

# Transport Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 14 May 2020

Good afternoon and welcome to today's Downing Street press conference.

I'm pleased to be joined by Professor Jonathan Van-Tam.

## **Latest data**

Let me start by updating you on the latest information from the Government's COBR data file.

Through our monitoring and testing programme, as of today:

- 2,219,281 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including a new record of 126,064 tests carried out yesterday
- 233,151 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 3,446 cases since yesterday
- 11,041 people are in hospital with COVID-19, down 14% from a week ago, when 12,802 patients were hospitalised
- and sadly, of those tested positive for coronavirus, 33,614 have now died – that's an increase of 428 fatalities since yesterday.

This new figure includes deaths in all settings not just in hospitals.

Our deepest sympathies go out to the families and friends as the nation battles to defeat the disease.

## **Main content**

Today I'm going to set out how – whilst the country has been at a virtual standstill – this downtime has been used to fix and upgrade the nation's road and rail infrastructure, along with plans to help our economy bounce back.

But before I set out today's transport announcements, let me briefly remind you of the government's roadmap out of this crisis.

As you know, we have established a new COVID Alert System, with five levels – based primarily on the R value and the number of cases.

Throughout the lockdown, we have been at Level 4.

Thanks to the British people, we have brought the R down and we can now begin moving carefully to Level 3.

From this week we're at Step 1, meaning that:

- those who cannot work from home should now speak to their employer about going back to work

- you can now spend time outdoors and exercise as much as you like
- you can meet one person who's not part of your household outside, provided you stay 2 metres apart

Step 2 – from June 1, at the earliest, as long as it's safe, we aim to allow:

- primary schools to reopen for some pupils, in smaller class sizes
- non-essential retail to start to reopen
- cultural and sporting events to take place behind closed doors, without crowds

And then Step 3 – no earlier than July 4, and again, only if the data says it's safe, we aim to allow:

- more businesses to open, including those offering personal care, those in the leisure sector, together with places of worship

We can control this virus if we stay alert.

But what does staying alert actually mean?

Staying alert, for the vast majority of people still means staying at home as much as possible, and working from home if you can.

But it also means:

- limiting contact with other people
- keeping your distance if you go out
- washing your hands regularly
- wearing a face covering in enclosed spaces where it's difficult to be socially distant – for example on public transport
- and if you or anyone in your household has symptoms, you all need to self-isolate

If everyone stays alert and follows the rules, we can control coronavirus by keeping the R down and reducing the number of infections.

This is how we can continue to save lives, and livelihoods, as we begin as a nation to recover from coronavirus.

## **Transport context**

Today I want to update you on the measures we're taking to speed up our economic recovery while keeping people safe.

For 2 months, we've remained in lockdown, travelling as little as possible, and in doing so, the whole country has protected the NHS and helped reduce the number of COVID infections.

But as we begin making tentative steps towards restarting our economy and people in some sectors who can't work from home begin to return to their workplaces, it is clear that transport has a critical role to play.

Last Saturday, I explained why it's our civic duty to avoid public transport, if at all possible.

Because, even when we have 100% of services up and running, there may only be socially-distanced space available for 1 in 10 passengers.

Therefore, in order to help reduce crowding, we set out a [£2 billion programme to put cycling and walking](#) at the heart of transport, with £250 million emergency spending already underway.

Over the past week, we have followed this up by publishing 3 pieces of detailed guidance.

First, [for local authorities in England](#), explaining how they should prepare for significantly-increased numbers of cyclists and pedestrians.

Next, [for the transport sector](#), to ensure they provide safer services for those travelling, and safer workplaces for their staff.

And third, and most importantly, [for passengers](#).

We're asking the public to help ensure that the transport system does not become significantly overwhelmed by returning commuters.

The guidance makes clear, that if you can't walk or cycle but you do have access to a car, please use it, rather than travelling by bus, train or tram....

Especially where that public transport is liable to be overcrowded.

And, for those people who absolutely need to use public transport...

It also explains how you can best protect yourself and those around you.

## **Transport upgrades during lockdown**

In the coming weeks, as we carefully and cautiously restart sectors of our economy, and people begin to travel once again...

They should notice that, whilst the country has been in down-time...

...with the roads and railways quiet...

We've been busy...

Getting on with essential work...

Fixing the nation's infrastructure...

So we can recover faster when the time comes.

This upgrade programme...

...the kind of work that – at any other time – would cause inevitable

disruption and service delays, whilst costing the taxpayer more...

...has instead been carried out in previously unimaginable circumstances of a largely unused transport network.

For example, we completed 419 separate Network Rail projects over Easter, with a further 1,000 upgrades being carried out throughout the May bank holidays.

Meanwhile, Highways England has been busy accelerating maintenance projects on the nation's roads.

Last week, for example, we opened the vital A14 upgrade 7 months ahead of schedule.

This is a route normally used by 85,000 drivers daily, which will dramatically improve access to the UK's largest container port at Felixstowe and permanently boost the distribution of goods around the UK.

As Northern Powerhouse minister – I can report that – in the North, we've delivered £96 million of rail infrastructure improvements during April.

And throughout the country, we've accelerated maintenance projects on road and rail...

Whilst always sticking to PHE safety guidelines....

So that altogether, Highways England has delivered over £200 million of upgrades, and Network Rail £550 million worth, during April alone.

I'd like to thank the army of transport and construction workers who have been grafting very hard throughout the lockdown.

## **Building future infrastructure**

But to make sure that Britain is ready to bounce-back from coronavirus...

Today I can announce nearly £2 billion to upgrade our roads and railways, to put our transport infrastructure in the best possible shape and to get our economy growing once again.

This package includes £1.7 billion for local roads – making journeys smoother and safer for drivers, hauliers, cyclists, motorcyclists, pedestrians and others...

By filling millions of dangerous potholes, we will make our roads safer – and encourage more people to cycle, or even take part in the upcoming e-scooter trials...

Helping more people play a part in relieving pressure on public transport.

This investment will also help fix damage caused by winter flooding, repair roads and bridges, and fund numerous road improvement schemes.

As more people become mobile again, we'll be building a network of rapid charging stations for electric cars...

Including a big expansion of rapid-charging facilities at motorway service stations...

Helping the country to lock-in the dramatic air-quality improvements we've experienced during the coronavirus lockdown.

## **A better future**

Amid all the sad news and tragedy of loved ones we've lost, we've somehow managed to do things in weeks that would normally take years...

Building new hospitals...

Moving public services online...

Making instant reforms and fast-tracking new laws...

Extraordinary changes in the way that employers and employees work...

Effectively taking large swathes of the economy online almost overnight...

Now we want to keep this momentum going.

If building a new hospital takes 2 weeks, why should building a new road still take as long as 20 years?

If GP surgeries can quickly move online, why are most rail passengers still travelling on cardboard tickets?

We must exploit our newfound capacity to respond at pace and apply it to rapidly improving our infrastructure.

And we must examine why it is that bureaucratic bindweed makes British infrastructure some of the costliest and slowest in Europe to build.

Because whilst many will continue to work from home even after this immediate crisis...

...both the long-term transport trend and the pressing need to level-up communities across the country, dictate that infrastructure will be even more important in stimulating our recovery and supporting new jobs.

So by combining fast home-internet access, with vastly upgraded transport connections, we can help revive many of our small and medium-sized towns which over decades have been left behind.

This has been a devastating start to the year, not just for Britain, but for the world.

And we are only at Phase 1 of the recovery plan.

But we all know that it is our reaction to adversity that will ultimately define how we recover.

We must harness our approach to tackling the pandemic...

And apply it to rebuilding our own infrastructure.

With the same swift action, innovation, and collective determination that has characterised the past few months....

And in doing so, we can emerge stronger.