

Transport Secretary announces up to £3 million for coach services to meet Christmas travel demand

- up to £3 million funding to be made available to provide up to 80,000 more seats on coach services over the Christmas travel window (23 to 27 December 2020)
- this is in addition to recently announced measures to support safe journeys over the festive period
- passengers urged to plan carefully, book ahead and follow guidance if they decide to travel

A support package worth up to £3 million that will enable coach operators to provide additional scheduled services over the Christmas travel window, has today (12 December 2020) been announced by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps.

The government is working with the coach industry, including National Express, megabus and Snap – who together provide a network of coach services covering Great Britain – to ensure extra scheduled services are provided over the Christmas travel window (23 to 27 December), including on Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

People are reminded that however they choose to travel this Christmas, they must plan carefully and book ahead where possible to avoid disappointment, as availability could become limited and they may not be able to travel on their preferred service.

They should also make sure they:

- regularly sanitise their hands
- wear a face-covering unless exempt
- social distance where possible while travelling

Coach operators are currently running reduced networks due to the impact of COVID-19 on demand. The funding announced today will enable scheduled coach operators to boost services to up to 75% of pre-pandemic services – helping more people travel safely to their Christmas bubble should they wish. The move will make up to an additional 80,000 seats available.

The government has set out that people can travel to form a Christmas bubble, composed of no more than 3 households, between 23 and 27 December. Anyone travelling to or from Northern Ireland may travel on the 22 and 28 December.

To minimise disruption and help people travel safely to their bubble, the government set out a series of measures last week, including:

- lifting 100s of miles of roadworks
- enhancing rail services

- postponing and accelerating rail engineering works
- cutting ticket charges

The new support for scheduled coach services builds on this and ensures that, should there be pressure on rail services, people will have alternative travel options.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps, said:

We've already set out important measures so journeys can run as smoothly as possible this Christmas. Today's funding announcement for the coach sector goes one step further, ensuring there are more options available for people wanting to travel to celebrate with loved ones and friends.

We remind everyone that it's essential to plan their journey and book ahead, be considerate of other passengers and staff across our transport network, and follow the guidance, including keeping space and wearing a face covering, unless exempt, on public transport.

Christmas travel co-ordinator Sir Peter Hendy said:

This is very welcome, as it gives additional and flexible COVID-safe public transport capacity for the Christmas period. I'll continue to assure transport provision so we can get everyone to their Christmas bubbles safely. Please book early to help achieve that.

Alison Edwards, Head of Policy at The Confederation of Passenger Transport UK, said:

The pandemic has made it challenging to run scheduled coach services. It's welcome to see this recognised by government. Coaches provide a vital means of transport during the Christmas period and will be running throughout the festive period, including on Christmas Day. This funding will mean more coaches on our roads to help people travel safely and ease overall pressure on public transport.

Chris Hardy, Managing Director, National Express Coach, said:

Maintaining the UK's largest network of scheduled coach services has been challenging but we've worked hard to provide safe, low-carbon travel over the festive season.

This funding will allow us to increase the frequency of some routes, introduce new direct services and add more locations on our

23 to 27 December timetable.

We'll initially be doubling the mileage of the network and will further increase the number of vehicles and seats available on routes as necessary. The flexibility of coach travel means we can respond to demand and quickly and safely increase capacity with covid-secure measures in place.

Mark Venables, Managing Director for megabus, said:

Public transport continues to play a vital role in helping to connect communities, and that's even more important this year as people travel to reunite with their families and loved ones for Christmas.

We're pleased to have worked in partnership with the UK Department for Transport to provide thousands of additional seats on our megabus coaches this Christmas, and we'll be running right throughout the festive period, including on Christmas Day.

Seats are selling fast, so we're urging people to plan ahead and book their travel as soon as possible. Our megabus services offer safe, environmentally friendly, easy, hassle-free and flexible travel and provide a great alternative to travelling by car.

Thomas Ableman, Founder & CEO of Snap, said:

We're thrilled to be able to help people see their family at Christmas. Our network of incredible quality local coach operators are ready to get people to where they need to go with safety, security and a smile. We know people have really valued their local small businesses this year, so are sure they'll continue to do so by booking their travel with a local coach operator through Snap.

[Ban on keeping primates as pets moves step closer](#)

The government has today (12 December) launched proposals to ban keeping primates as pets in England, inviting the public to have their say on the issue over the next eight weeks.

This [public consultation](#) on the government's manifesto commitment to ban

keeping primates such as capuchins, lemurs and squirrel monkeys forms part of a renewed push to cement the UK's position as a world leader on animal welfare.

Primates are highly intelligent wild animals with complicated welfare needs, and require open spaces, varied diets, social contact and plenty of warmth and light. Findings from a recent [call for evidence](#) found that these complex needs cannot be met in a home environment.

Under these new plans, it will be an offence to keep a primate as a pet in England. Only those keeping primates to zoo level standards will be permitted to keep primates.

Animal Welfare Minister Lord Goldsmith said:

Primates are hugely intelligent and socially complex animals. When they are confined in tiny cages, often alone and with little stimulation, their lives are a misery.

It's important that we take action to prevent the suffering caused to them when they are kept as pets, and so I am delighted that we are moving a big step closer towards banning the practice. These proposals will ensure that we have the strongest protections in place for our animals.

We have some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world, and these plans form part of a range of measures we are taking to raise the bar even further, such as ending live animal exports and cracking down on illegal puppy smuggling.

The government anticipates that up to 5,000 primates are currently kept outside of licensed zoos in the UK. Marmosets are by far the most commonly held primates in the UK, with capuchins, squirrel monkeys, lemurs and tamarins also among the most common species.

Monkey World, a sanctuary for abused and neglected primates in Dorset, have taken in over 100 primates from the UK pet trade, with 78 primates rescued in the last 10 years alone and now have a waiting list of over 100 more.

The new proposals mean that specialist primate keepers who do not hold a zoo licence will need to obtain a new specialist private primate keeper licence to ensure they are meeting the required high welfare standards. These plans will also place welfare restrictions on the breeding and transferring of primates.

Monkey World Director Dr Alison Cronin said:

Monkey World has rescued primates from the UK pet trade for more than 30 years, and we have experienced a dramatic increase in the numbers recently.

Current laws are not protecting the monkeys from abuse or neglect, as they arrive at the park malnourished, with rickets, mobility problems and psychologically damaged as a result of living in solitary confinement, inside people's houses.

We are asking people to take part in this consultation to signal that this trade is unacceptable and the current legislation is not working. The laws must change.

Dr Ros Clubb, Senior Scientific Manager at the RSPCA said:

We warmly welcome the government's proposals to ban keeping primates as pets in England. We look forward to reading the government's proposals in detail and hope that the legislation will deliver an end to the keeping and trade of primates as pets.

The RSPCA has been calling for a complete ban on the keeping and trade of primates as pets for some time, because their needs simply cannot be met in a domestic environment. They are intelligent, sentient and highly social animals with complex needs.

Just like humans, primates can become depressed without adequate stimulation. They need a spacious and enriched environment that challenges their intelligent brains and allows for them to behave like primates should, yet we are still finding them kept alone in indoor bird cages in living rooms.

This announcement marks the start of renewed efforts from the government to raise standards on animal welfare even further now we are outside the EU, including taking [steps to end live animal exports](#) and crack down on the illegal smuggling of dogs and puppies, with further proposals to improve standards and eradicate cruel practices expected to be set out in the coming months.

You can respond to the eight-week consultation by clicking [here](#).

[Meeting global humanitarian needs in 2021](#)

2020 has been a year like no other.

Many have tragically died and fallen ill as a result of COVID-19 and the virus has triggered a global recession not seen since the 1930s. We risk losing decades of human progress. Extreme poverty is rising for the first

time in over 20 years.

And, as the UN's Global Humanitarian Needs Overview for 2021 laid out in stark terms, 235 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. That's 1 in 33 people across the globe.

But the story of 2020 is not just about COVID-19. The main drivers of humanitarian crises have not gone away.

Conflict continues to take a heavy toll on civilians and violence against humanitarian workers remains rife. The impact of climate change and weather-related disasters continues to grow. The most vulnerable, including women and girls, are being hit hardest.

As a result, we are now facing the daunting prospect of famine and acute food insecurity in multiple contexts. The UK is particularly worried about the risks in Burkina Faso, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen.

As we look ahead to 2021, how do we meet the humanitarian needs of 235 million people? How can we slow increasing funding requirements? And how can we support humanitarians in field?

The UK remains committed to the global humanitarian cause. In September we appointed our first Special Envoy on Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs. His immediate focus is building the necessary alliances to drive up levels of humanitarian funding and to develop political solutions to prevent the most acute food security crises.

The UK continues to be a leading humanitarian donor. We have provided \$1.8 billion over the course of 2020. And in the last week alone, we announced almost almost \$90 million in funding for the CERF and \$18 million to Yemen.

It is no secret that budgets are under pressure around the world. But it is staggering that the top ten donors account for 83% of humanitarian funding. Words are not enough. Major economies, outside of that top ten, need to step up.

The trajectory of ever-increasing funding needs, \$28.8 billion needed at the start of 2020 leaping to \$35 billion for 2021, simply isn't sustainable. So we need to be better at anticipating crises. Investing in a more proactive response to avert humanitarian crises could reduce the cost by as much as 30%. This means using early warning analysis and data more effectively, but crucially ensuring data is linked to plans in advance of crisis and tied to practical early action.

But a humanitarian response alone is not enough. Humanitarian crises require political solutions. We need to ensure that the UN is making the full use of all the levers at its disposal – development, peace and political actors all have role to play in preventing crises.

We also need to ensure humanitarian assistance reaches those in need – and is not obstructed or frustrated – and that civilians and civilian objects are not the targets of violence. International Humanitarian Law must be respected

and we need to unequivocally support the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. A weakened normative framework helps no one.

Mr President, amid these unprecedented challenges, I want to finish by celebrating the successes of the international humanitarian community and, indeed, the successes of multilateralism.

Humanitarian workers, at great personal cost and risk, have adapted and innovated to ensure the delivery of aid and services to 98 million people worldwide. And I congratulate the World Food Programme on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for their commitment to tackling global starvation.

These are extraordinary achievements that we must all build on to overcome the grave challenges we will face in 2021. On this basis, we offer our full support for consensual adoption of the resolutions before us today.

Thank you.

Explanation of Vote at UN General Assembly Plenary Session on Humanitarian Affairs

Mr President, the United Kingdom is grateful to facilitators for their leadership on the draft resolutions before us and we welcome the approach taken not to re-open the text.

We would like to express our disappointment at the calling of a vote by the United States that seeks to delete agreed language on access to sexual and reproductive health services.

The UK is unwavering in its commitment to gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights for all and we are concerned about the repeated attempts to pushback against these long-standing rights.

The UK is concerned by attempts to curtail access to sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls, particularly as access to these vital services have been diverted during the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Sexual and reproductive health services are often life-saving, and women and girls affected by conflict and crisis need sexual and reproductive health services more than ever. These needs are particularly acute in crisis, conflict and humanitarian settings.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights – which includes access to quality, comprehensive health services – are critical to the empowerment of women and girls everywhere. We will not achieve the Global Goals if we do not ensure all people have access to and can realise their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

So it is essential that the international community reaffirms its long-standing resolve to defend and implement its commitments on gender equality and the rights of women and girls. We cannot accept this attempt to walk back

previously agreed language. And this is why the UK will vote in support of the paragraphs on which a vote has been called and we urge all member states to do the same.

Thank you.

Supporting the OPCW in its work to investigate chemical weapons use

Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to start by thanking Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu, and Director-General Arias for their briefings to the Council today. The Director-General's attendance alongside Ms Nakamitsu underlines the cooperation between the OPCW and the UN on this issue affecting international peace and security.

I thank Director-General Arias for his 86th monthly report and for his update today on the work of the OPCW. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has spared no effort in attempting to take forward its mandated activities. We are grateful for the professionalism and dedication of the OPCW and its personnel.

We take particular note of updates on the work of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT). The Director General's report raises two important points:

First, we note that the Declaration Assessment Team and Syria were able to close three outstanding issues related to Syria's initial declaration. This shows that contrary to the assertions of some – that the outstanding issues are artificial – they are, in fact, real and eminently capable of resolution.

Second, the report highlights evidence collected by the Declaration Assessment Team since 2014 that indicates the production and/or weaponisation of chemical warfare nerve agents at a production facility that the Syrian regime declared never to have been used for such production. This underlines the serious nature of, and the importance of, resolving the remaining 19 issues.

In addition, the unresolved issues in Syria's declaration include thousands of munitions and hundreds of tonnes of chemical agents, which Syria has not accounted for. Until all the issues are resolved, the complete elimination of Syria's chemical weapons program, as required under resolution 2118 and the Chemical Weapons Convention, cannot be verified. Given that the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) and the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), have established that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons on at least seven occasions since 2013, it is undebatable that the situation

represents an ongoing threat to international peace and security.

In light of this, we welcome the resolve shown by the OPCW Executive Council in adopting its decision of 9th of July 2020 in response to the findings of the IIT on the 2017 chemical weapons attacks in Ltamenah carried out by the Syrian Arab Air Force.

In that decision, the Executive Council was explicit that Syria had to declare the chemical weapons and facilities in its possession, acknowledge its chemical weapons activity, and resolve the outstanding issues with its initial declaration. As Director-General Arias has once again confirmed today, Syria failed to comply with the decision, and this will now be addressed during the next session of the Conference of States Parties in April 2021.

Just as the OPCW Executive Council and Conference of States Parties have a role in upholding compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and its own decisions, so the Security Council has a clear and distinct obligation to address Syria's repeated breaches of resolution 2118.

These breaches include the use of chemical weapons as identified by both the OPCW-UN JIM and the IIT; the retention and/or production of chemical weapons to carry out those attacks and the failure to comply fully with the OPCW, including on its initial declaration and access for the Investigation and Identification Team.

We were unequivocal on the action this Council would take in response to non-compliance with resolution 2118. Not to do so would be a dereliction of this Council's duty.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the UK's trust and confidence in the OPCW, its work and its dedicated staff. We have full confidence in the expertise of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the robust methodologies of its Fact-Finding Mission investigating allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria. It is not surprising that individuals working in the Technical Secretariat hold a range of views, and a robust assessment process should involve debate and challenge. However, as the Director-General has confirmed, the Technical Secretariat took all views, evidence and theories into account in reaching its considered overall judgement regarding the attack in Douma. The OPCW Technical Secretariat and its multinational personnel showed great professionalism and resilience under intense external pressure and scrutiny. This has included, as we've heard, cyber-attacks – for example, the foiled Russian GRU cyber-attack attempt in The Hague in 2018 – and a sustained disinformation campaign designed to undermine its credibility.

Attempts to undermine the OPCW and its staff have intensified since the use of nerve agents attack in Salisbury and Amesbury in 2013; since the OPCW Conference of State Parties voted to give the Technical Secretariat the role of attributing responsibility for chemical weapons attack in Syria in 2018; and since the poisoning of Russian opposition politician, Alexey Navalny, with a nerve agent from the Novichok group this year.

Only a year ago this Council adopted a Presidential Statement which unanimously reaffirmed our strong support for the work of the OPCW. Just two weeks ago, the overwhelming majority of State Parties, from across all regional groups, voted in favor of the OPCW's budget, which included renewed funding for the IIT and other Technical Secretariat teams working on Syria.

As a permanent member of the Security Council, the UK is well aware of the responsibility conferred on us by the members of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security. We will continue to act on behalf of the vast majority of Member States who believe in the necessity to protect the long-held norm prohibiting the use of chemical weapons and to hold those who violate it to account.

Mr President, I do have questions for the Director-General, which I will indicate now, but he may prefer, as is customary, to answer them in closed session.

Some have argued that Syria verifiably destroyed all of its chemical weapons in 2014 and the OPCW has not been able to find any evidence to the contrary since then. How would you answer this?

Our second question: in some respects, Syria appears to be engaging in process with the OPCW, and yet verification of its declaration has been outstanding for 7 years. How can Syria improve its engagement and how does the Director-General assess the prospects of achieving a complete and accurate declaration of its program by the SAR? What is needed in order to achieve this?

And our third question, does the Director-General know of any other case where it has been necessary for the Technical Secretariat, to engage continually with a state party over several years in order to arrive at a declaration that is considered accurate and complete in accordance with the CWC?

Thank you, Mr President.

[Secretary of State announces appointment to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland](#)

Press release

Secretary of State announces appointment to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland.



The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt. Hon Brandon Lewis CBE MP has announced the appointment of Sarah Havlin as a member of the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland.

Notes for Editors

The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland's role is to review the number, names, designation and boundaries of parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland and to submit reports with recommendations to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is responsible for making appointments to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland in accordance with Schedule 1 of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986.

Terms of appointment

- The position is a part-time appointment for five years. The appointment will end on 10 December 2025.
- The position attracts a daily remuneration of £505.50.
- The position is not pensionable.

Biography of Appointee

Sarah Havlin is a solicitor by profession currently serving as the Certification Officer of Northern Ireland. She holds appointments as the legal member of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority of Northern Ireland, and as a member of the Parades Commission for Northern Ireland. Previous appointments include Assistant Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, Assistant District Electoral Areas Commissioner and she previously served one term on the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland.

Political Activity

All appointments are made on merit and with regards to the statutory requirements. Political activity plays no part in the selection process.

However, in accordance with the original Nolan recommendations, there is a requirement for appointees' political activity in defined categories to be made public.

Sarah Havlin has declared no political activity.

Regulation

This appointment is regulated by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointment (OCPA) and all stages of the process were overseen by an independent panel member.

Statutory Requirements

This appointment is made by the Secretary of State in accordance with Schedule 1 Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986.

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