

[Rail update: 16 October 2020](#)

I am updating the House that the Department for Transport has negotiated a further direct award for the Cross Country rail franchise.

I am pleased to inform the house that the [government has signed a new contract with Arriva to ensure vital train services continue across the UK's most extensive rail network](#). Stretching from Aberdeen to Penzance and from Stansted Airport to Cardiff, CrossCountry's network is the most geographically extensive passenger rail franchise in Great Britain. It calls at over 100 stations and connects seven of Britain's ten largest cities.

The new agreement means Arriva CrossCountry, which has run the service since 2007, will continue to operate the franchise for three more years until October 2023. This brings stability to CrossCountry services and provides certainty for passengers and staff as the future direction of rail reform takes shape.

Vital, long-distance rail services, which people across the length of Great Britain rely on, will continue to run and support the UK's recovery from COVID-19, thanks to this new contract. As people return to the railway, passengers will benefit from more capacity and operational staff, along with new measures to help passengers with disabilities, aligned with current best practice across the rail industry.

The contract also has a renewed focus on tackling environmental impacts. To reduce diesel emissions, Arriva CrossCountry will trial the use of electrical shore supplies when Turbostars are in depots for cleaning, and on-train batteries when Voyagers enter end leave stations. We will continue to work with the owners of the Voyagers to ensure engines are turned off when at platforms.

This new contract complements the [Emergency Recovery Measures Agreements \(ERMAs\) announced in September, in place for up to 18 months](#), where the government pays train companies a small management fee to keep services running through the pandemic.

The contract will see the Government take on the revenue and cost risk associated with the franchise and pay Arriva a performance-linked fee to operate the service, incentivising the company to deliver improvements to operational performance, passenger experience and service quality.

[Quint statement on Israeli settlements](#)

News story

Statement from the UK, France, Germany, Italy & Spain on Israel's decision to advance more than 4,900 settlement units in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.



We are deeply concerned by the decision taken by the Israeli authorities to advance more than 4,900 settlement building units in the occupied West Bank. The expansion of settlements violates international law and further imperils the viability of a two-state solution to bring about a just and lasting peace to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is also a counterproductive move in light of the positive developments of normalisation agreements reached between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. As we have emphasised directly with the Government of Israel, this step also undermines efforts to rebuild trust between the parties with a view to resuming dialogue. We therefore call for an immediate halt to settlement construction, as well as to evictions and to demolitions of Palestinian structures in East-Jerusalem and the West Bank.

We call for the full implementation of UN Security Council resolution 2334 with all its provisions. We emphasise that we will not recognise any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regards to Jerusalem, unless agreed to between the parties. The suspension of plans to annex parts of Occupied Palestinian Territories must become permanent. We call on both sides to refrain from any unilateral action and resume a credible dialogue, as well as direct negotiations on all final-status issues.

Published 16 October 2020

[Joint Statement – Five Eyes nations defence ministers](#)

News story

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Defence Secretary Ben Wallace yesterday evening took part in a videoconference of defence ministers from the Five Eyes nations, chaired by Canada's Minister of National Defence the Honourable Harjit S. Sajjan.

Mr Wallace joined defence ministers from Australia, Canada, and the United States. New Zealand were represented by a senior official, due to the ongoing New Zealand general election.

Ministers highlighted the long-standing and trusted collaboration in intelligence among Five Eyes partners, and reaffirmed their commitment to advance defence and security cooperation to protect shared interests and values.

Ministers discussed current and future international initiatives, and considered how the Five Eyes might increase cooperation to address shared global security challenges. They concluded the meeting by sharing their respective engagement strategies in the Indo-Pacific region and identified ways to better coordinate efforts.

Ministers underscored the importance of meeting regularly to discuss defence issues and strengthen mutual support, and committed to convening again in the near future.

Published 16 October 2020

[Swedish community votes 'yes' for a Geological Disposal Facility](#)

News story

Swedish nuclear fuel and waste management company, SKB, passes historic milestone



Image, courtesy of SKB

On 13th October, the Municipality Council of Östhammar in Sweden voted in favour of a formal acceptance of the final underground repository for spent nuclear fuel.

The community has shown strong support for the facility throughout the development process. Earlier this year, 82% of the community respondents to the annual poll in Östhammar Municipality stated that they were in favour of SKB's plans to build the final repository in Forsmark.

The final decision is now with the Swedish Government and is the last remaining decision point for SKB to obtain the construction licence for their repository.

Johan Dasht, SKB's CEO, said:

It is very gratifying indeed that Östhammar Municipality has made this historic decision. This is absolutely crucial for making it possible for Sweden to take the final responsibility for the radioactive waste produced by our generation.

It is internationally recognised that a permanent deep disposal facility is the safest and most secure way to manage higher-activity waste for the long term. Countries around the world are planning to dispose of their higher-activity waste in this way. As well as [Sweden](#), [Canada](#), [Finland](#), [France](#), and [Switzerland](#) are well ahead of the UK in their implementation.

In the UK, RWM plan to [work in partnership](#) with a number of communities from across the country to explore how having a GDF in their area can provide long-term economic and employment benefits and play a major part in their development plans.

The search for a host community is a nationwide process, based on consent, and includes detailed investigations to make sure there is a suitable site at which to construct a safe and secure GDF.

[Find out more about the UK's plans.](#)

Published 16 October 2020

[Liz Truss ramps up engagement with trade unions and civil society groups](#)

- International Trade Secretary steps up engagement with stakeholders across the UK as trade talks with Australia, New Zealand and US proceed at pace and we prepare for the end of the transition period.
- New trade union advisory group created to advise government on how to protect and advance workers' interests as part of UK trade policy.
- Strategic Trade Advisory Group (STAG) relaunched with expanded membership to reflect the UK economy and ensure a wider range of voices are represented.

The creation of a new trade union advisory group has been announced today by the Secretary of State for International Trade, as part of a major drive to ramp up engagement on trade policy with key stakeholders (Friday 16 October).

Launched today at an event in Whitehall, the new group will see representatives from some of the UK's leading trade unions advise the government on how to protect and advance the interests of workers as part of its UK trade policy.

The move comes as trade talks with New Zealand, Australia and the US enter their crucial latter stages, and forms part of the government's bid to ensure diverse interests and voices are heard as the UK prepares to become a fully independent trading nation from January 1st.

Their advice will be used to help inform the government's trade policy agenda over the long-term and help it deliver trade deals that benefits all parts of the UK.

As part of today's announcement, DIT is also expanding and refreshing the membership of its Strategic Trade Advisory Group (STAG) – the department's main trade policy advisory group – to reflect the modern UK economy. The revamped STAG will hold its first meeting today, and will feature new civil society representatives, including a new Environment and Climate seat, and more 'nationwide' business representatives from across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, bringing the total number of members to 21.

The STAG is a forum for high-level strategic discussion between government and stakeholders from a cross-section of society, including business, labour and consumer groups with a key interest in UK trade policy.

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said:

I want our trade policy to benefit workers, the environment, business and families, and for every person and company in the country to feel fully engaged as we become an independent trading nation once again.

That is why today I am stepping up engagement with trade unions and civil society organisations to bring them closer to discussions and ensure all voices are heard. Listening to a wider range of interests will ultimately help us strike better trade deals and drive economic growth across all parts of the country, resulting in more highly-skilled jobs, more opportunities and more prosperity for British people.

CEO of Fairtrade Foundation, Michael Gidney said:

I am delighted to re-join this vital group and ensure that the voices of civil society are heard at this crucial time, including those of Fairtrade farmers and workers supplying goods to the UK market. Trade policy has an impact on all our lives and we must ensure deals that work for the UK and its partners, by delivering benefits that include poverty reduction and environmental goals.

I look forward to working with ministers in pursuit of a “gold standard” trade policy which benefits the whole of society at home and abroad.

Dame Carolyn Fairbairn, CBI Director-General, said:

Working hand in hand with business is a proven way to boost trade and the benefits it brings. Consulting firms alongside civil society and trade unions will give Government the live insight it needs to strike the best deals. The CBI and our members are committed to helping the STAG position Britain as a world leader in free, fair and inclusive trade.

As part of the department’s increased engagement with key stakeholders, Ministers will also hold a series of roundtables with civil society groups to hear their views and concerns, with the first of the series also taking place today. The meetings will cover issues like the environment, sustainability, development and gender as they relate to trade policy.

The new trade union advisory group is separate from the STAG and Trade Advisory Groups. The trade union advisory group will contribute to the ongoing work of DIT in formulating trade policy that works for all areas and people of the UK.

The first meeting of the trade union advisory group will take place today, and it will meet at least three times a year, or as required, to support policy development. It will be chaired by Minister Jayawardena.