

Press release: England gets ready for Russia

With England now preparing for matches against Tunisia, Panama and Belgium next summer following Friday's World Cup draw, thousands of England fans will be travelling to the three host cities of Volgograd, Nizhny Novgorod and Kaliningrad.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has been working with Russian authorities to help maximise the chances of a trouble-free tournament for fans, and the British Embassy in Moscow has visited all 11 of the host cities over the past year to discuss safety and security preparations.

The FCO's 'Be On The Ball' campaign gives supporters simple advice and tips to help avoid preventable problems and boost their World Cup experience. This includes specific Russia 2018 travel advice, and a preparation checklist. The FCO offers a country-specific travel advice alert system and those travelling to Russia for the tournament are encouraged to sign-up to this.

Foreign Office Minister Sir Alan Duncan said:

We're all looking forward to the World Cup in Russia next summer – nobody more so than those planning to travel for the tournament. Russia is getting ready to host the World Cup, but fans need to be prepared too.

We hope our advice will help fans Be On The Ball by planning ahead with appropriate travel insurance, passport validity, emergency numbers and other essentials.

Start doing your trip research now. Signing up to Russia travel advice alerts is the easiest and quickest way to receive any updates to our advice, to help ensure you have a safe and trouble-free visit.

The UK and Russia have been cooperating closely to ensure the safety of British supporters at the tournament. This has included regular visits by the UK police to Russia and reciprocal visits from the Russian police to the UK.

The signs from Russia have been promising – after recent Liverpool and Manchester United matches in Moscow, the embassy has recorded zero consular cases.

We want this success to continue, and enhanced security measures during the tournament will help to ensure those travelling from the UK can safely enjoy the games.

Ticket holders should apply for a FAN ID, which will give them free travel on

match day, enable those with tickets to access stadiums, and will even act as their visa for the tournament. There's also advice for fans without tickets, who will need to apply for a visa to travel.

Last year, Britons made 150,000 visits to Russia, and we are expecting tens of thousands more to travel next summer.

Further information

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Further information

News story: UK bolsters defence ties in the Western Balkans

The trip marks the first time Mark Lancaster has been to Kosovo since he served there in 1999-2000 and it's the first visit to Serbia by a British defence minister in more than 10 years.

Defence Minister Mark Lancaster said:

The Western Balkans is a key region for the stability and security of Europe, and the UK continues to play a leading role in supporting the Kosovo Security Force and the Serbian Armed Forces.

Our connections are historic; it is a hundred years since we fought side by side with Serbia during the First World War, and we will continue to build on our rich history with both countries in the years to come.

Mr Lancaster's visit to Kosovo comes at a time when the UK has boosted its presence in the country, having recently deployed 30 troops to NATO's Force based there to work with allies to promote safety, security and stability in the region. This is in addition to long-standing defence training assistance and capacity-building of the Kosovo Security Force.

The Defence Minister went on to visit Belgrade, to meet with his counterparts. It marked the hundredth anniversary since British and Commonwealth troops successfully fought alongside Serbian counterparts to secure the Salonika Front during the First World War. The UK has a proud history of training side-by-side with Serbian forces, with the 2nd Battalion the Royal Irish Regiment recently working on Exercise Platinum Wolf in Cepotina.

While in Kosovo Mark Lancaster met with President Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, Minister for the Kosovo Security Force Mr Rrustem Berisha, and Lieutenant General Rrahman Rama. He also laid a wreath at the UK memorial in Pristina and saw a demonstration by the Kosovo Security Force. In Serbia the Minister met Defence Minister Aleksandar Vulin, laid a wreath at the Belgrade War Cemetery and addressed military personnel at the Peacekeeping Centre.

The visit comes ahead of the major Western Balkans Summit in London in next year.

Press release: M20 motorway Junction 10A granted development consent

Consent has been granted to construct the M20 Junction 10A; a new interchange on the M20 east of Junction 10 that will incorporate a new two-lane dual carriageway link road to the existing A2070 Southern orbital Road (Bad Munstereifel Road), together with other associated improvements. The consent also includes the option to construct an 'Alternative Scheme' which, in addition to the above, would include the provision of a new access in the form of a roundabout from the new A2070 link road to the proposed Stour Park Development site, located immediately south of the proposed A2070 link road.

The application was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for consideration by Highways England on 19 July 2016 and accepted for examination on 11 August 2016. Following a six month examination during which the public, statutory consultees and interested parties were given the opportunity to give evidence to the Examining Authority, a recommendation was made to the Secretary of State for Transport on 1 September 2017.

The Planning Inspectorate is committed to giving local communities the opportunity to be involved in the examination of projects that may affect them. Local people, the local authorities and other interested parties were able to participate in the six month examination. The Examining Authority listened and gave full consideration to local views before making its recommendation.

The Planning Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Sarah Richards said: "The

Planning Inspectorate has again demonstrated its ability to examine Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) within the timescales laid down in the Planning Act 2008.”

“This provides developers and investors with the confidence to build and improve the infrastructure this country needs to secure future economic growth.”

The decision announced today supports the recommendation made by the Planning Inspectorate. It is the 69th NSIP application to be examined and decided, and the 20th transport project.

The Secretary of State’s decision and statement of reasons, the recommendation made by the Examining Authority to the Secretary of State and the evidence considered by the Examining Authority in reaching its recommendation is publicly available on the [National Infrastructure Planning website](#)

Ends

Journalists wanting further information should contact the Planning Inspectorate Press Office, on: 0303 444 5004 or 0303 444 5005 or email: pressoffice@pins.gsi.gov.uk

Notes to editors:

The Planning Inspectorate, National Infrastructure Programme of Projects details the proposals which are anticipated to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate as applications in the coming months. It can be viewed at <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/>

Speech: Transport investment in the north

Introduction

I’m really pleased to have been asked to deliver the closing address at today’s (30 November 2017) conference.

And what a choice of venue.

I hope there is no deliberate symbolism in asking a Westminster politician to talk to a northern audience about investment in the north in a building devoted to medieval warfare, hunting and instruments of torture.

Before anyone gets any ideas, let me make absolutely that clear I am a

northerner as well – both in terms of where I grew up and who I represent in parliament.

And very glad I am too that these days we decide which regions get what resources through sensible means, such as consultation exercises, elections and civil dialogue.

Investment debate

Even so, the truth is that anyone who follows the debate about transport investment in the north might have got the impression that, of late, things have become somewhat gladiatorial.

Well, my view is that that, in itself, is no bad thing.

In fact, one of the reasons that the government pushed hard for metro mayors, and for the creation of sub-national transport bodies like TfN, and why we're making good progress on giving statutory status to TfN, is because we want regions across the UK to speak with a more powerful voice.

So if we're hearing free and frank debate, including at conferences like this one, something's going right.

Our record

But no one should mistake that debate for a divergence from our shared goals – that of building a transport-fuelled Northern Powerhouse.

Or still more serious a mistake – that the government is somehow washing its hands of transport in the north.

Because speaking as a northern MP who now has a seat in government, it's incredibly exciting to have a hand in delivering the things I called for when I was a backbencher.

When I took up the rail brief 17 months ago, there was already good progress underway.

In 2014, 15 minutes had been knocked off the journey between Liverpool and Manchester by upgrading the track.

In 2015, electrification of the route between Liverpool and Wigan was completed, securing quicker, more reliable journeys.

We upgraded Manchester Victoria, and built new stations at Kirkstall Forge and Apperley Bridge.

In 2016, we awarded new Northern and TransPennine Express rail franchises, which will deliver new trains, 500 new carriages, over 2,000 extra services, and room for 40,000 more passengers per week.

These new franchises mean that, by 2020, rail travel in the north will have

been transformed.

All the trains will be brand new or completely refurbished, and all the Pacer trains will be gone.

Also in 2016, we committed £60 million for TfN to develop plans for Northern Powerhouse Rail.

And this year, we opened the Ordsall Chord, connecting Manchester's three main railway stations for the first time; all part of the Great North Rail Project, on which we are spending over a billion pounds to deliver better services across the north, with more seats and faster journeys.

Still to come

And there are many more important rail projects underway right now.

The upgrade of Liverpool Lime Street station.

The extra services between Blackburn and Manchester, Bishop Auckland and Darlington – starting next month.

Next year, upgrades between Manchester and Blackpool via Bolton and Preston will be complete.

Followed by a new fleet of Azuma Class 800 trains on the East Coast Main Line.

And we're working with Network Rail and Rail North on options for upgrades between Manchester, Leeds and York to deliver more seats and faster journeys.

I could go on – but I think the point is clear.

That's the to-do list of a government taking very seriously its responsibilities towards northern transport.

And I haven't even mentioned the billions we are spending on northern roads.

Recent announcements

Now, I hope these projects will be familiar to most people in the room.

But I'd also like to touch on some recent announcements that might be less familiar.

Such as the [Rail Strategy we announced yesterday](#).

The [HS2 productivity report](#) also out today.

The [Transforming Cities Fund, announced in last week's budget](#).

And the new Nexus rolling stock announcement for Newcastle, Gateshead and Sunderland.

Rail strategy

Let me take the rail strategy first.

It's a story that begins with privatisation, over 20 years ago.

On all the measures that matter most, privatisation has succeeded.

We have one of the most improved railways in Europe, and the safest.

Passenger numbers have more than doubled.

In the north, too, whether one is looking at journeys within the different regions of the north, or to and from the north and elsewhere in the country, passenger numbers are all significantly up over the last 20 years.

Today, for instance, TransPennine Express is one of the country's fastest growing operators.

But just because something has worked, doesn't mean it can't be improved.

I understand why the railways were privatised in the way they were, with the trains and the tracks split into separate companies.

But the railway of the mid-1990s is very different from that of today.

And delivering the kind of improvements I've been talking about on a working railway is tough.

Doing so across different teams with complicated contracting arrangements is even tougher.

And when things go wrong, a lack of a joined up approach can make things much worse for passengers.

Solutions can take too long.

Communication with passengers is poor.

Train companies take the blame for the failings of Network Rail.

And Network Rail as an infrastructure company has not always been incentivised to focus on the best possible customer service.

So last year we announced that we would start bringing back together the operation of track and train on our railways.

And today I am very pleased to announce that, as part of our reforms, the first line on which track and train operations will be jointly run will be the East Coast Main Line, connecting London, Yorkshire, the north east and Scotland.

From 2020, we're going to introduce a new generation of long-term partnerships between the public sector and a private partner.

Both track and train will be operated by a single management, under a single brand and overseen by a single leader.

It will mean a better railway, better able to meet today's challenges.

Whether it's planning essential repairs, putting in place improvements that can squeeze in an extra service to meet demand, or responding quickly to a problem on the network – the line should be much better run by one team of people working together.

HS2

Let me move on to talk about HS2.

Today we're publishing a report written following discussions with 100 employers, local authorities and universities across the country.

It sets out how HS2 will improve northern productivity by raising regional growth, leading to a wider range of jobs and careers, which in turn will make it more attractive for graduates to stay in the north – among many other benefits.

But one thing that is very clear is that both central government and local public bodies of all kinds need to work together and plan ahead for HS2 if we are to maximise its benefits – whether to housing, education, local businesses or anything else.

HS2 is coming.

It's going to transform travel in our country and in the north.

And local areas need to get HS2-ready.

Nexus trains

That's some of what we've announced today and yesterday.

But there were also some big announcements for the north in the budget last week.

Foremost among which is our commitment to spend £337 million replacing the 40-year-old trains on the Tyne and Wear Metro.

The Metro was Britain's first light rapid transit system and first step-free railway.

Today it remains the second largest metro system in the country.

But its trains are showing their age.

So Tyne and Wear is going to have a new fleet, with the first deliveries coming in 2021 – creating a state of the art Metro once again.

Transforming Cities Fund

The other big announcement in the budget was the government's new [Transforming Cities Fund](#).

And it's an idea inspired by this city.

Leeds has long had ambitions to improve transport across the city – ambitions the government shares.

So when a proposed a trolleybus scheme didn't get the approval it needed last year, we pledged to put £173 million into an alternative.

First Group and local leaders since raised an extra £100 million on top.

Now Leeds is getting:

- new buses
- new park and ride sites
- real-time information for passengers
- and accessibility improvements

The aim is to double bus patronage in Leeds within 10 years.

And what's worked in Leeds can work elsewhere, so last week the Chancellor unveiled our new £1.7 billion Transforming Cities Fund.

Half to be shared by the 6 areas with elected metro mayors.

With other cities in England to bid for the remainder.

Liverpool City Region will get £134 million.

And Greater Manchester £243 million.

Just like in Leeds, we want the money to drive productivity and spread prosperity, by improving local transport links and making it easier for people to get around and access jobs.

And we want changes that benefit every citizen, especially those struggling at the margins.

It will be up to cities to tell us what improvements they want, but we want truly transformational changes.

Conclusion

So I hope those remarks are sufficient to suggest that the government hasn't quite given up on the north just yet.

In fact, we're only just getting going.

But suffice it to say, for now, that in coming months and years, we are going

to be working with the north and for the north.

There'll be plenty of debate and discussion on the way.

But during my time in the job, I'll be focused on deeds.

On delivery.

That's how we'll all be judged in the future.

On what we, working together, do for the north.

Thank you for your time.