

Local transport update: national bus strategy for England published

Today (15 March 2021) the government has published [Bus Back Better](#), the long-term national bus strategy for England outside London.

Our strategy will deliver better bus services for passengers across England, through ambitious and far-reaching reform of how services are planned and delivered. [The Prime Minister's announcement of transformational funding \(a combined £5 billion for buses, cycling and walking\) in February last year](#) demonstrated the government's commitment to buses and active travel.

Following publication in June 2020 of [Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking](#), today's publication explains how buses will be transformed.

Buses are our most-used form of public transport but, even before coronavirus (COVID-19), they faced challenges. There are pockets of good bus performance outside London, but far too many places have fallen behind. Turning this around is central to this government's objectives of reaching net zero and levelling up.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on buses, as with all transport. It gives urgency to the strategy, but also an opportunity. Dealing with the emergency fostered greater cooperation between bus operators and local authorities, which we can build on. We know that wherever and whenever bus patronage grows, there are bus operators and local government working together to deliver improvements for passengers. We want this for all passengers, and the strategy sets out that we want every local transport authority and bus operator in England to be in a statutory enhanced partnership or a franchising arrangement, using existing powers in the [Bus Services Act 2017](#). We will make £25 million available straight away to develop these.

The developing partnerships will be asked to produce robust and ambitious Bus Service Improvement Plans by the end of October 2021. We will expect the plans to set out a roadmap to better services for passengers and communities, urban and rural, and be fully informed by local needs.

The strategy also sets out our ambitious roadmap to a zero-emission bus fleet, including a commitment that we will [consult on ending the sale of new diesel buses](#). This will bring buses into line with other vehicles – we have already announced [ending the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030](#).

Disabled people rely on bus services more than most and the strategy confirms our continuing commitment to supporting an inclusive transport system. One of the strategy's aims is to improve equality of opportunity, particularly for older and disabled people. We want to see improvement plans that drive improvement in accessibility for all. Disabled people should have the confidence to travel when and where they want to, and our plans ensure that

bus services play their part in making that possible.

Alongside this, we have also announced today that 17 rural and suburban communities will see an additional investment of £20 million from the government's [rural mobility fund](#) to trial innovative on-demand services that are able to get closer to where people live and at a time convenient for them – another example of the government's work to level-up transport infrastructure across the country.

I am placing a copy of the [national bus strategy](#) in the libraries of both Houses.

[Veterinary Medicines Pharmacovigilance Annual Review 2019: Summary](#)

News story

A summary of results from surveillance work carried out by the VMD's pharmacovigilance team concerning reported adverse events.



Highlights of the key results from the Veterinary Medicines Pharmacovigilance Annual Review 2019.

The annual review summarises the 7,118 UK adverse events in animals, humans and the environment after use of veterinary medicines and other products reported to VMD in 2019.

These reports resulted in improvements to 55 of the medicine information leaflets included with animal medicines making the products safer to use and giving better information to users of medicines.

Information describing the clinical signs (symptoms) observed following use of different types of veterinary medicine can be accessed through the [VMD's adverse events dashboard](#).

Published 15 March 2021

[UK Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan visits Egypt](#)

World news story

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UK Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, H.E Robert Fairweather, visited Cairo to discuss the situation in Sudan and South Sudan with Deputy Foreign Minister for African Affairs Hamdi Lowza and other government officials. This follows the recent high-level visits of Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi to Khartoum and Sudanese Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok to Cairo.

The meeting was also attended by Assistant Foreign Minister for African Affairs Osama Shaltout and Deputy to the British Ambassador in Egypt Neerav Patel.

During the meeting, both sides reaffirmed that the UK and Egypt are strong supporters of a stable and prosperous Sudan, and will continue to stand together to support the Sudanese authorities in creating a better future for the Sudanese people.

Earlier this year during his visit to Sudan, British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab announced the UK's contribution of £40 million to the Sudan Family Support Programme, helping support Sudanese communities while critical economic reforms are implemented.

The UK has also pledged over \$175m this year in response to people's needs in South Sudan.

UK Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, Robert Fairweather, said:

It is fantastic to be here in Egypt, and to have the opportunity to discuss the important issue of peace and stability in the region. The UK is keen to see the Juba Peace Agreement implemented, and we look forward to cooperating with Egypt and providing the support

necessary to make a complete transition to peace possible.

Before arriving in Cairo, Fairweather visited Khartoum and met with Sudanese Prime Minister Hamdok to express the UK's intent to provide a £330m bridging loan to clear Sudan's arrears with the African Development Bank. He also met with Deputy Head of the Sudanese Sovereign Council, General Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, to discuss transitional justice and the situation in South Sudan, among other important issues.

Published 15 March 2021

£20 million SME Brexit Support Fund opens for applications

Smaller businesses can today (15 March 2021) apply for grants of up to £2,000 to help them adapt to new customs and tax rules when trading with the EU.

The £20 million SME Brexit Support Fund enables traders to access practical support, including training for new customs, rules of origin and VAT processes.

[Katherine Green and Sophie Dean](#), Directors General, Borders and Trade, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), said:

We recognise that changes to customs rules have been challenging for small and micro businesses, and this is why we are encouraging business owners to apply for support through the SME Brexit Support Fund.

We do not take for granted that the UK's small businesses – from designers creating bespoke handmade pieces from their kitchen tables, to those selling sweet treats – are vital to the growth and prosperity of our economy, so we look forward to supporting them with practical help to do business with our European partners, on top of a wide range of support available from the government.

Small and medium sized businesses that trade solely with the EU – and are therefore new to importing and exporting processes – are encouraged to apply for the grants.

The fund, [announced in February](#) by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Michael Gove, is the latest round of government support for UK trade.

To be eligible, businesses must import or export goods between Great Britain and the EU, or move goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

This follows the government setting out a new timetable for introducing import border control processes to enable UK businesses to focus on their recovery. Full import border control processes will now be introduced on 1 January 2022, six months later than originally planned.

Mike Cherry, Federation of Small Businesses National Chairman, said:

The vast majority of UK small firms that do business overseas trade with the EU. Not only are they trying to stay afloat as lockdowns gradually ease, they now have new, unfamiliar paperwork and costs to navigate when they buy from, or sell to, Europe.

That's why we asked the government for targeted funding to help them navigate these fresh demands, and it's brilliant to see that funding go live today.

We encourage all eligible small businesses to take a look and apply for this new source of help.

Jon Geldart, Director-General, Institute of Directors, said:

Smaller firms have long needed assistance with managing the host of new requirements that come with changing our EU trading arrangements, and that need has only grown in the current adjustment phase.

This is why the Institute of Directors has campaigned for so long to help companies with the cost of accessing the professional advice they need, and we commend the government for stepping in to do so.

More [information about the SME Brexit Support Fund, including details of how to apply](#), can be found on GOV.UK.

In addition to this new support, the government is:

- meeting businesses from specific sectors across all parts of the UK weekly through the Brexit Business Taskforce chaired by Michael Gove – the latest meeting focused specifically on businesses in Wales
- leading the Seafood Exports Working Group, meeting twice a week to troubleshoot issues raised by the industry, and a newly established Scottish Seafood Exports Task Force
- offering support to businesses moving goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland through its Trader Support Service
- providing numerous [helplines](#) which businesses can contact if they need further information – this includes a dedicated [HMRC imports and exports](#)

[enquiry service](#) which is available via phone on 0300 322 9434 or via [online webchat](#)

- running regular [webinars with policy specialists](#)
- providing the [Brexit Checker Tool on GOV.UK](#) which gives businesses a personalised list of actions that they need to take
- providing one-to-one support for exporters in delivered via a network of around 300 International Trade Advisers
- leading a specific taskforce working with businesses across Northern Ireland and Great Britain on issues related to the Northern Ireland Protocol
- operating a range of other support schemes including a guarantee scheme aimed at SMEs which means the government can provide an 80% guarantee on financial support from lenders to help with general exporting costs, up to the value of £25 million

[eAlert 12 March 2021 – New tree fund for local communities](#)

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