

# Phase 2a Act to bring HS2 to the north

- High Speed 2 (HS2) Phase 2a Bill given Royal Assent
- act means works can start to build new rail line between Crewe and Birmingham
- law signed exactly 1 year after government gives green light to deliver HS2
- Royal Assent comes alongside launch of West Midlands Combined Authority's HS2 Growth Strategy

The [HS2 Phase 2a: High Speed Rail \(West Midlands to Crewe\) Bill](#) has been given Royal Assent today (11 February 2021), cementing in law the government's commitment to bring the new high-speed railway to the north.

The act of Parliament was passed exactly 1 year after ministers gave the project the green light and will allow [HS2 Ltd](#) to begin work to construct the next phase of the new high-speed railway between Crewe and Birmingham, creating thousands of jobs.

Construction of the first stage of the project between the West Midlands and London is already underway and now supporting more than 15,000 jobs and 500 apprenticeships.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

Whatever your view of this project, HS2 is now a reality – heading north, creating jobs and building a brighter future for our country. This vital project is at the heart of the government's commitments to build back better from the pandemic, tackle the north-south divide and drive growth across the country.

The signing of the Phase 2a Bill into law is a historic milestone for this ambitious project, which is already creating and supporting thousands of jobs across the UK. I look forward to seeing spades in the ground to get this section built and deliver the benefits of high-speed rail to the north as swiftly as possible.

Now that the Phase 2a Bill has been signed into law, HS2 Ltd will be able to start environmental works along the route with construction expected to begin on this section by 2024.

Construction of Phase 2a is expected to support around 5,000 jobs, with many more in the supply chain. In addition, the railway will support 140 permanent jobs at its maintenance base near Stone in Staffordshire.

It comes after HS2 Ltd marked National Apprenticeship Week this week by announcing that it will be directly recruiting for 30 new apprentices to join

the company in September 2021.

The company has also launched a [new online jobs board](#), which illustrates the broad range of opportunities currently available on the project. HS2 Ltd's construction partners and station contractors are currently recruiting for over 100 live vacancies, with jobs based at various office and satellite locations along the Birmingham to London route.

Today's announcement comes alongside the launch of the [West Midlands Combined Authority's](#) HS2 Growth Strategy, which outlines how the new railway could generate 175,000 jobs and £20 billion investment in the region.

Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands, said:

HS2 was always going to be a game changer for the West Midlands, but the jobs and economy aspect of the scheme has taken on even more significance in light of the pandemic.

HS2 will be a key anchor of the region's recovery plans, with our latest research suggesting the knock-on effect of HS2 could eventually generate 175,000 jobs and more than £20 billion of investment.

These are extraordinary numbers, which shows just how critical it was to win the argument for HS2. With thousands in the West Midlands already employed and working on the project, HS2 is making a critical difference to people's livelihoods right now.

Councillor Craig Browne, deputy leader of Cheshire East Council, said:

This is a hugely important milestone in bringing high-speed rail to Crewe. HS2 is a strategically important project and will drive increased business confidence to invest in Crewe – creating opportunities to not only enhance the town, but also the wider borough, through the jobs, services and improved opportunities it can provide.

We are committed to maximising the significant benefits the scheme will bring and it is more important than ever as we support our local economy to bounce back from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Working with our strategic partners, we are continuing to push forward with multiple projects to transform Crewe and the wider area, and ensure it is ready for HS2's arrival, including our proposals for Crewe Hub station.

Once built, HS2 will become the spine of the UK's rail network, better connecting the country's towns and cities and boosting capacity to provide

better journeys for passengers.

Early this year, the government will publish its [integrated rail plan](#), which will outline how HS2 can work with existing rail plans and Northern Powerhouse Rail to deliver the benefits of HS2 to the East Midlands, Yorkshire and beyond

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## **Landmark moment for UK pensions as Bill receives Royal Assent**

The Bill, now an Act, will bolster protections for savers and further the government's green agenda by supporting progress towards net zero.

Minister for Pensions, Guy Opperman, said:

This is a historic day for UK pensions, and I'm thrilled that after more than 12 months, amidst all the challenges we've faced, the Bill has now received Royal Assent.

This Act makes our pensions safer, better and greener, as we look to build back better from the pandemic. Its passage will reassure savers that they can, and will, have a retirement they deserve.

The Act will strengthen protections for pension savers by extending the powers of the Pensions Regulator, introducing the power to issue civil penalties of up to £1 million, alongside three new criminal offences.

A tough new sentence has been created – with a maximum penalty of seven years in prison – for bosses who run pension schemes into the ground, or plunder pots to line their own pockets. This will deter employers from making reckless decisions with their defined benefit schemes and strengthen the regulators' powers to take efficient and timely actions to protect members' hard-earned savings.

The introduction of pensions dashboards will hail a digital revolution for savers, creating one single platform to more easily access and review pension pots. Savers will be able to see how much they can expect each month in retirement, and find out how they can improve their retirement prospects.

The Act ensures pensions play their part in our transition to a net zero future through climate risk reporting, and changes to requirements around pension scheme funding to improve financial sustainability.

The Act also legislates for the creation of a new style of pension scheme – Collective Defined Contributions (CDCs). Developed in cooperation with trade unions, CDCs have the potential to increase returns for millions, whilst being more sustainable for both workers and employers.

**Additional information:**

- Provisions for commencement of all the measures are contained in section 131 of the Act. These timings vary depending on the measure.

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## [The future of health and care](#)

Mr Speaker, I come to the House today to set out our white paper on the future of health and care.

The past year has been the most challenging in the NHS's proud 72-year history.

And the health and care system – as a whole – has risen in the face of great difficulties.

Throughout, people have done incredible things and worked in novel and remarkable ways to deliver for patients.

We, in this House, salute them all.

Not just the nurse who may have had to care for 2, or 3, or 4 times as many patients as he would in normal times.

Not just the surgeon who may have been called to treat patients beyond her normal specialism.

But the managers across health and care who've come together – in teams, as part of a health family, at local and national level.

The public health experts who have been needed more than ever before.

The local authority staff who've embraced change to deliver for their residents.

And, from all, a sense of teamwork that has been inspiring to see.

As a citizen, I care deeply for the whole health and care family, for the values they stand for, and the security they represent.

They're there for us at the best of times – and they're there for us at the worst of times.

As Health Secretary, I see it as my role sometimes to challenge – but most of all to support – the health and care family in their defining mission: of improving the health of the nation – and for caring for those most in need.

I come before the House to present a white paper, based firmly on those values, which I believe are the values our whole nation holds dear.

The white paper is built on more than 2 years of work – with the NHS, local councils and the public.

At its heart, this white paper enables greater integration, reduces bureaucracy and supports the way that the NHS and social care work when they work at their best: together.

It strengthens accountability to this House and, crucially, it takes the lessons we've learned in this pandemic of how the system can rise to meet huge challenges – and frames a legislative basis to support that effort.

My job as Health Secretary is to make the system work for those who work in the system.

To free up, to empower and to harness the mission driven capability of 'Team Health and Care'.

The goal of this white paper is to allow that to happen.

Mr Speaker, before turning to the core measures, I want to answer 2 questions that I know have been on people's minds.

First: are these changes needed?

Even before the pandemic, it was clear reform was needed: to update the law, to improve how the NHS operates and reduce bureaucracy.

Local government and the NHS have told us they want to work together to improve health outcomes for residents.

Clinicians have told us they want to do more than just treat conditions – they want to address the factors that determine people's health and prevent illness in the first place.

And all parts of the system told us they want to embrace modern technology: to innovate, to join up, to share data, to serve people and, ultimately, to be trusted to get on and do all of that so they can improve patient care and save lives.

And we've listened – and these changes reflect what our health and care family have been asking for, building on the NHS's own long-term plan.

The second question: why now?

Now, as we tackle the biggest public health emergency in modern history?

The response to COVID-19 has, in my view, accelerated the pace of collaboration across health and social care, showing what we can do when we work together – flexibly – adopting new technology focused on the needs of the patient and setting aside bureaucratic rules.

The pandemic has also brought home the importance of preventing ill health in the first place, by tackling obesity and taking steps like fluoridation that will improve the health of the nation.

The pandemic has made the changes in this white paper more, not less, urgent, and it is our role in Parliament to make the legislative changes that are needed.

There is no better time than now.

Mr Speaker, turning to the measures in detail.

The first set of measures promote integration between different parts of the health and care system, and put the focus of health funding on the health of the population – not just the health of patients.

Health and care have always been part of the same ecosystem.

With an ageing population, with more complex needs, that's never been more true.

And these proposals, Mr Speaker, will make it easier for clinicians, for carers and public health experts to achieve what they already work so hard to do, to operate seamlessly across health and care without being split into artificial silos that keep them apart.

The new approach is based on the concept of population health.

A statutory Integrated Care System will be responsible, in each part of England, for the funding to support the health of their area.

They will provide, not just for the treatments that are needed, but support people to stay healthy in the first place.

In some parts of the country, ICSs are already showing the way, and they will be accountable for outcomes of the health of the population and be held to account by the Care Quality Commission.

Our goal is to integrate decision-making at a local level between the NHS and local authorities as much as is practically possible, and ensure decisions about local health can be taken as locally as possible.

Next, Mr Speaker, we will use legislation to remove bureaucracy that makes sensible decision-making harder, so freeing up the system to innovate and to embrace technology as a better platform to support staff and patient care.

Our proposals preserve the division between funding decisions and provision of care, which has been the cornerstone of efforts to ensure the best value for taxpayers for over 30 years.

But we're setting out a more joined-up approach, built on collaborative relationships, so that more strategic decisions can be taken to shape health and care for decades to come.

At its heart it's about population health: using the collective resources of the local system, the NHS, local authorities, the voluntary sector and others to improve the health of their area.

Finally, Mr Speaker, the white paper will ensure a system that is accountable.

Ministers have rightly always been accountable to this House for the performance of the NHS – and always will.

Clinical decisions should always be independent.

But when the NHS is the public's top domestic priority, with over £140 billion pounds of taxpayers' money spent each year, and when the quality of our healthcare matters to every single citizen and every single one of our constituents, Mr Speaker, of course the NHS must be accountable to ministers, ministers accountable to Parliament, and Parliament accountable to the people we all serve.

Medical matters are matters for ministers.

The white paper provides a statutory basis for unified national leadership of the NHS, merging 3 different bodies that legally oversee the NHS into one – as NHS England.

NHS England will have clinical and day-to-day operational independence.

But the Secretary of State will be empowered to set direction for the NHS and intervene where necessary.

This white paper can give the public confidence that the system will truly work together to respond to their needs.

Mr Speaker, these legislative measures support reforms already underway in the NHS, and they should be seen in the context of those broader reforms.

And they are by no means the full extent of our ambition for the nation's health.

As we continue to tackle this pandemic, we will also bring forward changes in social care, public health and mental health services.

We are committed to reform the funding of adult social care and we will bring forward proposals this year.

The public health interventions outlined in this white paper sit alongside our proposals to strengthen the public health system, including the creation of the National Institute for Health Protection (NIHP).

And last month, in our mental health white paper, we committed to bringing forward legislation to update the Mental Health Act for the 21st century.

Mr Speaker, this landmark white paper builds on what colleagues in health and care have told us – and we will continue that engagement in the weeks ahead.

It builds on more than that: it builds on this party's commitment to the NHS – from the very beginning.

And eagle-eyed visitors to my office on Victoria Street will have noticed the portrait of Sir Henry Willink, who published the white paper in 1944, from this despatch box, that set out plans for "A National Health Service" that was later implemented by post-war governments.

Throughout its proud 72-year history, successive governments have believed in our health and care system and strengthened it for their times.

I believe the NHS is the finest health service in the world. I believe in the values that underpin it, that we all share responsibility for the health of one another.

Its extraordinary feats this past year are unsurpassed, even in its own proud history.

And, once again, we must support the NHS – and the whole health and care system – with a legislative framework fit for our times, and fit for the future.

A more integrated, more innovative and more responsive system, harnessing the best of modern technology and supporting the vocation and dedication of those who work in it.

This white paper is the next step in that noble endeavour, and I commend this statement to the House.

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## **Use of schools in the May 2021 Elections**

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## A record 3 million people tested by NHS Test and Trace this reporting week

- More people tested during this reporting week than ever before
- More than a third of the population in England have now been tested at least once since NHS Test and Trace was launched
- Test turnaround times for most testing routes continue to fall, with 97.6% of in-person test results returned the next day after the test was taken

In total, almost 21.8 million people have now been tested at least once since NHS Test and Trace was launched; that equates to a third of all people in England.

Of those people who took their tests in-person, at either a local or regional test centre, nearly all (97.6%) received their results the following day, while the median turnaround time for home test kits was just 35 hours.

Not only are people able to receive a test result more quickly and conveniently, but the service continues to reach a high proportion of cases and contacts.

NHS Test and Trace has successfully reached 87.0% of the people who received a positive test result, and 93.5% of their contacts, making a real impact in breaking chains of transmission. In total during the week of 28 January to 3 February, 377,391 people who had either tested positive or been identified as a recent close contact were reached and told to self-isolate, people who might otherwise have gone on to unknowingly spread the virus.

Between 28 January and 3 February, 264,577 people were identified as recent close contacts, with 96.5% of those with communication details provided reached and told to self-isolate. Since Test and Trace launched 89.8% of close contacts for whom communication details were provided have been reached.

During 28 January to 3 February, 90.2% (217,148) of contacts that were reached were reached within 3 days of the case that reported them taking their test, while the median time taken for contacts to be reached from the case that identified them reporting their first observed symptoms was 78 hours.

The NHS COVID-19 app has now been updated with the capability to alert users in postcode district areas where there is a variant of concern to provide additional messaging to users, for example that they may be eligible for surge testing, even if they don't have symptoms and where to find more information.

NHS Test and Trace's test site network continues to expand. With more than 850 test sites in operation, including 484 local test sites, people are travelling a shorter distance than ever before to get a test. The median distance travelled for a test is just 2.0 miles, a record for the service, compared to 5.1 miles as recently as September.

NHS Test and Trace has also delivered its best median turnaround times for home test kit results since the service launched last May, with a median turnaround time of 34 hours. The service is ensuring that those who are required to take a COVID-19 test are able to access one without visiting a test centre and meeting demand despite the current weather conditions.

More than 300 local authorities have joined forces with NHS Test and Trace to launch local tracing partnerships, combining specialist local expertise with the data and resources of NHS Test and Trace. These partnerships enable NHS Test and Trace to go further in supporting people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and tracing their recent contacts.

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

More people than ever before have had a COVID-19 test this week and have also received their test result quickly and conveniently despite the demands on the service. These numbers are hugely impressive and have an enormous impact on the spread of the virus.

This week NHS Test and Trace have identified 149,317 positive cases and 264,577 contacts of those cases, leading to 377,391 people being told to isolate. This continues to have a significant impact on breaking the chains of transmission.

The number of LFD tests conducted across the country has continued to increase at pace, ensuring NHS Test and Trace can identify people who are infectious, but not showing symptoms. Around one in 3 people with COVID-19 don't display symptoms. This means every positive LFD test helps us break a chain of transmission we wouldn't have identified otherwise.

Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection, Baroness Dido Harding, said:

We are continuing to deliver effective results at speed, and it is a continuation of the programme's strong start to the year. More than a third of the English population has now been tested for COVID-19 at least once which is crucial in halting the spread of the virus.

I am incredibly grateful to everyone involved in NHS Test and Trace who are working non-stop to help us combat the spread of the virus.

## Testing

As of 9 February, more than 75 million tests have been processed in the UK in total since testing began, more than any other comparable European country.

In the latest reporting week, 2,372,358 lateral flow device (LFD) tests have been carried out, which is 17 times higher than those conducted in mid December. The number of LFD tests has been increasing across all regions for the past month, with most in this reporting week conducted in the South West followed by the North West.

Pillar 1 test results made available within 24 hours has increased to 96.6%, compared with last week's percentage of 95.1%. 96.0% of satellite tests were received within 3 days after the day they were taken, compared with 96.5% the previous week.

Over the past months, the government has put in place the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities created in British history. NHS Test and Trace currently has the capacity to carry out more than 790,000 tests per day, compared to 2,000 just 9 months ago.

## Tracing

So far, more than 8.6 million cases and contacts have been reached and told to self-isolate by contact tracers.

Tracing performance has remained high with 87.0% of cases and 93.5% of contacts reached last week. The proportion of contacts reached within 24 hours once identified as a contact was consistent with the previous week at 98.0%.

149,317 positive cases were transferred to contact tracers between 28 January and 3 February, with 129,880 reached and told to self-isolate.

## Background information

The [weekly statistics from the 36th week of NHS Test and Trace \(England\)](#) show in the most recent week of operations (28 January to 3 February):

- the proportion of contacts reached by tracing service has remained consistent at 93.5%
- 87.0% of people who tested positive and were transferred to the contact-tracing system were reached and asked to provide information about their contacts, compared with 87.2% the previous week
- 96.5% of contacts where communication details were given were reached and told to self-isolate, compared with 96.6% the previous week
- 97.6% of in-person test results were received the next day after the test was taken, compared with 97.2% of tests the previous week
- 96.6% of pillar 1 test results were made available within 24 hours, compared with 95.1% the previous week
- 86.2% of in-person test results were received within 24 hours after the

test was taken, compared with 82.7% the previous week

- 96.0% of satellite test results were received within 3 days after the day they were taken, compared with 96.5% the previous week

Last month, the government announced an additional £20 million to local authorities to cover the cost of the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme, to ensure people continue to have access to the support they need to stay at home and reduce the transmission of COVID-19. This includes an additional £10 million to enable local authorities to continue making discretionary payments to people who fall outside the scope of the main scheme, but who will still face hardship if required to self-isolate.

[NHS COVID-19 app stats will be published weekly from 18 February on the NHS website](#)

The [methodology used to calculate the impact that testing, tracing and self-isolation could be having on transmission](#), referred to in the [NHS Test and Trace business plan](#), has been published.