

Press release: New £192 million A556 set to open after weekend work

Cheshire's brand new A556 dual carriageway is set to open for the first time a week today (6 March) following a second round of weekend junction and carriageway closures to complete the project.

The M56 junctions 7 and 8, M6 junction 19 and the existing A556 will all be closed next weekend as work to open the new £192 million Knutsford to Bowdon dual carriageway nears completion.

Work during the first of the 3 scheduled weekend closures was completed successfully on Monday morning allowing Highways England to confirm next weekend's arrangements – another full 56 hour weekend closure running from 9pm next Friday night (3 March) and 5am on the following Monday morning (6 March).

Highways England project manager Paul Hampson said:

We made some excellent progress at the weekend and we won't need another full weekend closure until next week – as scheduled. Everything is looking promising for the road to open a week on Monday.

Next weekend's closure will allow the old road to be finally sealed off to through traffic and for the motorway junctions to be tied into the new dual carriageway.

Motorway users will be diverted to alternative junctions to leave or join the M6 or M56:

- drivers on the northbound M6 heading for Manchester and Manchester Airport will need to stay on the M6, join the westbound M56 at Lymm Interchange (M6 junction 20) and then join the eastbound M56 at junction 10 (Stretton)
- drivers on the westbound M56 heading away from Manchester and wanting to join the southbound M6 will also need to travel to junction 10 at Stretton – joining the eastbound M56 from there to travel back to Lymm Interchange and access the southbound M6

Local diversions which will be strictly monitored will also be in place with access to the A50, Chapel Lane and Mereside Road. A one way system, travelling southbound, will be in place at Bucklow Hill to allow access for residents and businesses located between the Bucklow Hill and Mere junctions along Chester Road. Vehicles must use Mereside Road and Chapel Lane to access Chester Road. Traffic marshalls will be at Mere and Bucklow Hill junctions to facilitate the local diversion.

Over the weekend, only the northbound exit slip at junction 19 of the M6 will remain partially open – allowing drivers to access the southbound, local authority section, of the A556 towards Northwich.

Drivers are advised to build in some extra time for the diversions and to check traffic conditions before setting out on journeys. Highways England provides live traffic information [via its website](#), local and national radio travel bulletins, electronic road signs and mobile apps.

Information is also available from Twitter via @highwaysNWEST as well as services in other regions. Providing they can do so safely, road users can also call the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000 to keep up to date with road conditions.

The new road and the motorway junctions will be closed for finishing works during the project's third and final full weekend of closures between 9pm on Friday 10 March and 5am on Monday 13 March.

Construction of the new A556 link road, between the M56 and the M6, started in November 2014 and is part of a £15 billion government investment in motorways and major A roads by 2021 which is being delivered by Highways England as part of the Northern Powerhouse initiative.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[Press release: Patel: women are key to building post-conflict stability](#)

Countries will only be able to fully recover from conflict if they involve women in building security and stability, International Development Secretary Priti Patel said today following a visit to Afghanistan.

Ms Patel welcomed the progress Afghanistan has made on women's rights and girls' education since the Taliban's repressive rule. But ahead of International Women's Day next month, she warned that countries like Afghanistan will only achieve security and prosperity if women have the opportunity to play a full and active role in business, politics, peacebuilding and shaping the future of their country.

During her visit, Ms Patel saw a HALO Trust training site where UK funding is helping staff learn to identify and safely remove mines and other unexploded ordnance, saving lives and reclaiming land that can be used for agriculture and building. She also met female HALO workers who identify and map the location of mines for disposal, as well as educating communities and children on the dangers of unexploded ordnance.

Ms Patel also met First Lady Rula Ghani, a champion of women's rights in Afghanistan. And she spoke to female students, teachers and community advocates who benefit from UK funding that has helped provide education to more than 300,000 girls from rural and impoverished communities, who would have had no opportunity to learn under Taliban rule.

Priti Patel said:

Afghanistan can only succeed in creating a secure and prosperous future if girls and women are put at the heart of its political and economic development.

Women and girls are key to delivering real and lasting peace and stability in countries like Afghanistan – and that is clearly in the UK's interests as well.

Together, the UK and Afghanistan have made huge progress so far. The inspirational girls and women I met during my visit will be instrumental in charting Afghanistan's path to prosperity.

Whilst in Afghanistan, the International Development Secretary also met President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah. She reaffirmed the UK's enduring commitment to working with the Afghan Government and civil society to improve rights for women and girls, and underlined that this was a critical part of the UK's pledge of up to £750 million, made at the Brussels Development Conference last year.

She also spent two days in Pakistan prior to visiting Afghanistan. Whilst there, she met Finance Minister Senator Ishaq Dar, the Chief Minister of Punjab, Shahbaz Sharif and Ahsan Iqbal, Minister of Planning and Development.

She visited a UK-funded health centre that provides primary healthcare services including delivering babies, treating child malnutrition, immunisations and family planning services. She also visited a tuberculosis and leprosy hospital to see how UK support is helping to provide state of the art facilities to diagnose and treat patients.

Notes to editors

1. Today, more than seven million children in Afghanistan are attending school and 39% of them are girls; there has been significant progress in maternal healthcare; and women now hold 28% of parliamentary seats.
2. Legislatively, women's rights have been enshrined in the 2004 Constitution, recognising gender equality and women's right to education

and to work.

3. Significant challenges remain, however. Afghanistan still ranks among the lowest in the world for gender equality. Female literacy rates are extremely low at 17%, only 19% of women are in work, and an estimated 87% of women experience violence, abuse and sexual harassment in private and public life.
4. UK funding has helped 2.5 million girls get an education, including the 300,000 under the Girls Education Challenge programme that supported the teachers and students that the International Development Secretary met during his visit.
5. The UK is also providing services and access to justice for women victims of violence and helping thousands of women access quality jobs and gain business skills. It is also helping to train security and police forces to provide better support on gender and violence issues.
6. International Women's Day takes place on 8th March and is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The theme of International Women's Day 2017 is 'Be Bold for Change'.

News story: Installed: the machine set to clean up Sellafield's most hazardous building

The £100 million Silo Emptying Plant will scoop radioactive waste out of the Magnox Swarf Storage Silo.

The 1960s storage facility has been described as one of the most hazardous buildings in western Europe and contains 10,000 cubic metres of intermediate level waste from the earliest days of the UK's civil nuclear industry.

John Clarke, outgoing NDA Chief Executive, unveiled the machine – the first of three being assembled in the building – at a ceremony yesterday.

He said:

This is an enormous step forward for the Sellafield decommissioning programme.

It is the culmination of 20 years of work to get to the position where we've got the first machine in place that will retrieve waste from these silos.

The machines will sit on rails on top of the silo's 22 vertical waste

compartments. Each compartment is big enough to accommodate six double decker buses stacked three high.

Once operational, the emptying machines will be manoeuvred into place over the top of each compartment to scoop out their contents.

The material will then be packed into nuclear skips and sent to modern waste stores at Sellafield, pending final disposal in the UK's Geological Disposal Facility.

The machines will be ready to start retrieving waste in 2018, taking an estimated 20-25 years to complete the task.

Chris Halliwell, head of the Magnox Swarf Storage Silo, said:

This is probably the most complicated and advanced machine ever built at Sellafield.

It has about 13,500 different working parts and its design and concept was first drawn up more than 20 years ago.

Turning that vision into the machine we have today has been a major challenge for the UK's advanced manufacturing and nuclear supply chain.

The process has been hugely challenging because no plans were drawn up for how waste would be taken out of the building when it was built in the 1960s.

The emptying machines were built by engineering firm NES Ansaldo at its Wolverhampton factory, before being dismantled and sent to Sellafield in 23 separate modules.

These modules were lifted one by one into the silo building and then re-assembled in situ.

Chris Halliwell added:

There is no job at Sellafield more important than the one being done by this machine. Emptying the waste from this legacy silo is our number one priority.

It has to be reliable because once it starts taking waste out, the contamination inside it would make it very difficult to maintain or repair.

The silo took waste from nuclear power stations all over the UK until its closure in June 2000.

Its contents are chiefly made up of magnesium cladding which was stripped from nuclear fuel rods before they were sent for reprocessing.

Labour councillor joins Exeter Greens



28 February 2017

The Green Party in Exeter have gained their first city councillor, following the defection from Labour by Alphington councillor, Chris Musgrave. Councillor Musgrave says he has been drawn to the Green Party because of their deep-seated commitment to openness and transparency in local government, something he says is 'in short supply with the current Labour administration.'

Councillor Musgrave says he has become increasingly disillusioned with a 'small clique making decisions behind closed doors' and a refusal by the Labour group to accept proper scrutiny in decision making. He also accuses the Labour-run council of ignoring the results of public consultations, Cllr Chris Musgrave said:

"Openness and transparency is in short supply in the local Labour Party. Major decisions are increasingly made by a small clique behind closed doors with the majority of councillors locked out of the process. Whenever I have challenged the Labour Party and Labour-led council on major decisions – which is exactly what I believe I should be doing as an elected Councillor – I have been told in no uncertain terms to be quiet.

"I have become convinced that the best way I can serve the residents of my ward is by joining the Green Party, which is clearly committed to open and transparent local government. I have also become increasingly convinced that the Greens have the right policies for protecting public services, safeguarding our local environment and tackling the city's rising inequality.

"The Tories seem incapable or unwilling to challenge Exeter Labour, so it will be up to the Green Party to hold the Labour Party to account. As the city's first Green councillor, I intend to do just that."

Molly Scott Cato, Green MEP for the South West, has expressed her delight that Exeter has its first Green councillor. She said:

"Great news for Exeter! The South West is the strongest region of the country for Greens. This defection builds on resounding wins in recent local elections in [Weymouth](#) and the [Forest of Dean](#) – where Greens unseated a UKIP councillor. People across the region are coming to realise that the Green Party offers effective opposition and a clear alternative vision to business as usual".

Caroline Lucas MP, co-leader of the Green Party, who studied as an undergraduate at Exeter University, said:

“It’s great that Exeter now has a Green councillor to hold the Labour run council to account. Greens are committed to working hard for their communities and fighting the corner of local people. This defection will strengthen our local party and puts us in good stead to win further seats in the coming years.”

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News story: Reforms to put financial stability at the heart of the UK’s regulatory system complete

From Wednesday 1 March, the Bank of England’s new Prudential Regulation Committee (PRC) will take control of the Prudential Regulation Authority’s (PRA) most important financial stability supervision and policy decisions.

The change, which was set out in the Bank of England and Financial Services Act 2016, ends the PRA’s subsidiary status to the Bank and sees the PRC replace the PRA board. There are no changes to the PRA’s objectives or functions.

These changes will mean the Bank of England is better equipped to fulfil its vital role of overseeing monetary policy and financial stability for the whole of the UK by strengthening the governance and accountability of the Bank.

The Chancellor has reappointed the external members of the PRA Board to the PRC and has approved the new appointment by the Governor of the Bank of England of Ben Broadbent to the PRC.

Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Simon Kirby, said:

A well-regulated financial system is central to a strong economy. Since 2010, we have radically reformed how the UK’s financial services industry is supervised and put the Bank of England back at the heart of the system, where it belongs.

Integrating the Prudential Regulation Authority with the Bank of England completes this process and strengthens the governance and accountability of the Bank.

The Prudential Regulation Committee is created on the same legal footing as the Monetary Policy Committee and the Financial Policy Committee.

The Bank of England and Financial Services Act 2016 is the government's third major piece of legislation since 2010 to fundamentally reform the financial sector.

The Financial Services Act 2012 dismantled the failed tripartite system, putting the Bank of England at the centre of a new framework of financial regulation.

The Banking Reform Act 2013 put in place strict new rules on bank ring-fencing and made sweeping changes to enhance individual accountability and raise standards in banking.