

# Union connectivity review: final report

In October 2020, the Prime Minister asked Sir Peter Hendy to undertake a detailed review of how the quality and availability of transport infrastructure across the UK can support economic growth and quality of life.

Since then, Sir Peter and his panel have engaged with a multitude of industries, individuals and institutions across the UK, and have drawn on their evidence, experiences and views to develop a set of recommendations. Today (26 November 2021), the recommendations are being published.

The UK government is extremely grateful to Sir Peter for his leadership of the review and to all the members of his advisory panel for their expert input. It is a thorough analysis of the current state of transport infrastructure in the UK and presents ambitious solutions to improving connectivity.

The [report published today](#) includes recommendations that the government should:

- design and implement a strategic transport network for the whole of the UK, with funding commitments targeted at parts of the network that require it the most
- upgrade the West Coast Main Line north of Crewe to improve journey times and capacity and to enable HS2 to better serve connectivity between Scotland and England
- seek to work with the Scottish Government to conduct an assessment of the East Coast rail and road corridor to determine appropriate investments for better connectivity between Scotland and England
- offer funding to upgrade the key A75 link to improve freight and passenger connectivity between Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- seek to work with the Welsh Government to develop improvements to connectivity between North Wales and North West England on the A55, M53 and M56 roads and on the North Wales Coast Main Line, utilising HS2 and electrification to better serve North Wales, and for connectivity with Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland
- relieve congestion on the M4 South Wales and England corridor by upgrading and building new rail stations, supporting the Welsh Government's package of public transport improvements and easing capacity restrictions at the junction of the M4/ M5
- develop a package of measures to improve rail journey times and capacity between Cardiff and Birmingham and beyond
- improve connectivity to and from Northern Ireland through the development of a long-term pipeline of infrastructure investment, better rail connections to airports and by supporting the Northern Ireland Executive in their participation in the All-island Strategic Rail Review
- take measures to improve domestic aviation connectivity through revising subsidy rules, reducing tax and by intervening in the assignment of

slots at London airports

- secure better rail connectivity for freight across the UK with ports and freeports as they are established

Sir Peter was also asked to assess the technical engineering [feasibility of constructing a fixed transport link between Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#). The UK government would like to thank Professor Douglas Oakervee CBE and Professor Gordon Masterton OBE for their leadership of this work.

Sir Peter's work found that a bridge or a tunnel between Northern Ireland and Great Britain is feasible. But with today's technology and existing infrastructure, Sir Peter has concluded that the benefits would outweigh the costs. He is, therefore, recommending that further work on the fixed transport link should not progress beyond this feasibility study. We accept this recommendation – it is a visionary project whose time might come in future decades, but not now.

The government's levelling up vision can only be achieved if the transport system across the UK on which we all rely supports and drives economic growth, job creation and social cohesion.

The UK government wholly welcomes Sir Peter's report and invites the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive to work closely with us, in a spirit of collaboration and cooperation, to consider the review's recommendations and to agree how a new strategic transport network for the whole United Kingdom and the vital upgrades highlighted by Sir Peter can be taken forward to strengthen transport connectivity for the benefit of all parts of the UK.

As we build back better, the government is determined to do so in a way that levels up across the UK, bringing communities across the country even closer together. Wherever you live in the UK, a connected local and national transport network will bring you closer to all the social and economic opportunities available.

Sir Peter's review is a landmark study along that path to a better-connected future. The UK government thanks him and his team for their excellent work. We will reflect on his conclusions, discuss them with our colleagues across the UK and aim to publish a full response to the review in early 2022.

---

## [Free period product scheme for schools and colleges extended](#)

The Government has today extended its fully funded scheme providing tampons, pads, and menstrual cups and other environmentally-friendly products until the end of the academic year.

The programme, which launched in January 2020, aims to make sure girls can access period products when they are needed, reducing stigma and keeping young people attending school and college and engaged in education, when they might have otherwise missed out.

A study by PHS Group with 250 young people suggests 35% of girls aged 13-18 have taken time off school or college because of their period, with 11% of those claiming they missed school due to lack of affordability of period products.

The scheme helps young people make the most of every possible day in the classroom, particularly following the pandemic when most young people spent time learning from home rather than in class.

Will Quince, Minister for Children and Families, said:

I'm delighted that the incredibly important scheme providing free period products for schools and colleges across England is to continue running.

Nothing should get in the way of students spending every possible moment in class, and no girl should ever be ashamed of being on their period.

Any school or college that has not yet ordered through the scheme should do so at the first possible opportunity.

State funded organisations in England can order free period products for the remainder of the academic year, from supplier PHS Group.

Each school or college has a budget that will remain intact until the end of the calendar year, after which it will be renewed with a new spend cap in January 2022.

Gemma Abbott, Director of #FreePeriods, said:

Young people have already had so many hours away from the classroom – this scheme is an amazing opportunity for all schools and colleges to ensure that no young person has to miss out on their education for lack of access to period products.

We want to urge every school and college in England to place orders for free period supplies as soon as they can. We're glad to see the scheme has been extended to the end of the academic year – let's take the chance to show just how valuable it is, so we can secure its continuation well into the future.

Sharon Common, Head of Portland Academy, said:

Having access to free period products with no questions asked has made our female students feel more comfortable and confident, and as the products are visible around school, boys have also increased their understanding of menstruation.

Some of our autistic young ladies have sensory difficulties and find wearing sanitary protection a challenge which can lead to absence from school each month. Using school supplies means staff can work with students to work on improving this.

Having free stock also means parents and carers do not have to ration what they send in to school with their daughter which reduces impact on low-income families and increases personal hygiene.

---

## [New measures to reduce pupil absence](#)

As part of the Education Secretary's commitment to make school attendance his top priority, new expert attendance advisers with decades of first-hand experience are to begin work to reduce pupil absence.

They will work with local authorities and multi-academy trusts who have been identified as having potential to benefit from the support and who want to use the expertise of the advisers to help re-engage persistently absent pupils.

The Department has also identified schools with some of the greatest decreases in absence rates over a five-year period prior to the pandemic, and that have maintained their excellent approach. They will be sharing their approach with other schools in a variety of ways over the coming weeks and months, to help reduce high absence rates.

Schools Minister Robin Walker yesterday (Thursday 25 November) visited one of the schools with above average attendance rates, London Academy, to see their approach first-hand.

He used the visit as an opportunity to call on everyone who works with children, whether that be teachers and headteachers, social workers, youth workers or parents themselves, to help break down barriers to those children being in school.

As recovery from the impact of the pandemic continues, it has never been more important for children to have the maximum possible time with inspirational teachers in a classroom environment that is best for learning and helps them fulfil their potential.

Schools Minister Robin Walker said:

It has been fantastic to see how through a combination of data, proactivity and a focus on children's wellbeing, a school like the London Academy has driven up attendance and reduced persistent absence. Every lesson that we can prevent a child from missing is another building block to their life chances, development and wellbeing.

My department is channelling all its efforts to provide support and guidance to help schools, local authorities and multi-academy trusts take action to increase attendance, and I ask that everyone working with children does everything in their power to help break down any barriers to them attending school.

I recognise that covid is still with us and causing some unavoidable absence – but this is all the more reason that we must all take action to address every avoidable reason for a child not being in school.

The attendance advisors will draw on their expertise as former head teachers and local authority leaders, as well as best practice from across the sector, to support local authorities and school trusts with approaches tailored to their specific needs.

They might advise how data and partnership working can be improved across local areas to identify and support children at risk of persistent absence, or how local authorities can make sure all parts of their services from social workers to housing officers are focused on breaking down barriers to attendance.

Children are passionate about this issue too. Responding to the Children's Commissioner's Big Ask survey, children said they "like school" and they "realised how sitting in front of the computer is no proxy for being with a teacher".

The government is already taking action to address the range of potential barriers to good attendance that children may experience including:

- Making clear that the Pupil Premium and recovery funding, which aims to improve education outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, can be used by school leaders, who are best placed to assess their pupils' needs, to improve attendance, as well as other behaviour or social and emotional challenges.
- Investing in two new programmes to support children and young people most at risk of serious violence or gang exploitation to help them stay engaged with their education and out of harm. £45m is being provided for new SAFE (Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed) and alternative provision

(AP) taskforces, bringing together specialist support in schools and alternative provision settings in serious violence hotspots. The SAFE programme will also deliver targeted interventions to reduce truancy, improve behaviours, and reduce the risk of individuals failing to enter education, employment or training.

- Extending the role of Virtual School Heads – who work to raise educational standards for children in care – so there will be a local champion for children with a social worker in every local authority meaning more targeted support for these children to help improve how they engage with their education.
- Working with families who require early help through our Supporting Families programme, for example with attendance difficulties, but otherwise wouldn't meet the threshold for social care intervention.
- Investing £17 million towards improving mental health and wellbeing support, including £9.5m to offer senior mental health lead training to around a third of all state schools and colleges in 2021/22, helping them to implement effective holistic approaches to mental health and wellbeing. This is on top of £79 million to increase mental health provision, including more mental health support teams working with schools and colleges.

---

## [CMA secures improved commitments on Google's Privacy Sandbox](#)

It has been investigating Google's proposals since the start of the year due to concerns that, without the Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) involvement, Google's alternatives could be developed and implemented in ways that impede competition in digital advertising markets. This may cause advertising spending to become even more concentrated on Google, harming consumers who ultimately pay for the cost of advertising. It may also undermine the ability of online publishers such as newspapers to generate revenue and continue to produce valuable content in the future, reducing choice for consumers.

The CMA's intervention, and the improved commitments, are designed to ensure that Google's proposals can improve privacy without adversely affecting competition, which would be to the detriment of users.

In June 2021, the CMA consulted on initial commitments offered by Google, which provided the CMA with a key oversight role in the design and

development of its Privacy Sandbox proposals. Google announced that if the CMA accepted those commitments, Google would apply them globally.

The CMA heard from over 40 third parties who agreed with the CMA's competition concerns but suggested that the commitments should be strengthened in a number of areas. These included increasing Google's transparency and engagement with the industry, adding that certain functionality should not be removed before third-party cookies, improving the provisions on Google self-preferencing its advertising products and services and bolstering the monitoring of Google's compliance.

To address these points Google has now offered to:

- ensure that the CMA's role and the ongoing CMA process are mentioned in Google's key public announcements;
- instruct its staff not to make claims to customers which contradict the commitments;
- report regularly to the CMA on how Google has taken account of third party views;
- address concerns about Google removing functionality or information before the full Privacy Sandbox changes, including by delaying enforcement of its Privacy Budget proposal, and offering commitments around the introduction of measures to reduce access to IP addresses;
- clarify the internal limits on the data that Google can use;
- provide greater certainty to third parties developing alternative technologies;
- improve the provisions on reporting and compliance, including by appointing a CMA-approved monitoring trustee; and
- provide for a longer duration of 6 years from the date of any decision to accept Google's modified commitments.

The CMA's provisional view is that Google's revised offer addresses the CMA's competition concerns, so the CMA is now consulting on these modifications.

CMA Chief Executive Andrea Coscelli said:

We have always been clear that Google's efforts to protect user's privacy cannot come at the cost of reduced competition.

That's why we have worked with the Information Commissioner's Office, the CMA's international counterparts and parties across this sector throughout this process to secure an outcome that works for everyone.

We welcome Google's co-operation and are grateful to all the interested parties who engaged with us during the consultation.

If accepted, the commitments we have obtained from Google become legally binding, promoting competition in digital markets, helping to protect the ability of online publishers to raise money through advertising and safeguarding users' privacy.

The CMA will now consult on these new commitments until 5pm on 17 December 2021.

If the commitments are accepted, this would result in the closure of the CMA's investigation, and lead to the next phase of this oversight work for the CMA.

For more information on all possible investigation outcomes, see Chapter 10 of the [CMA's investigation procedures in Competition Act 1998 cases: CMA8](#).

1. More information is available on the case page for ['Investigation into Google's 'Privacy Sandbox' browser changes'](#).
2. This is further evidence of the collaborative partnership between the CMA and the ICO, and of the close relationship between the interests of competition and data protection. The ICO and CMA published a joint statement on the relationship between the aims of competition and data protection in May 2021. Within its notice published today, the CMA has set out how it intends to consult with the ICO on aspects of the proposals that relate to data protection. On 25 November 2021, [the ICO published an opinion](#) that refers to the CMA's investigation.
3. The CMA will establish a [Digital Markets Unit \(DMU\)](#) to oversee a new regulatory regime for the most powerful digital firms, promoting greater competition and innovation in these markets and protecting consumers and businesses from unfair practices. The Government is currently analysing responses to a consultation on the DMU's powers. While the role of monitoring the implementation of any commitments would fall to the CMA for their duration, in the medium term the establishment of the DMU could provide a framework for regulatory oversight and scrutiny.
4. As further detailed in the notice published by the CMA today, the CMA does not intend to publish the responses to the consultation with any commitments decision or further notice to provisionally accept any modified commitments, but the information contained in the responses may



be used or summarised on an anonymous basis in these documents.

5. On Monday 29 November 2021 and Tuesday 30 November 2021 the CMA will host the first dedicated two-day summit with the heads of the G7 competition authorities to discuss cooperation across digital markets.
6. For media enquiries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or [press@cma.gov.uk](mailto:press@cma.gov.uk).

---

## [Port equipment merger raises competition concerns](#)

Cargotec and Konecranes both offer a range of container handling equipment and services to port terminals and other industry customers worldwide.

Following a fast-track referral to a phase 2 investigation, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has provisionally found that the merger would lead to a significant reduction in competition in the supply of a range of container handling equipment products.

The CMA's in-depth investigation has analysed a wide range of evidence, including data on bidding for previous contracts and many of the merging businesses' internal documents that show how they assess competition in the sector. The CMA has also engaged with a wide range of customers, competitors and other industry players to inform its provisional findings.

The evidence gathered by the CMA consistently shows that Cargotec and Konecranes are both major suppliers of container handling equipment, competing closely for business in the UK, and that UK customers would have few remaining alternative suppliers after the merger. While Cargotec and Konecranes have suggested that there would be an increased competitive threat from Chinese suppliers in future, the independent inquiry group found that this would not be sufficient to prevent the significant loss of competition that the merger of two key established suppliers would bring about.

Martin Coleman, Chair of the CMA inquiry group, said:

Container handling equipment plays a key role in the smooth running of UK ports, moving millions of containers each year to make sure that goods arrive safely on our shelves and British businesses are able to supply their customers overseas.

This is the first phase 2 investigation that the CMA has conducted

in parallel with a review by the European Commission since we left the EU, and this has allowed us to focus specifically on how the merger affects people and businesses within the UK.

We are currently concerned that this merger could lead to a reduced quality of service or higher prices for port terminals and other customers of container handling equipment. Our competition concerns need to be addressed to ensure that these customers are not worse off as a result of the deal, and there is no negative impact on UK consumers and businesses.

The deal is being reviewed by a number of competition authorities. While each investigation is being carried out independently, the CMA has engaged closely with other agencies – and continues to do so – to help progress its investigation.

The CMA welcomes responses from interested parties to its provisional findings by 17 December 2021 and its notice of possible remedies, which sets out potential options for addressing its provisional concerns, by 10 December 2021. These will be considered ahead of the CMA issuing its final report, which is due by 1 April 2022.

For more information, [visit the Cargotec Corporation / Konecranes Plc Merger Inquiry case page](#).

1. For media enquiries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or [press@cma.gov.uk](mailto:press@cma.gov.uk).
2. The CMA provisionally found that the anticipated merger would lead to significant lessening of competition in the following areas: the supply of certain types of gantry cranes (rubber tyred gantry cranes, automated stacking cranes); mobile equipment (reach stackers, heavy-duty forklifts and empty container handlers); and straddle and shuttle carriers.