high street by providing loans to establish Business Improvement Districts across the country

## **Further information**

The Future high Streets Fund was launched 26 December 2018.

Applications for Phase 1 of the Fund closed on Friday 22 March 2019.

That stage called for local authorities to submit Expressions of Interest. We will assess these and make an announcement on places moving forward to Phase 2 in summer 2019.

For further enquiries about the Fund, please contact  
highstreetsfund@communities.gov.uk.

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## [Speech: Lack of food and access to healthcare in Venezuela](#)

Thank you very much, Mr President. Thank you to our three briefers. And thank you to the United States for proposing this discussion today and to Vice President Pence for joining the Security Council.

Mr President, it's clear from the briefings that we heard: that the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela has reached epic proportions and it is right that the Security Council should discuss such issues. I know there's an age-old debate that we've never resolved as to how bad does a situation have to get within a country in order for it to constitute the sort of issue that the Security Council has looked at. But the figures that we've heard today and the effect on the Venezuelan people and the effect on their neighbours and the view of the regional authorities and the view of the international authorities – as represented by the Special Envoy and as represented by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, I think make it absolutely an issue that this Council should be discussing.

Mr President, we've heard today how ordinary Venezuelans are unable to access food and basic healthcare. Preventable diseases such as measles and diphtheria have reappeared. HIV goes untreated and maternal and newborn mortality rates are extremely high. Electricity and water shortages, as many speakers have said, made it all much worse.

The figures are appalling, but we're also starting to hear words like 'unprecedented' and 'unparalleled', and I heard today some things I didn't know – particularly about the health side say thank you to Dr Page – and it's truly shocking. The malaria figure particularly stuck in my mind. I think the answer on measles is to refer to the George Washington University study about Russian social media. So I'm not going to go into that there but I think malaria figure alone ought to really horrify us. I think it's all the more shocking because as a number of speakers have said, this crisis is manmade and all the more so because Venezuela used to be a prosperous country. My understanding of the OECD and World Bank figures, Mr President, is that Venezuela was considered to be an upper/middle income country. So that you can go from that status to having the sorts of problems that we heard described today really does draw the concern of the international community.

I wanted also to reference the refugee situation. We've heard the figure: 3.4 million Venezuelans have left their country to go to their neighbours. I too welcome the presence of the Colombian Foreign Minister here today and we commend him and his government and our Security Council colleague, Peru, and

others in the region that have offered refuge and hope to those millions of ordinary Venezuelans.

But we cannot rely solely on the region's efforts because as we also heard today that number is set to rise quite dramatically. I wanted to thank UNHCR and IOM through the Special Envoy for the efforts they have made.

I think we agree: it's a positive first step that the Maduro regime no longer denies the existence of the crisis and that the Red Cross and the UN are allowed to start the international humanitarian response – and the scale of what's needed was set out graphically by the Emergency Relief Coordinator. So I think it just points to how much more needs to be done.

For the United Kingdom, we agree with the majority of this Council, Mr President for a new start in Venezuela and we will be working closely with the international community to ensure assistance can reach those most in need. But I wanted to echo what Vice President Pence said in his emphasis on democracy and the rule of law. We stand with the Venezuelan people. This is about what is needed to help the Venezuelan people so we support the UN's efforts, under OCHA's leadership, to mount an international humanitarian response, commensurate with the severity of the situation and underpinned by the principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality. And I would call Member States' attention to the three areas that the Emergency Relief Coordinator outlined.

We call on the Maduro regime, Mr President, and all actors to facilitate the humanitarian process and to allow further international, UN, Red Cross and NGO humanitarian organisations unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to meet the urgent needs of the Venezuelan people. I repeat: it is against international law to try and deny your own people the help that they need, particularly food.

I'd also like, Mr President to use this occasion to call on Member States to support the UN's efforts. For our part, we have committed a package of nearly \$9 million in humanitarian aid to respond to the most severe needs in Venezuela and host countries. We hope that our aid package will respond to the most severe health and nutrition needs by supporting emergency rooms and maternity wards. We hope to help people fleeing their homes have access to critical support and we hope to help meet the immediate needs of those forced to flee Venezuela who are at greater risk of exploitation. So we plan to offer migrants access to personal documentation and information on how to access basic services.

Mr President, it's important we're clear that the suffering faced by the Venezuelan people is the result of years of mismanagement by the de facto Government. Humanitarian aid is urgently needed but, as many speakers have spoken out today, it won't solve the crisis. Political change is equally urgent. The legitimate interim President Juan Guaidó was stripped of his immunity of Speaker of the National Assembly. His Chief of Staff was arrested and others who are trying to secure peace and democracy in Venezuela have suffered similar intimidation and threats. Mr Guaidó has our full support in his efforts to bring about the necessary change. The people of Venezuela

deserve a better future and I repeat, Mr President, it is our belief that it's time for a new start with free and fair elections in accordance with international democratic standards. Thank you.

Right of Reply by Ambassador Karen Pierce at the Security Council Briefing on Venezuela

Thank you, Mr President. I don't want to prolong this. I don't want to get into a tit for tat but the money was not stolen from a British bank. It's very important that we correct these falsehoods. Thank you.

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Thank you, Mr President, I apologize for taking the floor again. But I can't allow those allegations against the Bank of England to go unaddressed. I reject completely the allegations made by the Venezuela Ambassador. He's made them before. I wrote to the then-President of the Security Council, the Equatorial Guinea PR, on the 21st February, rejecting the allegations. I will have that letter circulated again [and we'll put it on our website](#). But for the benefit of the record, the Bank of England's reputation is world-renowned. It operates to the highest standards. It has operational independence from the British government. Thank you.

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## [News story: British instruments reveal secrets of Martian sky](#)

Over the last year the European Space Agency's (ESA) Trace Gas Orbiter (TGO) spacecraft followed the onset of the storm and monitored how the increase in dust affected the water vapour in the atmosphere – important for understanding the history of water on Mars.

It did not observe the presence of methane, further adding to the mystery of why other missions like the NASA Curiosity rover reported localised concentrations, which could indicate life.

ExoMars is a two-part mission. The Trace Gas Orbiter will be joined by the UK-built Rosalind Franklin rover, which will roam the surface of the planet in 2021.

Sue Horne, Head of Space Exploration, UK Space Agency said:

ExoMars embodies the best of UK and European space science and I'm delighted that Britain is one of the biggest supporters.

This data release is the first of many on our mission to unearth the mysteries of the Red Planet. The results both answer, and raise

new questions, paving the way for more exciting discoveries from the Rosalind Franklin rover which is due to launch next year.

The UK Space Agency has invested €287 million to the overall ExoMars mission and €14 million to the instruments over 13 years, making it the second largest European contributor after Italy. A further £370,000 has been committed on the spacecraft's instrument operations and over £2.5 million on data analysis.

The UK space industry provided the spacecraft's batteries, ultra-high frequency (UHF) transceiver and aerodynamic analysis. Dr Manish Patel at the Open University led the UK design input for the spectrometer system which will look at atmospheric composition and is playing a key role in the instrument operations and data analysis. The UK Space Agency is also supporting 18 researchers in 5 British institutions to analyse data received on the Martian atmosphere.

Dr Manish Patel, Open University, and Co-Principal Investigator of the NOMAD instrument on TGO, said:

The measurements we have made are very surprising. The methane previously detected by ground-based telescopes, the ESA Mars Express spacecraft and the NASA Curiosity rover seems to have disappeared.

Mars continues to confound us – the only way these results make sense with previous observations is if there is a new mechanism in the atmosphere, removing the methane at a rate far faster than thought possible. As always, Mars provides us with another mystery to solve.

ESA's Trace Gas Orbiter is studying Martian atmospheric trace gases and their sources in unprecedented detail. It will help us understand the source of the methane in Mars' atmosphere and whether it is from a geological or biological source and provide a data connection to the Rosalind Franklin rover, currently under construction by Airbus in Stevenage, Hertfordshire.

The Trace Gas Orbiter arrived in orbit 400 km above the Red Planet in April 2018, just a couple of months before the start of the massive dust storm that would eventually lead to the demise of NASA's Opportunity rover after 15 years roving the Martian surface.

The ExoMars rover was named after UK scientist and co-discoverer of the structure of DNA Rosalind Franklin in February 2018, following a competition to which almost 36,000 people responded.

The Trace Gas Orbiter results were presented this morning at a press conference for the [European Geosciences Union \(EGU\) general assembly](#) in Vienna.