

# Britain's biggest road project opens to traffic eight months early

The upgraded road was originally planned to open to traffic by December 2020, but now the last of the 24/7 roadworks have been removed and the new lanes are available for traffic, eight months ahead of schedule.

The £1.5 billion A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon scheme will transform journeys on the A14 in Cambridgeshire, shaving up to 20 minutes off journeys and strengthen links between the Midlands and the East of England – vastly improving access to and from the UK's largest container port at Felixstowe.

Highways England chief executive Jim O'Sullivan said:

This upgrade is a key addition to our national infrastructure, better linking the North of England and the Midlands to the East of England and to the Haven ports. It also brings economic benefits to the wider region and local towns and communities.

Being able to open it more than six months early and on budget shows what the UK construction industry can achieve with an integrated client team, common goals and targets, and a shared vision of success.

I would like to thank everyone across Highways England and our supply chain for their contribution to this project as well as road users, residents and stakeholders for their patience and support during the work.

Roads Minister Baroness Vere said:

Our roads are more important than ever as we work to keep Britain moving, and I'm delighted that this key stretch of road will benefit drivers even sooner than planned.

The upgrade will deliver faster, easier journeys for those travelling between Cambridge and Huntingdon, and will also improve links to the UK's largest container port at Felixstowe – further bolstering our efforts to move goods around the UK at this critical time.

Today Highways England confirmed the work to upgrade the A14 between Cambridge and Huntingdon has largely been completed, which means the permanent roadworks have been removed and the national 70mph speed limit has been restored.

Further work in the road verges, including completing landscaping as well as cycle, horse riding and pedestrian paths, will continue. To carry out the remaining work safely, some temporary overnight closures or off-peak daytime lane closures will be needed.

The A14 is usually used by 85,000 drivers every day

Work to transform the old A14 for local journeys in and around Huntingdon, including taking down the 45-year-old Huntingdon viaduct, is also continuing as planned and should be completed by 2022. Work began to dismantle the 16,400 tonne A14 Huntingdon Railway Viaduct following the opening of the Huntingdon southern bypass, and more than half a mile of new link roads are being built into the town.

A stretch of the 21-mile scheme – a new 12-mile bypass south of Huntingdon – was opened in December 2019, a whole year early. Already, the bypass has been used to make almost 12 million journeys.

Essential work on the upgrade has continued throughout the Coronavirus outbreak, with new sections of road opened as quickly as possible, to ensure vital goods were able to travel through. A number of measures were also put in place to ensure work was completed safely and in line with Public Health England's advice. Government advice to only make essential journeys to prevent the spread of Coronavirus remains in place.

Work on the project began in November 2016, and has employed over 14,000 people in total, with up to 2,500 working on site during the project's peak. Building the new road took 14 million construction hours – the equivalent of almost 1,600 years.

Besides the Huntingdon southern bypass, the project includes an upgrade to the A14 between Swavesey and Milton, and a new road for local communities, the A1307, which runs parallel to it between Cambridge and Godmanchester. Approximately 24 miles of new routes for cyclists, walkers and horse riders are also included in the scheme.

21 miles of the A14 have been upgraded as part of this £1.5 billion scheme

The A1307 east of Huntingdon and along the Alconbury spur, and part of the A141 west of Huntingdon, both of which use the path of the old A14, will be handed over to Cambridgeshire County Council once the project is completed.

For the latest information about the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon improvement scheme, including advance notification of road closures, [visit our web page](#), follow [@A14C2H](#) on Twitter or like the scheme Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/A14C2H/](http://www.facebook.com/A14C2H/).

## 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.

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# Ministers urge councils to plan for safe re-opening of recycling centres

The government has [today published guidance for local authorities](#) on how they can safely re-open their Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs).

Councils are being encouraged to open sites to avoid the build-up of waste in homes and businesses and reduce the opportunity for fly-tipping – but only where social distancing can be maintained and the public and staff can be kept safe.

Under the terms of the lockdown, householders can travel to a centre if the waste in their home presents a risk of injury or a risk to public health or the local environment.

The guidance sets out how local authorities could manage access and the number of people who are able to be on site at any one time.

If possible, waste should continue to be stored safely and disposed of using regular council collections.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

Maintaining crucial waste services while protecting public health remains a top priority during these unprecedented times, and I commend our councils on the superbly efficient job they are doing in keeping waste collection services running.

We are publishing this guidance to help local authorities re-open their recycling centres over the coming days and weeks. This will ensure that more waste can be properly disposed of and we avoid the likelihood of fly-tipping.

The new guidance recognises the importance of councils making independent assessments of which centres can be re-opened based on how much capacity they have and the practicalities of adhering to social distancing requirements at any one site.

Householders should check with their council to see if their local site is open.

Local Government Minister Simon Clarke said:

Councils have been working tirelessly to keep rubbish and recycling collections open during this national emergency, while bin crews are also playing a vital role in keeping the country going.

Many residents have not been able to dispose of all of their excess or bulky waste. That is why we are helping councils to reopen these sites, where safe to do so, in a planned and organised way over the next few weeks.

Cllr David Renard, Environment spokesman for the Local Government Association, said:

Councils are keen to open household waste and recycling centres as soon as practicable. The decision to re-open sites will be taken by individual councils based on risk assessments in their area.

This will be a gradual process over the next few weeks and based on whether they have enough staff, social distancing measures are in place to protect workers and members of the public and waste staff are given personal protective equipment to reduce the risk of infection and provide reassurance.

Councils will introduce measures to keep staff and customers safe, for example by managing visits through pre-booked time slots.

People should only travel to re-opened HWRCs if it is essential – if their waste is posing a risk to their health, the local environment, or a risk of injury. They should always check with their local council that their waste and recycling centre has reopened before driving there.

In April, Defra published [waste collection prioritisation guidance for local](#)

[authorities](#), with recommendations on how they could prioritise and adapt their collection services and mitigate any impacts being felt by coronavirus. The government says councils' top priority should be the collection of residual 'black bag' waste to avoid the build-up of waste and protect public health.

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## Eligibility for government childcare offers protected

Parents who are normally eligible for the government's childcare offers will continue receiving the entitlements during the summer term if their income levels fall due to the impact of coronavirus.

The Government has announced that any working parent usually eligible for 30 hours free childcare or Tax-Free Childcare will remain eligible if they fall below the minimum income requirement due to COVID-19. Subject to Parliamentary approval, parents who are critical workers will also remain eligible for these entitlements if their income has increased over the maximum threshold during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It remains the case that all educational settings – including early years – are closed, except for children of critical workers and vulnerable children.

In response to the challenges many working parents are facing during the pandemic, these changes will mean critical workers and the parents of vulnerable children can still benefit from these entitlements even if their working hours fall as a result of self-isolating, illness, furloughing or job loss – or, in the case of many critical workers, their hours increase.

This temporary flexibility will ensure critical workers can continue to access the childcare they need to enable them to work. These arrangements will be reviewed over the summer.

Minister for Children's and Families Vicky Ford said:

Juggling the demands of work and childcare is never easy for parents, and now more than ever they have our full support. Nurseries, childminders and all our early years settings are working hard to continue offering safe and high-quality childcare places for critical workers and parents of vulnerable children.

No parent whose income falls as a result of this virus should lose their eligibility for free childcare at this time. That's why we are confirming that anyone who was previously eligible should

remain so.

I am also asking local authorities to extend the validity of 30 hours codes of any parents who have missed their chance to reconfirm. This will help smooth the transition period when settings reopen.

Parents are required to reconfirm their eligibility for 30 hours free childcare and Tax-Free Childcare quarterly. The 30 hours deadline for the summer term has been extended to the 31st August to give working parents additional time to protect their place.

The temporary changes are in line with wider Government measures to make sure working parents remain eligible for 30 hours free childcare and Tax-Free Childcare even if they fall below the minimum working wage threshold due to coronavirus, equal to 16 hours per week at the national minimum wage.

Local authorities can extend the validity dates on the 30 hours codes received by parents who are critical workers during the summer term, ensuring those who are eligible can access the childcare offer despite having missed their reconfirmation date or the application deadline of 31 March 2020.

[Guidance](#) for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus outbreak will be updated in due course to reflect these temporary changes.

This builds on recently announced efforts to boost access to childcare, giving councils the flexibility to move around government funding for free childcare entitlements in exceptional circumstances to make sure sufficient childcare places are available for vulnerable children and those of critical workers.

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## [Marian Spain appointed new Natural England chief executive](#)

News story

Marian Spain has been appointed as the new chief executive of Natural England, taking the post on a permanent basis.



Marian Spain has been appointed as the new chief executive of Natural England, taking the post on a permanent basis after serving as interim chief executive since December 2018.

Natural England chair Tony Juniper said:

Marian has shown an unrivalled commitment to protect and enhance our natural environment along with excellent leadership skills.

It is so important not only for Natural England but also our environment to have someone with Marian's passion and experience to lead our teams at this vital time for conservation. She will ensure that the organisation can meet the challenge of restoring nature, which lies at the heart of the government's environmental policy, as the country recovers from the impact of coronavirus.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

I want to thank Marian for all her excellent work over the last year.

As we focus on setting environmental policy and farming support outside the European Union, Natural England has never been so important. I am looking forward to working further with Marian as we link together our wide range of initiatives to restore this nation's nature.

Natural England chief executive Marian Spain said:

It has been an honour to lead Natural England's exceptional, talented and passionate teams and I am so proud to be able to continue.

Every day our people work incredibly hard to make life in our country better. The future of Natural England is an exciting one as we build the partnerships we need to help nature thrive, so that we have a healthier planet and healthier people.

Marian Spain was appointed interim Chief Executive by the Natural England Board in November 2018, taking up the role in December that year.

She was chief executive of Plant Life as well as holding a number of senior roles with organisations in the environment sector, including the Environment Agency and Countryside Agency – a predecessor body of Natural England.

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## [260 kilos of cocaine seized by Border Force at Coquelles](#)

News story

Border Force officers at Coquelles have prevented an attempt to smuggle more than 260 kilos of cocaine into the UK in a lorry.



The seizure, which had a potential street value of around £20 million, happened on 28 April at the juxtaposed controls at Coquelles, France. Officers intercepted a lorry in the UK controlled zone at the port which was found to contain a consignment of car parts. A number of plywood boxes were found within the load which contained more than a quarter of a tonne of cocaine.

Chris Philp, Minister for Immigration Compliance said:

This seizure has taken millions of pounds worth of cocaine out of the hands of organised criminals and off our streets.

Drugs are currency for organised gangs and are intrinsically linked to crime, violence and exploitation which is why we will do all we can to stop drug traffickers and bring them to justice.

Following the 28 April seizure the driver of the lorry, a Romanian national, was arrested on suspicion of importing Class A drugs and the investigation was passed to the National Crime Agency (NCA). The driver was later released under investigation.

NCA Dover branch commander Martin Grace said:

We know that international OCGs remain criminally active and despite the restrictions on movement brought about by coronavirus.

As a result of joint working between the NCA and our Border Force partners, attempts to smuggle significant quantities of drugs have been thwarted before creating harm to our communities in the UK.

Border Force officers use hi-tech search equipment to combat immigration crime and detect banned and restricted goods that smugglers attempt to bring into the country.

Anyone with information about activity they suspect may be linked to smuggling should call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or go to <https://www.gov.uk/report-smuggling>.

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