

News story: Work to improve disabled access to toilets on trains and at stations is underway

Work to improve disabled access to toilets on trains and at stations is underway following talks between Rail Minister Paul Maynard and senior rail industry representatives.

The Rail Minister met with senior executives after Paralympian Anne Wafula Strike highlighted the issue. Clearer information will be made available about the availability of accessible toilets in advance of journeys and the Department for Transport will work with train companies to see how staff training can be improved. Where facilities are out of order, we have challenged industry to make sure disabled passengers are informed before the train departs. Maintenance teams will also ensure accessible toilets are more reliable and fix them more quickly when problems arise, ensuring fewer toilets are out of service in the first place.

Rail Minister Paul Maynard said:

I take the issue of accessibility on our railways extremely seriously and these commitments from industry are just one step forward to improve things.

It is vital that all people, including disabled passengers, are able use public transport and I will continue to push train companies on this matter.

Paul Plummer, chief executive of the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), which represents train operators and Network Rail, said:

The rail industry wants to modernise what is often Victorian infrastructure to make it more accessible and to provide far better information to enable people with disabilities to travel with confidence.

When things go wrong, rail companies want to put them right, and we are keen to hear directly from people with disabilities to understand their experiences which is why the industry is already engaging more with disability groups to understand how we can improve.

It has been a requirement since 1999 that all new trains with toilets are built with accessible toilets as standard – all trains built before then must comply by 2020.

The meeting sought to identify and address the reasons behind the lack of provision of accessible toilets, as part of the government's ongoing commitment to reduce barriers to disabled people accessing transport services. The steps were agreed as part of the rail industry's continued strong engagement with disabled advocacy groups.

More than 150 stations have been upgraded under the [Access for All programme](#) to remove barriers to independent travel – this includes installing signs, ramps and lifts. A further 68 are in construction or development.

The Department for Transport will be publish its 'Accessibility action plan' later this year, which will address accessibility across all modes of public transport. In addition, Aviation Minister Lord Ahmad will be holding talks on access to air travel for disabled passengers.

[Press release: Natural England backs hedges and boundaries for wildlife and people](#)

The [hedgerows and boundaries grant](#), individually worth up to £5,000, is designed to help farmers and other land managers improve important farmland boundaries.

The application window for the £5 million scheme closes on 28 April. Farmers can apply for a one-off grant towards the restoration of a range of traditional boundaries including hedgerows, dry stone walls, stone-faced banks and earth banks. Nearly 800 applicants were successful last year.

Guy Thompson, Chief Operating Officer of Natural England, said:

Hedgerows, dry stone walls and earth banks are a quintessential part of the English countryside. Not only do they perform a vital agricultural role in protecting crops and livestock from the elements, they help support a variety of wildlife. Increasingly farmland boundaries also play a major role in preventing soil loss as well as reducing pollution and flooding. I'm pleased that this grant will help to support these traditional boundaries and the wider benefits that they bring.

Payment rates are fixed for each item. These include hedge-laying or coppicing, hedgerow restoration through gapping-up, stone-faced bank repair and stone wall restoration, which can include a top wiring supplement.

Like the rest of the Countryside Stewardship scheme, the application process is competitive. Applications score more highly if the business has been in a previous Environmental Stewardship agreement or England Woodland Grant Scheme. Priority is given to smaller holdings and restoring hedges or walls is preferred to stone-faced or earth banks. More points are awarded if the application is for more than £1,000, and if the holding is part of a group receiving Facilitation Fund payments.

Grants are not available on land parcels already within Mid or Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship, a live 2016 Hedgerow and Boundary Grant, Higher Level Stewardship or Uplands Entry Level Stewardship on 31 July 2017. Land parcels in Entry Level Stewardship can be included in applications, as long as other eligibility criteria are met.

Grant offers will be made to successful applicants from July 2017. The deadline for submitting claims to Natural England is 31 December 2018.

Customers can apply by downloading an [application form](#) or by using the new online application process which is expected to be available on the [Rural Payments service](#) from early March 2017.

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[News story: Toby Wallace report published](#)

From:

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Fatal man overboard from ocean rowing boat in the North Atlantic Ocean.

MAIB's report on the investigation of the man overboard from the ocean rowing boat Toby Wallace in the North Atlantic Ocean with loss of 1 life on 14 February 2016 is now published.

The report contains details of what happened and the subsequent actions taken:

PDF, 1.95MB, 31 pages

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News story: Opening statement on Second Reading of EU (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill

Mr Speaker, I beg to move that the Bill be read a second time.

This Bill responds directly to the Supreme Court Judgment of 24 January and seeks to honour the commitment the Government gave to respect the outcome of the referendum held on 23 June last year.

It is not a Bill about whether the UK should leave the EU, or indeed how it should do so. It is simply about Parliament empowering the Government to implement a decision already made, a point of no return already passed. We asked the people of the UK if they wanted to leave the European Union; they decided they did.

So at the core of this Bill lies a very simple question: do we trust the people or not?

The democratic mandate is clear: the electorate voted for a Government to give them a referendum; Parliament then voted to hold that referendum; the people voted in that referendum and we are now honouring the result of that referendum, as we said we would.

So this is the most straightforward possible Bill necessary to enact the referendum result and respect the Supreme Court's judgment. Indeed, the House of Commons has already overwhelmingly passed a motion to support the triggering of Article 50 by 31 March. We will respect the will of the people and implement their decision by 31 March.

Sub-section 1 of clause 1 simply confers on the Prime Minister the power to notify, under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, the United Kingdom's intention to withdraw from the European Union.

Sub-section 2 of clause 1 is included to make it clear that the power to trigger Article 50 may be conferred on the Prime Minister regardless of any restrictions in other legislation, including in particular the European Communities Act of 1972.

Together these clear and succinct powers will allow the Prime Minister to

begin the process of withdrawal from the European Union, respecting the decision of the Supreme Court. And this is just the beginning, the beginning of a process to ensure that the decision made by the people last June is honoured.

I would like to draw Hon. Members' attention to the Explanatory Notes of the Bill, which set out the application of the Bill to Euratom. The Bill also gives the Prime Minister the power to start the process to leave Euratom.

The Bill also makes clear that in invoking Article 50, we will be leaving Euratom, the agency established by treaty to ensure cooperation on nuclear matters, as well as leaving the European Union. This is because, although Euratom was established in a treaty separate to European Union agreements and treaties, it uses the same institutions as the European Union including the Court of Justice. That is why the 2008 EU Amendment Act makes clear that, in UK law, membership of the European Union includes Euratom. And it is why Article 50 applies to both the European Union and Euratom.

Our aims are clear – we will maintain the closest possible nuclear cooperation with the European Union. That relationship could take a number of different forms and will be of course subject to negotiation, which will start after we have notified.

The Prime Minister has set out a bold and ambitious vision for the UK, outlining our key negotiating objectives as we move to establish a comprehensive new partnership with the European Union. This will be a partnership that is in the best interests of the whole of the United Kingdom, and we will continue to work with the Devolved Administrations to make sure that the voices of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland continue to be heard throughout the negotiation process.

I made a statement to this House on the 17 January about the negotiations ahead of us, and I do not propose to repeat it, save to say that our aim is to take this opportunity for the United Kingdom to emerge from this period of change stronger, fairer, more united and more outward-looking than ever before.

I also set out our 12 objectives for those negotiations. They are:

- to deliver certainty and clarity where we can
- to take control of our own laws
- to protect and strengthen the Union
- to maintain the Common Travel Area with the Republic of Ireland
- to control immigration
- to protect the rights of EU nationals in the UK and UK nationals in the European Union
- to protect workers' rights
- to allow free trade with European markets
- to forge new trade deals with other countries
- to boost science and innovation
- to protect and enhance cooperation over crime, terrorism and security and to make our exit smooth and orderly

In due course, the Government will be publishing our plan for exit in a White Paper in this House and the other place.

On 17 January, the Prime Minister also made it clear that this House and the other place will have a vote on the deal the Government negotiates with the EU before it comes into force. Ahead of that, Parliament will have a key role in scrutinising and shaping the decisions made, through debate in both Houses, plus the work of select committees, including the Brexit Select Committee whose chairman is actually in the chamber today.

Government ministers will continue to provide regular updates to Parliament. Further, since our proposal is to shift the 'acquis' – the body of EU law – into UK law at the point this country leaves the EU, it will be for Parliament to determine any changes to our domestic legislation in the national interest.

But as the Prime Minister said, to disclose all the details as we negotiate is not in the best interests of this country. Indeed, I have said all along that we will lay out as much detail of our strategy as possible subject to the caveat that it does not damage our negotiating position. This approach has been endorsed by this House a number of times.

I turn now to the reasoned amendment tabled by the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson).

As I have already said, this Bill simply seeks to deliver the outcome of the Referendum, a decision that the people of the UK have already made. They will view any attempt to halt its progress dimly.

The Supreme Court's judgment last week made clear that foreign affairs are reserved to the UK Government. The devolved legislatures do not have a veto on the UK's decision to withdraw from the European Union. But that doesn't mean we haven't paid a great deal of attention to them.

We have consistently engaged with the Devolved Administrations through the Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiation) and the Joint Ministerial Committee (Plenary), the second of which met yesterday in Cardiff and was attended by the First Ministers of all of the Devolved Administrations.

As well as that there have been bilateral meetings with those Devolved Administrations independent to those hearings, and 79 official level meetings to discuss the interests of each of the Devolved Administrations.

The Prime Minister has committed to bring forward a White Paper setting out the Government's plan, and I confirm this will be published in the near future.

Guaranteeing UK citizens' rights in the EU, and EU citizens' rights in the UK, is one of the objectives set out by the Prime Minister. We have been and remain ready to reach such a deal now if other countries agree.

Finally, there has been continual parliamentary scrutiny of the Government on this process. I have made five oral statements in the House of Commons and

there have been more than 10 debates – including four in Government time – and over 30 Select Committee inquiries. We will of course continue to support Parliament in its scrutiny role as we reach the negotiating stage.

We have been clear that there must be no attempts to remain inside the European Union, no attempts to rejoin it through the back door, and no second referendum. The country voted to leave the European Union, and it is the duty of the Government to make sure we do just that.

Finally, we remain committed to the timetable the Prime Minister has set to trigger Article 50 by no later than the 31 March. While we will provide plenty of time for debate and scrutiny of this Bill, it is equally vital that Honourable and Rt Honourable Members move swiftly to adopt this legislation in keeping with the Prime Minister's timetable for triggering Article 50 by the end of March – a timetable that this House voted in favour of in December and that is providing certainty both at home and in the Europe Union.

I conclude by saying this: the eyes of the nation are on this chamber as we consider this Bill. For many years, there has been a creeping sense in the country – and not just this country – that politicians say one thing, and do another.

We voted to give the people the chance to determine our future in a referendum, now we must honour our side of the agreement: to vote to deliver on the result.

So really we are considering that very simple question: do we trust the people or not? For generations, my party has done so. Now that question is before every member of this House.

This Bill provides the power for the Prime Minister to begin that process and honour the decision made by the people of the United Kingdom on 23 June last year, and I commend it to the House. Trust the people.

[News story: A New Chapter for Welsh devolution](#)

From:

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A new chapter in Welsh devolution was launched today as the Wales Bill received Royal Assent.

A new chapter in Welsh devolution was launched today (Tuesday January 31st) as the Wales Bill received Royal Assent.

Alun Cairns, Secretary of State for Wales, said:

The Wales Act 2017 delivers what I've always intended – a clearer, stronger and fairer devolution settlement for Wales based on a reserved powers model.

The provisions in this Act will make a real difference to the lives of everyone living in Wales. The powers being devolved to the National Assembly and Welsh Ministers have a real purpose and will enable them to decide the speed limits on Welsh roads; whether fracking should take place in Wales and how new gaming machines should be licensed.

With more powers, comes more responsibility. The new Welsh rates of income tax will make the Welsh Government more accountable to the people of Wales for the money they spend and doubling capital borrowing to £1bn will help the Welsh Government to invest in infrastructure.

This truly marks the coming of age of Welsh devolution. I will be working closely with the National Assembly and the Welsh Government in the coming months on plans to bring the new Welsh devolution settlement into force.

The Wales Act 2017:

- Introduces a new reserved powers model of devolution for Wales. The National Assembly will be able to legislate on anything not reserved to the UK Parliament.
- Devolves powers to the National Assembly and Welsh Government in areas including consenting for new energy projects, fracking, sewerage, teachers' pay, licensing gaming machines in new premises, speed limits, pedestrian crossings and traffic signs.
- Provides a comprehensive package of water and sewerage devolution.
- Opens the door for the Welsh Rates of Income Tax to come on stream.
- Enables the National Assembly to change its name and take control of its own affairs.
- Devolves control of National Assembly elections and local government elections in Wales.