

Press release: Better mobile and Wi-Fi connectivity for rail passengers

- Proposals could allow everyone onboard to stream videos simultaneously
- Fibre optic cables and mobile masts could be rolled out alongside tracks to provide gigabit speeds to trains
- Ministers now looking at “future proofing” rail connectivity to help pave the way for a 5G rollout

The Government has fired the starting gun on an ambitious plan that could see the UK’s train passengers to benefit from a dramatic improvement in onboard mobile and Wi-Fi connections.

The rapid growth of mobile data requirements and the use of smartphones and tablets now means that consumers expect high quality, reliable connectivity everywhere. As part of its [5G strategy](#) the Government has committed to improving coverage where people live, work and travel – including on trains.

Minimum standards for mobile connectivity on new franchises already being introduced, but today’s proposals set out how, working with industry, connectivity for passengers on all mainline routes could be dramatically improved by 2025.

Each train could get speeds of around 1 Gigabit Per Second (Gbps). This would future proof the connectivity, and in practice could allow several hundred passengers to stream uninterrupted video content at the same time.

Minister for Digital Matt Hancock said:

We want people to be able to get connected where they live, work and travel. This means improving connections on Britain’s railways now, and making sure they are fit for the future. We’ve got a long way to travel but our destination is world-class signal for passengers. This will not only make journeys more enjoyable and productive, but will help improve the operation and safety of the railway and deliver economic benefits for the whole of the UK.

Bruce Williamson from Railfuture said:

Wi-fi has moved from being an optional extra to something essential for the 21st century rail passenger, so we welcome any improvements to capacity and coverage. It should become absolutely standard for all trains on the British railway network to have seamless connectivity, as it’s essential for attracting the smartphone connected generation to rail, as well as the business traveller working on the move. Very soon, trains without wi-fi will become unthinkable, and rail passengers will look forward to the day when

the phone doesn't cut out in tunnels.

Rail passenger connectivity is largely delivered through mobile phone networks operating from remote (non-trackside) masts, meaning coverage is patchy and in many places, non-existent. To deliver the improvements, upgraded trackside infrastructure could be required for reliable connectivity in areas of high passenger demand and in hard to reach areas such as tunnels. Delivering this will involve laying fibre along the tracks, mounting wireless devices on masts (and other trackside infrastructure) to transmit the signal to the train; and providing power supplies to these masts.

To help us understand some of the technical and practical deployment challenges of trackside infrastructure, work has already begun on a trial on the Trans Pennine route between Manchester and York, in partnership with Network Rail. This will ensure we know how best to make use of existing trackside infrastructure and utilise Network Rail assets, as well as testing suitable track-to-train radio systems to deliver services to passengers under real-life conditions. This pilot is part of the government's £31 billion National Productivity Investment Fund, which has already earmarked £1bn specifically for improving Britain's digital infrastructure, ensuring the UK is match-fit for the future.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

We are investing record levels delivering the biggest rail improvement plan since Victorian times to improve services for passengers – providing faster, better and more comfortable trains with extra seats.

Improved mobile connectivity will help passengers to keep up with work, connect with friends or even check the latest journey information online while on the move, as we continue to build and develop a railway fit for the twenty-first century.

A [call for evidence](#) has now been launched on the different ways the improvements could be delivered to support the Government's ambitions to have a digitally connected railway that meets customers' expectations and cements the UK's place as a world leader in 5G technology.

1. [Take part in the consultation](#)
2. Network Rail already owns trackside fibre along parts of the rail corridor. Where possible, it will make available access to trackside assets (e.g. fibre, underground ducts, masts and power) on an appropriate basis, to support commercial models.

3. The project could be delivered via:

- dedicated trackside infrastructure comprising base stations/masts, fibre to backhaul the signal from the masts to the core telecoms network, and access to power for these systems
- a radio system external to the train that links it to the trackside system. The radio system including spectrum must be capable of meeting growing passenger demand
- in-carriage systems that provide Wi-Fi and/or mobile network connectivity

Press release: British medical heroes deploying to combat deadly diphtheria outbreak in Bangladesh

NHS staff members of the UK Emergency Medical Team taking part in a training exercise, December 2016

More than 40 British doctors, nurses and firefighters from the UK's Emergency Medical Team (EMT) are making their way to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh to save thousands of lives at risk from a rapid and deadly outbreak of diphtheria.

This is the first ever deployment of Britain's EMT since it was certified by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2016 and will see more than a dozen medical heroes fly out shortly after Christmas on 28 December, followed by the rest in the days after.

The UK's latest response follows a formal request for assistance from the WHO and the Government of Bangladesh after more than 2000 suspected cases and 22 reported deaths from the airborne virus. This is expected to increase significantly over the Christmas period and there are currently not enough staff or beds to manage the outbreak.

Diphtheria is a fast spreading, extremely deadly infection, and there are a reported 160 new cases every day in Cox's Bazar which is home to more than 600,000 Rohingya people who have recently fled the violence and military persecution in Burma. It is especially dangerous for children who are particularly vulnerable. It causes extreme difficulty breathing, inflammation

of the heart which can lead to heart failure, problems with the nervous system and fatal paralysis.

People in the UK are routinely vaccinated against diphtheria; however, the overcrowded camps are a breeding ground for this fatal disease. DFID is already providing vaccines in response to the crisis.

The EMT will be deployed to Cox's Bazar for six weeks, where clinicians will work using existing health facilities. This will include 36 NHS medics, such as doctors, nurses and epidemiologists who will provide immediate specialist life-saving care to tackle the diphtheria outbreak, as well as around five logistics staff from UK fire and rescue services who will provide expert advice to create the right infrastructure for the EMT to start their urgent work.

The UK's support will strengthen the capacity of the Government of Bangladesh and NGOs to manage future outbreaks.

An advance team will travel to Cox's Bazar on 27 December to make logistical preparations. Following pre-deployment training, all remaining staff will be deployed from the 28 December, with the first wave leaving from Manchester Airport.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

This will be an absolutely critical deployment, in a race against time for men, women and children at risk of dying from one of the world's cruellest infections.

Our brave British medical heroes are the world leaders in saving lives, acting rapidly in crisis to avert a humanitarian catastrophe.

I have heard first-hand the harrowing stories of Rohingya families who have escaped persistent persecution, violence and tragedy. In the face of this new horror it is absolutely right that we step up to end their relentless suffering and stop them falling prey to a rampaging, preventable disease that could kill thousands.

Department of Health Minister Steve Brine said:

The UK has a proud tradition of supporting nations in need.

Today marks another proud moment in the history of the NHS as selfless clinical staff once again show their skill, commitment and passion for helping people around the world.

Notes for Editors:

1. The UK's Emergency Medical Team is a collaboration between DFID, the NHS, Public Health England, UK Med – a register of NHS volunteers ready to deploy to emergencies, Handicap International and the UK Fire and Rescue Service. This is the first deployment of the EMT since it was verified by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in December 2016. UK medical personnel have previously been deployed to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013 and the Nepal earthquake in 2015.
 2. The deployment will be funded from DFID's Bangladesh humanitarian budget – up to £650,000 has been earmarked for the EMT.
 3. Diphtheria is a bacterial infection. It most often causes infection of the upper respiratory tract. Diphtheria is most commonly spread from person to person through respiratory droplets (coughs and sneezes), or by direct contact with either respiratory secretions or infected skin lesions. Respiratory diphtheria usually occurs after an incubation period of 2-5 days. It causes life-threatening airway obstruction (suffocation) if untreated
 4. The first suspected case of diphtheria was reported on 10 November at an MSF clinic in Cox's Bazar. The outbreak was confirmed through laboratory testing on 04 December 2017. As of 23/12, 2,248 suspected cases of diphtheria and 22 deaths have been reported.
 5. In response to the diphtheria outbreak in Cox's Bazaar, existing clinical facilities are being converted and scaled up. This is currently being led by Médecins Sans Frontières MSF and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). However IOM and other international NGOs are unable to manage the complex care needs of these patients, which is why they require the support of UK staff.
 6. IOM will provide the medical facilities for the deployment. WHO will provide drugs. UK EMT will provide a specialised clinical team, clinical oversight, some key medical equipment not available in country, and accommodation and transport for staff.
 7. Following the request for international assistance by the World Health Organisation on 15 December, a UK EMT team travelled to Bangladesh to conduct an emergency assessment, and recommended the deployment of the EMT.
 8. Staff will be rotated out of Cox's Bazaar after three weeks, to ensure they remain fresh. Staff will have a diphtheria booster injection before deployment and will then be at minimal risk of contracting the disease.
 9. The International Development Secretary visited Cox's Bazar in November 2017, where she announced extra UK aid for the humanitarian crisis, providing urgently needed food now and ensuring more lives are not put at risk when international funding starts to run out in February 2018. This brings the UK's total humanitarian support to £59 million since 25 August 2017.
 10. Free-to-use video content is available to download [here](#).
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[Press release: UK welcomes important prisoner exchange in the conflict in eastern Ukraine](#)

The prisoner exchange between Ukraine and the Russian-backed separatist is an important development, and is a welcome step towards meeting the commitments all sides have made under the Minsk Agreements.

An FCO spokesperson said:

The UK welcomes the exchange of over 300 prisoners between Ukraine and the Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. The release of prisoners is a commitment which Ukraine, Russia and the Russian-backed separatists signed up to as part of the Minsk Agreements to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

We hope that all sides use this positive development to make progress on their remaining commitments under the Minsk Agreements, beginning with all sides adhering to the ceasefire; engaging cooperatively to reduce the humanitarian suffering of civilians on both sides of the line of contact; and Russia withdrawing its weapons and personnel from eastern Ukraine.

The UK is grateful to all those who mediated this agreement, including the Trilateral Contact Group, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Further information

Follow the Foreign Office on [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#).

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[Press release: Logging on to festive admin](#)

While over 7 million people tuned into the Queen's Speech on Christmas day,

figures show that thousands of people also logged on to DVLA's online services to stay on top of their admin.

From taxing cars to buying personalised registrations, people chose to log on to DVLA's online services on 25 December 2017.

So, as well as the 10 million turkeys eaten and the thousands of people who took part in a sea swim, on Christmas day this year...

Oliver Morley, Chief Executive of DVLA said:

Giving customers choice in how, where and when they use our services is at the heart of what we do. We are committed to creating digital services that meet the needs of our customers and clearly, these services are allowing people the opportunity to fit their admin into their lifestyle – 365 days a year.

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[Press release: Minister urges households to recycle as much as possible over Christmas](#)

Households across the country are being encouraged by the Minister for Local Government, Marcus Jones, to make it a record-breaking year for recycling over the Christmas period.

It's estimated that the UK recycled a staggering 289,000 tonnes of card packaging last Christmas. However, with the weight of paper and card not collected equating to nearly 2,000 blue whales, there's cause for everyone to double their recycling efforts this year.

From wrapping paper to Christmas cards, mince pie foil cases to Christmas trees, there's a host of items that can be easily recycled or disposed of in a responsible, eco-friendly way.

Local authorities across the UK are offering helpful tips, guidance and even some dedicated treecycling services to help residents recycle as much as they can over the Christmas period:

- Trafford Council has produced the ['naughty or nice'](#) list of items that can and can't be recycled.
- Cambridgeshire County Council has issued [12 top recycling tips](#) to help residents make it a great recycling Christmas!
- The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham offer residents a dedicated [Christmas tree collection service on certain days](#) and multiple drop-off points located across the borough for residents who want to 'treecycle.' The council estimate that it will recycle over 75 tonnes of festive firs over the holiday season.
- Swansea Council has released a downloadable [2018 recycling calendar](#) so that residents can start the year as they mean to go on – recycling as much as possible.
- Lancaster City Council has partnered with St. John's Hospice to boost treecycling and [raise money for charity](#); for a small donation, residents can pay to have their real Christmas trees collected from their doorsteps by hospice volunteers.

Minister for Local Government, Marcus Jones, said:

Local authorities across the country are offering great initiatives to help us recycle as much as we can over the Christmas period – including the Christmas tree!

I'm encouraging households to find out what schemes are running in their area so that they can maximise their recycling and treecycling this year!

Here are DCLG's top 5 recycling tips for the festive season this year:

Recycle that cardboard!

A lot of Christmas gifts will come in recyclable cardboard packing – especially large electronic items such as laptops, televisions and computer game consoles. It's estimated that we could make a cardboard motorway stretching from Leeds to Lapland and back – 111 times – with all the cardboard packaging we use at Christmas. Don't let it go to landfill!

Scrunch test your wrapping paper!

Did you know, paper or cards with glitter can't be recycled? The scrunch test is a helpful way to test whether your Christmas wrapping paper is recyclable.

If you literally scrunch the paper in your hand and it stays in a ball, it can be put into the recycling. Remember to remove ribbons, bows and other adornments before sticking it in the recycling.

Don't 'fidget' to treecycle!

Millions of trees brighten up homes and offices across the UK each Christmas. These can be recycled for composting and wood chipping. The chippings can then be used locally in parks or woodland areas.

Some councils will collect Christmas trees with normal garden waste, some will have designated collections and others will have special drop-off points. Visit your local authority's website for detailed guidance. Find out more about the [Forestry Commission's sustainable Christmas trees](#) too.

Don't bin the festive fairy lights!

Fairy lights and other electronic Christmas decorations may be classed as Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE). These items must not be sent to landfill but disposed of at designated sites such as household waste recycling centres. If in doubt, check with your local authority for guidance on disposing of those old fairy lights.

You can go 'Cold Turkey'!

Who doesn't love leftovers? Christmas dinner stays fresh for at least a few days after the big event and for months or more if you put it in the freezer.

You can freeze cooked turkey and use it to make a new meal; if you're sick of turkey and cranberry sandwiches, why not be creative and try making a turkey curry? Additional tips and advice can be found on the [Food Standards Agency's website](#).