

Government invests £35 million to protect critical freight routes

Vital freight routes into, out of and around the UK will continue to run smoothly, thanks to a multi-million-pound government scheme to help ensure critical goods, such as food and medical supplies, can move freely.

The government has signed agreements with 6 operators to provide up to £35 million to help ensure there is enough freight capacity to prevent disruption to the flow of goods.

The decision has been made to protect 16 of the most important routes covering the Channel, the Short Strait, the North Sea and routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland which were previously at risk of closure due to a drop in demand as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19). They will now be designated as Public Service Obligation routes for a period of up to 9 weeks.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

From the very beginning of the outbreak, we have committed to do whatever it takes to minimise the disruption caused by COVID-19.

By taking this action, we have helped protect the movement of goods and services in and out of the UK, safeguarding the flow of supplies across the Union.

The Department for Transport is working closely with the transport sector and devolved administrations to monitor the situation on all freight routes (not just those in the scheme) in order to ensure critical goods, such as food and medical supplies, can move freely.

The agreements follow the UK, French and Irish governments' [pledge to work together on temporary measures to ensure COVID-19 does not threaten vital freight routes between the countries.](#)

UK Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps, Irish Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Shane Ross, and French Minister of Transport, Jean-Baptiste Djebbari, said the nations are united by trade and we will continue to engage closely to help keep freight moving.

Adaptability is the key for nuclear worker Kay

When she left her house for work for the first time after the coronavirus lock down was announced, Kay Mulhatton felt nervous.

While other people were urged to stay at home, as a key worker keeping one of our nuclear plants safe, Kay was asked to continue to come to work.

It felt strange the first time I set off for work. I didn't know what to expect. Thankfully, as time has moved on, things have felt more normal.

Kay works 12-hour shifts in the vitrification plant. While the plant isn't currently turning radioactive waste into glass, work in the facility cannot stop. This has meant a change in Kay's role.

Our team of 5 process engineers would ordinarily be working to keep the plant running. As the plant's normal processes are paused, we're carrying out other work that must continue, and are supporting our colleagues in other parts of the facility and at home. In fact, we've been doing quite different sets of tasks to normal.

We've all adapted to our new circumstances, and it's reassuring to see just how seriously all key workers on the site are taking this. It did take time though. At first people were trying to work as usual, but we all support each other and call out behaviours that are unsafe. This means pointing out when people are not social distancing.

Thankfully we've had to point this out less as people have become accustomed to it. But we obviously remain nervous about what happens when more people return to work. With more people on site it will be harder to social distance. But the measures we are seeing being put in place should help this.

These include reconfiguring canteen areas so people can keep their distance in the workplace, more robust cleaning regimes and new stations for hand sanitising and cleaning down kit.

Since the changes to working arrangements, only a small number of people have been based in the plant, but this will increase slowly, over time, as a phased return to operations takes place.

Until that point, Kay is reassured by the way those on site are working, and

the camaraderie they are showing.

I've been working with a fantastic team, and we're all chipping in to help each other. We're continuing to have good conversations about both work and our wellbeing and are enjoying some lovely home-made food. Thank you!

While there are far fewer of us on plant and on site, we're certainly a team.

Kay recognises the importance of mental health. As well as supporting colleagues and checking in with other team members, she keeps her mind busy outside of work with crocheting, knitting and DIY, as well as walking her dog.

Kay was keen to thank her colleagues for their efforts during this time. She is happy to speak to anyone who feels overwhelmed at the moment.

[Vernacare increases production by 60% to fight Coronavirus](#)

- Coronavirus wards across the NHS and in more than 60 countries are using infection control products from UK exporter, Vernacare
- The Department for International Trade has worked with Vernacare to increase supply to global healthcare providers, contributing to a 60% rise in production

Vernacare has been providing the NHS with infection control products for 50 years, but since the outbreak of Coronavirus the global demand for its single-use disposable containers and macerators has reached an unprecedented scale.

The Lancashire based healthcare company has increased production by 60%, as healthcare facilities follow World Health Organisation (WHO) advice that 'single use and disposable' equipment is needed to minimise the risk of transmission of Coronavirus. The company's infection control products are now being used by 95% of NHS hospitals. With the assistance of the UK government's international trade advisors, these are also exported to more than 60 countries, including Spain, Italy, India, Australia, New Zealand and Mexico.

Vernacare has revolutionised the healthcare sector, not only through its range of disposable containers such as urinals, washbowls and jugs, but also through its hospital macerators, bathing alternatives and disinfectant wipes.

As the largest medical grade pulp manufacturer in the world, Vernacare has shone a light on UK innovation by being adaptive and resourceful throughout the pandemic. Producing its goods in-house has allowed Vernacare to fulfil all of its domestic orders as well as meeting international demand.

Hakeem Adebisi, International Sales and Marketing Director of Vernacare, said:

With no current cure, it is vital that we focus on curbing the spread of Coronavirus, which is exactly what our products are made to do.

At the heart of this fight are our frontline workers and it is our duty to help protect them from infection, so that they can continue to save lives. That is why we ramped up production by 60%, so that we can meet the growing demand.

The response of our team has been magnificent, and it is extremely rewarding to see our products being used in hospitals and age care facilities in the UK and worldwide.

Since the start of the Coronavirus outbreak, Department for International Trade (DIT) officials around the world have introduced the company to a wide range of healthcare contacts, generating further business for Vernacare in countries like Australia and Singapore.

Minister for Exports, Graham Stuart, said:

Vernacare is one of the many UK businesses working incredibly hard to supply crucial products to frontline workers across the world, helping to save lives and prevent the spread of Coronavirus.

Through innovation and manufacturing excellence, Vernacare's infection control products are transforming the global healthcare sector and will continue to do so long after the pandemic.

My department is doing everything it can to support UK businesses to continue trading, and I'm glad DIT has been able to ensure Vernacare's products reach those across the globe who need them the most.

Alexander Dalrymple Award presented to Vice Admiral Vinay Badhwar

The 2019 Alexander Dalrymple Award has been presented to Vice Adm Vinay Badhwar, National Hydrographer to the Government of India, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to Indian hydrography and across the wider Indian Ocean region.

The Alexander Dalrymple Award was first awarded by the UKHO in 2006 and is named after the first Hydrographer of the Admiralty. Recipients of the award are selected by the Executive Committee of the UKHO for their efforts in raising the standards of hydrography, cartography and navigation around the world.

Having joined the Indian Navy in 1982, Vice Admiral Badhwar has extensive hydrographic surveying experience. This includes work in the Gulfs of Kutch and Khambhat, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands – widely recognised as some of the most challenging environments to survey in the world.

In his capacity as National Hydrographer, Vice Adm Badhwar has been a pivotal member of the International Hydrographic Organization's Capacity Building Sub-Committee since its creation. He also leads the Indian Naval Hydrographic Office's own regional Capacity Building programmes. In this role, Vice Adm Badhwar coordinates efforts to help Indian Ocean coastal states to develop their hydrographic and cartographic capabilities – an important step to unlocking each of these states' blue economies.

Vice Adm Badhwar's contribution to the sustainable development of Indian Ocean coastal economies was also recognised in 2019, when he received the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal for 'distinguished service of an exceptional order during peacetime'.

Commenting on the 2019 Alexander Dalrymple Award, RAdm Peter Sparkes, the UK's National Hydrographer at the UKHO, said:

Vice Admiral Badhwar is a true champion of the hydrographic profession. He has helped to unlock the economic potential of marine geospatial data and further hydrographic science in both India and the wider Indian Ocean region.

The important capacity building contribution of our friends and partners at the Indian Naval Hydrographic Office, who work in concert with the IHO, is helping to usher in a safer, more prosperous and more sustainable world. We look forward to continuing to work with Vice Admiral Badhwar and his team as we help all nations unlock the power of their blue economies.

Adding his thoughts on the award, Vice Admiral Vinay Badhwar said:

This recognition would not have been possible without the support of my colleagues in the National Hydrographic Department, who worked tirelessly towards achieving the goals set forth by the United Nations and IHO. Last but not the least, I am also grateful to all my fellow hydrographers worldwide for acknowledging our work.

Joint Statement on the Occassion of IDAHOT Day

World news story

27 Embassies in Romania have signed a joint statement on the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia in Romania.



Joint Statement on the occasion of the IDAHOT Day: International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia in Romania

Bucharest, 17 May 2020 – On the occasion of the International Day against

Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia, we express our solidarity with all persons in Romania, who are discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression and sex characteristics.

LGBTI persons continue to face discrimination, violence and stigmatization all around the world. Our countries seek to combat such discrimination by promoting human rights for everyone. This respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and dignity obliges governments to protect all citizens from violence and discrimination and to ensure that all people enjoy equal treatment and equal opportunities.

We believe that only when diversity is appreciated and supported can a country achieve its full potential. The current COVID-19 pandemic does not allow groups or individuals to gather for festivals and marches, but we reaffirm on this day our full support for the peaceful fight for the cessation of all forms of discrimination and violence, including on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression and sex characteristics.

The joint statement is issued by the embassies of: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay and the European Commission Representation in Romania.

Published 18 May 2020