

M60's missing link scheme moves closer to reality

The M60 around Manchester could soon get its missing link, making it England's only complete orbital motorway. Two thirds of the public have given their backing to proposals to create a new link road at junction 18 of the M60 near Prestwich so that drivers travelling clockwise will no longer need to use a roundabout to continue their journey on the same motorway.

Highways England has now selected the link road as its preferred option for a major upgrade of the junction, which will see a new loop take drivers from the eastbound to the southbound M60.

A [virtual reality video](#) has been released showing how the new link road could look.

Jim O'Sullivan, Highways England's chief executive, said:

Our proposal for a new link road at Simister Island was the clear favourite during our public consultation. We will now develop detailed designs for the upgrade, which will benefit everyone from local shoppers to haulage firms travelling across the North.

Around 90,000 drivers use Simister Island every day to travel between the M60, M62 and M66, making it one of the North's busiest motorway junctions.

The missing link anomaly was created when the M60 was formed 21 years ago, connecting several existing motorways with a new stretch of motorway to form a 36-mile ring road around Manchester.

The current setup means drivers travelling eastbound soon find themselves on the M62 on their way to Leeds if they don't use a roundabout to reach the southbound section of the M60.

Peter Molyneux, Major Roads Director at Transport for the North, said:

Correcting the well-known Simister Island anomaly will bring significant improvements for all those using it, offering safer and more reliable journeys around the M62, M66 and M60. It's fantastic to see plans progressing at pace on this scheme following the recent public consultation.

It is a vital element in our Northern Infrastructure Pipeline to enhance connectivity and reduce disruption for all road users, both in the immediate area and across the North West. We look forward to continuing to work closely with Highways England as detailed plans are progressed.

More than 800 people took part in a two-month public consultation on the proposals last year, with 67% saying they supported the option to connect the M60 in a loop to the north of the junction.

A new two-lane link road will also be created for drivers travelling from the northbound to the westbound stretches of the M60 at Simister Island, replacing the existing single lane slip road.

And the hard shoulder will be converted to a permanent extra lane along the mile-long stretch of the M60 between junctions 17 and 18 to improve the flow of traffic, providing dedicated lanes for drivers travelling between motorways. CCTV cameras, traffic sensors and electronic signs will be used to maintain safety.

Highways England will hold another public consultation later this year once it has developed detailed designs for the scheme, with a planning application due to be submitted next winter. Construction work is due to start by spring 2025.

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.

Violations of the right to peaceful assembly in the Russian Federation: UK statement

Madam Chair,

The United Kingdom, like a number of other participating States, is deeply concerned by the detention of thousands of peaceful protesters and journalists in Russia on 23 January. We call upon Russia to adhere to its national and international obligations and release those detained arbitrarily for exercising their right of peaceful assembly.

Peaceful protest is a vital part of any democratic society, as is a free and independent media. The violent suppression by police forces of the right of individuals to express their opinion is unacceptable. These events confirm a continuous negative pattern of shrinking space for the opposition, civil

society, human rights defenders and independent voices in Russia.

Madam Chair,

At last week's Permanent Council, we raised our concerns about the politically motivated detention of Alexey Navalny. His treatment and continued detention is another example of the shrinking democratic space in Russia and the deterioration in human rights.

In Astana in 2010, all OSCE participating States reaffirmed all OSCE principles and commitments, without exception, emphasized that we are accountable to our citizens, and that our commitments are matters of legitimate concern to all participating States. We therefore do not agree with any suggestion that the events of 23 January, or the continued detention of Mr Navalny, are solely internal matters for the Russian Federation. They are matters of concern to all OSCE participating States including the UK, and we will continue to support the protection of human rights and the fundamental freedoms of expression, of association and of peaceful assembly throughout the OSCE region, including in Russia.

Madam Chair,

Once again, we call on Russia to demonstrate its commitment to its international obligations, including its commitments in the OSCE, to release those citizens detained during peaceful demonstrations, and to release Mr Navalny without delay.

Two more Nightingale courts open

- temporary courts open in Cirencester and Stafford
- 39 Nightingale courtrooms now open nationwide
- part of plans to ensure the courts system recovers from the pandemic as quickly as possible

Shire Hall has been provided by Staffordshire County Council, while the Cirencester site is a former magistrates' court owned by the local Police and Crime Commissioner – each venue provides two additional courtrooms.

The temporary facilities will help to free up space at their respective nearby Crown courts – allowing more hearings to be held safely and delivering speedier justice for victims.

It brings the total number of Nightingale courtrooms, set up nationwide to alleviate pressure on courts and tribunals resulting from the pandemic, to 39.

Justice Minister Chris Philp said:

These new Nightingale courts will help to boost the capacity in the system – reducing delays and ensuring speedier justice for all.

This is the latest step in our plan to work with the judiciary and legal sector in pursuing every available option to ensure our courts recover as quickly as possible.

Staffordshire County Council's deputy leader, Philip White said:

We're pleased to have been able to lend our support to HM Courts and Tribunals Service to enable it to continue with proceedings and avoid delays by using the historic courtrooms at our Shire Hall building.

It's important that we all pull together to keep services going through the pandemic period for the benefit of our communities. The Shire Hall does of course provide the perfect space in its court rooms which were last used for this purpose over 30 years ago.

As we move forward beyond Covid-19 we can look forward to bringing the former library area in the Shire Hall back into productive use as our new enterprise hub for small businesses thanks to a £2m investment.

The Ministry of Justice has spared no expense in its continued efforts to keep the justice system running during this pandemic.

£142m has been spent on upgrading court buildings and technology, alongside £110m to increase capacity – making over a quarter of a billion-pound investment in court recovery this year.

1,600 extra staff are being hired, plexiglass screens set up in more than 450 courts, 20,000 remote hearings take place each week, and over 290 Covid-safe jury trial courtrooms are in operation – substantially more than before the pandemic.

The impact of these measures is already being seen. Since August, the magistrates' courts backlog has been relentlessly reducing month on month. In the last full week before Christmas, Crown Court disposals exceeded receipts for the first time since Covid started.

These efforts will be supported by an extra £337m announced in the recent Spending Review to deliver swifter justice and support victims, while £76m will further increase capacity in Family Courts and tribunals.

Every HMCTS building – including Nightingale courts – meet the government's Covid-secure guidelines, and public health experts have confirmed the arrangements remain sufficient to deal with the new strain of the virus.

1. More than £110m is being invested in a range of measures to tackle the

impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19), including the recruitment of 1,600 additional staff and opening more Nightingale courts

2. We're also spending £153m to improve court and tribunal buildings – the biggest single investment in court estate maintenance for more than 20 years
 3. This progress will be bolstered by an extra [£337m the government is spending next year](#) to deliver swifter justice and support victims, while an additional £76 million will further increase capacity in family courts and tribunals
 4. [Details on measures to keep courts safe, secure and clean](#)
 5. More details on the [Nightingale courtrooms in operation](#)
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[More than 22,000 people to work on Lower Thames Crossing project](#)

The new crossing under the River Thames will almost double road capacity between Kent and Essex, ease congestion across the region, and divert over 13 million vehicles away from the Dartford Crossing each year, currently the only river crossing east of London. The ambitious scheme includes the longest road tunnels in the UK, 14.3 miles of new road, new viaducts, seven new green bridges, and 24 miles of new paths connecting habitats and communities.

Delivery of this transformative project will support 10,000 jobs in the peak year of construction. Over the six-year building phase, it will employ more than 22,000 people, ranging from highly skilled engineers, architects, and designers, to other essential staff such as caterers, sign makers and IT support.

Highways England is currently developing a skills, employment and education strategy that will enable the delivery of the Lower Thames Crossing as well as support the long-term skills and employment needs of the local community.

The project has worked with Local Authorities and a wide range of stakeholders to understand their aspirations and the local skills market, so they can cultivate a workforce that can support these plans. The strategy will be published later this spring.

Matt Palmer, Lower Thames Crossing Executive Director, said:

By connecting people to jobs and businesses to customers, the Lower Thames Crossing will add billions to the local economy and play an important part in the Government's plan to level up the UK. But it also has a more urgent and crucial role to play in our economic recovery by employing more than 22,000 people over the lifetime of its construction.

Our aim to create local jobs, support local businesses, and nurture the next generation of talent, and in partnership with our contractors we have ambitious plans. We will create hundreds of apprentices and places for graduates and are offering free training to local businesses to help them work on this, or any other major infrastructure project. The scale of opportunity is huge, and I look forward sharing more detail on our approach and plans over the next few months.

Kate Willard OBE, Thames Estuary Envoy, said:

As the largest road scheme in more than three decades, it would be hard to overstate the monumental impact the Lower Thames Crossing will have on the region. I am delighted that local people and businesses in the Thames Estuary are being given the opportunity to work on this transformative project.

South East Local Enterprise Partnership Chair Christian Brodie said:

Not only will this transformative project bring major employers in to the SELEP area, but it will also provide a range of opportunities for the South East's SME community in terms of supply chain and service contracts. We are confident that these benefits will be particularly felt through the business communities adjacent to the crossing and will work with Highways England and our partner organisations in ensuring that this is the case.

This is a hugely important infrastructure project for the South East that will improve our connectivity, and in turn create new opportunities for the local economies either side of the river. That it will also create such a significant number of jobs for the area is an incredibly welcome bonus, and particularly good news at this time when so many have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As well committing to thousands of hours in schools, the project team are creating resources for students, teachers to help inspire the next generation of UK talent – such as career profiles of apprentices and films showcasing why the industry is so exciting.

Highways England is also building on its track record of supporting local businesses by helping firms across Kent and Essex prepare for the opportunities available. Over 100 business have already registered on a new SME directory that will be given to the main works contractors. Hundreds more local firms have taken up offers of free training to help them win work on this or any other major project.

The Lower Thames Crossing will add billions to the UK economy by helping

unlock the huge potential of the Thames Estuary – the UK's number one growth opportunity. The new connection will provide a quicker, more reliable connection between our major manufacturing centres, distribution hubs and key ports and open new markets for local businesses, creating a new economy between Kent and Essex.

[Visit the scheme website](#) for more information on this project.

To keep up to date with the latest travel information follow @HighwaysEast on Twitter or visit the [Highways England website](#).

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[Recovery work begins after heavy flooding in Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire](#)

- Teams from the Environment Agency have been on the ground in affected communities, including Didsbury, Warrington and Northwich, since the first bout of heavy and persistent rain over the week of the 18th January.
- Across the North West, Environment Agency staff are still protecting homes by making sure rivers are clear from blockages and ensuring assets are ready to operate.

Flood recovery work is now underway across Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire by the Environment Agency.

Teams have been on the ground in affected communities, including Didsbury, Warrington and Northwich, since the first bout of heavy and persistent rain over the week of the 18th January.

Through a combination of operating defences and assets, the Environment Agency were able to protect more than 24,000 properties and businesses and warn more than 6,000 people in advance of Christoph's arrival. 48 flood warnings and 5 severe flood warnings, meaning a danger to life, were also

were issued.

However, even with those measures in place, the severe weather caused between 369 properties across Greater Manchester and Cheshire to be affected by flooding, with the Environment Agency still gathering vital post-flood information to determine the total figure.

Lesley Worswick, Area Director for Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire said:

“We would like to thank our communities, partners and staff who have shown a rapid, dedicated response to the intense and unprecedented rainfall brought on by Storm Christoph.

Over the week, our teams operated our flood storage reservoirs in the Salford, Didsbury and Sale areas and, activated all 3 phases of the £7m Northwich scheme, which successfully held back the River Weaver. We are continuing to check our defences after the severe weather and are operating them as needed to help keep people and properties safe.

“The focus now is on recovery. The Environment Agency’s flood assets protected thousands of homes and businesses but sadly, some communities across the North West did suffer from flooding and we need to help them recover as quickly as possible.

“We are doing everything we can to support our communities. Alongside, our partners we are coordinating our field teams out on the ground in affected areas. They continue to work around the clock. Our Community Information Officers have also been in touch with residents and business owners to offer information and advice as well as signposting people to help by working with Local Authorities.”

With further heavy showers are expected to continue into the weekend, the Environment Agency is advising communities to remain vigilant and stay safe over the coming days.

People are advised to [sign up for free flood warnings](#) and keep up to date with [the latest safety advice](#), call Floodline on 0345 988 1188 or follow @EnvAgencyNW on Twitter for the latest flood updates.

Further information:

- Around 5.4 million, or one in six properties, are at risk from flooding from all sources across England. Of these, 2.4 million properties are at risk of river and coastal flooding..
- The construction of defences, such as flood walls, embankments and gates, is a key tool for reducing flood risk to homes, businesses and critical infrastructure sites – alongside other methods such as natural flood management and property level resilience.
- The government has recently announced a record £5.2 billion investment in flood and coastal defences – double the previous investment – to protect 336,000 properties, and the EA’s FCRM strategy will prepare us

for more extreme weather and build a better prepared and more resilient nation.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-strategy-for-england-2>

- For every £1 spent improving protection from flooding and coastal erosion, we avoid around £5 of property damages. This long-term commitment will make homes, businesses and infrastructure more resilient to the increasing impacts of climate change.