

Press release: Work gets underway on 'Halton Curve' to boost Liverpool City Region, Cheshire and North Wales rail links

Work has started on the 1.5 miles of rail track, known as the 'Halton Curve', that will unlock leisure and business opportunities between the Liverpool City Region, its airport, Cheshire and North Wales.

Leaders and key officials will today (Friday 14th July) be marking the occasion by going track-side onto the 'Curve'.

The Halton Curve scheme, delivered by Network Rail, is bringing back into full use the section of the line that links the Chester/Warrington line and the Liverpool/Crewe line at Frodsham Junction.

Vital upgrades to track and signalling on the curve will enable a new hourly service, in both directions, between Liverpool and Chester, serving Liverpool Lime Street, Liverpool South Parkway (for Liverpool John Lennon Airport) Runcorn, Frodsham and Helsby.

The services, proposed to start running from December 2018, will generate 250,000 new trips, boosting the economy by £100m.

While the service will be initially one train per hour, it's expected that demand would strengthen the case for increased frequency, especially with plans for services to be extended into North Wales – something currently being considered as part of the forthcoming Wales and Borders franchise.

As journeys between the Liverpool City Region, West Cheshire and North Wales are currently largely car dependent, it's expected that the new service would remove the need for 170,000 road journeys helping reduce demand on key routes such as the M56 and A55.

The upgrade forms part of Network Rail's Great North Rail Project which will see over £1bn invested in the railway across the north, as part of the national Railway Upgrade Plan.

This project, due to cost a maximum £18.75m, is being funded through the UK Government's Growth Deal and the Liverpool City Region. It is being developed by the Liverpool City Region (including Halton Council), Cheshire West and Cheshire Council, the Welsh Government and a consortium of the six county authorities in North Wales.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

This is a significant milestone on the way to making travel between

north-west England and north Wales much easier and I am delighted that the UK Government has been able to help make it happen. When completed, the line will improve links between Liverpool and north Wales, providing benefits for businesses, commuters and tourists, and unlocking the potential for economic growth in North Wales

Said Steve Rotheram, Mayor of the Liverpool City Region:

I welcome the spade being put in the ground on a project that has long been an ambition for many. People shouldn't be constrained in their work or leisure opportunities, as there are so many to be had across our City Region, Cheshire and North Wales. These can start to be fully realised through this much needed link.

This isn't a project in isolation but part of the overarching vision for connectivity within the Liverpool City Region and the wider North to join up north-south HS2 rail infrastructure with west-east Northern Powerhouse Rail to Liverpool.

Northern Powerhouse Minister Jake Berry said:

Liverpool was home to the world's first passenger railway, and now the city region is reclaiming its status at the forefront of rail connectivity with the Halton Curve.

The government has invested more than £16m in the Halton Curve, as part of our plans to improve transport across the Northern Powerhouse.

Just as the Northern Powerhouse is a long term government priority, this investment will provide lasting benefits with a predicted £100 million boost to the local economy.

Notes to Editors

Halton Curve is part of a £340m railway investment programme by Network Rail and Liverpool City Region from now until 2019. For more information click [here](#)

- Liverpool City Region Growth Deal Funding

The project has been allocated just over £16m of funding from the Growth Deal. In March 2014 the Liverpool City Region LEP secured a total of £232m of Local Growth Fund from the Growth Plan that was submitted to Government. This Plan outlined an ambitious vision of unlocking the region's potential with the long term goal of achieving economic growth and job creation.

For more information on the Growth Fund, click [here](#)

Press release: New drug strategy to safeguard vulnerable and stop substance misuse

Each year in the UK, drugs cost society £10.7 billion in policing, healthcare and crime, with drug-fuelled theft alone costing £6 billion a year. Research shows that for every £1 spent on treatment, an estimated £2.50 is saved.

In 2015/16, 2.7 million – over 8% – of 16-59-year-olds in England and Wales took illegal drugs. This is down from 10.5% a decade ago, but new threats are emerging including new psychoactive substances such as ‘spice’, image and performance enhancing drugs, ‘chemsex’ drugs and misuse of prescribed medicines.

The new strategy confronts these threats and sets out new action to protect the most vulnerable, including the homeless, victims of domestic abuse and those with mental health issues.

The comprehensive new approach brings the police, health and local partners together to support those most at risk. The strategy includes measures to:

- reduce demand: through deterrent work including an expansion of the Alcohol and Drugs Education and Prevention Information Service for young people
- restrict supply: by pursuing a strong law enforcement response and dismantling trafficking networks
- support recovery: a new National Recovery Champion will be appointed to make sure adequate housing, employment and mental health services are available to help people turn their lives around
- drive international action: an international strand is included for the first time, setting out action to strengthen controls at our borders, understand global trends and share intelligence

Home Secretary Amber Rudd said:

Since becoming Home Secretary I have seen first-hand how drugs can destroy lives. I am determined to confront the scale of this issue and prevent drug misuse devastating our families and communities.

This government has driven a tough law enforcement response in the UK and at our borders, but this must go hand in hand with prevention and recovery. This new strategy brings together police, health, community and global partners to clamp down on the illicit drug trade, safeguard the most vulnerable, and help those affected to turn their lives around.

We must follow through with our commitment to work together towards a common goal: a society free from the harms caused by drugs.

The Home Secretary will chair a new cross-government Drug Strategy Board, to drive action and ensure the strategy is delivered by all partners.

Under the strategy, police and law enforcement will continue to pursue a strong enforcement response to restrict the supply of drugs by adapting our approach to reflect changes in criminal activity and using innovative data and technology.

Just ten days ago Border Force and National Crime Agency officers helped intercept a boat carrying 1.5 tonnes of uncut South American cocaine, with a street value of about £200 million, preventing it from entering the UK.

In addition to a tough global and domestic law enforcement response, we will continue to promote the role of the police in referring drug-misusing offenders to appropriate services to maximise the significant benefits that investment in treatment can have on reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Drugs, Commander Simon Bray said:

Illicit drugs feature in so many types of harm and crime; they are frequently used as a commodity by organised criminals and gangs, often linked to violence and exploitation of the vulnerable. Drugs are the root cause behind countless burglaries, thefts and robberies, and are often associated with anti-social behaviour and public concern.

The government has set out their new strategy for tackling the complex harms and issues associated with drugs and police will play our part in delivering it.

Additional new action in the strategy includes improved measures to test the long-term success of treatment. As part of the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS), health services will now carry out additional checks to track the progress of those in recovery at 12 months, as well as after 6, to ensure they remain drug-free.

Building on the successful impact of the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, a new NPS intelligence system will ensure the treatment response stays one step ahead of the criminals pushing newly invented substances onto British streets.

The system, being developed by Public Health England, will reduce the length of time between drug-related health harms emerging and effective treatment responses being prepared.

A network of medical experts will analyse data from a new pilot system (RIDR – Report Illicit Drug Reactions) designed to gather information about adverse

reactions and harms caused by NPS and other drug use, to identify patterns and agree the best clinical responses.

Paul Hayes, Chief Executive of the Collective Voice, said:

The government's recognition that evidence based treatment, recovery, and harm reduction services need to be at the heart of our collective response to drug misuse is very welcome.

Investment in treatment has reduced levels of drug use, cut drug related crime, enabled tens of thousands of individuals to overcome dependence, and is crucial in combating the recent increase in drug related deaths.

The Home Secretary's commitment to personally lead this cross-government effort, and the increased transparency of local performance provide the political energy and focus needed to turn the strategy's aspirations into outcomes.

Press release: Alun Cairns: The Repeal Bill will provide certainty and stability across the board.

The Repeal Bill will provide certainty and stability for businesses, employees and consumers as the UK prepares to exit the European Union.

The Bill will convert existing EU law into UK domestic law, maintaining the same standards, same rules, same regulations, same measures and the same obligations on the day after exit as the day before.

Most importantly, it will deliver on our promise to end the supremacy of European Union law in the UK so that our future laws will be made in London, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast.

For the entire process, the UK Government will consult and listen to businesses, local authorities, the third sector, the Welsh Government and the National Assembly to ensure the UK's exit from the EU works for Wales and for the UK as a whole.

Press release: Foreign Secretary statement on Liu Xiaobo

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

I am deeply saddened to hear that Liu Xiaobo has passed away. He was a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and a lifelong campaigner for democracy, human rights and peace. His death is a huge loss and our hearts go out to his wife Liu Xia, his family, and his many friends and supporters.

Liu Xiaobo should have been allowed to choose his own medical treatment overseas, which the Chinese authorities repeatedly denied him. This was wrong and I now urge them to lift all restrictions on his widow, Liu Xia.

Further information

Follow the Foreign Secretary on twitter [@BorisJohnson](#)

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Press release: HMRC publishes Annual Report and Accounts for 2016-17

The report shows that HMRC brought in an additional £29 billion by cracking down on the minority of individuals and businesses who try to not pay the tax they owe, while improving customer service for all taxpayers.

Jon Thompson, Chief Executive and Permanent Secretary, HMRC, said:

In the last year, we have generated £28.9 billion of compliance yield, billions of pounds that would have otherwise been lost to the UK through avoidance, evasion and organised crime but will now be spent on public services. That's around £1,000 for every household in the UK. We have also strengthened our grip on the minority who deliberately try to cheat the system and continue to pursue those who refuse to pay what they owe, on behalf of the honest majority. The message is clear to those who try to not pay

their fair and legal share: there is nowhere left to hide.

Edward Troup, Executive Chair and Permanent Secretary, HMRC, said:

Our ability to collect the money required to fund the UK's public services is, of course, the ultimate yardstick by which we will be measured, but the public rightly judge us on the quality of service we provide to the overwhelming majority of people in the UK who are honest and pay the right amount of tax on time. Our continued focus on giving our customers the service level they deserve is paying dividends. There are now quick and simple online tools to allow people to deal with their taxes or tax credits anywhere, anytime and the best phone service in years for those wanting to call us.

In the last financial year HMRC surpassed expectations and exceeded targets across the board, but investment in supporting the vast majority of honest taxpayers to pay their tax and access services, has paid particular dividends. New online services are making it easier for customers to get advice and support, such as completing their Self Assessment, and has led to record numbers going digital.

And for customers still wishing to contact HMRC on the phone, they can now do so seven days a week, getting through in just four minutes on average.

HMRC's focus on making sure the minority of people who try to get away with paying less than their fair and legal share has meant record additional revenues from avoidance, evasion and organised crime. And continued progress on developing increasingly sophisticated and world-leading techniques will further close this net, making it harder than ever to get away with tax dodging.

The report shows that HMRC:

- is transforming tax and payments for customers with contact centre staff now available seven days a week and answering phone calls in less than four minutes in 2016/17
- is marking the seventh consecutive year of record total tax revenues, collecting a total of £574.9 billion – £38.1 billion more than last year
- generated record compliance yield of £28.9bn through our work to stop avoidance, evasion and organised crime; more than ever before
- has over the last six years brought more than 500 serious organised criminals to justice. Investigations and enforcement action against organised crime generated or protected £3.2 billion in compliance yield in 2016-17
- handled more than 1,200 cases heard in courts and tribunals – winning 83% and protecting £15 billion in tax revenues
- helped more than nine million individuals to access online services with more than five million businesses having access to their online account to file, pay and obtain help.