

# Super swift gates which automatically close off lanes to be trialled on National Highways' network

The innovation, SwiftGate, can be fully deployed in around five minutes compared to the 25 minutes it takes road workers to put out the taper of cones directing often fast-moving traffic away from a live lane.

SwiftGate is being installed at the A3 Hindhead Tunnel in Surrey which requires regular closures for essential maintenance work. To enable maintenance to be carried out safely, workers cone off the entrances on the north and southbound carriageways.

During 2019 there were 14 vehicle incursions into these roadworks putting the lives of workers at risk.

Now National Highways has teamed up with Kier and Highway Care to trial the automated taper gates which will be installed on the north and southbound carriageways of the tunnel.

The gates clearly and safely filter traffic out of the traffic lane. Cones can then be put out beyond the taper to clearly mark out the closed-off lane.

As well as avoiding the need for workers to manually set out tapers, the arms are a strong visual deterrent which will help avoid incursions, particularly at night-time.

[Watch how the new SwiftGate works](#)

Head of Lean and Continuous Improvement Martin Bolt, who has been overseeing the innovation for National Highways, said:

Installing and removing a taper of cones in the face of traffic exposes our road workers to risk, particularly on elevated sections of road, bridges or tunnels where there may not be an embankment or place of safety.

If successful, SwiftGate is another step to zero live lane working for our workforce as we work towards our goal of ensuring nobody is harmed while working or travelling on our roads.

The automated tapers free up workers to do other jobs and can be put out in just 50 seconds meaning work can begin straight away with less disruption for road users. We look forward to seeing SwiftGate in action at Hindhead Tunnel.

One of the arms of SwiftGate currently being installed at the Hindhead Tunnel

Kier Highways Senior Project Manager Mark Sheppard said:

The SwiftGate project will give us a great opportunity to trial something that is completely new to the National Highways network, that will modernise the standard approach to road worker protection.

Traffic management installation can be a high-risk activity, so the opportunity to introduce an automatic solution that has the potential to remove the need to put our workforce in the 'firing-line', is a worthy project.

Highway Care Business Development Director Ben Duncker said:

We are very pleased, after many months of hard work from the project team, that we are able to commence the trial of this exciting, safety innovation working collaboratively with Kier and National Highways.

We are confident that the system will be a success in not only improving the safety of our traffic management operatives but also improving customer journeys through the faster and more efficient closing and reopening of lanes.

Safety through innovation is our priority and the ability to trial such new solutions with National Highways is a testament to their commitment to making the roads safer for all users.

Hindhead Tunnel is the longest under-land road tunnel in the UK at 1.2miles (1.83km)

SwiftGate follows the successful trials of an automated cone laying machine by National Highways, Highway Care and Kier. The Falcon ACLM vehicle puts out and retrieves cones, avoiding the need for a two-man team to lift and drop cones from the back of a moving vehicle.

A second automated cone laying machine being developed by King Highway Products through the National Highways' innovation fund is due to undergo further off-road testing shortly.

National Highways has a ring-fenced pot, the Innovation and Modernisation Fund, which is helping to maximise the opportunities offered by technologies such as automated vehicles.

It is part of National Highways' Digital Roads 2025 vision which will

fundamentally change how our roads are designed, built, operated and used. The strategy sets out how the growth of digital technology and the move to electric, connected and autonomous vehicles will create the roads of the future.

Visit the [Digital Roads website](#)

## **General enquiries**

Members of the public should contact the National Highways customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

## **Media enquiries**

Journalists should contact the National Highways press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

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# **HMRC gives Self Assessment taxpayers more time to ease COVID-19 pressures**

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is waiving late filing and late payment penalties for Self Assessment taxpayers for one month – giving them extra time, if they need it, to complete their 2020 to 2021 tax return and pay any tax due.

HMRC is encouraging taxpayers to file and pay on time if they can, as the department reveals that, of the 12.2 million taxpayers who need to submit their tax return by 31 January 2022, almost 6.5 million have already done so.

HMRC recognises the pressure faced this year by Self Assessment taxpayers and their agents. COVID-19 is affecting the capacity of some agents and taxpayers to meet their obligations in time for the 31 January deadline. The penalty waivers give taxpayers who need it more time to complete and file their return online and pay the tax due without worrying about receiving a penalty.

The deadline to file and pay remains 31 January 2022. The penalty waivers will mean that:

- anyone who cannot file their return by the 31 January deadline will not receive a late filing penalty if they file online by 28 February
- anyone who cannot pay their Self Assessment tax by the 31 January deadline will not receive a late payment penalty if they pay their tax in full, or set up a Time to Pay arrangement, by 1 April

Interest will be payable from 1 February, as usual, so it is still better to pay on time if possible.

Angela MacDonald, HMRC's Deputy Chief Executive and Second Permanent Secretary, said:

We know the pressures individuals and businesses are again facing this year, due to the impacts of COVID-19. Our decision to waive penalties for one month for Self Assessment taxpayers will give them extra time to meet their obligations without worrying about receiving a penalty.

Lucy Frazer, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, said:

We recognise that Omicron is putting people under pressure, so we are giving millions of people more breathing space to manage their tax affairs.

Waiving late filing and payment penalties will help ease financial burdens and protect livelihoods as we navigate the months ahead.

The existing Time to Pay service allows any individual or business who needs it the option to [spread their tax payments over time](#). Self Assessment taxpayers with up to £30,000 of tax debt can do this online once they have filed their return.

The 2020 to 2021 tax return covers earnings and payments during the pandemic. Taxpayers will need to declare [if they received any grants or payments from the COVID-19 support schemes](#) up to 5 April 2021 on their Self Assessment, as these are taxable, including:

- Self-Employment Income Support Scheme
- Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme
- other COVID-19 grants and support payments such as self-isolation payments, local authority grants and those for the Eat Out to Help Out scheme

The £500 one-off payment for working households receiving tax credits should not be reported in Self Assessment.

HMRC urges everyone to be alert if they are contacted out of the blue by someone asking for money or personal information. Taxpayers should always type in the full online address [www.gov.uk/hmrc](http://www.gov.uk/hmrc) to get the correct link for filing their Self Assessment return online securely and free of charge.

HMRC sees high numbers of fraudsters emailing, calling or texting people claiming to be from the department. If in doubt, HMRC advises not to reply directly to anything suspicious, but to contact them straight away and to [search GOV.UK for 'HMRC scams'](#).

New Year filing figures for 2020 to 2021 tax returns:

- 31 December 2021: 33,467 tax returns were filed. The peak time for filing was 11:00 to 11:59 when 3,835 returns were received
- 1 January 2022: 14,231 tax returns were filed. The peak time for filing was 15:00 to 15:59 when 1,407 returns were received

Normally, late filing penalties are applied to all returns due on but filed after the 31 January deadline. Those penalties are cancelled if the taxpayer has a reasonable excuse for filing late. However, this year, like last year, HMRC is not charging late filing penalties for a month to help taxpayers and agents who are unable to meet the deadline. Late filing penalties will not be charged for online tax returns received by 28 February.

The payment deadline for Self Assessment is 31 January and interest will be charged from 1 February on any amounts outstanding. Normally a 5% late payment penalty is charged on any unpaid tax that is still outstanding on 3 March. This year, like last year, HMRC is giving taxpayers more time to pay or set up a payment plan. Self Assessment taxpayers will not be charged the 5% late payment penalty if they pay their tax or set up a payment plan by midnight on 1 April. They can pay their tax bill or set up a Time to Pay arrangement online at GOV.UK.

Self Assessment timeline:

- 31 January – Self Assessment deadline (filing and payment)
- 1 February – interest accrues on any outstanding tax bills
- 28 February – last date to file any late online tax returns to avoid a late filing penalty
- 1 April – last date to pay any outstanding tax or make a Time to Pay arrangement, to avoid a late payment penalty
- 1 April – last date to set up a self-serve Time to Pay arrangement online

There is no change to the filing or payment deadline and other obligations are not affected. This means that:

- interest will be charged on late payment. The late payment interest rate is 2.75%
- a return received online in February will be treated as a return received late, with a valid reasonable excuse for the lateness. This means that:
  1. there will be an extended enquiry window
  2. for returns filed after 28 February the other late filing penalties (daily penalties from 3 months, 6 and 12 month penalties) will operate as usual
  3. a 5% late payment penalty will be charged if tax remains outstanding, and a payment plan has not been set up, by midnight on 1 April 2022. Further late payment penalties will be charged at the usual 6 and 12 month points (August 2022 and February 2023 respectively) on tax outstanding where a payment plan has not been set up

We will not charge late filing penalties for SA700s and SA970s received in

February. These returns can only be filed on paper.

For SA800s and SA900s we will not charge a late filing penalty if taxpayers file online by the end of February. The deadline for filing SA800s and SA900s on paper was 31 October. Taxpayers who file late on paper will be charged a late filing penalty in the normal way. They can appeal against this penalty if they have a reasonable excuse for filing their paper return late.

HMRC supports taxpayers who may need help with their tax liabilities and cannot pay in full. Once they have filed their 2020 to 2021 tax return, taxpayers can set up an online Time to Pay arrangement to spread Self Assessment bills of up to £30,000 over up to 12 monthly instalments.

Taxpayers can apply for self-serve Time to Pay via GOV.UK. Interest will be applied to any outstanding balance from 1 February 2022. Taxpayers with Self Assessment debts over £30,000, or who need longer than 12 months to pay, may still be able to set up a Time to Pay arrangement by calling the Self Assessment Payment Helpline on 0300 200 3822.

Since 5 April 2021, more than 30,000 taxpayers have used the self-serve Time to Pay service, which is done online with no need to call HMRC, to manage their Self Assessment liabilities, totalling around £75 million.

A full list of the payment methods taxpayers can use to [pay their Self Assessment tax bill](#) is available on GOV.UK.

Information on [which COVID-19 support payments need to be reported to HMRC](#) and any that do not is available on GOV.UK.

Taxpayers who are required to make Payments on Account, and know their bill is going to be lower than the previous tax year, for example due to loss of earnings because of COVID-19, can reduce their Payments on Account. Visit GOV.UK to [find out more about Payments on Account and how to reduce them](#).

Where tax credits customers are unable to report their final/actual income for the 2020 to 2021 tax year by 31 January 2022, they should report the figure as soon as possible after 31 January. In most cases HMRC will update the income used to calculate finalised entitlement to tax credits if the delay is due to the impact of COVID-19.

Self-employed taxpayers who need to claim certain contributory benefits soon after 31 January 2022, need to ensure their annual Class 2 National Insurance contributions (NICs) are paid on time. This is to make sure their claims are unaffected. Class 2 NICs are included in the 2020 to 2021 Balancing Payment that is due to be paid by 31 January 2022. Benefit entitlements may be affected if they:

- couldn't pay their Balancing Payment by 31 January 2022
- have entered into a Time to Pay arrangement to pay off the Balancing Payment and other Self Assessment tax liabilities through instalments

Affected taxpayers should contact HMRC on 0300 200 3822 for help as soon as possible.

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## Last call for claims to scheme compensating victims of Nazis for property confiscated in WWII

- The Enemy Property Claims Assessment Panel (EPCAP) has been assessing claims of confiscated property for decades
- over £25 million of compensation has been paid to individuals
- government to consult on a date to close the scheme

The UK government has made a final call for claims for compensation for those who had property confiscated during World War II.

For more than 20 years the Enemy Property Claims Assessment Panel (EPCAP) has been compensating individuals whose assets were confiscated by the UK government where they had suffered Nazi persecution. The Panel also oversees the Baltic States Scheme.

Today, the government is launching a consultation on a final date for closure of the schemes, which have provided over £25 million of compensation over the course of their operation.

To date, EPCAP has considered more than 1200 applications for compensation, but in recent years the numbers of claims submitted has fallen substantially. Other comparable compensation schemes across Europe concluded their operations many years ago.

Those who have received compensation under the scheme have included a non-Jewish doctor who risked his life to help Jewish colleagues and was forced to flee his home, the family of an art collector who perished in the Holocaust, while his collection was sold off for profit, and Jewish people who fled from France to South America.

The government will now consult on a final date for claims to be submitted, with a provisional date set for 9 September 2022, pending response to the consultation. Potential claimants will be able to lodge claims throughout the consultation period.

Business Minister Paul Scully said:

These schemes, universally recognised as among the most generous to operate worldwide, have offered hundreds of people rightful compensation for the horrors they faced during the Second World War, at the hands of Nazis and other totalitarian oppressors.

The Enemy Property Claims Assessment Panel have done amazing work

in the past 2 decades or so, but the scheme is now drawing to a natural conclusion. I would urge anyone who has yet to make their claim to do so now, to ensure everyone receives the compensation they are entitled to.

EPCAP Panel Chair Arthur Harverd said:

The EPCAP Scheme has been a vitally important UK government initiative, providing the families of those who suffered Nazi persecution with a sense that at long last justice has been done, the suffering endured by their forebears has been recognised and closure achieved.

Panel colleagues have worked tirelessly in evaluating the details of every claim and we are thankful for the support of successive ministers and officials at BEIS and the dedicated assistance of the members of the EPCAP Secretariat in support of the scheme.

The overwhelming majority of the original owners of the assets concerned have of course now died and very few new claims are being received. We therefore believe that this is an appropriate time to consult on closing the schemes, while allowing for new claims still to be received up to the date of actual closure.

During the period of the Second World War the UK government confiscated assets in British territories owned by residents of enemy countries, including the former Nazi Germany, Italy and Japan and countries occupied by them, under the Trading with the Enemy Act 1939.

There are 2 schemes administered by the Enemy Property Claims Assessment Panel:

- Enemy Property Payments Scheme: under this Scheme the criterion for eligibility for compensation is that either the person who was the owner of the UK asset at the time it was confiscated by the UK government or the claimant (who must prove his or her relationship to such owner) must have suffered Nazi persecution, either through discriminatory legislation or action in pursuance of de facto state policy taken by the relevant enemy state
- the Baltic States Scheme: this Scheme applies to any resident of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania who had deposited assets in the UK before the War. Nazi persecution is not essential for the return of original confiscated asset

Individuals who believe that they or a direct relation may have held or deposited assets in the UK that were then confiscated by the UK government are encouraged to make their claim to EPCAP. Both Schemes are administered by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

Any individuals or organisations who would like to respond to the



[consultation for a final date for the EPCAP scheme](#) can do so.

- For more information and to make a claim please refer to the EPCAP publicity notice or via the [GOV.UK page](#).

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## **Government unveils plans to restore 300,000 hectares of habitat across England**

The Government has unveiled the next stages of its plan to reward farmers and landowners for actions which benefit the environment, supporting sustainable food production alongside vital nature recovery and work towards net zero.

Two new environmental land management schemes will play an essential role in halting the decline in species by 2030, bringing up to 60% of England's agricultural soil under sustainable management by 2030, and restoring up to 300,000 hectares of wildlife habitat by 2042.

The Local Nature Recovery scheme will pay farmers for locally-targeted actions which make space for nature in the farmed landscape and countryside such as creating wildlife habitat, planting trees or restoring peat and wetland areas. The Landscape Recovery scheme will support more radical changes to land-use change and habitat restoration such as establishing new nature reserves, restoring floodplains, or creating woodland and wetlands.

Taken together with the previously announced [Sustainable Farming Incentive](#) which supports sustainable farming practices, they are designed to provide farmers and land owners with a broad range of voluntary options from which they can choose the best for their business. The reforms are the biggest changes to farming and land management in 50 years with more than 3,000 farmers already testing the new schemes.

Speaking at the Oxford Farming Conference today, Environment Secretary George Eustice will announce that applications will shortly open for the first wave of Landscape Recovery projects. Up to 15 projects will be selected in this first wave, focusing on two themes – recovering England's threatened native species and restoring England's rivers and streams.

These pilot projects alone are expected to deliver significant environmental benefits including:

- the creation of 10,000 hectares of restored wildlife habitat
- carbon savings between 25 to 50 kilotonnes per year – roughly equivalent to taking between 12,000 – 25,000 cars off the road
- improved status of around half (45-57%) of the most threatened species

in England, including the Eurasian curlew, sand lizard and water vole

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

We want to see profitable farming businesses producing nutritious food, underpinning a growing rural economy, where nature is recovering and people have better access to it.

Through our new schemes, we are going to work with farmers and land managers to halt the decline in species, reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, increase woodland, improve water and air quality and create more space for nature.

We are building these schemes together, and we are already working with over 3,000 farmers across the sector to test and trial our future approach. Farmers will be able to choose which scheme or combination of schemes works best for their business, and we will support them to do so.

Farming in England is moving away from the arbitrary land-based subsidies and top-down bureaucracy of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, towards schemes that recognise the work that farmers do as stewards of the natural environment. Defra is working in partnership with farmers to design the new schemes and support the choices that they make for their own holdings.

Local Nature Recovery is the improved and more ambitious successor to the Countryside Stewardship scheme in England. It will reward farmers taking action at a local level and working together to tackle issues such as water pollution by reducing run-off, mitigating flood risk by installing flood reservoirs, restoring peat or wetland areas, and adding trees and hedgerows to fields.

An early version of the Local Nature Recovery scheme will be trialled in 2023 with a full roll-out across the country from 2024.

Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, said:

Collectively, these schemes mark an historic shift in the way we manage our land, setting us on course toward the production of sustainable food at the same time as rising to the urgent task of halting and reversing the decline of Nature.

More than two thirds of England is farmed and these reforms pave the way for those who manage the land to produce healthy food alongside other vital benefits, such as carbon storage, clean

water, reduced flood risk, thriving wildlife and beautiful landscapes for everyone to enjoy.

At Natural England we look forward to working with the government to breathe life into England's Nature Recovery Network, including through the very exciting ambition to create large scale Landscape Recovery Areas.

By 2028, Government spending is expected to be evenly split across farm-level, locally tailored, and landscape-scale investment. All schemes will be designed to pay for public goods which go above and beyond regulatory baselines and the schemes won't pay for the same actions twice.

All the environmental schemes will be voluntary and it will be for farmers to decide what combination of actions is right for them. Defra is designing them to be accessible, supportive and with fair compensation to incentivise high levels of uptake. The scheme will be adjusted and expanded as the pilots continue. The aims of the schemes will also be kept under review as long-term, legally binding targets are developed under the Environment Act.

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## [Uniting to stop the proliferation of chemical weapons in Syria](#)

Thank you Madam President and I join others in welcoming you to the presidency and assuring you of our full support.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to colleagues from Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates and look forward to working with you.

I'd like to thank USG Nakamitsu for her briefing and the OPCW Director-General for his monthly report.

As we enter a new year, this meeting – I agree – is an opportunity to review the facts and progress on this long-running agenda item.

Prior to the start of the conflict in 2011, Syria had an extensive chemical weapons programme. In 2013, following several chemical weapons attacks, including the large scale attack in Ghouta in August of that year, the Security Council adopted resolution 2118 requiring Syria to cooperate fully with the OPCW on the expeditious destruction of its chemical weapons programme.

Yet despite international cooperation on the destruction of chemical weapons

stocks declared by Syria in 2013, it subsequently became clear that Syria had retained a chemical weapons capability in contravention of resolution 2118 and the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Further chemical weapons attacks took place. And thorough investigations by OPCW and joint UN-OPCW experts have confirmed that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons, including chlorine and sarin, on at least 8 occasions throughout the conflict. These regime attacks have killed and injured hundreds of innocent people. ISIL terrorists were found to have used them on 3 occasions.

Over 8 years since Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention, the OPCW Director-General's monthly reports – of which there are now almost 100 – confirm there remain 20 unresolved issues with Syria's initial declaration. These include the undeclared production and weaponisation of toxic chemicals and the unknown whereabouts of significant quantities of chemical warfare agents and munitions.

Over the past 12 months, Syria's failure to meet its obligations has continued. Syria has repeatedly refused to issue visas for OPCW personnel, made no serious effort to meet Technical Secretariat experts and shown a total disregard for decisions of the OPCW Executive Council and Conference of States Parties.

Over the last 8 years, accountability and effective Council action to uphold resolution 2118 has been blocked by the use and threat of the veto, and by a concerted disinformation campaign to malign and undermine the OPCW and its findings.

In 2022, let us put aside narrow political motivations, stop the proliferation of chemical weapons and unite behind the full implementation of resolution 2118, including the verified complete destruction of Syria's chemical weapons programme and holding accountable those responsible for their use. Only then will we be able to stop chemical weapons proliferation and send a message that their use is unacceptable.