

# News story: Welsh Secretary – “Now is the time to create our own Western Powerhouse”

The pooling of skills and expertise on both sides of the Severn estuary can create an all new economic region to rival the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine, Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns will say today at the first Severn Growth Summit in Newport (22 January).

At the end of 2018, one of the greatest economic barriers to Wales' prosperity will be consigned to history when the UK Government removes the tolls to cross the Severn Bridges.

It will also signal the beginning of a transformation of the economic and cultural prospects of the south Wales and south west England region, making it easier to do business, to increase inward investment and tourism and to create jobs.

Alun Cairns will address a sell-out audience of over 350 guests from business, education, cultural and digital sectors on either side of the Severn Crossings at the inaugural summit at the Celtic Manor Resort. In his keynote speech, he will sound a clarion call urging all sectors to “seize the new opportunities the end of the tolls creates and work together to grasp the potential of this great region.”

Companies on both sides of the border are already benefitting from the removal of VAT earlier this month. With the tolls set to be abolished later this year, the Summit has been convened to galvanise the many strengths of the economic region, to generate ideas, innovation and entrepreneurship to stimulate every part of our economy.

## **Alun Cairns will say:**

Today's Severn Growth Summit is set to spark the biggest commercial conversation for the west of the UK in a generation, but it will be nothing without the collaborative backing of business, communities and governments on both sides of the estuary.

One of the key drivers behind the Northern Powerhouse was the volume of people commuting between Liverpool and Manchester. However, there are more people commuting between Bristol and either Cardiff or Newport. This shows that this region has the huge potential to rival the Northern Powerhouse or Midlands Engine.

**James Durie, Chief Executive Business West at Chambers of Commerce & Initiative said:**

In the past the Bristol City Region has largely tended to look east to London and the South East instead of also forging closer links with its close neighbours less than an hour's drive away.

Bristol and its wider city region and South Wales will have more in common than ever before and this is a great opportunity for the business community to make the most of those shared interests.

If we want to compete not just on the national stage, but also on the international stage, I believe we need to take full advantage of this once in a generation opportunity.

The sell-out event in Newport will feature talks and interactive sessions from senior representatives from sectors as diverse as transport, logistics, property, tech and finance. It will also provide an opportunity for business leaders to meet political decision makers face to face and hammer out a successful path for closer cross-border collaboration.

**Alun Cairns added:**

I want this event to be the catalyst that forges new partnerships with innovators, inventors, job creators, local leaders, workers and consumers.

A collective voice is an effective voice and I believe such cross-border co-operation will transform the economies of south Wales and the south west of England.

For information and to hear from key stakeholders on what the end of the tolls means to them, visit our new [Cross Border Growth](#) blog page.

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**[Press release: Industrial Strategy boost for UK medicines with £70 million of funding to help develop new treatments](#)**

- Funding through Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) will support projects including new manufacturing centres to speed up the production

- of medicine and new virtual reality projects to help patient recovery
- Landmark speech also confirms plans to map UK's research infrastructure to ensure UK remains at the cutting edge

New Science Minister Sam Gyimah will announce £70 million of funding to create new manufacturing centres to help speed up the development of new medicines during a visit to Imperial College London today (Monday 22 January).

The money forms part of the government's commitment to build a country fit for the future through a stronger economy and fairer society. It will create innovative new medical solutions, including using virtual reality to aid rehabilitation and investing in digital speech therapy solutions for stroke and brain injuries. The government's investment in high tech medical research will in turn boost jobs, enhance the NHS and ensure better care for people when they are unwell.

During his visit to Imperial College London, the minister is expected to see how new, innovative technology is being developed to help patients.

He will be shown a cartoon-like robot which can improve learning and emotional understanding in children with autism. Because of their programming, robots are precise in displaying the same facial expressions and gestures in every interaction. Researchers believe this consistency may be the key to helping young children with autism to learn the different facial expressions and gestures people use to display their emotions.

The minister is also likely to see some AI facial-recognition research which could be used to help elderly people by detecting the onset of depression, or in security systems to recognise visitors to dementia sufferers' homes as doctors, nurses or relatives.

As part of a day of Industrial Strategy activity, Sam Gyimah will also speak at the Royal Society where he will announce the start of the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Research and Innovation Infrastructure Roadmap Programme, which will comprehensively map UK research and innovation infrastructure, showcasing our abilities whilst identifying any gaps in infrastructure that we can address to boost the sector.

The Infrastructure Roadmap will be the first major piece of work that UKRI will undertake, and is expected to be finished in 2019 and will feature:

- Large scientific facilities and major equipment
- Collections, archives and scientific data
- E-infrastructures such as data and computing systems
- Communications networks

Universities and Science Minister Sam Gyimah said:

Through our ambitious, modern Industrial Strategy we want to unlock the innovations that will help people live better, longer lives by developing the medicines of the future. This investment will not

only support high-value, highly-skilled jobs but will develop lifesaving treatments that could change lives across the UK.

We want to improve the way we make medicines and we are determined to capitalise on our research and innovation infrastructure, which is why today I am launching the start of the UKRI Research and Innovation Infrastructure Roadmap Programme.

From RRS Discovery to the UK Biobank and the Diamond Light Source to the UK Data Archive, this country is world renowned for its research and innovation infrastructure. Now, for the first time, we will map this to enable us to showcase our capabilities around the world and identify future opportunities.

Chief Executive designate of UK Research and Innovation, Sir Mark Walport said:

One of UK Research and Innovation's key tasks is to make sure that the UK's businesses and researchers are ready and able to seize the opportunity presented by the Industrial Strategy. So I'm very pleased that alongside today's substantial investment in leading edge healthcare manufacturing technology, we are also starting the process to map out the UK's nationally and internationally important research and innovation infrastructure. This will enable us to make sure we are getting the absolute best out the infrastructure we already have, and identify what else we will need to stay competitive in the next 10-15 years.

Through the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF), the government is investing £181 million through the Leading Edge Healthcare and the Digital Health Technology Catalyst over 4 years in the areas of advanced therapies, medicines and vaccines development and manufacturing, alongside an estimated £250 million of private funding from industry.

The fund should return a value of £1 billion to the UK economy, support high-value, highly-skilled manufacturing, and increase productivity.

Nearly £50 million of this funding has been allocated to further the manufacture of medicines, ensuring that the right drugs and treatments reach patients.

The funding for the ISCF Leading Edge Healthcare Challenge allocation is made up of:

- £21 million for Advanced Therapies Treatment Centres
- £15 million for Medicines Manufacturing collaborative research and development round 1 competition
- £8 million for Digital Health Catalyst round 1
- £5.6 million for Viral vector production for Cell and Gene Therapy
- £8 million for Digital Health Technology Catalyst round 2 – funding

competition opens 15 February 2018

- £10 million for the Medicines Manufacturing challenge round 2 – funding opens 12 March 2018

Commenting on the funding, Health and Social Care Minister Lord O'Shaughnessy said:

NHS patients want to know that they can get the most innovative and effective treatments as quickly as possible, and that's what our investments will make happen.

Whether it is new cancer treatments, digital health technologies, or tools to help diagnose illness earlier, the Government is partnering with industry to deliver the life-changing and life-saving treatments as quickly as anywhere in the world.

The projects announced as part of the ISCF Leading Edge Healthcare Challenge will not only improve accessibility and production of medicines, it will further reaffirm the UK's position as being world-leading in research and development, which is a central to the Industrial Strategy.

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## **Press release: International Development Secretary: "We need new ideas to future-proof against Africa's biggest challenges"**

Penny Mordaunt visiting a UNICEF supported clinic in drought-affected Northern Kenya. Picture: Anna Dubuis/DFID

Penny Mordaunt has hailed the "incredible power of technology to deliver aid in new ways" on her first official visit to Kenya as International Development Secretary.

During her visit, Ms Mordaunt saw how UK aid is supporting vulnerable communities in the north of the country devastated by East Africa's drought. In Kenya's capital Nairobi, Ms Mordaunt also heard how UK support for innovative programmes is helping to create jobs for a rising population.

Ms Mordaunt was also in the country to hear from British businesses about how new technology has helped them tap into the Kenyan market. The UK is the fifth largest exporter of goods to Kenya and trade between the two countries is worth over £1 billion annually.

Innovative technology, supported by DFID, is helping Kenya build resilience to climate challenges, including drought, and to build a modern economy for the future.

During her visit the International Development Secretary:

- Saw how UK aid-supported research is helping to power low-cost insurance for livestock herders in drought-prone parts of Kenya. The research makes use of already existing satellite technology by NASA to provide images of vegetation cover. This ensures timely insurance pay-outs are made correctly and quickly if cover levels drop. DFID both backs the research and supports private sector insurers to provide it to local herders.
- Set out further UK aid support to the Hunger Safety Net Programme – an innovative cash-transfer scheme bringing together biometric technology and mobile money. This is helping more vulnerable households and supporting the Government of Kenya to own, manage and ultimately fund the programme. Ms Mordaunt also met some of the 100,000 households benefiting from the programme, and saw how cash transfers get aid to those who need it when they need it, achieving value for money by cutting excessive bureaucracy, avoiding duplication by aid agencies and reducing waste.
- Launched the second phase of Trade Mark East Africa. The landmark UK aid programme helps enterprise and creates jobs by breaking down barriers to trade. In Nairobi Ms Mordaunt saw how the first phase of the programme has cut customs clearance times – from an average of nine to two days – and reduced the cost of trading across the region with new cargo-tracking technologies and improved infrastructure. Ms Mordaunt heard from British business about how this technology has helped them enter the Kenyan market. She also announced the launch of a partnership programme, to support the Government of Kenya on urban economic planning and investment.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

I have seen how, in the face of East Africa's devastating drought, UK aid works and is saving lives.

But 2018 will bring more desperate weather conditions to the region. This is a stark reminder that we need to back new ideas to future-proof against the biggest challenges in Africa.

Here in Kenya technology is delivering UK aid in new ways, from innovative cash transfers using biometrics, through to trade technologies that support economic growth, jobs and investment.

It is in all our interests that we harness the best of British innovation with African entrepreneurialism – to create jobs, defeat poverty, and support our future trading partners, as we work towards a shared prosperous future.

While in Kenya Ms Mordaunt also visited a UNICEF supported clinic and pledged further DFID support from the crisis reserve to provide urgent cash transfer assistance to 71,000 families in Northern Kenya with severely malnourished children and pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Ms Mordaunt's visit to Kenya comes ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, taking place in London in April this year. The summit will bring together heads of government to discuss reforming and revitalising the Commonwealth, and establishing it as a modern organisation that is responsive to the global challenges we face today and in the future.

## **Notes to editors:**

### **Trade Mark East Africa II**

The UK is making major improvements to trade infrastructure through the next phase of the Trade Mark East Africa (TMEA) programme.

In East Africa, trade is constrained by the high cost of importing and exporting. High costs are caused by poor transport infrastructure, limited expertise in public and private sectors, and the persistence of non-tariff barriers along the main trade routes.

During Phase 1 of TMEA:

- 6 border posts have been rebuilt and are now operational. Transit time at these border posts has been halved.
- Red tape has been cut through technology and simplifying paperwork. Tanzania food permits which used to take 65 hours now only take 2.
- Unnecessary bureaucracy has been reduced. 80 of the most traded locally-produced goods in the EAC now have harmonized standards. For example, maize traders can now sell across East Africa without costly re-testing. Consumers enjoy lower prices, and are assured of food safety.
- Infrastructure projects in Dar es Salaam and Mombasa ports are progressing, reducing time to clear and export goods by around half.
- Travel time along the major corridors, from Kigali to Mombasa port, and from Bujumbura to Dar es Salaam, has fallen by 16.5%, despite increased trade and traffic.

The UK is significantly scaling up its support to trade and regional integration across East Africa, now providing a total of £211 million to the second phase of TMEA. This will increase sustainable and shared prosperity in East Africa and specifically:

- invest in improving the efficiency and capacity of transport, logistics and trade infrastructure at key port and border points
- invest in systems to improve trading standards, reduce non-tariff

- barriers and enhance transparency in trade processes
- improve the regulatory and policy environment for trade
- support private sector advocacy for trade competitiveness, the export capacity of East African businesses and the greater participation of women and small and growing businesses in trade.

### **Hunger Safety Net Programme**

Between 2007-2017 the UK committed £143 million to the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) to:

- deliver timely and predictable cash transfers to over 100,000 households (approximately 600,000 people) to help the most vulnerable households cope with shocks such as drought and floods, whilst reducing the need for expensive humanitarian responses.
- provide technical expertise and project management to strengthen the Government of Kenya's ability to fully own, manage and fund the HSNP.

Every two months approximately £40 is transferred to recipients' bank accounts. Per household, only one member can be registered as a HSNP recipient. Recipients, who have already been pre-assessed as vulnerable and qualifying for payments, go to their local payment agent to collect their payment. Payment agents scan the finger prints of recipients before payments can be withdrawn from their account, to ensure the right people are reached, and to protect against fraudulent collection of support, so that every penny of UK aid goes towards the vulnerable people that need help the most.

The announcement today is a one year £19.8 million extension (April 2018-March 2019) to the current phase.

The HSNP is co-financed by the Government of Kenya and implemented under by the National Drought Management Authority.

### **£10 million crisis reserve funding**

This assistance is delivered by the UN World Food Programme (WFP) over a three-month period (Dec 2017 – Feb 2018) to about 71,000 families (425,000 individuals).

The intervention is intended to improve the nutrition status of malnourished children and pregnant and breastfeeding women by:

- reducing sharing of nutrition commodities meant for treatment of acutely malnourished members within families
- improving utilisation and coverage of nutrition services and the effectiveness of nutrition treatment
- stabilising and improving food and nutrition security of the most at-risk families.

### **Sustainable Urban Economic Development partnership programme**

This £60 million programme will run until 2022, supporting up to ten rapidly urbanising towns in Kenya with urban economic planning, investment climate

reforms and attracting private sector investment.

The UK has also invested £8 million through the World Bank to assist the Government of Kenya in the development of more Special Economic Zones, private-public partnerships and select counties on doing business reforms.

This programme will also support urban planning in response to the new Government of Kenya's focus on improving access to affordable housing.

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## **News story: Minister Field statement on terrorist attack in Kabul**

This weekend's terrorist attack on the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul was another tragedy for a country and people who continue to confront such threats with great resolve. I would like to extend my heartfelt condolences to all those killed and injured in the attack. I commend the valiant efforts of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces who worked day and night with great courage and skill to defeat the terrorists, and whose swift intervention certainly prevented greater casualties.

The UK will continue to work with allies and partners to help the Afghan government defeat terrorism and to support the development of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in dealing with this threat. We remain committed to helping the Afghan people achieve a peaceful and secure future. Terrorism will not succeed.

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## **News story: People with hidden disabilities could enjoy new freedom with Blue Badge changes**

People with hidden disabilities could soon have greater access to blue badges under new plans from Transport Minister Jesse Norman today (21 January 2018).

The proposals, which would herald the most significant changes since the blue badge was introduced in 1970, would help remove barriers to travel for people with conditions such as dementia and autism, allowing them better access to work, shops and amenities. This could also further help create parity between physical and mental health, and means everyone can take advantage of every opportunity.

Currently, about 2.4 million disabled people in England have a blue badge, allowing them to park on roads without charge and normally without time limit. Around 75% of blue badge holders say they would go out less often if they didn't have one.

Transport Minister Jesse Norman said:

Blue badges give people with disabilities the freedom to get jobs, see friends or go to the shops with as much ease as possible.

We want to try to extend this to people with invisible disabilities, so they can enjoy the freedom to get out and about, where and when they want.

The changes could also see a variety of healthcare professionals, who are better placed to identify if mental health causes mobility issues, carry out assessments to determine if a blue badge should be given.

Sarah Lambert, Head of Policy at the National Autistic Society, said:

The National Autistic Society welcomes this government proposal. It could mean that many more autistic people will qualify for a Blue Badge, which can be a lifeline.

There are an estimated 700,000 autistic people in the UK and whilst every person on the autism spectrum is different, for some, not being able to park in a predictable place close to a destination can cause a great deal of anxiety and put their safety at risk. Some autistic people can experience too much information from the environment around them on public transport, while other autistic people might not be aware of dangers on the road.

However, current Blue Badge rules mean that all-too-often autistic people don't qualify. The National Autistic Society has raised this issue with government over recent years and we are pleased to see they have listened to the concerns of autistic people and their families. We hope the government will make this important change and we look forward to working with them to make sure that autistic people and their families benefit.

[Blue Badge animation video](#)

Councils have different interpretations of the existing rules with some recognising hidden disabilities, but the changes proposed would give a clear and consistent guidelines for the whole of England.

The consultation will last 8 weeks.