

Press release: Drivers to benefit from free Severn crossings from 2018

Drivers will see an end to tolls on the Severn Crossings in 2018, Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns announced today (21 July 2017).

The announcement comes as families prepare to take to the roads for the great summer getaway.

The Severn Crossings are iconic landmarks which have served commuters, businesses and local communities in Wales and England for over 50 years.

The bridges are used by more than 25 million vehicles each year, saving significant travel time and distance for commuters and drivers using the M4 motorway.

However, the tolls on both Severn Crossings have been seen as an economic and symbolic barrier to Wales' future prosperity.

Today the UK Government is delivering on the promise made to the people of Wales by the Prime Minister in May and has confirmed that it will abolish the tolls to all vehicles at the end of 2018.

It is estimated that this announcement would boost the economy of South Wales by around £100 million a year* and the average motorist could save over £1,400 per year**.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

The decision to abolish the Severn tolls next year sends a powerful message to businesses, commuters and tourists alike that the UK Government is committed to strengthening the Welsh economy.

By ending tolls for the 25 million annual journeys between two nations we will strengthen the links between communities and help to transform the joint economic prospects of South Wales and the South West of England.

I want to ensure that visitors and investors know what Wales has to offer socially, culturally and economically. Most importantly, I want the world to know how accessible we are to business. The decision we have taken today is right for Wales' future prosperity and I am sure that it will be welcomed by industry and motorists alike.

When the bridges come under public ownership, they will be run by Highways England. Previously it has been run by Severn River Crossing plc.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

Tens of millions of motorists a year will benefit from the end of tolls on the Severn bridges, saving them money and cutting journey times. People who use the crossing every day will save a minimum of £115 a month.

Abolishing the crossing fee will also drive economic growth for businesses in Wales and the South West and further strengthen the bond between our two great countries.

The Secretary of State for Wales will announce the news to an audience of business representatives from South West of England and South Wales at an event at Newport based Owens Group.

Ian Gallagher, Head of Policy for South West and Wales Freight Transport Association welcomed the announcement:

This announcement today is excellent news for the growth of the Welsh and South West Economies, a real shot in the arm for those businesses and commuters who use the bridges on a daily basis.

Removal of the tolls altogether has been a long-term policy position for the Freight Transport Association, with members on both side of the bridges incurring some of the highest tolls charges in the UK, money better spent on upskilling, recruitment and purchasing greener vehicles.

Notes to Editors

**** Welsh Government: The Impact of the Severn Tolls on the Welsh Economy, 30 May 2012**

****Based on a monthly tag charge of £117.92 over 12 months**

- The Severn Bridge was built in 1966 and a second crossing was completed 30 years later.
- The first Severn Bridge was opened in September 1966, providing a direct link from the M4 motorway into Wales, with a toll in place for use of the bridge to pay for the cost of construction. It continually operated above capacity and in 1986 the then Government stated that a second bridge would be constructed.
- In 1988 it was announced that tenders would be invited from private consortia to fund, build and operate the second bridge and take over the

operation of the first bridge. In 1990 the concession was awarded to Severn River Crossing PLC ("SRC"). Construction work also started in April 1992 and the second bridge was opened in June 1996.

Speech: "Make no mistake, this is a crisis of human creation; a crisis that South Sudan's leaders have had six years to prevent."

Thank you Mr President, thank you Assistant-Secretary-General Wane, thank you President Mogae for your briefings. And let me take this opportunity to reiterate the United Kingdom's full support for your work, and for the UN Mission in South Sudan.

I wouldn't normally take the floor before consultations but the horrifying and entrenched situation in South Sudan compels me to speak out.

Two weeks ago, the people of South Sudan should have been celebrating their young country's independence day. They should have been celebrating six years of progress; six years of a country learning to stand on its own two feet.

But six years on, South Sudan isn't standing. It's barely even crawling; stifled by its leaders who would rather serve their own ends than help their country. Six years of their rule has left over half the population without enough food, six million people dependent on humanitarian assistance just to survive.

Make no mistake, this is a crisis of human creation; a crisis that South Sudan's leaders have had six years to prevent.

But instead of helping, they have poured fuel on the fire. We need only look at the ongoing fighting across the country by the government and opposition forces. In Pagak, for example, the government offensive there has displaced thousands of civilians into Ethiopia. Aid workers have been evacuated, the already desperate humanitarian situation has been made even worse.

And yet when the government are asked about Pagak, we hear different stories from different people: some say there has been no violence there; others argue that the offensive was for self defence. So let's be clear, the violence is happening there and it is not self defence; it is a blatant infringement of the ceasefire that Kiir declared only a few months ago.

Not content with misleading their people and the international community, the

government of South Sudan have systematically clamped down on the media and on access to information. Last Friday, internet service providers in South Sudan were ordered to block media outlets with which the government disagreed. The head of state television was reported to have been arrested for failing to broadcast President Kiir's Independence Day speech. The government say they are committed to media freedom, but their actions speak otherwise.

What the government of South Sudan says bears no relation to what it does. In June we saw humanitarian access being blocked a hundred times; the highest month in 2017 so far. In addition, ceasefire monitors have been blocked on multiple occasions by government troops from investigating incidents of reported violence. This is all in clear violation of the peace agreement and all at the cost of the South Sudanese people.

Until we see the government's actions match their words, this Council has no choice but to take measures to protect peace and security. For the United Kingdom, that means returning to the issue of an arms embargo on South Sudan once again. We must do all we can to stop the uncontrolled flow of weapons that is driving this violence.

In parallel, we should continue to work with IGAD to support their Revitalisation Forum Initiative. The first priority for this must be to bring an end to the fighting. This will require a negotiated ceasefire or cessation of hostilities agreement amongst a broad and meaningful range of armed actors. It will require national and local initiatives. And we must be clear that any actors blocking peace will face consequences.

But in truth, Mr President, we have said all of this before. In this Chamber back in May I said that we were not yet fulfilling our responsibilities as a Council to the people of South Sudan. Two months on that, I'm afraid, is still the case. The parties continue to put violence before peace.

This cannot continue. We have a unique window of opportunity before the end of the rainy season to make meaningful progress in South Sudan. Should we fail in our efforts, South Sudan will enter into a fifth year of conflict. And for a country that is only six years old, that is simply heartbreaking.

Thank you Mr President.

Press release: Troika and EU Joint Statement on South Sudan

The members of the Troika (Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and the European Union condemn the continuing violence in South Sudan, especially the Government of South Sudan's current offensive against SPLM-In

Opposition (SPLM-IO) forces near Pagak, as well as ongoing road ambushes and attacks by the SPLM-IO. The Pagak offensive is a clear violation of the unilateral ceasefire declared by President Salva Kiir on May 22, and calls into question the government's commitment to reach peace through the National Dialogue, notwithstanding the sincere efforts undertaken by the leaders of the Steering Committee.

The Troika and EU repeat and endorse the June 12 call by the leaders of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) for President Kiir to ensure that his forces respect the unilateral ceasefire, for the armed opposition groups to reciprocate the ceasefire, and for all groups to allow the unfettered delivery of humanitarian assistance to all those in need. We also welcome IGAD's announcement of a High-Level Revitalization Forum for the South Sudan peace process. We call upon IGAD to expeditiously convene the Forum, and to include the current principal parties to the conflict. Likewise, we urge all parties to fully participate in the Forum. The Troika and EU agree with IGAD that the Forum should focus on achieving a ceasefire and resuming political dialogue that focuses on updating the agreement's timelines and other provisions that are now obsolete in light of the expansion of conflict since 2015.

The proliferation of violence, displacement, and food insecurity renders any discussion of elections in the foreseeable future as an unnecessary diversion from the primary goals of achieving peace and reconciliation. South Sudan's leaders, neighbors, and regional and international partners must first focus on achieving peace in order to create the conditions needed to hold credible elections. To achieve these urgent goals, we look forward to the prompt revitalization of an inclusive and credible peace process by IGAD; such progress would be required in order for the Troika and EU to commit further resources to institutions designed to implement the agreement.

Further information

[News story: PM meeting with the new business council: 20 July 2017](#)

The Prime Minister this afternoon chaired the first meeting of the new business council at Downing Street.

The Prime Minister emphasised her desire to listen to the views of businesses, to channel their experience and to share with them the government's vision for a successful Brexit and a country in which growth and opportunity is shared by everyone across the whole of the UK.

On Brexit, the Prime Minister reiterated that the Government's overarching goal is for a smooth, orderly exit culminating in a comprehensive free trade

deal with the EU, with a period of implementation in order to avoid any cliff-edges.

The Prime Minister welcomed the valuable contributions which have come from discussions with businesses at various levels of government over the past year, including on the development of a modern industrial strategy, and emphasised the need for this engagement to intensify over the period ahead.

Beyond Brexit, the Prime Minister committed to using this forum to focus on wider issues of importance to the UK economy.

The council discussed the importance of steps that can be taken to boost productivity, drive investment and keep our economy strong. They also discussed ways to build business and consumer confidence, and strengthen the positive role of business within society.

The Prime Minister looked forward to using future quarterly meetings to hear from as wide a variety of voices as possible to ensure the interests of those who work across a range of sectors can be represented.

[News story: Improving crowd resilience: apply now for innovation funding](#)

Organisations can apply for up to £2 million SBRI funding for projects reducing the threat from terrorists and explosives in public spaces.

The [Home Office](#) is to invest up to £2 million in ideas that will reduce the threat from terrorists and the use of explosives and weapons in public spaces by using the crowd as a sensor.

Funding is available for the development of technologies that will use the crowd to identify a threat by:

- detecting the crowd's conscious and sub-conscious reaction to threats
- training the public to spot threats
- enabling the crowd to report threats

This competition seeks proposals for technologies, systems and behavioural sciences.

This is a [Defence and Security Accelerator](#) and [Small Business Research Initiative](#) (SBRI) competition. It's part of the Home Office security-related science and technology programme.

This is phase 1 of a 2-phase competition.

- this competition is open now
- the application deadline is midday on 20 September 2017
- there will be an [innovation network event](#) on 27 July 2017
- SBRI is open to any type of organisation
- successful projects will attract 100% funded development contracts
- up to £1 million is available for phase 1 of this competition
- up to £1 million will be available for phase 2