

# Press release: Next generation Road Communications Network

The Government company has let the contract for the next generation road communications network which will help reduce congestion, make journeys more reliable, and help drivers who get into difficulty.

The National Roads Telecommunications Service (NRTS) connects the company's seven regional control centres, the national traffic operations centre and the 30,000 roadside technology assets including message signs, CCTV cameras and emergency roadside telephones.

Today, 18 December 2017, Highways England has announced the award of the £450 million second NRTS contract, to telent Technology Services Ltd.

Chief Information Officer at Highways England, Tony Malone said:

Safety is at the heart of everything we do and this network, the central nervous system for England's motorways, enables us to operate safe roads. We are pleased to be working with telent Technology Services to deliver the reliability, resilience and innovation that will enable us to keep drivers safe and informed on our roads.

The 30,000-plus items of on road technology equipment for which Highways England is responsible, include 3,327 CCTV cameras, 3,774 message signs, 229 weather stations and 7,155 SOS phones. The network enables traffic information services to provide accurate, real-time travel information to drivers and travel news providers. The message signs help warn drivers of potential hazards and display real-time journey information.

The new service will renew equipment and deliver a service that will provide an open, flexible and scalable telecommunications network to meet the future needs of the business; it will also enable and support Highways England in the development of innovative services such as 'connected vehicles' and 5G.

Additionally the technology will continue to underpin the development and operation of the smart motorway and expressway programmes that are central to the modernisation of England's motorways and will help ensure the network continue to drive economic growth and prosperity.

The new contract will run from 16 March 2018 for 7 years.

## **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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# Press release: Extra lanes to open before Christmas on Manchester smart motorway

Highways England is opening a permanent fourth lane in each direction between junctions 18 and 20 of the M62 as part of a phased opening of the Manchester smart motorway scheme – increasing capacity on one of England's busiest stretches of motorway by a third.

Roadworks will be removed from the eastbound carriageway tonight (Monday 18 December 2017) and from the westbound carriageway tomorrow night (Tuesday 19 December 2017).

New electronic signs will also be switched on along this section of the M62 as well as on the M60 between junctions 8 and 10 near the Trafford Centre, providing drivers with journey time updates and details on incidents.

The opening of ten miles of extra lanes on the M62 are among almost 400 miles of roadworks across England being lifted or completed by Highways England in time for the Christmas getaway.

Almost 99 per cent of motorways and major A roads will be roadworks-free, meaning people travelling to meet up with families and friends can more easily reach their destinations.

Jon Stokes, Senior Project Manager at Highways England, said:

The extra lanes on the M62 will provide a significant increase in capacity on the busy stretch of motorway between Greater Manchester and Yorkshire, benefitting the 180,000 drivers who use the route every day.

We're now at a stage where we can open the extra lanes in time to benefit both Christmas shoppers and people travelling to visit family and friends over the festive season.

Nearly 600 people are currently working to complete the smart motorway and we will open each section along the route as soon as possible, improving drivers' journeys and supporting the economy.

Variable speed limits will be introduced on the M62 (junctions 18 to 20) and the M60 (junctions 8 to 10) in early 2018 which will automatically change in response to the flow of traffic. The speed limit will remain at 50mph while the new technology is being fine-tuned.

Construction work will continue between junctions 10 and 18 on the M60 in 2018 to complete the installation of over 350 electronic signs, over 100 traffic sensors and 50 CCTV cameras.

Resurfacing work will also take place along the entire smart motorway route using overnight carriageway closures. The project is due to be completed by summer 2018.

The scheme is Highways England's most complex smart motorway project, affecting the second busiest motorway in the country and covering 13 junctions – an average of one junction every 1.4 miles.

The full scheme stretches 17 miles between junction 8 of the M60 near Sale and junction 20 of the M62 near Rochdale.

More details on the Manchester smart motorway scheme can be found on the [scheme website](#).

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# **[News story: Defence Secretary and 02 team up for 2000th signing of Armed Forces Covenant](#)**

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson and 02 Chief Executive Mark Evans sign the Armed Forces Covenant.

The news comes after a record breaking year for the Armed Forces Covenant with more employers signing up in a single year than ever before.

02 is the latest employer to sign the Armed Forces Covenant, bringing the

total number of signatories up to 2,000. Today, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson and O2's CEO Mark Evans co-signed the Covenant at a ceremony in London. The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2017 by the Ministry of Defence was also published today, looking back at the achievements of this year.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation to those who serve or who have served, and their families, which says we will do all we can to ensure they are treated fairly and are not disadvantaged in their day-to-day lives.

Among O2's pledges of support for members of the Armed Forces and their families, O2 is offering paid leave for Reservists to complete their annual training as well as suspension of their mobile phone contracts in the event of deployment.

As part of their pledge to support Veterans and Cadets, O2 are offering them access to their WAYRA initiative. WAYRA is a world-leading start-up accelerator programme which takes between nine and 12 entrepreneurs for a nine month period in London, Oldham, and Birmingham to develop their business ideas.

By signing the Armed Forces Covenant, O2 joins large and small organisations across the country who are helping to ensure that current and ex-Forces personnel and their families get a fair deal when accessing goods and services as well as equal opportunity when transitioning to civilian jobs.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood:

Britain prides itself on the professionalism of our Armed Forces, who are the best in the world. The transferrable skills they take into civilian life are phenomenal. They are natural leaders, can work in a team, are disciplined, reliable, committed, brave and extremely well trained. These attributes are not lost when veterans hand in their uniform for the last time, and I would encourage any organisation to reflect on the value veterans can bring to their business.

Since 2013, the number of employers turning their pledges into positive initiatives for the Forces through the Armed Forces Covenant has doubled every year. The Covenant has leveraged growing support from companies in many sectors such as education, manufacturing, construction, arts, entertainment, and recreation, to name but a few. From supermarkets to banks to football clubs and charities, the Covenant is also attracting wide support from companies of all sizes. The achievements of the Armed Forces Covenant over the last twelve months are set out in the 2017 annual report and include:

- Fairer mobile phone contracts, freezing the accounts of Armed Forces personnel and their families posted overseas and removing cancellation fees

- Better deals in motor insurance, allowing personnel to keep their no claims bonuses and avoid cancellation fees when posted overseas at short notice
- Better access to banking, such as savings accounts to Service families posted overseas
- Tackling commercial disadvantage previously experienced by the Armed Forces community in relation to credit rating and access to mortgages on offer, allowing Service personnel posted overseas or in the UK to rent out their homes without having to switch to a 'buy to let' mortgage and incurring additional fees.
- Over 12,800 payments and £193 million advanced to Service Personnel through the Forces Help To Buy scheme, helping the Armed Forces community get on the property ladder
- Committing over £22.5 million of Service Pupil Premium funding to benefit over 75,000 eligible pupils from Armed Forces families in primary and secondary schools.
- Employer networks in a wide range of sectors to support Service leavers through their transition to new careers.
- Better access to mentoring, work placements and employment opportunities for personnel leaving the Services
- Increased funding and sponsorship of military charities and sports events such as the Invictus Games
- Flexible paid or unpaid leave for mobilised Reservists
- Employment support for Veterans, Reservists, Service spouses and partners, as well as support for Cadets
- Discounts and special deals for individuals and their families

The Armed Forces Covenant delivery partners include businesses and trade bodies, charities and community organisations, local authorities and government departments. Signatories tailor their own pledges to support the Armed Forces community and implement these promises through their choice of policies, services, and projects.

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## News story: Could your experiment fly on the International Space Station?

International Space Station. Credit: NASA.

There is a growing community of scientists looking to experiment in microgravity – where astronauts and objects float weightlessly. The UK Space Agency will select a number of ideas for development which could then be flown on board the International Space Station.

The UK can propose national experiments through the European Space Agency's European Exploration Enveloped Programme, ensuring UK science benefits directly from human spaceflight.

The unique environment of the ISS offers a great opportunity to investigate novel materials, life in space, the human body, fluid physics, new technologies and many other things. Previous experiments with UK involvement have created new metal alloys, studied microorganisms and analysed changes to the human voice.

The European Space Agency announced in December 2016 that it intends for all of the astronauts that were selected in Tim Peake's 2009 class to be assigned a second mission.

Libby Jackson, Human Spaceflight and Microgravity Programme Manager at the UK Space Agency, said:

"This programme gives UK researchers and businesses the chance to do real science in space.

"Microgravity provides a unique facility for scientific research, allowing us to gain new knowledge that will improve life on Earth."

Ideas are welcomed from all UK organisations, including university-led academic research proposals and industry-led commercial research proposals.

Applications ideas will then be invited to provide full detailed experiment proposals. Subject to confirmation must be received by 28 February 2018. Selected of future funding, a number of these experiments will be selected for development and nomination to ESA for flight.

View full [details of the call.](#)

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# News story: Preferred candidate chosen for the role of Executive Chair of the Medical Research Council

Professor Watt is currently Director of the Centre for Stem Cells and Regenerative Medicine at King's College London. Here she leads a team of 80 academic researchers and is internationally recognised in her field with particular expertise in the stem cells of healthy and diseased skin.

The current MRC Chief Executive, Sir John Savill FRS, steps down at the end of March 2018 before UKRI is launched.

Professor Watt said:

I am deeply honoured to be selected as the Government's preferred candidate to lead the MRC at this time of extraordinary opportunity for the UK's biomedical researchers.

Sir Mark Walport, UKRI CEO Designate, said:

Professor Fiona Watt is a distinguished biomedical scientist who will be an outstanding leader of the Medical Research Council. I am delighted she has been selected as the Government's preferred candidate for the role of MRC Executive Chair.

The post of MRC Executive Chair is potentially subject to a pre-appointment hearing by the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. The Committee will consider this in due course. If a pre-appointment hearing is requested then arrangements will be made for this in the New Year.