News story: Transport Minister visits cycle taxi scheme to highlight Accessibility Action Plan consultation

Transport Minister Paul Maynard has urged people to make their views heard on the government's Accessibility Action Plan, with just 2 weeks of the consultation remaining, during a visit to East London today (31 October 2017).

The Minister was in Hackney to see a demonstration of the Ride Side by Side project, a cycle taxi scheme which received £55,000 funding as part of the government's Innovation Challenge Fund. The scheme helps older people or those with limited mobility make free, short local trips by road, using specially adapted cycles, while accompanied by a co-rider.

Transport Minister Paul Maynard said:

> The Ride Side by Side project shows what can be done to help those with limited mobility travel to the shops or clinics for appointments. It is a great innovation and will make life easier for many people.
>
> I take the issue of accessibility across all modes of transport very seriously and that is why I encourage as many people as possible to respond to the Accessibility Action Plan consultation.
>
> This will help us tackle the issues that make it difficult for people with disabilities to use our transport network.

Mobility-impaired transport users, including older people, often rely on services such as Dial-a-Ride or taxis to make short trips. However, they can often be impeded by long waiting times.

The Ride Side by Side service can be booked online or by phone and takes people as far as 2 miles or 30 minutes from where they live. Further support is then offered, such as help to access a clinic or shop.

David Dansky, Head of Training and Development at Cycle Training UK, said:

> There has been much enthusiasm for the project from local people who use the service for leisure rides, to go to the supermarket or local market, or to visit friends and family.
>
> There is also an amazing social element where participants sit next to the rider and are able to chat. Ride Side by Side not only offers exercise, practical and social benefits, it is also great

fun.

The government is consulting on its Accessibility Action Plan until November 15. Among measures to improve transport for people with disabilities are:

- improving accessible toilets on the railways
- ensuring better use of Blue Badges
- trials in autonomous vehicles

News story: Event – Leeds Cross Government SME Roadshow

The Leeds Cross Government SME Roadshow is a great opportunity for SMEs in Yorkshire and beyond to hear directly from Central Government (Department for Work and Pensions, Ministry of Justice, Crown Commercial Service), NHS (Department of Health, NHS England, NHS Digital) and local government (Leeds City Council) about the opportunities to sell to the public sector.

You'll hear about what organisations based in Yorkshire are looking to buy, what they expect from their suppliers and about government's commitment to see more of its business won by SMEs.

You'll also hear from an SME who has successfully sold to government and who is now advising them how to get more of their business done with SMEs.

It is a chance to meet the people who make purchasing decisions, find out how you can find opportunities and what you can expect when you bid for a contract and after you've won it, and also find out about future opportunities.

Confirmed speakers include:

- Emma Jones – SME Crown Representative
- Liz Freeman – Category Specialist, Crown Commercial Service
- Elizabeth Vega – SME Panel member and supplier to government (Informed Solutions)
- Stephen Tokely – Small Business Policy Team, Crown Commercial Service and representatives from DWP, Ministry of Justice and Leeds City Council.

To register your attendance, please visit here.

Press release: Car parts supplier must sell local depots to maintain competition

Euro Car Parts must now sell a depot in each of these areas to a purchaser approved by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), so that customers don't lose out.

Euro Car Parts bought most of the Andrew Page business in October 2016, after the company went into administration. Both companies own a network of depots across the UK from which they sell car parts to independent garages and workshops and to larger national or multi-regional customers, including repair centre chains, vehicle fleets and roadside assistance companies.

A group of independent CMA panel members identified 9 areas in England where the 2 companies were close competitors and where the merger could significantly reduce competition for local customers.

The group did not consider that larger national or multi-regional customers would be adversely affected by the merger.

Professor Alasdair Smith, Inquiry Chair, said:

> Following an in-depth investigation, we have found that this merger has the potential to drive up prices or reduce levels of service for customers in 9 local areas. That's why we are requiring a depot in each area to be sold to a buyer approved by the CMA.
>
> Outside of these areas, we did not find that the merger will further reduce competition compared to what would have happened if Euro Car Parts had not purchased Andrew Page.

The 9 local areas are: Blackpool, Brighton, Gloucester, Liphook, Scunthorpe, Sunderland, Wakefield, Worthing and York. Swindon had also been identified during the provisional findings stage, but new evidence came to light which resulted in the group deciding that competition would not be affected in this area.

Notes for editors

1. 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.

2. The final report can be found on the case page.

3. On 10 March 2017, the CMA started its initial investigation and on 22 May 2017 the CMA referred it for a phase 2 investigation. Provisional findings were published on 14 September 2017.

4. All the CMA's functions in phase 2 merger inquiries are performed by independent inquiry groups, chosen from the CMA's panel members, and supported by CMA staff. The appointed inquiry group are the decision-makers on phase 2 inquiries.

5. The members of the inquiry group are: Professor Alasdair Smith (Inquiry Chair), Lesley Ainsworth and Rosalind Hedley-Miller.

6. 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.

7. For more information on the CMA see our homepage or follow us on Twitter @CMAgovuk, Facebook, Flickr and LinkedIn. Sign up to our email alerts to receive updates on merger cases.

8. Media enquiries should be directed to: press@cma.gsi.gov.uk, 020 3738 6337.

Press release: Funding for supported housing for older people to encourage building new homes

A tailored approach to protect and encourage the supply of a wide range of supported housing has been set out by government today (31 October). All long-term housing will remain in the welfare system and a proposed 'sheltered rent' for sheltered and extra care housing will keep rent and service charge at an appropriate level, protecting the housing needs of older and vulnerable people.

Local areas will be taking a bigger role in providing short-term and emergency housing through a ring-fenced grant to local authorities by April 2020, allowing vulnerable people to access secure accommodation without

worrying about meeting housing costs at a difficult point in their lives. The grant will be underpinned by a National Statement of Expectation setting out how local authorities should plan effectively for provision in their area.

Supported housing provides a home to some of the most vulnerable people in this country and the vast majority is provided for older people. The government knows the supply of these homes needs to grow as this country's ageing population means that demand is forecast to increase.

Currently supported accommodation is funded through the welfare system, including the housing costs and extra support services. These reforms will ensure:

- funding certainty for the sector, and encouraging long-term investment and new supply
- local areas have a greater role in commissioning services
- councils have a stronger role in providing the right services for their local areas

Local Government Minister Marcus Jones said:

> This government is committed to boosting the supply of new homes, and helping people to live independently and with dignity for as long as possible. This is why we are giving the supported housing sector the certainty of funding they need to get building new homes.
>
> These reforms will deliver quality and value for money, funding certainty for the sector and give local areas a greater role in commissioning services.

Minister for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance Minister Caroline Dinenage said:

> We value the important role supported housing plays and that's why we have worked closely with providers and listened to their feedback to come up with solutions that will safeguard its future and improve support for those that need a home that is safe and secure.
>
> The new flexible funding model and reforms will give housing providers certainty over future funding and drive up quality and provide value for money.

The supported housing sector support provides homes from older renters. It also provides a home for other vulnerable groups such as people with learning disabilities, mental ill health, homeless people and victims of domestic abuse.

The government's latest policy statement is published online including further consultation on the detailed implementation of the flexible funding models for both sheltered rent and long term supported accommodation.

The consultation on the detailed implementation of the flexible funding model for supported housing will run until 23 January 2018.

Last week (25 October 2017) the government announced that the Local Housing Allowance rate will not be applied to the social rented sector.

News story: Science and tech at core of defence as Minister launches new strategy in Birmingham

By setting out specific research areas and capability priorities, like autonomy, cyber and sensor technology, the strategy will encourage defence to be even more responsive to emerging opportunities and threats, whilst promoting more innovation and collaboration with suppliers.

The Defence Minister made the announcement while visiting Small and Medium-Sized businesses (SMEs) in Birmingham, one of the UK's up-and-coming tech hubs, at EEF's brand new facility in the West Midlands.

Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin said:

> This new strategy puts world-beating science and technology right at the core of our Armed Forces. Investing millions into innovative ideas from dynamic British companies will help us defend the country in the face of intensifying threats and keep us ahead of the curve.

A world-leading centre for life sciences, Birmingham has over 36,800 digital jobs, with over 550 startups created from 2011 to 2015, making it a fertile ground for new ideas for UK Defence and Security.

Last year saw the department's direct spend with smaller business increase by over 10%. Many have benefitted from the MOD's £800 million Innovation Fund, with the department committed to spend 1.2% of its rising defence budget on science and technology.

The Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) is one way the finances are channelled, harnessing innovative ideas to give the UK a strategic advantage in Defence and Security through themed competitions and an 'Open Call' for

Innovation.

Since its launch, the DASA has assessed nearly 700 proposals from almost 400 organisations and has successfully awarded its defence portion of the ‘Open Call’ budget for this year.

Ideas have included computer games to help military units develop more effective tactics, a device to reduce the noise of aircraft and vehicles and a redesigned geolocation tracker.

Over 40% of submissions received were from SMEs that have not engaged with defence before, reflecting the success of the MOD efforts to make it easier for SMEs to win defence business, maximising the innovative solutions they can offer the Armed Forces.

Last month the Defence Minister announced the launch of the MOD’s new Supplier Portal, which brings together for the first time a range of useful information for new and prospective suppliers in one place.

A new Twitter channel, @defenceproc, is also being used to provide regular updates to suppliers on opportunities and events that the MOD is supporting, whilst the department also launched two simplified, plain English short-form contracts for use in lower value less complex procurements last year, reducing the existing baseline terms and conditions from 18 pages to three.

The new Science and Technology Strategy will be led by the MOD’s Chief Scientific Adviser Hugh Durrant-Whyte, who joined this year following a career at the forefront of the robotics sector in Australia.