

Transport Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 4 June 2020

Good afternoon.

And welcome to today's Downing Street press conference.

I'm joined today by Sir Peter Hendy, Chair of Network Rail. Peter was Commissioner of transport for the London Olympics and the person who has helped oversee the restart of our transport system.

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

First slide please...

This slide shows data on the use of different types of transport.

These graphs show significant falls in the use public transport – rail, buses, the tube in London – even before lockdown was introduced on 23 March. This is welcome, it shows the public have responded positively to our requests to avoid public transport wherever possible.

The use of motor vehicles fell substantially initially and has since risen steadily, though not back to the levels seen in mid-March. Again, this is what we would expect as we have introduced some easements to the lockdown and encouraged people to return to work.

One form of transport which has seen a significant increase is cycling – it is great to see people switching to a clean, green mode of transport with significant public health benefits.

Second slide please...

This slide shows tests and cases.

The number of tests carried out or posted out in the UK has risen past 5 million for the first time, to 5,005,565. This includes a record 220,057 tests carried out or posted out yesterday.

281,661 people have tested positive, an increase of 1,805 cases since yesterday. The graph shows a steadily falling number of identified cases on a 7-day rolling average, despite the increase in testing.

Third slide please...

This slide shows the latest data from hospitals.

505 people were admitted to hospital with coronavirus in England on 2 June, up marginally from 475 a week ago, but down from the peak of 3,121 on 2

April.

604 coronavirus patients are in mechanical ventilation beds in the UK, down from 783 a week ago, and down from a peak of 3,301 on 12 April.

Fourth slide please...

This slide shows what is happening in hospitals across the country.

There are now 7,312 people in hospital with coronavirus in the UK, down 15% from 8,558 a week ago and down from a peak of 20,699 on 12 April.

As the graphs show, while there is some variation, most nations and regions of the UK are broadly following a similar pattern.

Last slide please...

This slide shows the daily figures for those who have sadly lost their lives after testing positive for coronavirus.

Across all settings, the total number of deaths now stands at 39,904. That's an increase of 176 fatalities since yesterday.

When measured by a 7-day rolling average, the daily number of deaths currently stands at 241, down from a peak of 943 on 14 April.

These figures are a reminder that COVID-19 still represents a very real threat...

That the fight still goes on to defeat it...

And that there are tragically still too many people across the country who are losing loved ones.

Our thoughts are with them all.

Transport leading green recovery

As we've made clear in recent weeks, our road to recovery must be carefully and cautiously managed.

Most importantly, we must avoid a second infection spike.

This careful, deliberate approach has been central to the restart of public transport.

In advance of previous easing of the total lockdown, we ensured transport availability was increased to allow for adequate social distancing.

In addition, we also announced measures to help people choose other forms of transport.

For example, with a record [£2 billion investment in cycling and walking...](#)

As well as the acceleration of e-scooter trials, brought forward to the end of this month.

Meticulous planning – alongside the considerable effort of passengers avoiding public transport – has worked well so far.

There has been an absence of crowding, even as passenger numbers have ticked up... partly thanks to the work of Sir Peter.

But these challenges are about to increase.

We expect – conditions permitting – that the next easing of restrictions will occur on Monday 15th June.

Non-essential shops will re-open and some children will return to secondary school, if it is safe to do so. That means there will be more pressure on our public transport.

To help meet that demand, we're ramping up services on buses, trains and trams; with substantial government funding.

But still we need to do more.

So today I want to highlight measures to help keep us all safer, and reduce the risks of the Coronavirus coming back.

There are three points I want to highlight.

Work from home if possible

First, let me reiterate – and this is important – if you can work from home, you should continue to do so.

If you cannot work from home, you should avoid public transport wherever possible.

And if you must use public transport, you should follow the guidance, including avoiding the rush hour.

Updated guidance – face coverings

Second, I can announce that, as of Monday 15th June, face coverings will become mandatory on public transport.

That doesn't mean surgical masks, which we must keep for clinical settings. It means the kind of face covering you can easily make at home.

There'll be exceptions to the rule for very young children, disabled people and those with breathing difficulties.

But broadly, as we come through this phase, we're doing what many other countries have asked transport users to do.

And as passenger numbers increase, and we expect this trend to continue, we need to ensure every precaution is taken, on buses, trains, aircraft and ferries.

With more people using transport, the evidence suggests that wearing a face covering offers some – albeit limited – protection against the spread of the virus.

A face covering helps protect our fellow passengers. It is something that we can each do to help each other.

And whilst it also remains true that measures like maintaining social distance and washing your hands remain most critical, we also know that, on public transport, keeping two-metres apart is not always possible, all of the time.

Indeed, the guidance explicitly recognises this fact.

So, when more people return to the network, from the 15th June onwards, they will be required to wear a face covering on our transport network.

We'll make these rules changes under the National Rail Conditions of Travel and the Public Service Vehicle Regulations for buses.

This will mean you can be refused travel if you don't comply and could be fined.

Alongside transport operators, this will be enforced by the British Transport Police, as necessary.

But I expect the vast majority of people won't need to be forced into this, because wearing a face-covering helps to protect others, and most people simply want to help defeat this disease.

Of course, frontline staff – those in contact with passengers, doing such an important job at this crucial time – will also need to wear face coverings.

In the coming days, the government will work with unions, who have been supportive for which I am grateful, transport operators and police to ensure they have the supplies they need to be safe and provide reassurance to the public.

These measures apply in England, and we are working with the devolved administrations ahead of implementation.

Active and alternatives to public transport

Third, to ease pressure on public transport, I want to update you on the measures we're taking to boost alternative ways to travel.

Now that vehicle showrooms are open again, there's a growing range of electric cars, mopeds, motorbikes on sale...

And as our economy gets moving, their popularity will continue to increase.

Later this month we'll be introducing the Fix Your Bike Voucher – worth 50 quid.

We'll have hundreds-of-thousands more bikes roadworthy as a result of this programme.

Then there's the Cycle To Work scheme which enables employees to buy a tax free bike – an effective saving of 25 – 39%.

And that scheme has been extended to cover e-bikes as well, meaning that cyclists can cover longer distances by getting assistance on those uphill stretches.

And this is a great time to start using them...

As we redesign our street landscape to cope with millions more cyclists and pedestrians in the months ahead.

The evidence is that commuters are already responding...

Despite fewer people travelling overall during this crisis, we've seen around a 100% increase in weekday cycling.

And at weekends, that increase has been up to around 200%, compared to pre-COVID-19 levels.

We want to use this recovery to permanently change the way we travel.

With huge levels of investment....

We're bringing forward green transport improvements that otherwise would have taken years, if not decades, to achieve.

In the short-term, whilst there's still a threat from the virus, they'll help millions of people avoid public transport journeys.

And in the longer term, they'll help transform our country into a lower carbon, cleaner and greener place to live.

Conclusion

Our history shows us how quickly we can adapt as a nation.

Just as we did nearly 200 years ago, when Britain invented the railway...

And just as we did in the 20th century, when we embraced the motor car...

And then in the 1950s, when we launched the first passenger jet airliner, coincidentally designed and built in my Hatfield constituency.

Each of these transport revolutions was triggered by a unique alignment of people and events.

Brilliant engineers and entrepreneurs.

Cutting-edge new technologies.

Supportive governments.

And the needs of citizens.

Combining to bring about important change.

And now we stand on the verge of a new transport revolution...

This time, not limited to one particular means of travel, but rather to all forms of transport...

A green transport revolution...

Which will help us rebuild a stronger, more prosperous Britain, as well as a cleaner and healthier one.