

Virtual reality stations and video-call assistance: government invests in new transport accessibility innovation

- tech start-ups awarded new funding to kickstart innovative projects that break down barriers faced by disabled passengers
- projects will improve communication between passengers and staff, as well as mapping out accessible routes

Pioneering technologies including virtual reality simulations of rail vehicles and stations and a journey planning app that includes video calling for assistance are among winners of government funding announced today (16 July 2021) to improve the travel experience for disabled passengers.

The technologies developed by the 5 [Accessibility Transport Research and Innovation Grant \(TRIG: Accessibility\) 2021 winners](#), announced today, will help break down barriers faced by disabled passengers as we build back fairer from coronavirus (COVID-19).

The TRIG: Accessibility programme, in partnership with [Connected Places Catapult \(CPC\)](#), is focused on knocking down the barriers that disabled people face when travelling, to help budding innovators and academics to propel their ideas to market more quickly.

Winning projects include a system that fully navigates the user from their front door to their destination, taking into account any special requirements, and allowing passengers to video call staff directly to provide support.

A highly realistic virtual reality simulation, immersing users in rail stations and carriages, has also received funding, to help improve staff understanding of the challenges faced by passengers and build the confidence of disabled passengers when travelling on the rail network.

Another project is focused on building a more reliable experience for airport passengers needing assistance, providing an app to improve communication with airport staff.

Chris Heaton-Harris Accessibility Minister said:

These 5 innovative projects will help make our transport network more open, stress-free and simple for disabled passengers, and I'm proud that we're investing in unique technology to improve accessibility across the UK.

We're committed to making transport accessible for all and this investment, along with the [Inclusive Transport Strategy](#), will build

a better, fairer network for the future.

Winning firms will receive almost £600,000 to launch these innovative projects and the trial period will be completed by the end of November 2021, with working prototypes being showcased to industry following this.

Nicola Yates OBE, CEO, Connected Places Catapult, said:

It is great to be working alongside the Department for Transport Accessibility Policy Team to deliver an expanded TRIG programme to the world of transport accessibility.

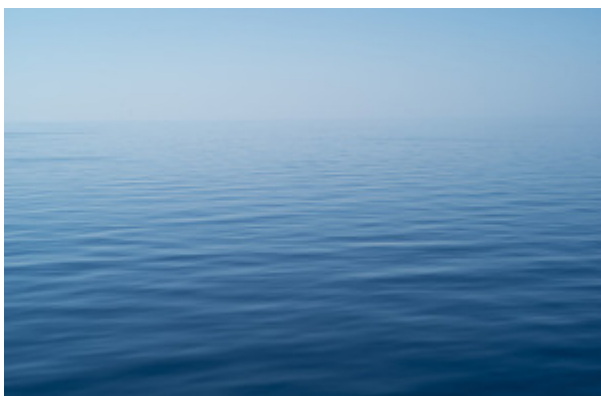
The funding that the 5 winners will receive as part of the TRIG: Accessibility programme, alongside technical and commercial guidance from the Catapult, will enable them to demonstrate their innovative solutions later this year.

It is our aim that these solutions will enable access to England's transport services for passengers who may need support when travelling to connect with the places around them.

[Have your say on Celtic nephrops proposals](#)

News story

The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has launched a consultation on proposals for new technical measures affecting Nephrops-directed fisheries in Celtic Sea UK waters of the Celtic Sea.



The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has today launched a consultation on proposals for new technical measures affecting

Nephrops-directed fisheries in Celtic Sea UK waters of the Celtic Sea.

Defra is seeking views on:

- Limiting the selectivity device options to include only the most selective devices for Nephrops. These include the Seltra Panel and Sorting Grid, as per current gear options, as well as two new options under consideration; the Netgrid selectivity device and SepNep (both as legislated in the North Sea).
- Prohibiting the use and carriage of strengthening bags. This measure will be applied to otter trawl and bottom seine vessels in the Celtic Sea from 5 September 2021 and it is ; we are proposing to extend this measure apply the ban to Nephrops-directed fisheries later in the year.
- Increasing the catch composition threshold, which defines a Nephrops-directed fishery in the Celtic Sea, from 5% to either 15 or 30%.

For more information on the proposed changes and to share your views on the management of Nephrops-directed fisheries in UK waters of the Celtic Sea, follow the link to the consultation survey on [Citizen Space](#)

Alternatively, you can contact Defra at Nephrops.consultation@defra.gov.uk

The deadline for responses is 13 August 2021.

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[Sophie set for momentous climate change voyage](#)

Sophie Goodall-Smith, aged 48, will board the Pelican of London on Sunday 18 July – a tall ship on a 13-week expedition around the British Isles for the Darwin200 environmental research project.

She is joining the last 4 week leg of the voyage as a crew member, alongside professional crew, trainee sailors and marine scientists who are studying the concentrations of plastic waste in UK waters, as well as surveying seabirds and marine megafauna.

Environmental organisation City to Sea is also partnering with Darwin200 to undertake the first UK-wide plastics survey.

Sophie, who supports the Environment Agency's plastics and sustainability team's Interreg Preventing Plastic Pollution project, is having a break from the day job to undertake the trip in her personal time.

She said:

I am passionate about our precious planet, so protecting our natural world from harmful pollution, including plastics, is an issue very close to my heart professionally and personally.

I am thrilled to be joining this voyage, helping to gather invaluable conservation data to inspire and influence others to help our ocean ecosystems and marine life thrive.

It'll be part of my role to crew the ship and help City to Sea with its plastics survey, looking at floating macroplastics, microplastics suspended in the water column, and washed ashore beach plastics.

The Darwin200 dive team will also be collecting samples of seabed sediment at locations around the UK which will be analysed for their plastic content. The data collected is forming the basis of several academic studies and will contribute to national surveys.

Sophie, whose passion for the natural world has led to a 26-year career in the environment sector, is no stranger to adventure having previously undertaken conservation work in the Amazon rainforest, visited water, sanitation and hygiene projects in Uganda as a WaterAid ambassador, and run the Great Wall Marathon in China for charity.

Sophie's love of the ocean means she is also a regular sea swimmer and community volunteer, undertaking kayak river cleans, and beach cleans, including for the Leave No Trace Brighton group.

Sophie Goodall-Smith

She has also been actively involved in her local Greening Steyning campaign and Brighton and Hove WaterAid group, and recently volunteered at her local Covid vaccination centre in Brighton.

Further information about [Darwin200 and City to Sea](#) and [Darwin200 Voyage City to Sea Connecting our actions to our oceans](#).

For more information about the Interreg Preventing Plastic Pollution project visit [Home – Preventing Plastic Pollution](#).

Notes to editor

Environment Agency: As a regulator, preventing waste plastic entering the

environment by cracking down on waste crime and poor waste management is a key activity for the Environment Agency. As an influencer, it also has an ambition to promote better environmental practices that result in a reduction of plastic waste, helping to achieve the goals and commitments outlined in its five year plan to create better place for people, wildlife and the environment, and the government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

Preventing Plastic Pollution project: [Preventing Plastic Pollution](#) (PPP) seeks to understand and reduce the impacts of plastic pollution in the river and marine environments. By looking at the catchment from source to sea, the project will identify and target hotspots for plastic, embed behaviour change in local communities and businesses, and implement effective solutions and alternatives. PPP is a €14million funded EU INTERREG VA France (Channel) England Programme project co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund which works mainly across seven pilot sites: Brest Harbour, Bay of Douarnenez, Bay of Veys, Poole Harbour, and the Medway, Tamar, and Great Ouse estuaries.

Partners are the Environment Agency, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Queen Mary University of London, LABOCEA Conseil, Expertise et Analyses, Syndicat mixte établissement public de gestion et d'aménagement de la baie de Douarnenez, Office Français De La Biodiversité, Parc naturel marin d'Iroise, Brest Métropole, Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Conseil départemental de la Manche, Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer, The Rivers Trust, Syndicat de bassin de l'Elorn, ACTIMAR, Brest'aim, Westcountry Rivers Trust, South East Rivers Trust and Plymouth City Council.

[UK Carrier Strike Group reaches Indian Ocean region](#)

Following a series of successful engagements and operations in the Mediterranean it is now sailing East across the Indian Ocean towards India. It will then meet with ships from the Indian Navy to conduct routine maritime exercises.

The deployment represents the UK's commitment to deepening diplomatic, economic and security ties with India and in the Indo-Pacific region. It demonstrates both the UK's support for the freedom of passage through vital trading routes and for a free, open and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

The UK Carrier Strike Group deployment is a major moment for UK defence as we develop this cutting edge capability across the

globe.

The group is sailing the Indian Ocean and will shortly conduct exercises with the Indian Navy, building on our already strong partnership with an important ally and friend.

The deployment illustrates the UK's enduring commitment to global defence and security, strengthening our existing alliances and forging new partnerships with like-minded countries as we face up to the challenges of the 21st century.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

The Carrier Strike Group deployment marks the start of a new era of defence cooperation with allies in India and the Indo-Pacific.

By visiting 40 countries and working alongside our partners, the UK is standing up for democratic values, seizing new trading opportunities and tackling the shared threats we face together.

The deployment will interact with India, strengthening our already deep ties for the benefit of both our peoples' security and prosperity.

British High Commissioner to India, Alex Ellis, said:

The Carrier Strike Group is a powerful demonstration of our commitment to the security of India and the Indo-Pacific. Its arrival follows the UK's first International Liaison Officer joining the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region in Gurugram.

Today marks another step towards delivering the ambition set out jointly by our Prime Ministers in the 2030 Roadmap, bringing our countries, economies and people closer together.

Further information

Free-to-use photos of the Carrier Strike Group are available to download [here](#).

As part of its maiden operational deployment, the CSG will sail over 26,000 nautical miles, engaging with 40 countries from the Mediterranean to the Indo-Pacific and back again.

This deployment will provide tangible reassurance and security to our friends and a credible deterrence to those who seek to undermine global security.

As the spearhead of UK's Joint Expeditionary capability and a cornerstone of

the UK's conventional military deterrent, the CSG comprises nine ships, 32 aircraft and one submarine and is manned by 3,700 sailors, aviators and marines from the combined forces of the UK, US and the Netherlands.

The fifth generation HMS Queen Elizabeth carrier, at 65,000 tonnes, is the largest surface vessel ever constructed in the UK. Taller than Niagara Falls, her propellers generate the power of 50 high-speed trains. She leads six Royal Navy ships, a Royal Navy submarine, a US Navy destroyer and a frigate from the Netherlands in the largest concentration of maritime and air power to leave the UK in a generation. It is equipped with the fifth generation F-35B Lightning multi-role aircrafts. They are being jointly crewed by the Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and the US Marine Corps.

From defending democratic values and tackling shared threats, to seizing new trade opportunities through engagements with Singapore, the Republic of Korea, Japan, India and others, the deployment marks a step-change in UK engagement in the region. The UK is already investing significantly in the region by seeking ASEAN Dialogue Partner status, kicking off negotiations to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and rapidly progressing trade talks with Australia, New Zealand and India.

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[New hospitality strategy to help pubs, bars and restaurants build back better from the pandemic](#)

- First-ever hospitality strategy launched to support the reopening, recovery and resilience of England's pubs, restaurants, cafes and nightclubs
- measures to build back better and greener from the pandemic include bringing businesses together with universities to boost innovation, and reducing waste and plastic consumption

- Hospitality Sector Council set up and co-chaired by entrepreneur Karen Jones and Minister Scully to oversee delivery of the strategy

A new strategy to ensure England's pubs, bars, restaurants and other hospitality venues can thrive long-term and adapt to consumer demands has been launched by Business Minister Paul Scully today (16 July).

The Hospitality Strategy focuses on reopening, recovery and resilience.

To support the industry in its reopening, the Strategy sets out measures including highlighting opportunities in the hospitality industry to jobseekers through DWP's dedicated work coaches and helping the sector address current recruitment challenges. This is on top of the continued support for businesses through the government's unprecedented £352 billion package of economic support and guidance this week to help ease them back to operating normally.

Recovery measures will boost business and consumer confidence and help the sector return to profitability. This includes working with the government-owned British Business Bank and directly with lenders to support access to finance for hospitality firms so they can invest in their businesses.

It will be easier for pubs, restaurants and cafes on the high street to offer al fresco dining and serve more customers outside, with pavement licenses being extended and made permanent. Takeaway pints will also continue for another 12 months as the temporary permissions for off-sales of alcohol are extended in England and Wales, boosting sales.

The government is also setting out ways to help the sector improve its resilience, including by making hospitality a career option of choice, boosting creativity, and developing a greener sector. Measures include:

- exploring options for vocational skills and training that support careers in the sector, including apprenticeships, bootcamps and other qualifications like a T-Level, and working with the sector to raise the profile of careers in hospitality
- supporting innovation and productivity by using the government's Help to Grow programmes to strengthen the sector's digital and management skills, and bringing hospitality businesses together with universities and other innovators to support the next generation of hospitality start-ups
- helping the sector reduce emissions, including by cutting waste and single-use plastic consumption

This comes as the £150 million Community Ownership Fund launched yesterday, giving people across the UK the chance to run local pubs at risk of closure as community-owned businesses. Communities in all 4 nations will be able to bid for up to £250,000 matched funding.

Business Minister Paul Scully said:

The pandemic has meant we've had to stay apart, and this has had a big impact on the hospitality industry, which exists to bring people together. We've been working with hospitality businesses throughout the pandemic to understand what support they need to not only reopen, but change and improve how they do things to meet changing consumer demands and protect jobs and livelihoods.

We want young people to see the hospitality sector as a go-to option for long-term careers, and that's why we will explore new options for vocational training and help further boost the creativity and environmental friendliness of the sector through the first-ever government strategy for the hospitality industry.

A new Hospitality Sector Council made up of industry leaders and government is being created to oversee the delivery of the strategy. The council will agree an action plan to deliver the recommendations, review progress against this plan and monitor the overall recovery of the sector as businesses transition from reopening to recovery to resilience. The council will be co-chaired by Business Minister Paul Scully and hospitality entrepreneur Karen Jones and further members will be announced in due course.

Entrepreneur and Hospitality Sector Council co-chair Karen Jones said:

I think the last 16 months has shown us many things, underlining the importance of our people and our teams and the key role hospitality has to play in lighting up our high streets and city centres. We need to capitalise on the energy, creativity and innovation that will be released post-pandemic to continue our creation of a world-class hospitality sector: this strategy will aid in making that a reality.

I am honoured to be co-chair alongside Minister Scully and will work with a will with hospitality and government colleagues to put in place all our wonderful industry needs to flourish.

UK Hospitality CEO Kate Nicholls said:

Hospitality is absolutely fundamental to the country's economic and social wellbeing, so this new strategy which recognises our unique role is very welcome. It provides our sector with a strong platform to deliver the supportive regulatory and trading environment we need to recover, rebuild resilience and thrive. We look forward to working closely with the minister to deliver an action plan that enables our nation's hospitality venues to bounce back from the devastation caused by the pandemic and return to creating jobs and careers – supporting government's agenda on levelling up.

Emma McClarkin, Chief Executive of the British Beer & Pub Association, said:

After nearly 18 months of closure and restrictions, our sector can now start its recovery as it begins to fully reopen.

This strategy for hospitality, the first of its kind, is a recognition of the importance of our sector's contribution to the economy and society and will bring government investment that will help our sector to build back better and serve communities across the UK once more.

We look forward to realising the government's ambition for hospitality with further investment in the sector and especially pubs and brewers.

British Institute of Innkeeping (BII) CEO Steven Alton said:

As our members start the process of rebuilding their businesses in every community, government support through this hospitality strategy will be essential. Pubs provide fantastic opportunities allowing progression through professional development, from skilled entry level roles to entrepreneurs running vibrant businesses across the UK.

This specific hospitality strategy recognises the contribution of hospitality to the economy, jobs and careers and the vital role that pubs play at the heart of their communities.

Today's announcement comes alongside the recent publication of the government's [High Streets Strategy](#) and Tourism Strategy. A thriving hospitality sector supports tourism and high streets and vice-versa – these strategies work together to deliver an even greater impact for businesses and workers.

Among other measures supporting the hospitality sector, the High Streets Strategy includes a commitment to work with local authorities and the sector to develop a model for hospitality-led regeneration hubs across each nation of the UK.

The Hospitality Strategy sets out a vision for the future of the sector, building on the unprecedented £352 billion package of support available throughout the pandemic. In addition to having access to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, loan guarantees and protection from commercial rent eviction and debt forfeitures, hospitality businesses also had access to further support including grants, business rates relief, a VAT cut on food and non-alcoholic beverages to 5% and the Eat Out to Help Out Scheme.

Last month, the government extended its measures protecting commercial tenants from eviction to March 2022 and announced that legislation will be introduced to help resolve commercial rent debts resulting from COVID-19 business closures.

- the UK hospitality sector is comprised of approximately 143,000 businesses, employs around 1.7 million people and in 2019 generated £40.4 billion in Gross Value Added