

Press release: First phase of Manchester's smart motorway opening this autumn

The £208 million Highways England scheme will provide more technology to help keep traffic flowing more smoothly and more capacity, meaning journeys will be more reliable.

The first sections to complete will be along a 5 mile stretch of the M62 near Rochdale and on a 2 mile stretch of the M60 near the Trafford Centre.

A similar smart motorway scheme on a stretch of the M62 in West Yorkshire, which was completed in 2013, has resulted in commuters saving around 30 minutes each week.

Jon Stokes, Senior Project Manager at Highways England, said:

We will be able to begin a phased opening of the new smart motorway scheme this autumn – benefiting the 180,000 drivers who use the route every day.

When the smart motorway is complete, drivers will be able to travel in an extra lane on the M62 and variable speed limits will keep traffic moving at a steady speed – tackling the stop/start conditions and tailbacks caused by sudden braking.

Nearly 600 people are currently working to complete the project and we will open each section along the route as soon as possible.

The scheme is Highways England's most complex smart motorway project, affecting the second busiest motorway in the country and covering 13 junctions – an average of one junction every 1.4 miles.

The full scheme stretches between junction 8 of the M60 near Sale and junction 20 of the M62 near Rochdale.

The phased opening over the next few months will see the removal of the temporary narrow lanes on the M62 starting in October, and between junctions 8 and 10 on the M60 later in the autumn.

The new technology will then be tested to ensure the 100 traffic sensors which have been installed along the 17-mile route are working effectively, before the new electronic variable speed limit signs are switched on from junctions 8 to 10 on the M60 and junctions 18 to 20 on the M62 by the end of the year.

The extra lanes on the M62 are also due to open in time for the Christmas

getaway – increasing capacity on the stretch of motorway between Greater Manchester and Yorkshire by a third.

To keep disruption as minimal as possible during the construction, Highways England has worked hard to keep all of the lanes open in each direction during the day. This has meant major construction work could only be carried out overnight, affecting the overall duration of the project.

Other issues such as needing to relocate unrecorded utility pipes and carrying out additional maintenance work has meant that part of the scheme will need to continue into 2018.

The temporary narrow lanes are due to be removed between junctions 15 and 18 on the M60 in early 2018, and from the final section of roadworks – on a 5 mile stretch of the M60 between junctions 10 and 15 – in spring 2018. The new variable speed limit signs are due to be switched on between junctions 10 and 18 by summer 2018.

When the smart motorway is complete, traffic sensors will automatically monitor vehicle numbers and adjust the speed limit accordingly. A total of 50 CCTV cameras will also provide 100% coverage of the route, and allow Highways England's traffic officers and the emergency services to respond quickly to incidents.

For more information, [go to the scheme website](#).

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[News story: First hole is cut in world's oldest nuclear store](#)

The world's oldest nuclear waste store has been cut open for the first time.

Experts at the Sellafield nuclear site have cut the hole in the Pile Fuel Cladding Silo, a locked vault which was never designed to be opened.

This is the first of six holes that will allow radioactive waste to be removed from one of the site's most hazardous buildings.

The silo was built in the 1950s when the site's purpose was to make material for nuclear weapons.

Safely decommissioning the building is one of the highest priorities for Sellafield Ltd and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, and will take them a step closer to reducing the UK's nuclear hazard.

[The most complicated 'hole in a wall' ever made](#)

Steven Carroll, Head of the Pile Fuel Cladding Silo, said:

I am incredibly proud of the work that our Sellafield Ltd and supply chain teams have achieved together, in preparing the silo for successful waste retrievals.

The level of challenge involved with this facility is unparalleled, considering the age of the building, the lack of historical information about the waste itself, the atmosphere inside the silo and its position on one of the most congested sites, anywhere in the world.

Despite this, the teams have carried out some world class engineering in difficult environments to get us closer to getting the waste out and into safer storage earlier than planned.

The work is being carried out by Sellafield Ltd, along with Bechtel Cavendish Nuclear Solutions and Babcock Marine Technology.

Preparations have been under way for a number of years, which involved practising the cutting operation at a full-scale replica test rig in Rosyth, Scotland.

The six holes are cut at the top of each of the facility's six compartments, allowing access to the waste within the silo's walls for the first time in 65 years.

Each section is cut away in a single piece and withdrawn into a containment bag. A containment door is then lowered over the aperture and closed.

The giant steel doors will provide a safe barrier between the waste inside the silo and the outside world. Work to remove the material will start in 2019.

To remove the waste, a crane will extend through the cut holes, a grabber will then drop down to scoop the waste up, lifting it out of the container and back through the hole.

It will then be dropped into a specially-designed metal box, for safe and secure storage in a modern facility.

Press release: Multi-million upgrade for A1 in Northumberland

Following a six-week consultation last year, 3 options were presented to residents and local stakeholders for plans to widen the A1 between Morpeth and Felton, and 1 option to widen the A1 between Alnwick and Ellingham.

Highways England is planning to upgrade the sections of single carriageway in Northumberland, creating a dual carriageway on the entire stretch of the route between Newcastle and Ellingham.

These improvements will provide additional capacity, and improve journey times and safety while supporting economic growth in the region.

A total of 587 responses were received and the majority of people (41%) preferred the green option for the Morpeth to Felton section and nearly half of respondents agreed with the orange option for the Alnwick to Ellingham section (49%). Today these options were unveiled as the ones Highways England is taking forward in its preferred route announcement (PRA) for the improvements.

Highways England project manager Nanette Hoyle said:

We recognise the importance of this route and are delighted to announce the 2 options we are taking forward are the ones which the majority of people wanted in last year's consultation.

Over the last few months we have worked hard to identify the best possible options by working through the feedback from the events, along with safety, economic and environmental analysis and we are excited to share our plans with local stakeholders, businesses and the community.

Work now continues, adding detail to the design for each of the dualling options and on planning how we will deliver them in a way that keeps traffic moving.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for taking part. There will be further opportunities to have your say as the schemes develop.

The green option between Morpeth and Felton includes building a new carriageway to the west of the existing road between Priest's Bridge and Burgham Park. This option will improve safety along the route and will also have benefits during construction in terms of worker safety and efficiency. The existing A1 will act as a local road once the scheme has been completed.

The orange route between Alnwick and Ellingham involves upgrading the existing road to dual carriageway, widening either the east or west of the current road depending on the local features that need to be considered. This option also includes improvements at the South Charlton junction.

Further work to refine the ideas will now take place and a further consultation with more design details included will take place next year. Construction work on the £290 million scheme could start 2019/2020.

You can view the preferred route announcement and all other reports on the [consultation page](#).

Money for widening the A1 is being provided as part of the Government's £15 billion Road Investment Strategy (RIS), and will help boost the Northern Powerhouse agenda of improving transport connectivity and reliability to help the economy of the North.

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[Speech: Exchequer Secretary's speech at the Offshore Europe Conference](#)

It's great to join you all in the Granite city for my first Offshore Europe conference – and many thanks to SPE for inviting me along here today.

Our thoughts are inevitably with the people of Houston, Aberdeen's sister city at this time.

The links between the two cities and their people have been forged through this industry.

So I know I speak for everyone here in wishing them strength in the days and weeks ahead.

For now, let's return to the focus of this conference, which is to look to the future of this industry.

And what I want to do is contribute to those discussions and shed some light

on the government's perspective on an industry of such importance to the UK's economy.

Challenges

Our starting point, then, is one of real optimism.

Undoubtedly, this has been a challenging time for the industry – we all recognise that.

And that's not just been our experience here in the UK – though we of course have our own challenges with such a mature basin.

But these have been challenging times the world over for the oil and gas industry, its workers and their families.

Here in the UK though, we've responded strongly.

The government has taken unprecedented measures to back the UK's industry – with over £2 billion of support in the last couple of years – boosted further by an already competitive tax and business environment.

We've also been pleased to see the industry itself responding so effectively to difficult conditions.

The progress you've achieved in terms of improving efficiency and competitiveness has been impressive as we've seen operating costs come tumbling down in this time.

Over the last couple of years, the average cost for a barrel has almost halved – from around \$30 to \$15.

Those are productivity gains I'd like to see all our industries making in Britain!

Confidence

What we've seen more recently, therefore, has been encouraging signs of growing confidence.

We started the year with asset and corporate deals worth almost \$4 billion.

And high profile deals investing in the UK Continental Shelf have continued to be announced since then.

But as confidence returns, there is still no room for complacency – in industry, or indeed in government.

Commitment

That's why I've come here today to confirm – once again – our commitment to this sector.

The principles we set out for the UK's oil and gas fiscal regime – in our paper [Driving Investment](#) – they are principles that remain firmly in place.

Because we fully understand the importance of certainty and predictability in the taxes you pay. You can expect a competitive and stable environment in which to plan your investments.

And, as we promised in the [Spring Budget](#), we are investigating whether we can make our tax system better to encourage investment in our older oil and gas assets. I am talking about transferable tax history here.

We will be reporting back in a few months' time at the Autumn Budget.

But it is worth pausing on the age of our basin in the UK, because that clearly brings challenges, as well as opportunities.

There is, of course, still a lot of life left in the UK Continental Shelf.

With up to 20 billion barrels still to be recovered, we still need to get new investment coming in.

Decommissioning

But we must also recognise that the UK is a mature basin, and decommissioning will feature much more heavily in its future.

We've already seen around 10% of North Sea facilities decommissioned.

Over the next decade we're set to see another 100 offshore platforms fully or partially removed, and 1,800 wells plugged.

And such a clean up mission will come at some cost.

Earlier this year, the Oil and Gas Authority produced a new estimate of how much it might be in total – around £60 billion between now and the 2050s.

Bringing the Costs Down

That amount won't all need to be found by the industry – we estimate about £24 billion will be met by the Exchequer through 'decommissioning tax relief'.

So we have a shared goal in making sure those costs fall further!

The Oil and Gas Authority has set an ambitious target to bring the total cost down to less than £39 billion.

That will call for big changes to the way we do things – with better skills and more innovation and technological advances.

But we've already seen what the industry can do in making big efficiency gains.

And we're also seeing our top academic and training centres rallying to meet

this challenge.

Over the last half a century, they've been instrumental in training generation after generation of skilled experts for the industry, and working hand in hand with the sector to research tomorrow's technologies.

Now we're seeing them lead the way in decommissioning – with Aberdeen's new Oil and Gas Technology Centre teaming up with Aberdeen University and Robert Gordon University to set up a dedicated Decommissioning Solution Centre.

This multimillion pound venture will bring together academic researchers with industry and business experts to build new expertise, research new technologies and support a world-class supply chain that can help meet the global demand for decommissioning.

Window of opportunity

This joint effort between industry and academia is so important.

Right now we have a huge window of opportunity to become pioneers in decommissioning.

We were the first to try new technologies and methods to overcome the inhospitable waters of the North Sea, so many decades ago.

Now, as the North Sea becomes the first major production basin in the world to reach maturity and start large scale decommissioning, we have the chance to once again make ourselves the go-to global experts.

That means thousands of highly-skilled job opportunities, it means export opportunities, and it means British businesses taking their place in a worldwide, world-class supply chain.

The North Sea decommissioning industry is already worth £2 billion a year – I hope we'll start to see that grow rapidly and I know that ideas about how we do that and make our mark on the global stage will be a big part of this conference.

Conclusion

So thank you all for listening – and if there are two things I hope you take away from what I've said today, it's first that the government remains fully committed in its support of the UK's oil and gas industry.

But second, that we're excited about the opportunities for its future.

I wish you all a good conference.

News story: £8,989.70 fine imposed for fisheries offences

On 29 August 2017 the Plymouth Magistrates' Court sentenced Mr Robert Manning a self-employed fish merchant in a prosecution brought by the MMO.

The court heard how Mr Manning, a registered buyer of first sale fish had failed to submit sales notes to the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) within the 48 hour period required by EU Regulations.

Investigations by MMO Officers revealed a total of 270 sales notes, detailing purchases that Mr Manning had made between 1 January 2014 and 30 June 2016 from four vessels were not provided to the MMO. The transactions amounted to a total of 57,562kg, of scallops valued at £127,934.60.

Mr Manning entered a guilty plea to the charge and after hearing mitigation on his behalf the court ordered him to pay a fine of £1,882, the costs of bringing the prosecution of £6,937.70 and a victim surcharge of £170. A spokesman for the MMO said:

"The requirement to submit sales notes within 48 hours enables the MMO to gain an accurate picture of fish stocks on which to base its fisheries management decisions. When (as in this case) sales notes are not submitted that picture becomes partial, distorted or inaccurate. This prosecution shows that the MMO will take the appropriate enforcement action to prevent such a situation occurring."