

Response to points raised in Road Haulage Association letter to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

Thanks to the hard work put in by hauliers and traders to get ready for the end of the Brexit transition period, there are no queues at the Short Straits, disruption at the border has so far been minimal and freight movements are now close to normal levels, despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a responsible government, we made extensive preparations for a wide range of scenarios at the border, including the reasonable worst case. However, it appears increasingly unlikely that our reasonable worst case scenario will occur.

We know that some businesses are facing challenges with the new rules, which is why we are operating export helplines, running webinars with policy experts and offering businesses support via our network of 300 international trade advisers. This is on top of the millions we have invested in the customs intermediaries sector.

We are committed to ensuring that businesses get the support they need to trade effectively with Europe and seize new opportunities as we strike trade deals with the world's fastest growing markets.

That is why we will continue to work constructively with the Road Haulage Association and other business representative organisations, including through the weekly Brexit Business Taskforce, to get them the tailored support to tackle any outstanding issues.

CLAIM:

According to a RHA survey “Exports going through British ports to the EU fell by 68% last month compared with January last year” (Observer, 07/02/21)

RESPONSE:

We do not recognise this figure and further details from the survey have not been shared.

Flows are monitored on a daily basis by the Border Operations Centre. In the last full week (30 Jan to 5 Feb) both outbound and inbound flows (across all UK ports) were close to normal, at 95% outbound and 96% inbound, in spite of the impact of COVID lockdowns on trade.

For the same week, flows outbound specifically across the Short Straits were at 82%.

The Port of Dover's own data confirms that volumes are close to normal.

CLAIM:

Richard Burnett, Chief Executive of the RHA “told the Observer that in addition to the 68% fall-off in exports, about 65%-75% of vehicles that had come over from the EU were going back empty” (Observer, 07/02/21)

RESPONSE:

This does not reflect the data from our French counterparts, which puts the figure at closer to 50%.

It is an entirely normal part of freight flows to have empty lorries on the outbound leg from the UK into the EU – this has always been the case.

Indeed, estimates suggest that prior to 1 January, around 30% of all outbound lorries were empty.

Taking the impact of Covid-19 on economic activity into account, the current levels are not surprising when compared to normal outbound flows.

CLAIM:

“On several occasions we have offered to facilitate a roundtable with affected businesses which so far has been ignored” (Richard Burnett letter to CDL, 01/02/21)

RESPONSE:

We have had intensive engagement with the road haulage industry over many months, including through the weekly CDL-led Brexit Business Taskforce, and we are still facilitating regular calls with representative groups.

The RHA’s letter references a meeting on 24 January during which these issues were discussed.

A separate working group on the Northern Ireland Protocol has also been established to drive forward key actions, such as the very successful groupage pilot on which DEFRA and DAERA partnered with Logistics UK.

CLAIM:

“The shortage of customs agents to support the intermediaries market shows no sign of improvement... we estimate that as many as 50,000 customs brokers will be required and so far, there are only 10,000 in place” (Richard Burnett letter to CDL, 01/02/21)

RESPONSE:

We do not recognise this claim.

Recent survey data has shown the sector expected to see a near fourfold increase in their ability to process declarations and that there are intermediary businesses who currently have spare capacity.

50,000 is an arbitrary industry calculation – it is not and never has been a Government target.

The Government has also invested £84million so that customs intermediary businesses could boost their capacity.

CLAIM:

The RHA has repeatedly “warned repeatedly that there was a lack of clarity over how the new arrangements would work” and called for an extension to the transition period (Richard Burnett letter to CDL, 01/02/21)

RESPONSE:

The RHA suggested in the run up to December that key Government systems and infrastructure would not be ready in time.

In fact, all IT systems and infrastructure were ready in time and are operating effectively.

Similarly, trader and haulier readiness has been significantly higher than planned for or anticipated. This is evidenced by the excellent levels of compliance with our Check an HGV and Kent Access Permit requirements, with around 85% compliance and by the very low turnback rate at Dover and Eurotunnel, where turnbacks have been consistently below 5%.

CLAIM:

“Government is not doing enough to address” the “devastating consequences” on critical supply chains (Richard Burnett letter to CDL, 01/02/21)

RESPONSE:

The Cabinet Office monitors critical supply chains daily. Currently, all critical supply chain indicators are within normal tolerances.

While traders on the whole are managing the changes well, the government knows that some businesses are facing challenges with some of the new rules that are now in place. That’s why the government is:

- Meeting businesses from specific sectors across all parts of the UK weekly through the Brexit Business Taskforce chaired by Michael Gove
- Increasing staff and opening hours for HMRC exporting telephone and online helplines. The number is 0300 322 9434 and businesses can also speak to an adviser online at tax.service.gov.uk
- Running regular webinars with policy specialists
- Providing the [Brexit Checker Tool](#) on gov.uk which gives businesses a personalised list of actions that they need to take
- Offering face-to-face support for exporters in delivered via a network of around 300 International Trade Advisers (ITAs);
- Setting up a taskforce with businesses and the devolved administration in Scotland to understand and address any practical issues facing Scottish businesses, including the seafood sector

- Offering support to businesses moving goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland through its Trader Support Service

CLAIM:

New guidance on groupage (where lorries pick up multiple consignments of SPS relevant products from different locations) was drafted following “limited engagement with the industry and feedback from operators” and the new model has “not been stress tested” (Richard Burnett letter to CDL, 01/02/21)

RESPONSE:

This is wrong. Industry participated in workshops with DAERA and Defra to develop the guidance. They were also involved in pilot runs into NI with the final guidance reflecting that experience. The guidance itself was shared with stakeholders for comments well in advance of publication and will continue to be refined in the light of experience.

The new guidance gives much needed clarity on what is required to be compliant with EU law and provides options as to how they meet the required SPS checks.

CLAIM:

New groupage guidance “falls well short of addressing the many issues being experienced by traders, hauliers, manufacturers and consumers” (Richard Burnett letter to CDL, 01/02/21)

RESPONSE:

We have been clear that there are outstanding problems with the Northern Ireland Protocol that need to be resolved to ensure trade continues to flow smoothly and there is as little impact as possible on the everyday life of communities.

We will continue to work constructively and pragmatically with the European Commission to restore confidence in the operation of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Government boost to rapid workplace testing

- New government drive to increase workplace testing in sectors open during lockdown, to detect coronavirus (COVID-19) in people who are not showing symptoms

- Government departments tasked with ensuring targeted, rapid testing is set up in all key workplaces to ensure vital public and economic services can continue
- Criteria for joining the workplace testing programme is reduced to businesses with more than 50 employees, boosting the availability of rapid testing further

Cabinet ministers have been tasked to encourage their sectors to take up the offer of rapid workplace testing, marking efforts to normalise testing in the workplace across both public and private sectors.

The government is working closely with organisations across different sectors that are vital to the running of our country and where employees cannot work from home during lockdown, from transport networks to food manufacturers, to sign up to rapid testing programmes that identify cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in employees who are not showing symptoms. This will help stop the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) and ensure vital public and economic services can continue.

Many employers have already taken up the offer of rapid, regular workforce testing, with 112 UK organisations across almost 500 sites joining government backed rapid testing. Today, the government can confirm that it has widened the criteria for joining the workplace rapid testing programme from businesses with more than 250 employees, to businesses with more than 50 employees.

This hugely increases the number of different businesses that are able to sign up, so that small and medium size companies can benefit from rapid testing as we work to Build Back Better.

Testing is key to breaking the chains of transmission. More than 2.5 million tests have been distributed across the public and private sectors so far, and [an online portal has been launched to make it even easier for business in the private sector to get involved and find out more about offering rapid testing in the workplace](#). All those who can work from home should continue to do so.

Around one in three people who have coronavirus (COVID-19) have no symptoms and may be unknowingly spreading the virus. This expansion of testing will find more positive cases, keeping workers who cannot work from home unknowingly passing on the virus and protecting vital public services. It's essential we still continue to use tests to safeguard the population and prevent the spread of the virus.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

"To save lives and protect the NHS, we have again asked for everyone to work from home. But we know that for some this is not possible, which is why the workplace rapid testing programme is so important.

"Employers should regularly test their staff, and this drive across

government to raise awareness and encourage more businesses to introduce rapid testing for employees is incredibly important. When you consider that around one in three people have the virus without symptoms and could potentially infect people without even knowing it, it becomes clear why focusing testing on those without symptoms is so essential.

"We are already working with many employers to scale up workforce testing, spanning the food industry, retail sector, transport network, and across the public sector too. I strongly urge businesses and employees across the country to take up this offer of rapid testing to help stop this virus spreading further."

Case studies

The Department for Transport is working with organisations including Transport for London (TfL), the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and Network Rail on rapid testing to help keep the transport network safer. TfL opened 4 asymptomatic test sites across London, and have been offering testing to frontline operational employees in London Underground and surface transport, including station staff, train operators and revenue inspectors. The rapid testing programme has been protecting teams working on the frontline, operating the railway so that key workers can continue to travel to work. As of 29 January, NHS Test and Trace had provided TfL staff with 2,173 tests, identifying 28 positive cases that would have otherwise continued working alongside colleagues.

The Home Office has worked with police and fire services throughout the pandemic to ensure emergency workers have access to testing. This has included working with the National Police Coordination Centre to identify appropriate locations for asymptomatic testing sites. The Metropolitan Police is rolling out asymptomatic testing across 7 sites from 25 January. Other forces are due to get asymptomatic testing running in the coming weeks, including Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, and Dorset. 60,000 tests have been given to fire and rescue services since November to ensure their staff can carry out coronavirus (COVID-19) support roles.

The Ministry of Justice is rolling out rapid workforce testing for prisons staff, as well as assessing how it could work in courts, to help ensure that the vital work of the justice system can continue.

The Business Department has been engaging with a wide range of businesses across the country, with companies in the energy, manufacturing, life sciences and retail sectors, already ordering mass testing kits for their workforces.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) continue to work closely with businesses in Defra sectors, including food, waste, water, and veterinary medicines, to support them in setting up testing for their workforces or hauliers and protecting supply chains. All major supermarkets are now planning to offer rapid testing to their workforce.

Border Force has also rolled out rapid testing to ensure that staff are able

to carry out their critical role of protecting the UK border. The Border Force asymptomatic testing programme currently has 3 live sites with testing available for over 900 officers. These sites have seen over 2,100 people tested so far. Border Force officers at Heathrow Airport have access to the airport's extensive testing capacity, and more than 120 officers have already volunteered to be involved in the asymptomatic testing programme with further sites for asymptomatic testing being identified and brought online in the coming weeks.

The government has opened (Monday 1 February) an asymptomatic testing facility in the Queen Elizabeth II Centre to provide rapid testing for essential civil service staff working in key departments involved in the coronavirus (COVID-19) response. The testing centre is one of several measures implemented by the government, including remote working and Covid-secure workplace measures, to help prevent the spread of the disease, keep civil servants safe and ensure the ongoing smooth running of government operations during the pandemic.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

"Businesses across the country have been working extremely hard to keep their workforces safe during the pandemic, with retail, manufacturing and energy companies among those already taking up the offer of workplace testing.

"I urge even more employers to do the same to help stop the spread of the virus and protect our NHS. We want to be able to reopen the economy and recover our way of life as soon as it is safe to do so, and large-scale workplace testing will complement our work in getting the British people vaccinated."

The Transport Secretary said:

"Our frontline transport workers have kept the country moving, allowing key workers to get to work, and ensuring vital services remain accessible throughout this incredibly difficult time.

"This is why it's so important the government ramps up the rolling out of mass testing, providing them with an extra level of protection and confidence. We've already set up a number of pilots to conduct mass testing for transport workers, and I'll continue to work with organisations to rollout similar schemes right across the transport network."

Dr Samantha Phillips, Head of Health and Wellbeing at Transport for London, said:

"We have been part of a Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) pilot whereby employees can volunteer to do twice weekly rapid antigen testing.

"We have had an enthusiastic response to the pilot and employees are finding it reassuring, particularly if they have vulnerable relatives at home or family members who are also key workers. Identifying asymptomatic employees has also helped us in our efforts to protect the welfare and safety of all our team members working on the frontline."

Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary Robert Buckland QC MP said:

“From the outset of the pandemic we have been clear that justice must continue to be delivered for the public, victims and defendants.

“So I am delighted we are ramping up the provision of rapid tests for prison staff across the country while exploring how it could work in courts.

“I want to thank all those working across our justice system who, in collaboration with health professionals, are making this possible.”

Alex Chisholm, Chief Operating Officer for the Civil Service and Permanent Secretary for the Cabinet Office, said:

“I am delighted we have opened an asymptomatic test centre in Whitehall for those civil servants and contractors who need to go into their workplace. This test centre contributes to ensuring the safety of our staff and smooth running of our operations, while helping to break the chain of transmission.”

Notes to editors

Lateral flow tests used by the UK government go through a rigorous evaluation by the country's leading scientists. Tests detect cases with high levels of virus, making them effective in finding infectious individuals who are not showing any symptoms and are the most likely to transmit the disease.

[See further information on rapid workplace testing](#)

[See latest testing statistics](#)

NHS Test & Trace will support organisations to deliver scalable asymptomatic testing through provision of a digital solution, clinical protocol, supply of tests kits, guidance, training and framework for delivery.

Tests are currently being provided free to both public and private sector employers until at least 31 March. The government's support will be kept under review and we will engage with employers before any changes to the support offer are made.

Extensive clinical evaluation from Public Health England and the University of Oxford research shows lateral flow tests are specific and sensitive enough to be deployed for mass testing, including for asymptomatic people. The [Oxford University and Public Health evaluation is available](#).

[More information on getting tested is available.](#)

£40 million government funding to help polluting businesses clean up

- £40 million government investment to help polluting industries including steel, pharmaceuticals and food and drink to find new ways to reduce their carbon emissions
- solutions including using heat recovery technology to generate electricity and replacing gas with hydrogen fuel will help businesses cut energy costs, protect jobs, and improve air quality across the UK
- funding supports the government's mission to build back greener and eliminate the UK's contribution to carbon emissions by 2050

Some of the UK's most polluting industries will benefit from £40 million funding to help them cut their carbon emissions, while reducing their energy bills, the government announced today (Sunday 7 February).

Businesses in energy-intensive sectors, including pharmaceuticals, steel, paper and food and drink, will be able to apply for grants worth up to £14 million through the government's [Industrial Energy Transformation Fund](#) – totalling £289 million in funding up until 2024.

In this second competition window, the minimum grant has been lowered to £100,000 for deployment projects, offering more flexibility for small businesses to receive funding so they can speed up getting their ideas to market.

With potential projects taking place across the East and West Midlands, North East, North West, and Yorkshire and the Humber as well as Wales and Northern Ireland, the government grants will enable businesses to use new technology to improve the efficiency of industrial processes and reduce energy demand.

They will drive them towards a cleaner, more sustainable future as part of our green industrial revolution by 2030 and mission to eliminate our contribution to climate change by 2050.

This includes factories installing electric motors and heat pumps to replace their natural gas-fired boilers and steam turbines, manufacturers using heat recovery technology to recycle waste heat and generate renewable electricity, and industries such as the food and drink sector carrying out studies to replace natural gas with hydrogen as their primary fuel.

Doing so will create and support thousands of British jobs, cut carbon emissions and lead to cleaner air for the people of the UK.

Energy Minister Anne-Marie Trevelyan said

We can only achieve our ambitious plans to tackle climate change if everyone plays their part, including businesses large and small.

That's why our £40 million investment will not only help some of the highest polluting industries like steel, paper and pharmaceuticals build back greener by finding innovative ways to reduce their carbon emissions but will also create more opportunities for growth and jobs by levelling up and making industry fit for the future.

The fund supports the UK government's mission to build back greener and level up the country's industrial heartlands by allowing them to lay the path for economic growth.

The government's Industrial Energy Transformation Fund is worth £289 million with funding available across England, Wales and Northern Ireland up until 2024. The fund supports heavy industry as the UK transitions to a low-carbon economy.

Today's announcement follows an initial launch in June 2020 which saw 39 applications approved for funding in the first window, totalling £31 million.

It is calculated that as a result of these projects carbon emissions will be reduced by 2.6 million tonnes over their lifespan, which is equivalent to taking 38,000 fossil-fuelled cars off the road over a 30 year period.

The Industrial Energy Transformation Fund (IETF) window opens for applications on Monday 8 March and closes on Wednesday 14 July:

Surge testing to be deployed in further areas in connection to new variants

Press release

More areas will have additional testing made available to control and suppress the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) variants.



Working in partnership with local authorities, additional surge testing and sequencing is being deployed to targeted areas around Worcestershire WR3, an area in Sefton PR9, and areas in Bristol and South Gloucestershire, where coronavirus (COVID-19) variants have been found.

Surge testing is in addition to existing extensive testing, and in combination with following the lockdown rules and remembering hands-face-space, will help to monitor and suppress the spread of the virus. Positive cases will be sequenced for genomic data to help understand coronavirus (COVID-19) variants and their spread within these areas.

People living in targeted areas with these locations are strongly encouraged to take a coronavirus (COVID-19) test this week, whether they are showing symptoms or not. People with symptoms should book a test in the usual way. People without symptoms should visit their local authority website for more information.

Surge testing in Kent ME15 which began on Monday is now complete. Council websites will be updated with more information as soon as it is available.

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Smartphone technology in bid to revolutionise early detection of kidney disease

Patients with diabetes and high blood pressure are benefiting from pioneering artificial intelligence (AI) that turns a smartphone camera into a clinical-grade tool to detect early kidney disease.

NHSX, the digital transformation arm of the NHS, is supporting Healthy.io to offer 500,000 patients technology-supported home-testing kits over the next 3 years. More than 3,500 patients have already received their kits.

Patients taking part receive a simple test kit and smartphone app that allows them to test, scan and transmit their results to their GP within minutes, without leaving home.

The technology developed by Healthy.io essentially turns patients' smartphone cameras into medical devices – analysing testing images and producing results regardless of lighting conditions, setting or camera type.

With chronic kidney disease affecting around 1 in 10 people in the UK, this new testing and technology is designed to reduce unnecessary trips to the GP and hospital. It should encourage more people to seek an early diagnosis, ultimately saving thousands of lives each year.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This is another brilliant example of how innovative technologies are transforming healthcare and improving lives. Patients are able to receive a diagnosis sooner, saving time for clinicians so they can spend more time on treatment, and ultimately saving more lives through earlier diagnosis.

This innovation is another step forwards in making high-quality healthcare more accessible – in some cases without leaving the comfort of your own home.

Matthew Gould, Chief Executive of NHSX, said:

Artificial intelligence holds enormous potential for the NHS and in many areas is already providing radical benefits for patients and clinicians.

The use of this latest testing technology is another huge step forward enabling us to provide earlier diagnosis of disease and improve patient care and treatment outcomes while also freeing up NHS staff.

The technology is one of 42 innovations that are being supported by the first round of the AI in Health and Care Award programme, managed by the Accelerated Access Collaborative in partnership with NHSX and the National Institute for Health Research.

In a project at Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust, the team found that by allowing people with type 1 diabetes to self-test at home, the testing rate rose from 0% to 79% among the consented untested population. Almost 1 in 5 were found to have abnormal or highly abnormal results.

Dr David Lipscomb, diabetes clinical lead at Sussex Community Foundation NHS Trust, said:

The service has enabled us to identify and prioritise follow-up care for people who may have early-stage chronic kidney disease that could have otherwise gone undetected.

It allows us to offer our patients a new way of engaging with their care that is more convenient for both patients and staff.

With Healthy.io's CKD Early Detection Service, people receive a test kit by mail, which includes a standard urine dipstick, a urine collection pot and a patented colour board. An app guides the user through the test, which includes scanning the dipstick on the colour board using a standard smartphone camera.

Using AI and colourmetric analysis, the app is able to read the dipstick results equivalent to a lab-based device. Results are then shared instantly with the individual's GP practice, which can follow up if there is an abnormal result.

During the ongoing pandemic, by offering at-home tests to populations at higher risk, such as those living with diabetes, the NHS can provide an easy alternative to visiting the clinic.

The technology is being tested and evaluated over a 3-year period to explore its benefits at scale before a potential roll-out across the NHS.

Dr Indra Joshi, Director of AI at NHSX, said:

Technologies like this have great potential to identify serious disease earlier, and can empower people to make the lifestyle changes needed to help better manage their condition.

Enabling people to self-test at home using their smartphone's camera can ease the burden on frontline services whilst encouraging uptake of an important test that is far easier to conduct at home.

Through the AI Award we are testing some of the most promising AI-based innovations to see if the NHS should consider spreading them on a much larger scale to even more patients.

According to an independent evaluation by the York Health Economics Consortium, if rolled out nationally Healthy.io's solution has the potential to save more than 11,000 lives and save the NHS at least £660 million over 5 years.

Katherine Ward, Chief Commercial Officer and Managing Director of UK and Europe, Healthy.io, said:

Chronic kidney disease is a silent killer and has a major impact on society, yet very few people are aware of its dangers. Early

detection of the disease from the comfort of home will help people avoid dialysis or transplant and will be a huge cost saving for the NHS.

The NHS has been at the forefront of the AI revolution with the creation of the NHS AI Lab within NHSX and the £140 million AI in Health and Care Award programme, which in September announced the first 42 innovations approved, each receiving a share of over £50 million.

The package also includes funding to support the research, development and testing of promising ideas that could be used in the NHS in future to help speed up diagnosis or improve care for a range of conditions including sepsis, cancer and Parkinson's.

The NHS is committed to becoming a world leader in the use of AI and machine learning, aiming to reap the benefits that range from faster and more personalised diagnosis to greater efficiency in screening services.

To deliver technology for use in health and care, the NHS AI Lab in January published A Guide to Good Practice for Digital and Data-driven Health Technologies, setting out what the NHS is looking for when it buys digital and data-driven technology for use in health and care.

[Read the full Sussex case study](#)

[Read a case study of the service that won an HSJ and BMJ award](#)

[Read the York Health Economics Consortium estimate of cost savings](#)

[Read the NICE Medtech Innovation Briefing on the product](#)