

Transport Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 9 May 2020

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

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

Latest data

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

I can report that through the government's monitoring and testing programme, as of today...

- 1, 728,443 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 96, 878 tests yesterday
- 215,260 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 3,896 cases since yesterday
- 11,809 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus in the UK, down from 12,284 yesterday

And tragically, of those hospitalised with the virus, 31,587 have now died. That's an increase of 346 fatalities since yesterday.

These deaths are devastating for the families and friends of victims, who are in our thoughts and prayers are with all of them every day.

But they also strengthen our resolve to fight this pandemic with all the resources we can muster in the weeks ahead...

Planning for restart/opportunity for lasting change

Tomorrow, the Prime Minister will set out a roadmap for the next phase in our strategy to tackle coronavirus.

In support of this, I am setting out today an ambitious programme to help prepare our transport network for the critical role it will play as we emerge from this crisis.

Importantly, it is true to say that moving beyond COVID will be a gradual process... not a single-leap to freedom.

When we do emerge, the world will seem quite different, at least for a while.

The need to maintain social distancing means that our public transport system cannot go back to where it left off.

Here is a very stark fact...

Even with public transport reverting to full service – once you take into account the 2 metre social distancing rule – there would only be effective capacity for one in ten passengers on many parts of the network.

Just a tenth of the old capacity.

So, getting Britain moving again, while not overcrowding our transport network, is going to require many of us to think carefully about how and when we travel.

Everyone involved

We have accomplished so much over the past 7 weeks of lockdown.

The whole country has been responsible for reducing the COVID reproduction or 'R' rate...

Millions of households across the UK have changed their behaviour for the greater good.

Getting Britain moving again, whilst not overcrowding our transport network, represents another enormous logistical challenge.

Yet this is a problem which presents a health opportunity too... an opportunity to make lasting changes that could not only make us fitter, but also better-off – both mentally and physically – in the long run.

Active travel

During the crisis, millions of people have discovered the benefits of active travel.

By cycling or walking, we've been able to enjoy this remarkably warm spring whilst sticking to the guidelines.

In some places, there's been a 70% rise in the number of people on bikes whether it's for exercise, or necessary journeys, such as stocking up on food.

So, while it's still crucial that we stay at home, when the country does get back to work, we need those people to carry on cycling and walking, and to be joined by many more.

Otherwise, with public transport capacity severely restricted, more cars could be drawn to the road and our towns and cities could become gridlocked.

We also know that in this new world, pedestrians will need more space.

So today (9 May 2020) I am [announcing a £2 billion package to put cycling and walking at the heart of our transport policy](#).

To set out how we will deliver this, I will bring forward a national cycling plan for publication in early June, in line with the statutory Cycling and

Walking Investment Strategy to help double cycling and increase walking by 2025.

The first stage, worth £250 million, is a series of swift, emergency interventions to make cycling and walking safer.

Pop-up bike lanes. Wider pavements. Cycle and bus-only streets. All examples of what people will start to see more of.

Accompanying the new money, we are today publishing fast-tracked statutory guidance, effective immediately, requiring councils in England to cater for significantly-increased numbers of cyclists and pedestrians, and making it easier for them to create safer streets.

For employees who want to start cycling to their place of work, but who don't have a bike right now, the popular [Cycle to Work Scheme](#) already allows employees to save between 25% and 39% on the cost of a new bike or an electric bike.

There has been a huge increase in people using the scheme, and we will work with employers to increase uptake further.

And for those who may have an old bike in the shed, and want to get it back into a roadworthy condition, there will be a voucher scheme for bike repairs and maintenance.

Plans are also being developed to boost bike fixing facilities.

What's more, over the next few months, we will set out further measures to make a 'once in a generation' change to the way people travel in Britain.

These will include tough new standards for cycling infrastructure;

- a new national cycling champion to inspire us
- much closer links with the NHS, with GPs prescribing cycling to help us get fitter
- legal changes to protect vulnerable road users
- at least one "zero-emission city," with its centre restricted to bikes and electric vehicles
- and the creation of a long-term cycling programme and budget, just like we have for our roads

There's clear evidence, including from the Prime Minister's time as mayor of London, that making streets safe for walking and cycling is good for retailers, business and the economy.

Green travel / E-scooters / E-vehicles

And in making these changes, our national recovery can also become a green recovery.

One of the few positive benefits about the crisis is drastically better air quality and the health benefits that that brings.

More than 20,000 extra deaths a year in the UK are attributed to nitrogen dioxide emissions, which are highest in areas with most road traffic.

We want to try to preserve this as much as possible.

So today I'm also fast-tracking trials of e-scooters, bringing this programme, already underway, forward from next year, to next month....

And extending those trials from four local authorities to every region in the country that wants them....

... in a bid to get e-scooter rental schemes up-and-running in our cities as fast as possible....

Helping reduce car use on shorter journeys, and taking some pressure off buses, at this vital time.

These trials will help us assess their safety and benefits, together with their impact on public spaces.

The car industry has of course been very badly hit during this crisis, but April's new sales figures showed – for the first time – that the two biggest selling models were both electric vehicles.

So, to help keep this quiet, clean car revolution going, I can also announce today, £10 million of additional support for car-charging points on our streets.

The car will remain the mainstay for many families and, as well as backing electric infrastructure, we're going to accelerate the filling of pot-holes that plague so many road users.

Data

And just as new technology is changing the vehicles we use, so new digital technologies will help us make more informed transport choices in our battle against Covid.

At a time when transport demand could quickly overwhelm capacity if users have no access to real-time travel information...

... It is crucial that we take advantage of the UK's digital tech expertise.

With the right mobile apps, people can find out which parts of the transport network are overcrowded. And avoid them!

They can choose alternative travel options, to help maintain safe social distancing...

... or they can get information to help stagger their journeys – and lift the burden on public transport at peak times.

This week I chaired a roundtable with key players like Google, Microsoft, and

British firm, Citymapper, to develop both data and apps to help the public view crowding across the transport network, in real-time.

Overall package

This £2 billion announcement represents the most significant package of cycling, walking and green travel by any British government.

Clearly, it will never be possible to cycle, walk or e-scooter everywhere. Cars will remain an absolutely vital form of transport for many...

And so in the coming days...

as we look to the future...

... there will be further announcements about the huge investment we're making in road and rail networks – taking advantage of their low usership during this COVID crisis.

Finally, as we begin the process of preparing public transport to get Britain moving again, no-one should underestimate the sheer scale of the challenge ahead.

Even with every train, bus and tram fully restored to service – this will not be enough.

Social distancing measures mean that everyone who travels will need to contribute to meeting this capacity challenge.

Changing our behaviour is the single biggest thing that's beaten back this virus.

The welcome fall we've seen in deaths is not only the achievement of our doctors and nurses and careworkers – but of everyone in the country for following the stay at home guidance.

To re-iterate, nothing I have said today changes these basic rules.

But as we contemplate the future, we will have to carry on making changes, particularly after we leave our homes.

Preventing overcrowding – which could lead to a second spike and more deaths – will be the responsibility of each and every one of us.

So please, only travel when you need to.

Be considerate to others, and help us prioritise essential workers.

And let's all play our part in Britain moving safely again when that time comes.