

Government Funding for Roads and Highways

I have received the enclosed letter from the Secretary of State for Transport. I am encouraging both Wokingham and West Berkshire Council to bid for funding to help improve our local roads:



From the Secretary of State
The Rt. Hon. Chris Grayling

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

22 July 2019

Dear Colleague

I am writing to announce that Government is launching a competition for local authorities to bid for £198m of funding for highways maintenance in 2019/20 and 2020/21, and for funding of £150m to ease congestion pinch points in 2021/22 and 2022/23. Both competitions are designed to improve local roads in England outside London.

I am sure you will welcome this funding announcement as this is significant for roads in your local areas, and I would encourage you to work with your local authority on identifying suitable opportunities for bids.

I know that the condition of our local roads and associated infrastructure is a major concern for constituents and this funding will help local authorities repair their roads, invest in keeping bridges open and safe, and make improvements that will ease congestion.

Further details of the funding are published on GOV.UK. Officials will be writing directly to local authorities with details of how they can apply for funding by the end of July 2019.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W.L. bat us by" with a flourish below it.

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT

The plight of the saver

In an era of ultra low interest rates some savers complain that they do not get a sufficient return on their savings. Anyone who wishes to keep their savings secure and not at risk of capital losses from price fluctuations of financial assets is left with a low income return on a deposit or a low yield on a secure bond with a specified later repayment date.

It is not true to say that all savers have suffered from the era of ultra low rates. Those savers who decided to run the risk of losing money have often done very well. Those who bought government bonds have seen them rise strongly over the last decade as rates fell and stayed down. Those who bought world shares have also seen good gains. Those who had property in the right places are sitting on capital gains on their property. Indeed, most savers own property, and many directly or indirectly own financial assets through their pension funds. This blog is not offering investment advice or commenting on what might happen next in markets but describing the past.

Japan has lived now with these ultra low rates for several decades. The big crash in Japan did far more damage to property values, share prices and banks there at the end of the 1980s than the western crash of 2007-9. It ushered in a long era of money creation and extra borrowing by the Japanese state. We can see in Japan what these distortions do if sustained. The state can make many investments at little cost, and may make investments that are highly marginal in more normal times. Some savers decide they need more savings because the return on safe investments is so low. The Japanese state has bought up around half of all the outstanding quoted state debt, and is also buying up substantial quantities of exchange traded funds that hold Japanese shares.

Japan's economy grows but slowly, though if you adjust the numbers for a falling population they look better. The high gross state debt at 250% of GSDP is far higher than anything in the west, but it is no great burden given the interest rates around zero and the state ownership of so much of that debt following Central Bank purchases. A policy of money creation which should have induced inflation has not done so, given the pressures against credit and inflation in the rest of the system.

Some will argue that giving states so much access to cheap capital will distort markets too much and lead to too many ill advised investments by governments. The alternative way through the current situation is a more concerted attempt to strengthen the banks and to encourage more private lending so there is more of a market test on new investment. The mood globally is once again to lower interest rates, with the Fed this week likely to cut rates. Australia has recently cut her rate from 1.5% down to 1%. Many EU government and Japanese government bonds now offer a negative interest rate, yet still people and institutions buy them.

Today the Conservative party elects a new leader



<https://johnredwoodsdiary.com/>

Today I expect Boris Johnson to be elected Leader of the Conservative party. Tomorrow he will take over as Prime Minister.

He will intensify so called No deal planning and get ready to implement his promise to leave the EU on 31 October.

The media is running the view that he will not be getting on planes to go to see EU leaders asking for a renegotiation. The Cameron/May style of European negotiation travelling as a supplicant to the capitals of Europe did not work for them or the UK. The UK should accept the EU often expressed view that they cannot re open the Withdrawal Agreement. The EU then has to understand the UK cannot sign the Withdrawal Agreement.

Once this has been understood it is then possible to discuss a potential free trade agreement and work on more improvements to trade arrangements for our departure. The EU Brexit officials would be welcome in London for positive talks on mutually advantageous trade arrangements . In the meantime WTO rules, a new lower UK tariff schedule and the WTO Facilitation of Trade Agreement will ensure trade continues.

Pay rises for valued public sector employees

I was pleased to see today that there has been a further relaxation in public sector pay restraints, to allow rises above inflation for various groups of employees.

- Teachers – the average classroom teacher will see a 2.75 per cent pay

increase, worth on average £1,000.

- Armed Forces – a soldier at Corporal level on average wages will see a 2.9 per cent raise worth £995, while the starting salary for an officer will rise by £769.
- NHS – Doctors and dentists will receive an increase of 2.5 per cent, with hospital doctors seeing an average £1,500 more to their salary. Nurses are seeing a pay increase of 6.5 per cent over three years, as agreed as part of a 3-year deal in 2018.
- Police – police constables will see a 2.5 per cent average pay increase, earning up to £978 more this year.
- Prison officers – prison officers will get at least a 2.2 per cent rise this year, with many receiving 3 per cent.

The size of the Royal Navy

In 1804 there were 572 fighting ships in the Royal Navy. The UK was engaged in a series of wars at the time which encouraged government to keep the force strong. In 1939 as war broke out the UK navy had 332 naval vessels. During the war there was a large expansion in the fleet, with 553 new ships added both to replace lost ships and to expand the size of the force. 58 new aircraft carriers were produced during the war years, for example.

Today in a period of relative peace there are just 67 fighting ships in the navy, including 18 small patrol boats with guns.