

News story: Government invests £350 million improving local roads

A £345.3 million funding package to improve local roads and public transport across the country has been announced today (19 October 2017) by Transport Secretary Chris Grayling.

76 projects from across the country have been awarded funding totalling £244 million to bring key benefits to local road users – such as improving access to public transport sites, opening up more roads for cyclists, addressing key local traffic ‘pinch points’ and supporting the development of new housing. An additional £101.3 million will pay for 2 new major roads in Middlewich, Cheshire, and Worcester in the Midlands.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

This government is taking the big decisions for Britain’s future and investing a record £23 billion on our roads to increase capacity and improve journeys.

These schemes will provide much needed upgrades to essential local roads up and down the country, cutting congestion, improving safety and shortening journey times for drivers.

They will also help boost regional economic growth by unlocking jobs and supporting vital new housing development.

The funding covers a huge range of projects, including:

- the delivery of contactless payment options across Nottingham’s bus and tram network
- creating a new link for buses in Plymouth providing direct access to Derriford hospital
- improvements on the A66 in Darlington which will help unlock 2,600 houses and 4,300 jobs by improving travel connections

A major road improvement scheme in Worcester with £54.5 million government funding will complete a series of upgrades to the Worcester Southern Relief Road, including a new carriageway alongside the existing Carrington Bridge. This will provide much needed congestion relief for local Worcester residents and commuters, as well as boosting jobs and economic growth in areas like Great Malvern by transforming access to the M5 and accelerate the building of more than 5,000 homes.

Another £46.8 million funding in Middlewich will pay for the Eastern Bypass scheme which will cut congestion for residents and open up more land for employment, potentially creating up to 2,000 extra jobs in the area.

Funding for all these schemes is being provided from the National Productivity Investment Fund and the Large Local Majors fund. This is part of the government's record investment in road to help keep Britain moving and the economy growing.

National Productivity Investment Fund regional breakdown

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[Statement to Parliament: Road funding via the National Productivity Investment Fund and the Large Local Majors fund](#)

I am today (19 October 2017) setting out further details of significant investment for our roads, including announcing the next 2 major local road schemes and 76 winners from the recent competition for National Productivity Investment Funding on local roads. This funding from the Department for Transport totals £345.3 million.

This funding includes 2 new large local major road schemes receiving Programme Entry approval, at Carrington Bridge in Worcester and at Middlewich in East Cheshire. The scheme in Worcester will alleviate congestion on the A4440 Southern Relief Road and receive £54.5 million of funding towards a total cost of £62 million. The Middlewich Eastern Bypass will alleviate congestion in the town centre and facilitate the expansion of the Ma6nitude employment site. It will receive £46.8 million of funding towards a total cost of £56.9 million.

I am today announcing the winning 76 local projects which will receive funding of £244 million from the National Productivity Investment Fund,

during 2018/19 and 2019/20. The schemes will help to ease congestion, provide upgrades on important local routes, as well as facilitating the unlocking of economic and job creation opportunities. They will also support, in some areas, the potential delivery of new housing developments. [Further information on today's announcement is available on the Department for Transport's website](#). These projects are an essential part of ensuring we have a country which works for everyone.

The government announced the [Road Investment Strategy \(RIS\)](#) in December 2014, an ambitious plan to increase much needed road capacity, boost economic development and improve road safety. It seeks to address many years of under-investment in England's motorways and major trunk roads. Highways England have made good progress on delivery to date, completing 18 road schemes and starting work on 15 more.

Highways England has also undertaken longer-term planning work to ensure that the high level of road investment along key corridors of the network can be delivered in a way to minimise disruption and keep road users moving. These plans also help to mitigate delivery risks and achieve better value for money for the tax-payer. This planning work was referred to in recent ORR and NAO reports on the Road Investment Strategy. I confirm that government has agreed with Highways England's plans to optimise delivery of the RIS. This re-profiling and optimisation of delivery is consistent with Highways England's remit and does not involve any cancellation of schemes, so the regions of England can expect continued and similar levels of road investment.

Further details can be found on [Highways England's website](#) and press releases.

[News story: Jo Johnson calls for free speech to be protected on campus](#)

Universities Minister Jo Johnson has today (19 October) called on the new Office for Students (OfS) to champion free speech in UK universities, as part of a newly launched consultation.

The consultation has been launched primarily to help establish how the OfS, the new regulator for English higher education, will undertake its main functions – ensuring teaching standards continue to rise so all students receive a high-quality education

As part of the consultation the Universities Minister has asked the OfS to focus on ensuring institutions recognise the importance of freedom of speech and the role it plays in ensuring open debate. The aim is to ensure students are exposed to a wide range of issues and ideas in a safe environment without fear of censorship, rebuke or reprisal.

Earlier in the year the Government extended the statutory duty to secure free speech so that it will apply to all providers of higher education registered with the new Office for Students in the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA). The Office for Students will be able to hold providers to account to ensure that lawful freedom of speech is upheld by their staff and student unions and student societies.

Universities Minister Jo Johnson said:

Free speech is one of the foundations on which our higher education tradition is built. It goes to the heart of our democratic values and is a principle I know universities hold dear.

I know there is good practice out there, and am proud that some of our university leaders and academics have publicly defended free speech. But there are still examples of censorship where groups have sought to stifle those who do not agree with them.

This is why I want the OfS to work with universities to encourage a culture of openness and debate and ensure that those with different backgrounds or perspectives can flourish in a higher education environment.

The consultation is on the 'technical details' of how the OfS will operate. This includes looking at:

- Compulsory participation in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) for higher education providers with over 500 students;
- Publication and justification of high salaries for senior staff;
- Transparency on how students can transfer between courses and empowerment of students through clearer student contracts; and
- The outcome of the consultation will form part of the OfS' 'Regulatory Framework' which will come into force for the academic year 2019 / 20.

Chair of the Office for Students, Sir Michael Barber said:

This consultation document sets out a framework for a new era in higher education. The Office for Students will be a modern regulator which consistently puts the interests of students – short, medium and long-term – first. It sets out a bold agenda and highlights the importance from a student perspective of fair access, excellent teaching, progression into worthwhile jobs and value for money.

The success of our universities has never been more important to the future of our country. The proposals in this consultation document will enable our universities to contribute to the cultural and economic growth of cities, regions and the whole country and to continue to thrive on the global stage.

Ensuring freedom of speech and learning how to disagree with diverse opinions and differing views of the world is a fundamental aspect of learning at university. The OfS will promote it vigorously.

The OfS, which was established through the HERA, will be officially launched on 1 April 2018 and has been created to allow more choice for students and more competition in the interest of students.

It has been established as a single regulator to replace the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Office for fair Access (OFFA).

Ministers have appointed Sir Michael Barber as the Chair of the OfS and Nicola Dandridge as its Chief Executive.

Press release: Consultation launched on laws around antique firearms

The Home Office has today (Thursday 19 October) published [proposals to update the laws around antique firearms](#), following advice from the police and the Law Commission of a rise in criminal cases involving antique weapons.

A new consultation will consider enshrining in law a new definition of antique firearms, which will help ensure older firearms which still pose a danger to the public are licensed.

Minister for Policing and the Fire Service Nick Hurd said:

This country has some of the most robust gun laws anywhere in the world.

But we must not be complacent, which is why these laws are kept under review, and a rise in antique guns being used in crime requires action.

This consultation will bring clarity to the law so that older firearms that still pose a danger to the public are properly licensed to stop them falling into the hands of criminals.

The consultation follows recent convictions connected to the misuse of antiques weapons. In November 2015, 18 members of the 'Burger Bar Boys' gang in Birmingham received substantial sentences for a range of firearms offences. They had sourced antique firearms and arranged for ammunition to be specially made to fit the weapons. They had then sold the weapons to criminal

gangs for considerable profit.

In June 2017, Sultan Meer from London was sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment for firearm offences. A police investigation showed that Meer, who claimed to be a collector of antique firearms but was already prohibited from possessing a firearm, was obtaining antique guns and trying to acquire ammunition for them.

The consultation will consider which obsolete cartridges and propulsion systems will lead to a firearm being considered antique. It will also consider a change to the automatic cut-off date of manufacture after which all weapons must be licensed. Currently this date is 1939 but this could shift to 1900.

Statement to Parliament: High Speed Rail (Preparation) Act 2013, Annual Expenditure Report for 2016-17

The [High Speed Rail \(Preparation\) Act annual expenditure report](#) is published today under Section 2 of the High Speed Rail (Preparation) Act 2013.

The report covers the period from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017.

A copy of the report will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.