

Press release: Partnership work to repair unexpected voids under M11

A lane closure on the M11 at Girton was lifted yesterday (Thursday 16 November) after Highways England and its partners worked together to repair a series of unexpected voids found beneath the motorway.

The voids, one of which is pictured here, were found in September, with Highways England quickly realising the urgent need to repair it and keep the 40,000 drivers that use the motorway daily moving.

Highways England project manager Karl Brooks said:

Safety is at the heart of everything we do at Highways England, and once we realised the extent of these voids underneath the M11 we moved quickly to get it repaired.

While we want to limit the impact that our work has on people's journeys, these voids did need to be repaired with haste and we needed to ensure that there would be no more surprises. We have worked with our partners to minimise the impact this work has had, and are pleased that we are now able to fully re-open the M11 to traffic at Girton.

The work to fill the voids, which were up to three meters deep in places, saw 1,200 tonnes of filling material used. Interserve and WSP, working on behalf of Highways England, had to dig out the voids to fully realise the extent of them, before being able to repair and resurface them. Drainage repairs, sheet piling installation and environmental works were also done to ensure there would be no recurrence of these voids. Further work will continue on the embankment, including replacing rabbit netting and top soiling, but this will be completed off the road itself, with a hard shoulder closure and temporary 40mph speed limit the only remaining restrictions.

The team also worked closely with their colleagues completing the new £1.5 billion A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon link road, upgrading 21 miles of the A14 to three lanes. This improved A14 will cut journey times by up to 20 minutes, and is on target to open to traffic in 2020. Both teams were able to share road closures to maximise productivity while minimising the impact on road users.

The emergency work to repair the voids is part of a wider £11 million package of work which also includes resurfacing, renewing digital message signs and safety improvements at key locations along the motorway, and on the A120 and A11.

Now completed, the temporary lane closure on the M11 at Girton has been removed, with just a hard shoulder closure and temporary 40mph speed limit

remaining to enable additional work to take place safely away from the carriageway.

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.

[News story: Defence and security technology entrepreneurs invited to apply for Pitch@Palace](#)

As part of our remit to find innovators who can benefit the defence and security of the UK, the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) is pleased to support the Pitch@Palace 9.0 “Data, Intelligence, and The Future of Security” Defence-themed campaign.

Pitch@Palace 9.0 is looking for innovation solutions to enhance the support and protection for the men and women who serve in the UK’s Armed Forces, across the range of challenges. These areas include:

- performance of personnel and training
- harnessing medical and rehabilitation advances
- data capture, processing and analysis
- greater efficiency through the use of automation and autonomy
- personal security, protective clothing and human augmentation
- virtual or augmented reality and simulation
- logistics management

Set up by His Royal Highness the Duke of York in 2014, Pitch@Palace is a charitable trust which aims to guide, help and connect early-stage businesses with potential supporters, including CEOs, influencers, angel investors, mentors and business partners.

The final event will be on the 31 January at St James’s Palace and will be attended by HRH Duke of York, Chief Scientific Adviser and senior MOD representatives/ ministers.

How do I apply?

Applications to the Pitch@Palace Series 9.0 should be made through the [Pitch@Palace website](#). Applications must be made by 17 January 2017.

How it works

Entrepreneurs who apply to the Pitch@Palace are first selected to participate in an On Tour Event, one of three regional heats from which they may get the invitation to attend a Boot Camp.

At Boot Camp the participants will receive support and guidance on how to develop and hone their pitch, as well as support with investment, introductions and strategic guidance.

All of the entrepreneurs selected for Boot Camp are invited to the final event at St. James's Palace, and a selection of these pitch directly to an influential audience from the worlds of entrepreneurship, technology, media and investment.

All of the Pitch@Palace Entrepreneurs, whether selected to pitch at St. James's Palace or not, join the growing alumni network of entrepreneurs and receive ongoing support.

For more information, visit the [Pitch@Palace website](#).

[Press release: Upgrades to the A31 at Ringwood backed](#)

Proposals for a multi-million pound upgrade to improve journeys for the 77,000 drivers who use the A31 at Ringwood in Hampshire each day have won backing in a public consultation, Highways England announced today (Friday 17 November).

91% of people who responded to the non-statutory consultation backed the need for the improvements, which will widen the A31 between the Ringwood and Verwood junctions, increase capacity at Ringwood junction and bring it in line with current safety standards by directing all local traffic via the junction instead of turning directly on to the dual carriageway. Facilities for cyclists and pedestrians will also be improved.

Today's announcement paves the way for work on the upgrade to start in the 2020/21 financial year, subject to statutory processes.

Highways England Project Manager Jens Reinke said:

This section of the A31 is used to make more than 77,000 journeys every day, and we've developed these plans to make real improvements to journeys.

I would like to thank everyone who took part in the consultation. It's great to see that there is such strong backing for improvements to this heavily congested section of the A31 at Ringwood. These plans will lead to the road being safer and supporting access for people getting to Ringwood town centre not only in the car but also on foot or by bike.

We are aware of people's concerns about the closure of the West Street junction to the A31 and have listened to feedback. Around 76% of respondents agreed with the proposal to close the junction for safety reasons, with around 14% preferring for it to stay open. We will now continue to look at the design of the West Street closure into next phase of the project.

The plans include:

- increasing the westbound carriageway of the A31 from two lanes to three between the Ringwood and Verwood junctions
- replacement of the two bridges over the River Avon and Bickerley Millstream to accommodate the westbound third lane
- closing the junction with West Street and the A31 to motorised vehicles
- closing one of the Fish Inn pub's entry/exit points on the A31
- improvements to the existing cycle and footpaths along the A31

A public consultation on the option was held from 23 June to 4 August 2017. Nearly 500 responses were received during this consultation. Information events were held at Ringwood Town Council for the public and stakeholders including local authorities, landowners and businesses, so people could look at the plans and speak to members of the project team.

91% of people who responded to the consultation questionnaire said they agree improvements are needed at Ringwood. 91% also said they are concerned about safety on the A31, with the same number also concerned about congestion or delays along this stretch. 75% of respondents understand the justification for options 2 and 3 being rejected.

A copy of the consultation report and announcement flyer can be found on the [Highways England website](#), where anyone interested in the scheme can also sign up to receive updates.

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Speech: Speech to the Conference of Parties (COP) 23

Bula vinaka! [boo-lah vee-nah-kah, meaning 'warm hello'].

It is such an honour to represent the United Kingdom at COP 23, and I want to thank the Fijian Presidency for its excellent leadership...

... and the people of Germany for their great hospitality.

As our Prime Minister highlighted in New York in September, the Paris Agreement is a brilliant example of effective global cooperation. Every country in the world has now signed the Agreement, and I am proud that the UK is part of this.

It has never been more important to accelerate our momentum. Recent extreme weather events have devastated the lives of many across the world. I would like to extend my deepest sympathy to all those affected and emphasise that we are taking our commitments under the Paris Agreement very seriously and we are taking action.

1. Firstly, for the UK we launched a Clean Growth Strategy for the UK just last month – a critical set of measures to meet our domestic carbon budgets and help our global CO2 reduction process.
2. I was also proud that the UK recently announced plans to phase out unabated coal fired electricity generation by 2025... our intent to end the sale of conventional petrol and diesel cars by 2040... and to establish our Green Finance Taskforce
3. Earlier today the UK, Canada, and over twenty five other parties committed to forming the Powering Past Coal Alliance – a new alliance committed to phasing out unabated coal from power generation.
4. We have also kept our promises in supporting poorer nations to accelerate the transition to a more resilient and low carbon future and play our role in meeting our collective goal of mobilising \$100bn in climate finance per year by 2020.

Last year, we showed international leadership by successfully balancing our climate finance across mitigation and adaptation... and so far we have mobilised £2.2 billion public and £500 million private finance for climate change purposes in developing countries. This has helped over 34 million people deal with the impacts of climate change.

... and I am very proud of the over three hundred million pounds of UK funding announcements at this COP on protecting forests, encouraging private sector investment in sustainable infrastructure, and helping countries finance their existing emissions reduction plans.

Plus we have recently committed to double our 2017 funding to IPCC and make multi-year pledges to be sure that this important institution can continue to play a crucial role in providing independent, rigorous and balanced scientific information on climate change.

The UK also continues to be a global leader in protecting oceans and marine life:

- We are on track to protect 4 million square kilometres of ocean across Overseas Territories by 2020.
- During this COP, we have also announced that the United Kingdom has signed up to the “Because the Oceans” declaration and I encourage others who have not done so, to do the same.

We see pre-2020 action as extremely important – on Tuesday we ratified the Kigali amendment to the Montreal Protocol on phasing down HFCs....

...and I am pleased to say that our Foreign Secretary signed the Doha Amendment yesterday.

We are not resting on our laurels. In the New Year we are looking forward to hosting the Commonwealth summit in London which will help to provide a springboard for future collective action...

We see it as crucial that over the next few years we achieve:

... Agreement on the rules that underpin the Paris Agreement...

... an increase in ambition as technology and innovation makes the transition a win win for the planet and our economy.

... but of course the action that really matters is in the real world where businesses and organisations are taking the signals from these negotiations to transform our future

There is much we can – and must – achieve together.

Thank you to all parties here for working together to make COP23 a huge success.

[News story: Sir Michael Barber report into improving value in public spending published](#)

Sir Michael Barber has published his report into how central government can ensure it is delivering maximum value for every pound spent on our hospitals, schools and other essential services.

The [review](#) sets out a practical, new approach to the understanding of public sector productivity and how it can be addressed in government. It aims to ensure that ongoing improvements in the delivery of public services become firmly embedded in daily working practice.

Chief Secretary Elizabeth Truss said:

Great public services unleash technology, creativity and ideas that improve lives. We are already focusing on ensuring our brilliant public sector workers can lead in transforming what they do. Alongside that, we must ensure every pound of public spending is as effective as possible. Sir Michael's report is a vital step as we aim to create a culture of public services that continuously improve.

Sir Michael Barber said:

There have been many efforts to make government more efficient in recent decades. Some of them have been very valuable but, once they are over, business as usual returns. The aim this time is to embed a new approach to productivity in the day-to-day working of government. That means changing how Treasury and departments work together to maximise public value. I have been very encouraged by the enthusiasm of ministers and officials for this new approach.

Announced at Spring Budget 2017, Sir Michael and the project team have explored how government understands and measures impact for each taxpayer pound spent on public services. The Public Value Review advises on the best ways to encourage ongoing improvements and better, more productive public services.

The central recommendation is for government to introduce a new Public Value Framework, that will be used by government to measure the likelihood that public spending will turn into results that improve people's lives. This Framework will set the agenda for dialogue between Treasury and departments.

The report also recommends:

- further improvements in data systems so that departments are better able to monitor the impact of public expenditure
- embedding incremental improvement or marginal gains in the way government works
- encouraging departments to put forward innovations that could improve outcomes at no extra cost, through, for example, the application of technology

The project team have consulted widely across government and with international experts in developing this approach.

The government will respond to Sir Michael's report in Autumn Budget.