

News story: Congestion busting scheme rolled out to benefit drivers

Long traffic jams caused by roadworks could be a thing of the past as a scheme which has already significantly reduced delays in Kent and London is rolled out nationwide.

Lane rental schemes, where utility companies are charged up to £2,500 a day for digging up the busiest roads at peak times, could now be adopted by councils nationwide after successful trials in the south-east.

They incentivise firms to work on quieter roads or outside of rush hour, or even to collaborate with other companies to stop roads being dug up multiple times, to reduce the impact of roadworks on drivers.

Pilot lane rental schemes in London and Kent have seen congestion on the busiest roads drop, saving drivers time and boosting the economy.

Transport Minister Jo Johnson said:

Drivers often see red when roadworks cause them delays, especially if no one is working on them.

Lane rental has seen a massive drop in disruption to drivers as utility companies have changed when and where they carry out work. Now we want millions of motorists around England to get the same benefits.

The Department for Transport carried out a [consultation into the scheme last year](#), and the majority of those responding supported its rollout nationwide. Many said they wanted to take advantage of the 'clear benefits' of lane rental schemes.

RAC head of roads policy Nicholas Lyes said:

This is a very welcome announcement. Trials showed that some of the worst congestion caused by planned utility works in London was reduced by half on roads where lane rental was in operation, so rolling this out will extend the benefits nationwide.

While motorists accept that some roadworks and congestion are unavoidable, lengthy and unnecessary queues are incredibly frustrating. RAC research suggests congestion on our roads and journey time reliability are growing concerns for motorists so introducing lane rental should encourage better planning and coordination of roadworks, and mean utility works are completed in a swifter, more efficient manner.

About 2.5 million roadworks are carried out each year, costing the economy £4 billion in increased costs to businesses through late employees or deliveries.

In London, utility companies have worked together more than 600 times since lane rental was introduced in 2015, up from just 100 beforehand.

The Department for Transport will produce guidance in the autumn to help councils develop lane rental schemes for approval. The first schemes could start by the end of 2019.

Press release: £45 million funding boost to support councils unlock land for thousands of homes

A £45 million cash injection into key community projects will help kick-start the building of thousands of new homes, Housing Minister Dominic Raab announced today (16 February 2018).

As part of government's drive to get Britain building homes again, a total of 79 projects from Newcastle to Plymouth will receive funding to support building up to 7,280 homes on council owned land.

To support local councils to meet their ambition to unlock enough of land they own for at least 160,000 homes by 2020, they will be able to use the Land Release Fund money to combat barriers which would otherwise make land unusable for development.

The projects – which aim to support building strong communities – include a range of necessary works such as asbestos removal and bat alleviation, as well as schemes that will significantly improve quality of life such as essential relocating of a pelican crossing.

This move comes 2 weeks after the projects set to benefit from the first wave of funding from the [£5 billion Housing Infrastructure Fund were announced](#), helping to get up to 200,000 homes off the ground through investment in local housing projects. This is part of the government's comprehensive strategy of planning reform and targeted investment to build 300,000 homes a year.

Housing and Planning Minister Dominic Raab said:

We are investing £45 million to build roads and provide utilities, so councils can release the land to get up to 7,280 new homes built.

It's part of our strategy to build the homes Britain needs, and carry local communities with us.

We're determined to make buying or renting more affordable for young families and those on low or middle incomes.

Projects from Newcastle to Plymouth will receive funding from the Land Release Fund, which will enable:

- Poulton-Le-Fylde, Lancashire, to build new roads, roundabouts, and utility services, which will unlock up to 330 homes potentially built with Japanese modular housing techniques. The works will cost £1.7 million.
- Worcester to demolish a leisure centre and undergo asbestos decontamination works near its city centre, helping to unlock up to 50 homes. The project will cost £750,000.
- Paignton, Devon, to build a new 350m sewer, drainage upgrades and 2 new roads, which will help unlock up to 200 homes. The works will cost £1.9 million.
- Brighton, Sussex, to divert a public sewer and make electricity substation and highways improvements. The £335,000 project will help unlock up to 30 homes.

The Land Release Fund is being administered through a partnership with the Local Government Association and Cabinet Office's One Public Estate (OPE) programme, which make the best use of council land and resources through practical advice and support.

OPE already works with over 70% of councils in England to transform local communities and services through large scale economic growth, delivering new jobs and new homes.

Further information

The Land Release Fund competitively assessed bids from local authorities on value for money, innovation, and the contribution to wider government housing objectives.

A total of 79 bids were successful in the assessment process, which will see £45 million being awarded to 41 authorities.

The fund was oversubscribed with more than £100 million received in funding requests for 143 projects.

The successful bids will release land for homes by March 2020.

In a [funding announcement](#) on 11 December 2017, One Public Estate gave councils – and their public sector partners – access to £8.7 million of funding, as well as practical support and expertise, to help them develop and deliver ambitious property programmes to benefit their communities.

OPE provides councils with funding and access to practical support and expertise to deliver property-based projects with wider public sector partners, including central government departments.

The joint initiative enables publicly-owned land and buildings to be used more efficiently and deliver real benefits to communities across the country, including new jobs and better services.

See details on the bids:

MS Excel Spreadsheet, 24.7KB

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[Press release: New measures to help farmers and growers in the food supply chain](#)

A 'collaboration fund' of up to £10 million has been announced today (16 February) as part of a series of measures to help farmers and small producers compete and thrive alongside larger businesses in the food supply chain.

The fund will be designed in consultation with the farming industry and will work by bringing together those interested in co-operation. These groups will be supported by the funding to formally establish, develop or expand, so that farmers and growers can take advantage of new market opportunities to help their businesses thrive. Collaboration between farmers can bring substantial economic benefits, enabling farmers to benefit from economies of scale, share knowledge and jointly market their produce.

The move was announced today in the [Government response](#) to the consultation on the remit of the [Groceries Code Adjudicator](#), along with a range of other measures which will come into force to help protect the rights of farmers and small producers, including:

- Introducing compulsory milk contracts between producers and purchasers to help protect dairy farmers by setting out clear terms, including the price for the delivery of milk, the timing of deliveries, the duration of the contract, details of payment procedures, and arrangements for collecting and delivering raw milk
- A requirement that slaughterhouses use a standard grid for the classification of sheep carcasses to help ensure farmers are paid per carcass in a more transparent manner, providing more certainty for farmers in the price they will get for their animals
- A commitment to work with industry to explore improving transparency and access to prices along the supply chain, to help farmers and small producers see if they are getting a fair deal for their produce
- An assessment from the Competition and Markets Authority into whether more grocery retailers could come under the remit of the GCA
- Tackling late payments by highlighting to farmers and small producers the role of the [Small Business Commissioner](#)

Announcing the measures Farming Minister George Eustice said:

This package of measures is designed to improve transparency and integrity within the food supply chain and to support collaborative business models where producers can come together to strengthen their position or work jointly on specific areas of work.

Too often in the past, farmers have ended up being price takers and there have been too many instances where a lack of transparency in prices and charges by some processors has undermined the market. If we want a successful farming industry in the future then it is essential that we have properly functioning markets and that farmers receive a fair share of the value of the food they produce.

Business Minister Andrew Griffiths said:

This Government's Industrial Strategy is building a Britain in which suppliers of all sizes can get a fair deal. The Groceries Code Adjudicator has already made a significant impact, with suppliers reporting retailers' improved compliance with the Code.

Today's announcement will build on this good work, protecting suppliers and ensuring their rights are enforced when it comes to late payments.

The measures will be designed with the farming industry and apply to farmers and smaller producers in England and are expected to be brought in later this

year. The collaboration fund will open for applications later this year.

1. The Groceries Code Adjudicator is the independent regulator ensuring that the UK's largest grocery retailers treat their direct suppliers lawfully and fairly
2. Small Business Commissioner was launched in December 2017 to support small businesses in resolving payment disputes and tackle unfair payment practices. The Commissioner handles complaints between small business suppliers (with fewer than 50 staff) and their larger customers
3. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy introduced a regulatory amendment on 5 February clarifying business representatives' right to legally challenge unfair payment behaviour, such as late payment, on behalf of their members.

Press release: PM calls with the Leaders of Sinn Fein and the DUP: 15 February 2018

The Prime Minister spoke to the leaders of Sinn Fein and the DUP on the phone earlier this evening about the recent phase of political talks in Northern Ireland.

In both phone calls the Prime Minister expressed her disappointment that an agreement had not yet been reached despite recent progress being made by everyone involved.

She reiterated how the government remains absolutely committed to restoring an Executive and that it is still her firm belief that restoring devolved government – so that democratically elected politicians can make locally accountable decisions – is in the best interests of everyone in Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister was clear that she still believes the basis for an agreement exists and recognised the leadership both parties had shown over past weeks and months. She urged them both to reflect on the recent phase of talks in order to find the best way forward.

On next steps, the Prime Minister was clear that the UK government has a responsibility to consider what needed to be done to protect the interests of Northern Ireland in the ongoing absence of an Executive. She added that the Northern Ireland Secretary would continue to work closely with the parties, and the Irish Government in accordance with the three stranded approach, to support that process.

Press release: Charity regulator sets out scope of statutory inquiry into Oxfam

The Charity Commission, the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales, has today set out the scope of its statutory inquiry into Oxfam, registered charity number 202918.

The inquiry was opened on 12 February 2018 after the Commission examined documents sent on Monday by Oxfam regarding allegations of misconduct by staff involved in its humanitarian response in Haiti. The Commission has concerns that Oxfam may not have fully and frankly disclosed material details about the allegations at the time in 2011, its handling of the incidents since, and the impact that these have both had on public trust and confidence.

The purpose of the statutory inquiry is to:

1. examine the charity's governance (including leadership and culture), its management and its policies and practices with regard to safeguarding, in the context of the applicable law, good practice and its obligations as a charity, both generally and particularly in relation to:
 - its response, general handling and disclosure to the Commission, statutory funders and other key donors, agencies and stakeholders in relation to serious safeguarding incidents which have taken place since 2011 including its Haiti programme
 - its responsibility to provide a safe environment for its beneficiaries, staff and other charity workers in the delivery of its overseas programmes and generally
 - its recruitment and supervision of its employees, volunteers and other charity workers
 - maintaining its reputation as a major aid charity which can be entrusted with international, governmental and public support and the confidence of its beneficiaries, staff and volunteers
2. scrutinise and review the charity's progress with implementing the requirements in the action plan agreed with the Commission in 2017 and ensure such other actions that may be required to address the findings from the inquiry's work are undertaken

Michelle Russell, Director of Investigations, Monitoring and Enforcement at the Charity Commission said:

Acting in the public interest as regulator, this inquiry must and will establish the facts about what the charity knew about events in Haiti in 2011, and how it responded at the time and since. The

inquiry will also help us, and the public, understand Oxfam's overall approach to safeguarding those who come into contact with the charity – whether they be beneficiaries, staff, volunteers, or the wider communities in which they work. Resolving this is key to upholding public and donor trust and confidence in charity.

This week Oxfam's Chair Caroline Thomson has given us an unequivocal commitment to co-operating fully with the inquiry to ensure our work progresses thoroughly and speedily and to resolving the issues faced by the charity to restore public trust and confidence in Oxfam.

It is expected that the inquiry will review and consider:

- case records to test and verify assurances on the charity's handling of cases
- the charity's handling of the allegations in Haiti; the extent of the charity's knowledge of similar allegations against its staff which predated Haiti (including Chad and Liberia); and the matters or risks arising from its handling and subsequent decision making
- the charity's reporting and communications with law enforcement and other agencies and donors, including DFID and DEC

Anyone with information that could be relevant to the inquiry is advised to contact OxfamInquiry@charitycommission.gsi.gov.uk.

The inquiry will assess what additional actions will need to be taken by the charity in order to address the findings from the inquiry's work and to assist in restoring public trust and confidence in Oxfam. The scope of the inquiry will include the charity's trading division and may be amended if other issues emerge during the course of the investigation which raise additional regulatory concerns.

It is the Commission's policy, after it has concluded an inquiry, to publish a report detailing what issues the inquiry looked at, what actions were undertaken as part of the inquiry and what the outcomes were. [Reports of previous inquiries](#) by the Commission are available on GOV.UK.

The charity's details can be viewed on the Commission's [online charity search tool](#).

Ends

Notes to editors

1. Charity Commission is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see our [annual report](#).
2. Search for charities on our [online register](#).
3. Section 46 of the Charities Act 2011 gives the Commission the power to institute inquiries. The opening of an inquiry gives the Commission access to a range of investigative, protective and remedial legal powers.

4. The Commission has been engaged with Oxfam on its safeguarding culture and practices since last year. As a result of the Commission's engagement, the charity committed to a number of actions in [late 2017](#) to review and improve:
- the charity's governance of safeguarding, including leadership, culture, role modelling and internal reporting;
 - the charity's HR culture, policies and practice;
 - the charity's organisation structures, management reporting lines and resourcing to support the effective delivery of the charity's safeguarding objectives; and
 - the safeguarding management framework where the charity has shared responsibilities in the Oxfam confederation, in particular with Oxfam International