

[News story: One year countdown begins to Severn tolls' abolition](#)

There is just a year to go until drivers will benefit from free travel into Wales across the Severn Crossings, thanks to the UK Government's promise to abolish the tolls by 31 December 2018.

The decision will strengthen the economic links and prospects of the natural corridor of South Wales and the South West of England, boosting the Welsh economy by an estimated £100m a year, and generating annual savings for regular motorists of thousands of pounds.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns has invited local partners and businesses from South East Wales and the South West of England to attend the first cross-border business summit in Newport on 22 January, in a bid to explore how links between the two economies can be strengthened ahead of removing the tolls.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

The major level of tolls on the Severn Crossings have represented a drag and barrier to Wales' economic growth for over half a century, in less than a year we will see the biggest economic stimulus for South Wales and the Valleys for decades.

My decision to abolish the tolls with the support of my UK Government cabinet colleagues is a boost to commuters, tourists and business owners alike who will be see extra money in their pockets as they make their way to and from Wales.

The tolls' removal will cement the ties between the economies and communities of South Wales and South West England, creating a growth corridor spanning from Cardiff through Newport to Bristol.

I have spoken to several business owners who are encouraged by this decision, and I look forward to discussing further cross-border business opportunities at January's summit.

Following the return of the Severn Crossings to public ownership on 8 January 2018, the tolls will be reduced for all drivers in line with the commitment made by the UK Government in Budget 2015.

This will be the first time the tolls have decreased since their introduction in 1966. The normal annual inflation increase (due 1 January 2018) will also not be applied.

From 8 Jan 2018:

- Cars will pay £5.60 instead of £6.70.
- Small buses or vans will pay £11.20 down from £13.40
- Lorries and coaches will pay £16.70 instead of £20

Notes to editors:

1. The abolition is set to benefit the Welsh economy by around £100m a year, according to Welsh Government: The Impact of the Severn Tolls on the Welsh Economy, 30 May 2012
2. Regular motorists are set to save over £1,400 per year based on a monthly tag charge of £117.92 over 12 months.
3. The Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns has announced that he will host the first cross-border, Severn Growth business summit on 22 January 2018 at the Celtic Manor Resort. Businesses can sign up to attend the summit via [Eventbrite](#).
4. On 13 January, the Government launched a consultation, setting out a series of proposals designed to deliver improvements at the Crossings. This consultation ran for eight weeks until 10 March. The consultation response can be found [here](#)
5. The Severn Bridge was built in 1966 and a second crossing was completed 30 years later.
6. When the bridges come under public ownership, they will be run by Highways England. Previously it has been run by Severn River Crossing plc.
7. The first Severn Bridge was opened in September 1966, providing a direct link from the M4 motorway into Wales, with a toll in place for use of the bridge to pay for the cost of construction. It continually operated above capacity and in 1986 the then Government stated that a second bridge would be constructed.
8. In 1988 it was announced that tenders would be invited from private consortia to fund, build and operate the second bridge and take over the operation of the first bridge. In 1990 the concession was awarded to Severn River Crossing PLC ("SRC"). Construction work also started in April 1992 and the second bridge was opened in June 1996.

Press release: Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns' New Year message for 2018.

Each New Year provides us with the opportunity to reflect on our achievements over the 12 months, and look forward to the year that stretches before us.

2017 was the year that Wales once again shone in the global spotlight and underlined its credentials as a first class host of major sporting events when Cardiff hosted the UEFA Champions League final. The biggest sporting event in the world that year was beamed to 200 countries and up to 170,000 fans from all over the world flocked to the city and left with a clear and positive message about everything Wales has to offer.

There is little doubt that 2017 was also the year that launched the UK into a seminal moment in our political and constitutional history.

We began the year by writing a new chapter in Welsh devolution as the Wales Bill received Royal Assent. In March we triggered Article 50, putting the decision taken by the British people to leave the European Union into action. And we ended the year by reaching an agreement on the first phase of negotiations which will take us through to discussions on trade and security in 2018.

It was the year that the UK Government also underpinned its ambition to re-balance the Welsh economy and grow the private sector with major investment in infrastructure.

The decision to reduce the Severn Tolls before abolishing them altogether, the introduction of state of the art trains on the Great Western Mainline and funding for superfast broadband, are all essential steps towards delivering long-term, balanced economic growth.

We have also continued to demonstrate that this Government is firmly on the side of business. The Government's modern Industrial Strategy has been designed to build on Wales' strengths in fields such as aerospace, technology and life sciences and I want to ensure that we are putting our best foot forward to maximise the benefits for Wales from the initiatives and grand challenges it presents.

And of course, the UK Government has set out the way forward for a comprehensive and ambitious series of City Deals for Cardiff and Swansea, is progressing with a growth deal for North Wales and is opening discussions on a growth deal for the Mid Wales region.

These deals are about creating a network of regional economic powerhouses capable of forging mutually beneficial connections and linkages.

This is why our announcement to abolish the Severn tolls is so important – my number one aim when I became Secretary of State – sending a direct message to businesses, commuters and tourists alike that we are committed to strengthening the links between England and Wales.

And in order to build on this, one of my first tasks in the New Year will be to host a Summit on 22nd January at the Celtic Manor to bring together local partners from across the South West of England and the South Wales to explore how we can further strengthen the links between the two economies.

So if 2017 was the year of progress for Wales and the United Kingdom, 2018 will be the year where we must have the vision and the courage to seize the opportunities these moment present.

This is also the challenge that we lay down to the Welsh Government when firmer foundations for devolution in Wales come into force on 1 April next year. The new reserved powers model of devolution in Wales will make clear what is devolved, and the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales, and what is reserved – and the responsibility of Parliament. This will put more decisions into the hands of Welsh Ministers, giving them important new levers to grow the Welsh economy and to deliver better public services across Wales.

As the voice of the UK Government in Wales, and the voice of Wales in Westminster my department will continue to closely work with departments across Whitehall to ensure companies and investors see Wales as an outward-looking, ambitious trading partner. That was the message I gave to business leaders on my recent trips to Japan and Qatar, where I spoke to a number of investors – both existing and potential – about what Wales has to offer post EU exit. And it will be the message we will carry forward into 2018.

The UK Government will not be found wanting in energy, enterprise or enthusiasm when it comes to delivering for Wales. In 2018, we will continue to manage our economy carefully, to build a country that works for everyone and an economy that is fit for the future.

This is how we will preserve, protect and progress our prosperity.

On behalf of my ministerial colleagues, I wish you all a very healthy, happy and prosperous 2018.

[Press release: David Mundell New Year Message](#)

Speaking just ahead of the turn of the year, Secretary of State for Scotland David Mundell said:

"We have experienced huge changes in Scotland this year.

"I know for many people 2017 will have sometimes felt like a challenging year.

"But as we look forward to the Bells, I'd like to reflect on the progress we have made – and address some of the tasks facing us in 2018.

"The General Election in June, the arrival of important new tax powers at Holyrood earlier this month, and our on-going preparations to leave the EU have all had an immense impact.

"I was honoured to be reappointed Secretary of State for Scotland after the election and I'm determined to ensure the UK Government continues to deliver for Scotland.

"At the beginning of the year, Scotland faced demands from the Scottish Government for a second independence referendum.

"But Scots used the General Election to reject their proposal and I hope the Scottish Government continues to heed the people's verdict.

"It has allowed Scotland's two governments to work much more collaboratively as we put in place the necessary arrangements for Brexit – and it is essential we continue to do that throughout 2018.

"We must build on the constructive relationships we have forged if we are to return powers from Brussels in a way that strengthens devolution and protects our vitally important UK single market.

"This year we reached agreement with the EU on a number of key areas, including our commitment to protect the rights of EU citizens after Brexit.

"I'm delighted that will reassure 200,000 friends, neighbours and colleagues who have made their homes in Scotland and whose contribution we value so much.

"Next year, we will begin negotiations on our future relationship with the EU and, working with the Scottish Government, we will put in place necessary arrangements for fishing, farming, trade and immigration.

"There is a lot of work to do. I'm in no doubt we'll need to work together.

"Since 2016 the UK Government and Scottish Government have been working together to transfer wide ranging new powers to Holyrood, which were agreed following the independence referendum.

"That work will continue next year as more welfare powers are devolved but already the changes are being felt.

"Earlier this month, the Scottish Government unveiled a budget which was based, for the first time, on its own income tax proposals.

“I disagree strongly with their decision to make Scotland the most highly taxed part of the UK. That cannot be the right choice for families or our economy.

“But I’m confident, 20 years after we voted for a Scottish Parliament, that it has made Holyrood far more accountable. The on-going tax debate is proof of that.

“In 2018 we must focus on the economy and I urge the Scottish Government to use their powers effectively and to work with the UK Government.

“We need to pull together as we roll out the UK’s ambitious Industrial Strategy.

“We’ll need to collaborate, too, on the Borderland’s Growth Deal and UK City Deals in Stirling and Tayside, and on supporting Scotland’s key industries, including whisky, life sciences and energy.

“The UK Government has been doing its part – for example our £1 billion backing of UK City Deals and important measures such as freezing spirits duty to allow Scottish distillers to invest and to encourage new firms.

“So here’s to 2018. There are many challenges ahead of us but I am confident it can be a great year for Scotland.

“As ever my door remains open to all those people and business who have a stake in Scotland’s success. Let’s work together as we look to the future.”

Press release: 2018 to be a great year for music and sport fans as Government bans the ticket tout “bots”

New legislation will ban ticket touts from using automated software to dodge security measures and snap up more tickets than allowed by event organisers, only to sell them on at hugely inflated prices.

A new criminal offence, to be brought forward thanks to a provision in the [Digital Economy Act](#), will mean those who break the law will face an unlimited fine. This places the UK at the forefront of the fight against touts exploiting real fans.

The [legislation](#) recently moved one step closer as Government notified the European Commission of its plans to take forward the proposals.

It comes as London musical Hamilton recently saw tickets being advertised on the secondary ticketing market for up to £6,000. Artists including Adele and

Ed Sheeran have also been targeted by professional touts.

[Matt Hancock](#), minister for the creative industries, said:

We're determined to make sure 2018 is the year we help real fans get the chance to see their favourite music and sports stars at a fair price. We'll be acting to stamp out the growing problem of touts misusing technology to scoop up vast numbers of tickets only to sell them on at rip-off prices.

Our work, together with improvements by industry, will help make the market more transparent and mean a great year for Britain's thriving live events scene.

The new legislation is part of a wider government drive to make sure genuine fans are not losing out through the secondary ticketing market. This includes:

The [Digital Economy Act 2017](#) putting additional requirements on ticket sellers to provide a unique ticket number where one was originally given and revised Consumer Rights Act guidance clarifying the information that should be provided on sale restrictions when reselling tickets.

Two high-profile investigations into bad practice delivering results:

- Officers from the eCrime unit of National Trading Standards (NTS) recently raided properties across the UK as part of its ongoing investigation looking into unfair practices in the secondary ticketing market and made four arrests in November. A range of equipment including computers, mobile phones and storage devices were seized as evidence.
- After a [thorough investigation](#), the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) identified widespread concerns about the information people are given about tickets on websites as a requirement under the Consumer Rights Act and gathered evidence which it considers breaches the law. It will require relevant websites to take appropriate action.

Ministers accepting the recommendations of a review into secondary ticketing by Professor Michael Waterson. These included calls for better consumer education around the ticketing market, greater standardisation and transparency by industry, for ticket sellers to do more to guard against bot attacks, stronger enforcement of existing consumer rights laws, and the threat of further action if the industry does not act against rogue ticket traders. Read the [Government's response](#).

Government work being bolstered by new approaches in the private sector:

- Dutch startup Guaranteed Unique Ticketing System has launched in the UK

and uses Blockchain technology to make it impossible to resell tickets at a higher price.

- British firm [DICE](#) is using innovative mobile technology to lock tickets to user accounts and beat the touts.
- Big UK music stars such as Adele and Ed Sheeran have partnered with sites such as [Twickets.co.uk](#), which prohibits the resale of tickets at a profit.

For more information please contact the DCMS press office on 0207 211 2210

[News story: Prime Minister Theresa May's New Year message for 2018](#)

2017 has been a year of progress for the United Kingdom.

In January, I set out our objectives for the Brexit negotiations, and in the months since we have pursued them with steady purpose.

In March we triggered Article 50, putting the decision of the British people into action.

In December we reached agreement on the first phase of negotiations with our EU partners.

Next year we will move on to the vital issues of trade and security, and I am determined that we will keep up our progress in 2018.

Because whichever way you voted in the referendum, most people just want the government to get on and deliver a good Brexit, and that's exactly what we are doing.

Making a success of Brexit is crucial, but it will not be the limit of our ambitions.

We also have to carry on making a difference here and now on the issues that matter to people's daily lives.

That means building an economy fit for the future and taking a balanced approach to government spending, so we get our debt falling but can also invest in the things that matter – our schools, our police and our precious NHS.

Our goal is simple: more good jobs in every part of the country, and more opportunities for young people to get on in life.

The first step to a better future is getting a place at a good school.

It's what every parent expects, and it's what every child deserves.

So we will build more good schools, keep a tight focus on standards and discipline, and give more help and support to our fantastic teachers.

We will build more homes, so housing becomes more affordable and more families can get on – and climb up – the housing ladder.

And we will protect and enhance our natural environment for the next generation.

2018 is a special year in the life of one of our most cherished institutions, as we will celebrate the 70th birthday of our National Health Service.

It is a year to rededicate ourselves to its founding ideal: that good healthcare should be available to everyone, regardless of income.

And it's a chance to celebrate the care and compassion of our wonderful NHS staff.

We will continue to invest in our NHS and ensure it can deliver a world-class service now and for generations to come.

As we mark the centenary of the end of the First World War, and remember the tremendous sacrifices of that conflict, the UK will remain a champion of peace and order around the world.

Together with our allies, we will continue the fight against all forms of extremism, and support our security services as they work every day to keep us safe.

When we host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April we'll work with our partners to tackle global problems like climate change and plastic waste in our oceans.

And as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first votes for women, let's vow to eliminate all prejudice and discrimination from our society.

Because in the United Kingdom in 2018, everyone deserves the chance to succeed and everyone has a right to be treated with respect.

That means safe workplaces, free from harassment.

And it also means a public sphere where debate is constructive and courteous, and where we treat each other with decency.

Of course any year brings its challenges – that is true for each of us personally, as much as for our country and the world.

But the real test is not whether challenges come; it's how you face them.

Whether you allow a task to overcome you, or tackle it head on with purpose and resolve.

I believe 2018 can be a year of renewed confidence and pride in our country.

A year in which we continue to make good progress towards a successful Brexit deal, an economy that's fit for the future, and a stronger and fairer society for everyone.

And whatever challenges we may face, I know we will overcome them by standing united as one proud union of nations and people.

I hope that 2018 is a great year for you and your family – and I wish everyone a very happy new year.