

Press release: Highways England lightening the load for hauliers and motorists this Christmas

Since it was created in 2015, Highways England has completed 18 road improvements across the country, which is a welcome bonus for haulage firms preparing to deliver millions of parcels over the next few weeks.

And Highways England is also going the extra mile this Christmas to help motorists and hauliers reach their destinations hassle-free as it prepares to lift and complete almost 400 miles of roadworks across the country. Almost 99 per cent of motorways and strategic A roads will be roadworks-free in time for Christmas, meaning people travelling to meet up with families and friends can more easily reach their destinations.

And that is a welcome bonus for UK next day parcel delivery firm, DPD, as it prepares to deliver 16 million parcels over the next three weeks.

Its 9,000-strong army of drivers will notch up more than 15 million miles of driving.

Justin Pegg, UK Operations Director for DPD, said:

Time is always of the essence in our business, so the work Highways England does throughout the year and especially in December is hugely appreciated. We're out there every single day in December – quite literally delivering Christmas – and if the roads are clear, it makes a huge difference to the service our drivers can provide.

DPD will be moving a record number of parcels the length and breadth of the country this December and the vast majority will need to be delivered the next day. We started planning for Christmas in January and every aspect of that plan is painstakingly put together, but there are still elements that remain outside of our control, such as traffic and the weather.

(LtoR): Finn Owens from DPD with Highways England customer service director Melanie Clarke and Highways England traffic officer Vicki Lawton who will be working on Christmas Day to keep traffic moving on the Midlands motorway network.

To help make journeys better in December, Highways England repair teams will be working around the clock to complete hundreds of miles of road improvements in time for the Christmas getaway.

The roadworks embargo runs from 6am on 22 December until 12.01am on 2 January to help people get away this Christmas with as little disruption as possible.

By suspending or completing roadworks, more lanes will be open and many speed restrictions will be lifted. Highways England's customer service director, Melanie Clarke, said:

We're doing everything we can to make journeys as smooth as possible this Christmas and that's why we're keeping 99 per cent of the road network we manage free from roadworks.

Over the past two years we've already added 190 lane miles of much needed capacity and that will make life easier for those travelling around this month, as the Christmas countdown begins.

The majority of the 18 large-scale improvements already completed by Highways England have added much-needed capacity to some of England's busiest roads.

And this Christmas, more than 5,000 Highways England staff including traffic officers and control room operatives will be working around the clock, helping to clear incidents and manage congestion.

During 2016/17 Highways England traffic officers attended more than 49,000 incidents, clearing just over 85 per cent of them within an hour.

Those wishing to find out more about driving on smart motorways, you can [view our webpage](#).

Drivers planning to use the Dartford Crossing are reminded to pay Dart Charge in advance or by midnight the day after crossing.

More information can be found on our website or by calling our information line (0300 123 5000) people can keep up to date with conditions on the roads.

For more detailed information on how to carry out your vehicle checks, search Think!

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.

Statement to Parliament: EU Transport Council: agenda for 5 December 2017

I will attend the only formal Transport Council under the Estonian Presidency (the Presidency) taking place in Brussels on Tuesday 5 December (2017).

The first item on the agenda will be a progress report on phase one of the mobility package, focusing on proposals designed to improve the clarity and enforcement of the EU road transport market (the 'market pillar'), and proposals on the application of social legislation in road transport (the 'social pillar').

Following this, the Presidency has proposed a policy debate on the 'charging pillar' of the package. The proposals to amend the existing directives on HGV road tolls and user charges ('Eurovignette') and the interoperability of electronic road toll systems (EETS) set out rules for charging vehicles using the road (but do not mandate such charging) and promote better functioning of charging across national barriers.

Next, there will be a progress report on the proposed amendment to the regulation on safeguarding competition in air transport. The proposal aims to tackle discriminatory practices and address perceived deficiencies in the existing legislation by allowing complaints to be made to the European Commission by a wider range of interested parties who suspect, or have evidence that, one or more EU carriers are being harmed by the unfair practices of a third country.

The council will adopt conclusions on the progress on Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) and Connecting Europe Facility (CEF). The conclusions do not place any binding requirements on member states. They recognise the value that the TEN-T Policy and CEF (the associated funding programme) bring to EU transport infrastructure and look to strengthen transport investment in the next EU budgeting period. The UK can support these conclusions.

Conclusions will also be adopted on the digitalisation of transport. 'Digital Europe' has been a priority for the Estonian Presidency and the conclusions highlight the potential and challenges for the digitalisation of transport and, amongst other things, call on the commission to develop a comprehensive and multimodal digitalisation strategy for the transport sector during the first quarter of 2019. The UK can support their adoption.

Next, the council will adopt conclusions on mid-term evaluation of the Galileo, EGNOS and European GNSS Agency. We welcome these conclusions and, in particular, the need for new recommendations about the future evolution of the programme to be proportionate and costed before they are brought forward for decision.

Under any other business, the commission will first present phase 2 of the

mobility package, which focuses on clean mobility and includes proposals on promotion of clean and energy-efficient vehicles, combined transport of goods, and access to the market for coach and bus services. The presidency will provide information on the state of play on the proposed rail passenger rights regulation. The delegations from Germany, the Commission, Poland, France and Finland will, respectively, provide information on automated cars, implementation of the aviation strategy, World Maritime Days, IMO greenhouse gas emission reduction strategy, and summertime arrangements. The commission will also provide information on military mobility, and finally, the Bulgarian delegation will present the transport work programme of their forthcoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Press release: Welsh business visits Downing Street ahead of Small Business Saturday

One of the small businesses selected for the event, Airpix Aerial Images combines nature with state of the art technology – providing aerial filming to capture the beautiful coastlines and valleys of Wales.

The business also provides services in industries ranging from surveying, to construction and engineering.

Airpix Aerial Images' founder, Jeremy Laugharne, said:

I'm so excited and still flying high about my invitation to 10 Downing Street. SmallBiz100 is a great way for businesses to connect with one another, and share unique and individual ideas. It also helps small businesses develop themselves and get valuable exposure.

The UK has 5.7 million small businesses and last year customers spent £717 million with small firms on Small Business Saturday alone.

The businesses were welcomed by Stephen Barclay, Economic Secretary to the Treasury and Baroness Fairhead CBE, Minister of State at the Department for International Trade.

Stephen Barclay said:

It's been great to welcome so many business owners to Number 10 to show our appreciation for the crucial contribution they make to

Britain.

Small businesses are vital to a thriving and competitive economy that is fit for the future, so it's great to see that the number of small businesses in the UK has been growing in recent years. We hope the country will join us in championing the UK's small businesses, and support them this Saturday.

Further information

Business Population Estimates:

BEIS published the annual Business Population Estimates on 30 November. These statistics detail the number of businesses, including small businesses, in the UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/business-population-estimates-2017>

Small Business Saturday:

Small Business Saturday is a grassroots, not-for-profit campaign, originally founded by American Express in the U.S. in 2010, which remains the principal supporter of the campaign in the UK as part of its on-going commitment to encourage consumers to shop small. The campaign also benefits from the backing of leading business organisations including the Federation of Small Businesses and Enterprise Nation.

Small Business Saturday takes place on the first Saturday in December each year, but the campaign aims to have a lasting impact on small businesses. In 2017 Small Business Saturday is on Saturday, December 2nd.

To learn more, visit smallbusinessaturdayuk.com

[News story: 1 January 2018: Update to the Patent Cooperation Treaty \(PCT\) fees](#)

The Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) fee structure changes on 1 January 2018.

The Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) fee structure changes on 1 January 2018 and are as follows:

Transmittal fee:

Search fee:

International fee:

- £1,029 for the first 30 sheets
- £12 for each sheet over 30

Restoration for restoration of priority

Reductions for e-filing

- £155: electronic filing (not being in character coded format)
- £232: electronic filing (being in character coded format)

Fees for preparation of priority document

PCT forms

Further information

[Press release: Blue Belt extended to protect rare seabirds](#)

Nearly 150,000 rare seabirds – including the iconic little tern and black-throated diver – will be better protected as the UK's 'Blue Belt' of marine protected areas extends by over 650 square miles, Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey announced today.

A newly classified marine [Special Protection Area \(SPA\)](#) will come into force along a 24 mile stretch of coast from Falmouth Bay to St Austell Bay in Cornwall. The area – equivalent to almost 55,000 football pitches – is the UK's most important site for the wintering black throated diver. This new protection will help to minimise disturbance to the feeding areas and marine habitats the birds rely on, providing a safe haven where they can spend the winter.

A further marine SPA has been announced in the Irish Sea between the Isle of Man and Anglesey – home to over 12,000 Manx shearwaters – while four other sites have been extended around the UK, ranging from Liverpool Bay in the north-west of England, Poole Harbour on the south coast, and the Outer Thames Estuary near London.

Marine SPAs are sites given special status to protect populations of rare, vulnerable and migratory birds. These latest designations will help to safeguard the feeding grounds of over one quarter of the UK's breeding population of little terns and bring the UK's total number of marine SPAs to 106.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

Like the millions of others watching Blue Planet II, I am only too aware of the importance of protecting our precious marine environment, and the wildlife that relies on healthy and productive seas.

The UK is already a world leader in marine conservation, with over 23 per cent of our waters protected, and these new sites will help to strengthen our Blue Belt and give rare seabirds like the little tern a brighter future.

Natural England's Chairman Andrew Sells said:

Extending the Blue Belt gives vital new protection to some of our most precious coastal wildlife. Terns and Manx shearwaters, with their dramatic aerial displays, are a magnificent sight above our seas.

These Special Protection Areas will provide havens for nearly 150,000 birds that breed on our shores in summer or flock there in autumn and winter, helping them to thrive into the future.

The SPAs will afford protection to a range of species, including three species of breeding tern: little tern, Sandwich tern and common tern – all of which are “amber listed” because of factors such as declines in the size or range of their breeding populations. The sites also include the first SPA in the UK for wintering black-throated diver, great northern diver and Eurasian spoonbill, and the first offshore SPA to protect the feeding grounds of Manx shearwater.

The sites form part of the government's ongoing commitment to create a 'Blue Belt' of protected areas around the UK's coast – with over 23 per cent of UK waters already protected and with more than 300 sites across the UK.