

[Press release: Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 2018](#)

The Queen has approved that His Grace Richard Walter John Montagu Douglas Scott, The Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, KBE, DL, FSA, FRSE, be appointed as Her Majesty's Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 2018.

The Lord High Commissioner is the Sovereign's personal representative to the Annual General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. He attends the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on behalf of the Sovereign. He makes the opening and closing addresses to the Assembly, and carries out a number of official functions as the Lord High Commissioner.

[Press release: Interim report: Collision near London Waterloo station](#)

RAIB has today released its interim report following a collision near London Waterloo station, 15 August 2017.

We will publish a final report, including any safety recommendations, at the conclusion of our investigation.

Our investigation is independent of any investigation by the railway industry or by the [Office of Rail and Road](#).

You can [subscribe](#) to automated emails notifying you when we publish our reports.

PDF, 1.3MB, 15 pages

If you use assistive technology (such as a screen reader) and need a version of this document in a more accessible format, please email enquiries@raib.gov.uk. Please tell us what format you need. It will help us if you say what assistive technology you use.

Press release: High speed broadband to become a legal right

The Government has confirmed that universal high speed broadband will be delivered by a regulatory Universal Service Obligation (USO), giving everyone in the UK access to speeds of at least 10 Mbps by 2020.

This is the speed that Ofcom, the independent regulator, says is needed to meet the requirements of an average family. After careful consideration the government has decided that regulation is the best way of making sure everyone in the UK can get a decent broadband connection of at least 10 Mbps as soon as possible.

Following the creation of new powers when the Government passed the Digital Economy Act 2017, we launched our consultation on the design of the regulatory USO in the summer. The Government will now set out the design for a legal right to high speed broadband in secondary legislation early next year, alongside our detailed response to the consultation.

Ofcom's implementation is expected to take two years from when we lay secondary legislation, meeting the Government's commitment of giving everyone access to high speed broadband by 2020.

In the summer, we received a proposal from BT to deliver universal broadband through a voluntary agreement. We welcomed BT's proposal and have considered this in detail alongside a regulatory approach. We did not feel the proposal was strong enough for us to take the regulatory USO off the table, and have therefore decided not to pursue BT's proposal in favour of providing a legal right to broadband.

The government believes that only a regulatory USO offers sufficient certainty and the legal enforceability that is required to ensure high speed broadband access for the whole of the UK by 2020. However, we welcome BT's continued investment to deliver broadband to all parts of the UK.

Culture Secretary Karen Bradley said:

We know how important broadband is to homes and businesses and we want everyone to benefit from a fast and reliable connection. We are grateful to BT for their proposal but have decided that only a regulatory approach will make high speed broadband a reality for everyone in the UK, regardless of where they live or work.

This is all part of our work on ensuring that Britain's telecoms infrastructure is fit for the future and will continue to deliver the connectivity that consumers need in the digital age.

This regulatory approach also brings a number of other advantages for the

consumer:

- the minimum speed of connection can be increased over time as consumers' connectivity requirements evolve;
- it provides for greater enforcement to help ensure households and businesses do get connected
- the scheme will maximise the provision of fixed line connections in the hardest to reach areas.
- places a legal requirement for high speed broadband to be provided to anyone requesting it, subject to a cost threshold (in the same way the universal service right to a landline telephone works)

ENDS

[Press release: Tesco/Booker merger cleared after in-depth review](#)

A group of independent Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) panel members has examined all submissions received since its [provisional findings](#) before coming to its final view. This follows an in-depth examination of evidence from a large number of wholesalers, suppliers and retail chains as well as a survey of hundreds of retailers.

Tesco, as a retailer, and Booker, as a wholesaler, do not compete head-to-head in most of their activities. However, since Booker supplies shops – such as Premier, Londis and Budgens – that do compete with Tesco, the group considered the impact of this carefully.

Booker does not own the shops it supplies and these retailers are free to set their prices and decide which products to stock. So, although these shops compete with Tesco, Booker cannot directly determine how they compete.

Given Tesco's influence generally in the retail sector, the CMA also examined whether the merged company could raise prices or reduce service quality at either the wholesale or retail levels. It found that existing strong competition in wholesale and retail made this unlikely.

During the course of its phase 2 investigation, the CMA surveyed hundreds of retailers which showed that most shops use more than one wholesaler and frequently switch. A quarter of symbol group retailers and a third of independent shops switched at least once a month.

In addition, almost half of symbol group retailers surveyed and more than a third of independent retailers said that if Booker were to raise prices after the merger with Tesco, they might stop buying from Booker altogether. And only around a fifth would continue buying the same volumes from Booker,

alongside their other wholesalers.

The CMA also considered concerns that, after the merger, Booker would be able to use Tesco's buying power to purchase groceries from suppliers at lower prices and that other wholesalers might not be able to compete. This could lead to Booker eventually raising its prices if the choice didn't then exist to keep prices competitive. But the CMA concluded that the wholesale market would remain competitive in the longer term, noting that Booker's share of the UK grocery wholesaling market was not sufficient to justify these longer-term concerns.

The CMA also noted that if Booker could get keener prices for its goods from suppliers, this might actually intensify competition in the wholesale market, leading to cheaper prices for the shoppers and caterers Booker supplies.

Simon Polito, Chair of the inquiry group, said:

We have carefully listened to feedback from retailers and wholesalers who operate in what are highly competitive UK retail and wholesale sectors. Retailers have told us that they shop around for the best prices and service from their wholesaler, and we are confident that this will continue after Tesco buys Booker.

This has been an important investigation for us. Millions of people use their local supermarket or convenience store to buy their groceries or essentials, so it is vital that they have enough choice to secure the best deal for them. Having examined the evidence in depth, we are satisfied this will remain the case following the merger.

The CMA opened its phase 1 investigation into the merger in May. At the end of June, the companies requested a 'fast track' referral to the next stage of the investigation.

All information relating to this merger inquiry can be found on the [case page](#).

Notes for editors

1. Tesco operates more than 3,000 stores across the UK. Booker supplies services to over 5,000 'symbol' stores as well as to thousands of independent retailers and caterers.
2. A 'symbol' store is an independent grocery retailer operating under a brand owned by a wholesaler. The retailer is usually required to purchase some of its wholesale supplies from the brand owner, in return for use of the brand and other supporting services. Booker's symbol group brands are the Premier, Londis, Budgens and Family Shopper.

3. The CMA's [report](#) also recognised that Booker operates a small number of shops. In the areas where Tesco and Booker shops compete with each other directly, the CMA has found that existing competition is likely to prevent prices from going up.
4. During the CMA's inquiry Palmer & Harvey McLane Limited, and most of its subsidiaries, entered administration. The CMA has taken that into account in its final report.
5. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law. For CMA updates, follow us on Twitter [@CMAgovuk](#), [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#) and [LinkedIn](#).
6. All the CMA's functions in phase 2 merger inquiries are performed by inquiry groups chosen from the CMA's independent panel members. The appointed inquiry group is the decision-maker on phase 2 inquiries. The CMA's panel members come from a variety of backgrounds, including economics, law, accountancy and/or business. The membership of an inquiry group usually reflects a mix of expertise and experience (including industry experience).
7. Media enquiries to the CMA should be directed to press@cma.gsi.gov.uk or 020 3738 6337.

[News story: Tough new penalties for misuse of lasers](#)

People who target transport operators with laser devices could be jailed for up to 5 years under new laws designed to protect the public.

The Laser Misuse (Vehicles) Bill, which was published today (Wednesday, 20 December 2017), will also expand the list of vehicles, beyond just planes, which it is an offence to target with lasers.

Drivers of trains and buses, captains of boats and even pilots of hovercraft will be among those protected by the new legislation.

The bill will make it easier to prosecute offenders by removing the need to prove an intention to endanger a vehicle.

And it will remove the cap on the amount offenders can be fined – which is currently limited to £2,500 – paving the way for substantial sanctions. Fines could be issued in isolation or alongside a prison sentence.

The police will also be given additional powers to catch those responsible for the misuse of lasers.

[Animation video](#)

Aviation Minister, Baroness Sugg said:

Lasers can dazzle, distract or blind those in control of a vehicle, with serious and potentially even fatal consequences.

The government is determined to protect pilots, captains, drivers and their passengers and take action against those who threaten their safety.

Alongside their existing powers of arrest and the ability to search a person once arrested, officers will no longer need to establish proof of intention endanger to a vehicle, aircraft or vessel, making it easier to prosecute swiftly. It will be an offence to shine or direct a laser towards a vehicle if it dazzles or distracts the operator, if done deliberately or if reasonable precautions to avoid doing so are not taken.

Laser pens have become a growing concern with the beam from the devices capable of affecting the ability of transport operators to control their vehicles.

Last year, the Civil Aviation Authority received reports of 1,258 laser incidents, with Heathrow the most frequent location for reports of the devices being used recklessly.

Earlier this year, the [Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy ran a call for evidence on the selling of laser pointers and is considering the findings before formally responding in the new year.](#)

BALPA General Secretary, Brian Strutton said:

This is good news for transport safety. BALPA pilots and other transport workers have raised the growing threat of laser attacks for some time.

The government's announcement of a bill to tackle the misuse of lasers is therefore very welcome and we will work with DfT to ensure its effective and speedy implementation.

BALPA also welcomes the BEIS consultation on restrictions to the supply of certain lasers which we hope will move forward quickly.

[Laser promotional video](#)

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

Recklessly shining a laser at an aircraft or another moving vehicle is deeply irresponsible and dangerous. By causing a distraction or, in some cases, short or long-term eye damage, laser attacks can lead to catastrophic incidents.

These new and robust measures send a clear message to perpetrators: laser attacks are a crime and serious consequences will follow from committing this offence.

It is essential that the police have the powers required to support these measures and we will continue to work with the government to ensure that these powers are in place.