

Press release: Smart alliance to improve journeys on England's busiest motorways

The government company has launched the procurement process for its Smart Motorway Alliance. It needs six partners to join it for 10 years to develop a smarter network, creating extra capacity relieving congestion, for more traffic to use the country's busiest motorways.

The infrastructure that goes into creating that capacity also forms the foundations for connected vehicles to use the motorways in the future.

The Alliance is the second part of the company's ground-breaking Routes to Market procurement approach; earlier this month it announced the companies it will work with on £8.7bn worth of Regional Delivery Partnership deals.

Highways England's Chief Executive, Jim O'Sullivan said:

We want a step change away from traditional thinking and more towards creating value. We want companies that can learn from their experiences, and work together to deliver ever improving efficiency and productivity.

Highways England has developed the model through engagement with the supply chain. The innovative and infrastructure leading approach will enable a step-change in performance and aid the delivery of a large number of schemes that will increase capacity and reduce congestion on motorways, whilst improving safety during the delivery of these schemes.

The company is seeking three on-site delivery partners, two digitally enabled design partners and one production management partner.

The six partners will work with Highways England to provide exemplar performance and achieve results that include:

- better safety, through better aligned and common working practices and reduced time on site
- more efficient delivery, through a programmatic approach that will drive standardisation, production and off-site assembly
- improved customer service with a reduction in time needed for works and minimising any disruptions for road users
- increased investment in skills and innovation from the supply chain, supported by a secure and long-term pipeline of work

The contract is outcome focused and partners will be collectively responsible and rewarded based upon delivering efficiencies. The Alliance puts integration and collaboration between Highways England and its supply chain

at the heart of how Highways England's smart motorway programme will work going forward.

The [Contract Notice](#) has been issued to the OJEU.

Accompanying procurement documents can be accessed via Bravo Solution, Highways England's e-procurement portal. View the Smart Motorway Alliance [descriptive document](#).

Interested potential partners from the supply chain can attending a briefing on Monday 10 December in central Birmingham.

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.

[Speech: New Life Sciences Sector Deal opens doors to transform treatments and save lives](#)

We have more over 75s than ever before, but for those born this year, 54% will live to be 100. In order for us all to live healthier lives for longer we need to diagnose disease earlier, making the most of new technology and new medicines.

Today, in a new deal between government and the life sciences sector, we have announced a [major study](#) to collect a range of data from 5 million healthy volunteers. This mammoth undertaking will be the biggest study of its kind, using artificial intelligence and other new technologies to diagnose diseases earlier.

We all know someone who we love who has suffered the effects of a devastating disease. If we can detect illnesses like cancer, Alzheimer's and heart disease before symptoms present, we can open doors to transform treatment and save lives. I am honoured to be leading the Accelerating Detection of Disease project which will bring together doctors, industry experts and leading charities including Cancer Research UK, the British Heart Foundation and Alzheimer's Research UK.

It is this kind of revolutionary work which will help people get the right treatment before they get ill, and it is my ambition that this will give more of us, more years of healthy life.

By working together, industry, charities, Government and the NHS can tackle major healthcare challenges. The [second Life Sciences Sector Deal](#) announced today demonstrates another major step forward for the Life Sciences Industrial Strategy in the UK. With 240,000 skilled jobs and a £70 billion contribution to the UK economy, the Life Sciences Sector is vibrant, successful and diverse. The new Life Sciences Sector Deal includes input from digital, medical and biological technology companies, diagnostics experts and pharmaceutical companies.

Not only that, but it includes significant inward investment from the sector – over £1.3 billion – and shows a continued commitment to UK expertise and facilities. I am also pleased to see the ongoing global engagement with the agenda I laid out in my [Life Sciences Industrial Strategy](#) last year to cultivate the best environment for research and development in the UK.

In years gone by, the idea of eliminating smallpox, managing HIV or curing Hepatitis C seemed impossible and yet we are living in an age where the risks associated with these diseases have been either eliminated or greatly reduced. The programme announced today will set us on the path to new medical breakthroughs, innovative treatments, and longer lives, cutting down suffering in the future. The UK's world leading life sciences experts are going further than ever before to help us live healthier, for longer.

Sir John Bell is a Life Sciences Champion and Regius Professor of Medicine at the University of Oxford.

[News story: Triple tonne triumph](#)



Skip being retrieved from the Pile Fuel Storage Pond at Sellafield

When retrieval operations in the Pile Fuel Storage Pond began in 2012 there was an estimated 750 tonnes of bulky waste items to remove, including redundant equipment and discarded skips.

The 300 tonne mark was achieved in November with the removal of the 89th skip.

There are now 97 skips remaining, which along with the other bulky waste should be fully removed and in safe interim storage by 2024.

A fit-for-purpose approach to removing intermediate level nuclear waste in simple shielded containers has helped find new routes out for waste which we previously couldn't remove.

Head of Pile Fuel Storage Pond Operations, Rob Smith, said: "Our mantra has always been 'first filled, first empty' and this is an important step in our journey. Every skip removed is a skip closer to us emptying one of the most highly-hazardous areas of the Sellafield site."

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[Press release: Spring announcement due for A358 route solution](#)

Earlier this year members of the public gave Highways England their views on proposals to dual the route, which, with the A303, forms a vital link between London, the South East and the South West.

The Government company has been busy analysing responses and in an update today said that further engineering and economic evaluation was required to help ensure that the route finally proposed is the right one.

It also announced the start of new engagement activities with community representatives early in the new year to help ensure local people are kept informed of progress.

David Stock, Highways England Project Manager for the A358 scheme, said:

We're very grateful to everyone who participated in our consultation, and we completely understand that people want a solution as soon as possible to the congestion and long delays they currently experience and the harmful impact on the region's economy.

The A303/A358 corridor is a vital connection between London, the South East and the South West, and we are committed to improving it, but we have to ensure we have the best solution possible.

We hope to announce the preferred solution in the spring, we'll be

keeping community groups informed in the meantime, and the public will have another chance to comment on the proposals after we have developed the design of the preferred route.

Three options were presented during consultation and more than 1,500 groups and individuals responded.

The engagement will start early next year with the first of a series of community forum events with representatives from local authorities, parish councils, local businesses and community groups.

Invitations to the community events will be issued shortly and updates will also be posted on the [scheme web page](#).

The Government is committed to upgrading all remaining single carriageway sections of the A303/A358 corridor, and together with the A358 scheme, Highways England is also delivering the A303 Stonehenge and A303 Sparkford to Ilchester schemes as part of the £15 billion first Road Investment Strategy.

Planning applications for the latter two schemes have been accepted for examination by the Planning Inspectorate.

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[Press release: UK Ambassador to Afghanistan appointed as next NATO Senior Civilian Representative](#)

The Senior Civilian Representative acts as the primary link between the Afghan Government and NATO, and helps to ensure the success of the NATO Resolute Support mission which provides training, advice and assistance to Afghanistan's security and police forces.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced the appointment at a NATO Foreign Ministers meeting on 5 December 2018. Sir Nicholas will take up his appointment in March 2019.

UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

Sir Nicholas Kay will bring a wealth of experience on the political developments in Afghanistan in his new role as NATO's Special Civilian Representative and I would like to thank him for his tireless work as the British Ambassador to Afghanistan.

Despite the violence, we have seen tentative steps towards a peace process beginning to emerge and the UK, along with our international partners, stands firmly with the Afghan government to support their efforts to build peace.

Sir Nicholas Kay said:

It is a great honour to be entrusted by Secretary General Stoltenberg to be NATO's SCR in Afghanistan. I pay tribute to the remarkable work of Ambassador Zimmermann, the outgoing SCR. My top priority will be to lead NATO's political and diplomatic efforts to bring an end to the conflict in Afghanistan. I shall work closely with the Government of Afghanistan and the international community to make 2019 a year of progress towards sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

The NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan carries forward the Alliance's political-military objectives in Afghanistan, representing the political leadership of the Alliance in Kabul officially and publicly. He liaises with the Afghan Government, civil society, representatives of the international community and neighbouring countries.

Sir Nicholas' appointment as NATO Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) in Afghanistan makes him the third British SCR after Sir Mark Sedwill and Sir Simon Gass in a demonstration of the UK's commitment to Afghanistan.

Sir Nicholas took up his appointment as Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in August 2017 and will complete his mission in December. Deputy Head of Mission Giles Lever will be Chargé d'Affaires ad interim.

Notes to Editors:

For further information, please contact the NATO Press Office on +32 2 707 5041