

Launch of Project SPEED challenges rail industry to cut time and costs of rail upgrades

- Rail Minister officially unveils the rail Project SPEED approach, focused on halving the time and significantly reducing costs of delivering rail infrastructure projects
- innovative ways of working and simplification of processes to be rolled out across all rail upgrades
- new approach builds on the Prime Minister's new taskforce, [announced last June](#), to complete public investment projects more rapidly and at lower cost

The government has challenged the rail industry today (26 February 2021) to pioneer new ways of working that will halve the time and reduce the cost of delivering critical infrastructure projects, as the country builds back better out of coronavirus (COVID-19), with the launch of the next stage of rail Project SPEED.

In a keynote speech at the Project SPEED conference today, hosted by the Rail Industry Association, Rail Minister Chis Heaton-Harris invited the 1,800-strong virtual audience to get on board with the new approach to become faster, smarter and more efficient in the way that projects are delivered.

Rail Project SPEED (Swift, Pragmatic and Efficient Enhancement Delivery) was jointly developed by the Department for Transport (DfT) and [Network Rail](#) last summer. [Infrastructure projects](#) at different stages of development have been reviewed to identify how government funding could go further and work could be carried out faster.

This approach identified 10 key themes to lower costs and speed up the delivery of infrastructure schemes, such as rapidly increasing the use of innovative construction methods and removing complexity from planning processes.

These new and innovative ways of working will be rolled out across all rail upgrades, with the intention of:

- ensuring passengers experience better journeys more quickly
- giving greater value to taxpayers
- transforming the pace and way in which our railways are improved

A project already benefitting from Project SPEED principles is the [scheme to reopen the Northumberland line between Ashington and Newcastle-upon-Tyne](#), which closed to passengers in 1964 as part of the Beeching cuts.

Northumberland County Council, DfT, Network Rail and AECOM have collectively worked to identify opportunities to bring this into service as quickly as

possible. This could take months off the schedule and deliver efficiencies that save millions from the programme.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris said:

The whole country has relied on the transport industry over the past year to keep the country moving, supplies delivered and key workers to their jobs saving lives. We are now depending on transport to kickstart our economic recovery.

Rail Project SPEED, forged alongside Network Rail, is a call to arms to cut unnecessary red tape, be bold and purposeful, and empower the railway to be radical in its thinking to halve the time and reduce the cost of delivering infrastructure projects.

By maximising the benefits of every pound that we're channelling into rail, we will make the case for continued investment. Our intention is to create a more resilient, resourceful and robust railway, equipped for the challenges ahead and delivering better for its passengers, as we build back better from COVID-19.

Andrew Haines, Network Rail's chief executive, said:

There has never been a more important time to make the case for rail. The pandemic has spurred us to make real progress in removing barriers that have long hindered industry transformation.

But, of course, there is still much more to do, and we will do that faster and more effectively when we work together across the industry.

At today's conference, the Rail Minister has called on the supply chain to come up with creative ideas where they can help reduce the cost of delivering infrastructure projects, with the best ideas set to be recognised in future industry awards.

The launch of rail Project SPEED builds on the new [Acceleration Unit](#), announced by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps in August 2020, to complete public investment projects more strategically and efficiently.

The DfT's new unit brings together transport experts, ministers, businesses, local government and other specialists to inspire fresh ideas, getting to grips with opportunities to improve infrastructure delivery, and help transport share best practice and learn from other industries.

DASA boosts regional innovation network

News story

Defence and Security Accelerator has realigned its regionally-based Innovation Partners to reflect UK economic regions to boost opportunities and prosperity



The Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) has realigned its Innovation Partner network to reflect the widely [recognised economic regions](#) of the United Kingdom used across Government and the private sector.

It is hoped that this change will make DASA's presence across the UK easier to understand and access by innovators in business and academia, as well as by Government partners.

The move will help DASA to improve its reach across the entire country, increasing opportunities for organisations of all shapes and sizes, and boosting national prosperity.

Innovation Partners are regionally based and available to give advice to any organisation about their ideas and how they can best engage with DASA to obtain UK Government funding to develop their innovations. All of our Innovation Partners are civil servants and they will protect your Intellectual Property. Your correspondence and any discussions will be in strict confidence.

Ben Whitaker, DASA Outreach Lead, said:

"As DASA continues to expand, the need to align with a more recognised system was evident. The UK Economic regions are familiar to the majority, if not all, of our key stakeholders.

This small change will ensure that DASA continues to represent innovators from across the UK and can more easily understand and articulate our regional impact.

The 12 regions of the UK are:

- East of England
- East Midlands
- London
- North East
- North West
- Northern Ireland
- Scotland
- South East
- South West
- Wales
- West Midlands
- Yorkshire & the Humber

DASA also has an Innovation Partner covering international organisations (non-UK based).

DASA is also pleased to welcome Jas Shanker who joins as the Innovation Partner for the East Midlands. He said:

It is an exciting time to be joining DASA – whilst the current climate has given us challenges that need to be addressed, we need to work in a different way to get workable ideas converted into meaningful results.

We need to build on our rich history of innovating to find, fund, and exploit ideas, and to this end, I am excited to be working with the East Midlands community.

Contact a DASA Innovation Partner

Innovation Partners, are available to give advice to suppliers about their ideas and how they can best engage with DASA. Please follow the [online guidance to contact your regional representative](#).

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[First Innovation Passport awarded to help support development and access to](#)

cutting-edge medicines

A promising treatment for a cancer-causing rare disease will be the first to pass a significant milestone under a new UK approval process designed to bring medicines more rapidly to patients.

Belzutifan, a treatment developed by MSD (UK) for adults with von Hippel Lindau disease (a rare genetic disorder that causes cancer) has been awarded the first 'Innovation Passport' by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and the Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC).

This means patients could benefit much sooner from this treatment and it will be accelerated through the approval process; the Innovative Licensing and Access Pathway (ILAP).

[Launched in January this year](#), the ILAP combines the MHRA's globally recognised high standards of quality and safety with improved flexibility to reduce the time it takes innovative treatments to be available to NHS patients.

Medicines developed through the ILAP will have more focus on patient engagement than ever before. By incorporating patient views, both on the benefits and risks of medicines in the pathway, and on how to improve patient outcomes throughout the product lifecycle, medicines can be developed to meet patient requirements more successfully.

The award of this designation celebrates another first: the successful partnership between the MHRA, NICE and the SMC in making effective joint decisions and awarding Innovation Passports to products that will benefit patients.

The Innovation Passport is the first step in the ILAP and is open to developers of a wide range of medicines, including medicines for rare diseases, repurposed medicines and Advanced Therapy Medicinal Products. Since launch, companies have submitted 10 applications.

Innovation Passport holders, the MHRA and partners will next work together to create a product-specific Target Development Profile (TDP) for the new medicine. The TDP will define key regulatory and development features, identify potential pitfalls, offer access to specialist toolkits and create a roadmap for delivering early patient access.

The TDP will also outline how the Innovation Passport holder can work together with other UK stakeholders to achieve coordinated, efficient evidence generation and evaluation, and address considerations regarding patient access.

Dr June Raine CBE, Chief Executive, Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, comments:

We're transforming the MHRA to make the regulator an enabler of innovation. I'm very pleased to announce the first Innovation Passport designation demonstrating that this process is well underway.

Our Innovative Licensing and Access Pathway is already working to deliver new and innovative treatments to patients through strong and effective partnerships.

Patients are our top priority and are involved at every stage of this process. Together, we look forward to bringing more Innovation Passport holders on board to deliver earlier access to these products, better outcomes for patients and to continue our transformation.

Prof Gillian Leng CBE, Chief Executive of NICE said:

I am delighted that our partnership with the MHRA and the SMC has delivered on this important milestone so quickly. Our contribution to the ILAP is one of the ways NICE is delivering tangible benefits to patients, the NHS and life sciences industry. We look forward to working with our ILAP partners and the company to explore the opportunities for efficient and timely development, regulation and access processes.

Mark MacGregor, Chairman of the Scottish Medicines Consortium, said:

This important milestone has helped to underscore our pivotal role in ILAP and as a key partner in ensuring patients in Scotland can benefit from the best, most clinically effective and cost-effective treatments that are available, as early as possible.

David Peacock, Managing Director of MSD (UK) Ltd, said:

We are excited to be the first company to receive an Innovation Passport as part of the new Innovative Licensing and Access Pathway (ILAP). We welcome the opportunity to participate in any approach that recognizes the potential value of innovative medicines and seeks to accelerate access for patients who might benefit. We look forward to continuing to play our role as an engaged partner in our efforts to improve the lives of patients in the UK and around the

world.

Notes to editor

- [Information about the Innovative Licensing and Access Pathway](#)
- Von Hippel-Lindau (VHL) disease is a rare genetic disorder caused by mutations in the VHL tumour suppressor gene. Patients commonly suffer from a kidney cancer called renal cell carcinoma that often spreads to other parts of the body. Approximately 1 in 33,000 people have Von Hippel-Lindau (VHL) disease.
- The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency is responsible for regulating all medicines and medical devices in the UK by ensuring they work and are acceptably safe. All our work is underpinned by robust and fact-based judgements to ensure that the benefits justify any risks.
- The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency ('the agency') has three centres. The MHRA, the [National Institute for Biological Standards and Control \(NIBSC\)](#) and the [Clinical Practice Research Datalink \(CPRD\)](#). The agency is an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care.
- The [Scottish Medicines Consortium \(SMC\)](#) is the national source of advice on the clinical and cost-effectiveness of all new medicines for NHS Scotland. As part of Healthcare Improvement Scotland, the SMC aims to ensure that people in Scotland have timely access to beneficial new medicines.
- The Innovation Passport does not replace the Promising Innovative Medicine (PIM) Designation of the [Early Access to Medicines Scheme \(EAMS\)](#) and applicants can apply for both. An applicant is required to submit an Innovation Passport application for each separate medicinal product (different active substances).

[More than 264,000 Help to Save accounts opened](#)

More than 264,000 individuals have opened a Help to Save account and could be earning money on their savings, statistics from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) have revealed.

Help to Save is the government-backed savings scheme that allows individuals to earn a 50p bonus for every £1 saved over 4 years. The 50% bonus is payable at the end of the second and fourth year and is based on how much account holders have saved.

Account holders can save up to £50 a month. If they save the maximum amount each month for 4 years, they could save £2,400 and earn £1,200 in bonus payments.

More than 42,000 new Help to Save accounts were created between August 2020 and January 2021. Individuals can check the [Help to Save eligibility criteria](#) and find out how to apply via GOV.UK.

Angela MacDonald, HMRC's Deputy Chief Executive, said:

The Help to Save scheme has helped more than 264,000 individuals open a savings account. And regular savers can earn up to £1,200 in bonus payments over 4 years.

It is easy to set up an account, just search 'help to save' on GOV.UK.

Almost 217,000 individuals have made a deposit to their Help to Save account. Of those depositing into their savings account, the average monthly deposit per person is £48, as at 31 January 2021.

The total deposits to the scheme in the 6-month period, August 2020 to January 2021, exceeded £40 million. This is the highest recorded amount saved in a 6-month period since the scheme began in September 2018.

Individuals can open a Help to Save account if any of the following applies. They are:

- receiving Working Tax Credit
- entitled to Working Tax Credit and receiving Child Tax Credit
- claiming Universal Credit and they (with their partner, if it's a joint claim) earned £604.56 or more from paid work in their last monthly assessment period

Eligible individuals can set up a Help to Save savings account at any time until September 2023. Accounts are open for 4 years and individuals can make deposits as many times as they like, without going over the monthly saving limit of £50.

Individuals can also withdraw money at any time, although this may affect their 50% bonus payments.

The first bonus payment has already been paid out to thousands of individuals, who opened accounts between 12 September 2018 and February 2019.

HMRC published the latest [Help to Save statistics \(August 2020 to January 2021\)](#) on 26 February 2021.

Anyone who does not have access to the internet but meets the eligibility criteria can still get an account. Call HMRC on 0300 322 7093 to speak to an adviser who can help set it up.

Second quarterly report on progress to address COVID-19 health inequalities

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1. 1 March 2021

Edited 2 instances where the groups being compared were not accurate, as follows. In the 'Executive summary', 'Summary' section: "For example, in the first wave, Black African people were 4.5 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than White British people but in the early part of the second wave the risk of death was the same for Black African and White British people." This has been changed to: "For example, in the first wave, Black African men were 4.5 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than White British men of the same age but in the early part of the second wave the risk of death was the same for Black African and White British men." In the 'Data and evidence' chapter, '4.3 Results', 'Hazard ratios' section: "In the first wave, Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi men were 4.5, 2.7 and 3.5 times more likely to die from COVID-19 respectively than White British men of the same age. In the second wave (to date) the mortality risk remained high for Pakistani and Bangladeshi men (4.8 and 4.1) but not for Black ethnic groups which had the same rate as White British." This has been changed to: "In the first wave, Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi men were 4.5, 2.7 and 3.5 times more likely to die from COVID-19 respectively than White British men of the same age. In the second wave (to date) the mortality risk remained high for Pakistani and Bangladeshi men (4.8 and 4.1) but not for men from Black ethnic groups who had the same rate as White British men."

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