

Speech: £625,000 for England's Economic Heartland to help shape its future transport priorities

It's a pleasure to join you this afternoon, at the end of a packed day of discussion on the future for England's Economic Heartland.

And how apt it is that we are meeting in Silverstone.

It reminds me of something I've been repeatedly telling my friends and family ever since I became a transport minister.

That transport can be fun.

In seriousness, it's great to see so many people here from a broad range of organisations.

Local Authorities, Highways England, Network Rail, National Infrastructure Commission and so many businesses from the supply chain that supports it all.

All here, and all demonstrating a commitment to improving this region's transport.

Significance of England's Economic Heartland

It's entirely right that this region is getting the attention it deserves.

It contains some of the fastest growing cities in the UK; Oxford, Milton Keynes, Cambridge.

Over 175,000 businesses.

1.6 million jobs.

And three and a half million people.

It's a region of world-leading universities.

And I am delighted that this region is gaining a reputation as a centre of excellence for the science, technology and innovation of transport.

As part of the government's Intelligent Mobility Fund, Milton Keynes is trialling autonomous vehicles that will revolutionise travel.

Yet none of this success can be taken for granted.

Many of you will have seen the National Infrastructure Commission's interim report which came out in the autumn.

The report highlighted the housing and connectivity challenges your area faces.

This region has some of the most expensive housing of anywhere in the UK outside London – driven up by the university towns of Cambridge and Oxford.

Yet thanks to a legacy of underinvestment by successive governments, its transport connectivity leaves something to be desired.

Getting across the region is time consuming; it's often quicker to travel in and out of London than to travel between east and west.

For example, the distance from Aylesbury to Milton Keynes is 21 miles, but can take up to 2 and a half hours by train.

Cambridge to Luton are 41 miles apart but a train journey takes almost 2 hours.

Transport for growth

When transport isn't all it should be, there's an economic and social toll to pay.

Yes, effective transport is essential for prosperity

But transport isn't just about getting people from A to B.

Transport helps people get on.

It provides access to education and to jobs; it connects businesses with customers, patients to healthcare, friends to friends and family to family.

So I am glad that in the Autumn Statement we were able to announce that we would press ahead with plans for a new road expressway from Oxford to Cambridge via Bedford and Milton Keynes.

And we're also looking into making improvements to the A1 between the M25 and Peterborough.

We're working to include these projects and more in our next Road Investment Strategy, and you will continue to be included in that work.

We are investing in East to West Rail, and we anticipate that train services will be operational between 2022 to 2024.

Late last year, the Secretary of State asked Rob Brighouse, former chief executive of Chiltern Rail, to look at how the project could be delivered more quickly.

And in the Autumn Statement, the Chancellor provided £10m to continue the development of the central section between Bedford and Cambridge.

All this is a good start.

It means we've got 2 important ingredients for investment – long-term planning and money.

But there's a third ingredient that's just as vital.

And that's the right governance.

After all, the government can find the money and make plans but the plans need to be turned into concrete reality, and the money spent in the right way.

This is where organisations such as England's Economic Heartland can have such an important role to play.

By taking local knowledge of needs and opportunities, and thinking strategically.

About how money is best allocated, on what schemes, and in what order.

You know your economy better than anyone.

You know what's needed to drive growth.

Yet currently decision-making over strategic transport schemes, for example, is often centralised at a national level.

So over the year ahead, we want to work with you, to support you in making a real difference to the region.

We want England's Economic Heartland to shape its future.

We want to see the region speak with one voice.

To have a shared vision for trains and buses, taking into account what passengers want.

We want to see your plans for reducing road congestion, and speeding up links the region's airports.

And we want to see a vision that links this thinking on transport to thinking on housing and economic growth.

We're seeing the early evidence that when local areas come together to plan long-term infrastructure, they can deliver outputs greater than the sum of their parts.

I'm pleased too that you're giving consideration to becoming a sub-national transport body.

It might offer significant benefits to the region.

But by definition, it's not something that should be imposed, or decided on before the hard work of analysis has been done.

The region must put forward its proposal and make the case for the benefits.

The government door will be open, and to help you have asked for £625,000 match fund to get moving. I am happy to confirm that central government is willing to confirm that funding today.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, my message is this.

We know the transport infrastructure across the region isn't good enough for a region with such incredible potential.

Now we have the chance to put it right.

Not by sitting in London and telling you what to do.

But by giving you the chance to shape your own future.

So thank you for listening, and thank you, Martin Tett, the Strategic Alliance, and Highways England for organising a brilliant event.

And thank you for bringing everyone together.

[News story: Venturefest East Midlands: business growth and innovation support](#)

If you're an entrepreneur or innovator you could benefit from a networking event to help grow your business through smart use of technology.

[Venturefest East Midlands](#) will invite businesses and investors to come together next month to network and share expertise. The event – supported by Innovate UK – is being held on Wednesday 22 March 2017 at Derby Arena, Derby. Entry is free.

The event theme is smart innovation. The aim is to help businesses unlock opportunities to engage in innovation. There will be a focus on how businesses can use technology to improve their processes and become more cost efficient.

Attendees will range from those who want to get or provide finance, and win or contract for new business.

Key speakers include:

Delegates will be able to meet other local businesses and discover how

they've improved their business through innovation and design.

[News story: Unknown World War 1 soldiers graves rededicated](#)

A funeral service was held for three unknown soldiers who enlisted into The Lancashire Fusiliers, the New Zealand (NZ) Infantry and of an unknown regiment on Tuesday 7 March 2017 at Perth Cemetery (China Wall) near Ypres, Belgium.

The service, organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services was conducted by Reverend Chris Kellock, Chaplain 1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers.

The service was supported by The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and by staff from the New Zealand Embassy. In attendance were delegates from both British and New Zealand Defence, regimental representatives and local dignitaries.

Three sets of remains were discovered near Zonnebeke in December 2012 and accompanying military insignia indicated the casualties were World War 1 soldiers of The Lancashire Fusiliers and NZ Infantry; no identifying insignia accompanied the third soldier. Despite extensive research, the JCCC was unable to identify the casualties and they will be buried as 'Soldiers of the Great War known unto God'.

Beverley Simon, JCCC said:

We owe a huge debt to those who fought in the Great War and we at JCCC take immense pride in ensuring all those who died in the service of their country are laid to rest with the appropriate dignity, ceremony and respect.

Reverend Chris Kellock QCVS RACHD, Chaplain 1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers said:

It is always an immense privilege to be involved on such occasions as this. As the current Chaplain to the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers it is an honour to join with other Fusiliers, past and present, alongside our friends from New Zealand to ensure a fitting remembrance to those who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

The memory of these unknown soldiers, in particular the Lancashire Fusilier, is part of our history but more importantly provides the motivation for our young Fusiliers as they follow in the proud

traditions of wearing the hackle.

Headstones for the unknown soldiers have been provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), who will now care for their final resting place in perpetuity.

[News story: A generation to drive society forward](#)

During this year's National Apprenticeship Week, Highways England have committed to recruiting a further 90 apprentices and 46 graduates.

Current apprentices at Highways England (left to Right) Ben Matthews, Amelia Kirwan, Liam Burns and Johnny Bowen (Daniel Hambury/Stella Pictures)

We will recruit the posts over the next 7 months as we increase our capability and capacity to deliver £15 billion worth of improvements across the country. We will continue to recruit at a similar level for the next 3 years at least.

To find out more, sign up for e-mail alerts and apply for an apprenticeship [visit the apprenticeship web page](#).

San Johal, Human Resources Director at Highways England, says:

Our apprentices tell us they find their work varied, engaging, challenging and exciting.

This is a great time to join our team. By 2021, we will have delivered a £15 billion government investment in our motorways and major A-roads to keep drivers and businesses moving, boosting the country's economy.

To do this, we are investing in the next generation. As an apprentice, you are learning whilst you are earning. Our apprenticeships are available to everyone and are a real alternative to traditional routes like university. Visit our website and explore our apprenticeship opportunities to begin a fantastic career with us.

The Highways England apprenticeship scheme supports the government's goal to create 30,000 apprenticeships in road and rail by 2020.

Amelia Kirwan, apprentice project manager, said:

I'm over the moon to have got a Higher Level Apprenticeship within Highways England, they want you to do well within your role and look after their employees. I'd say being only 18 and having a pension plan already set up and running is pretty good going.

Roles at Highways England including Project Managers, IT, civil engineering, finance, HR, business admin and customer service are open for applications and continue throughout 2017. There are opportunities across the country, including Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol, Bedford and Guildford.

New recruits will be helping to play a part in modernising England's motorways and major A-roads by developing and delivering technically advanced projects. These include schemes like the A303 Stonehenge improvements and the Lower Thames Crossing.

Looking further ahead, we are developing strong relationships with schools and colleges as part of a wider 'early talent' recruitment plan, to encourage children to continue the study of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects. This will help them to become the engineers and construction professionals of tomorrow.

[News story: Crime news: April to June 2017 and July to December 2017 duty rotas](#)

New duty solicitor rotas are available covering the period from 1 April to 30 June 2017.

April rotas

You can now go online to view the latest duty solicitor rotas – see link below.

Revised members' lists on which the rotas are based have also been published.

If you have any feedback about these rotas or members' lists you should use the contact details below.

July rotas

An amendment notice is also available on the crime tender page about the second rota period, which will begin on 1 July and run until 31 December 2017.

Guidance has also been published on when you will be invited to submit a CRM12 for this rota, should you wish to make changes to your duty solicitors details for the July rota.

2017 standard crime contracts

A copy of the 2017 standard crime contract is available on gov.uk – see link below.

Further information

[Duty solicitors: rotas, information and guidance](#) – duty solicitor rotas covering 1 April to 30 June 2017 and revised members' lists

[Legal aid crime tender 2017](#) – process for amendments to the July rota process

[Standard Crime Contract 2017](#) – final version of 2017 standard crime contract

crm12@legalaid.gsi.gov.uk – for feedback or enquiries about rotas or members' lists