



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

REPORT

Welsh Government response to the Roads Review

The Welsh Government's response to a report advising on current road projects and how to consider future projects.

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Overview

In June 2021, the Deputy Minister for Climate Change announced a review of new road schemes funded by the Welsh Government. The Roads Review panel was established with a membership made up of independent experts in transport policy, climate change, highway engineering, and the freight and logistics sector. The panel was chaired by Dr Lynn Sloman MBE.

The panel submitted its Final Report to the Welsh Government in September 2022. We thank the Panel for their comprehensive work, their time and commitment.

Background

Transport makes up 15% of our total emissions in Wales and has been the slowest sector to reduce levels of greenhouse gas pollution over the last 30 years, despite improvements in car engine technology. The transition to ultra-low emission vehicles is now underway, with the sale of electric cars increasing. However, we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions more quickly than would be delivered by this transition – the UK Committee on Climate Change has made it clear that a shift to electric vehicles is not enough to achieve our targets. We also need to reduce the other harms associated with road traffic.

For decades, increasing capacity for cars on our road network has been seen as a solution to transport problems. This has contributed to increasing reliance on the private car, resulting in urban sprawl and in many instances exacerbation of congestion, which has an economic impact and causes access issues as well as social and environmental problems. We need an approach that delivers social and economic benefits, is consistent with the Welsh Government's land use, decarbonisation and transport policies and helps address the nature and climate

emergencies together.

Purpose of the Roads Review

The review was commissioned due to concerns that some road investment schemes that were in development were no longer consistent with Welsh Government's policies, particularly the declaration of a climate and nature emergency. The purpose of the review was to:

- ensure road investment is fully aligned to the delivery of the Wales Transport Strategy ambitions and priorities, Welsh Government Programme for Government commitments and Net Zero Wales.
- develop a set of criteria which identify appropriate circumstances for expenditure of Welsh Government funds on roads
- use these criteria to recommend which of current road projects should be supported, modified, or have support withdrawn
- provide guidance on reallocating road space on parts of the road network which might in future benefit from enhancement
- consider how any savings might be allocated, in order to ensure problems on the road network are addressed, and in particular to make recommendations on how to tackle the backlog of road maintenance

Panel recommendations

The Roads Review panel report sets out:

- tests on the purposes and conditions for road investment that would be consistent with the Wales Transport Strategy, Net Zero Wales and the Programme for Government, and

- the panel's assessment of each of the road schemes reviewed, with recommendations

Welsh Government response

Responding to the recommendations is a complex piece of work, which has been further complicated by the significant reduction in our spending power, caused by record high levels of inflation and the UK Government's mismanagement of the economy.

There was no additional capital funding in the Autumn Statement for either 2023-24 or 2024-25 – this means the Welsh Government's overall capital budget will be 8.1% lower in real terms in 2024-25. We have therefore considered our response to the Roads Review in light of the deteriorating fiscal and economic situation.

The Welsh Government has carefully considered the panel's advice and recommendations in line with Llwybr Newydd, the Wales Transport Strategy, which sets out a vision for an accessible, sustainable and efficient transport system that:

- contributes to a more equal Wales and to a healthier Wales, that everyone has the confidence to use.
- delivers a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, maintains biodiversity and enhances ecosystem resilience, and reduces waste.
- contributes to our wider economic ambitions, and helps local communities, supports a more sustainable supply chain, uses the latest innovations and addresses transport affordability.
- supports the Welsh language, enables more people to use sustainable transport to get to arts, sport and cultural activities, and protects and enhances the historic environment.

The Welsh Government has also considered alignment with Net Zero Wales, Future Wales – the National Plan, and the Economic Resilience and Reconstruction Mission. Cross-government discussions have also taken place to ensure the way forward considers impacts across all our wellbeing goals. The Welsh Government accepts the core principles and new approach set out in the panel’s report.

Future road building tests

Taking the Roads Review, wider policy objectives and context into account, the Welsh Government recognises the role of roads investment in supporting the ‘wellbeing economy’ – which drives prosperity, is environmentally sound, and helps everyone realise their potential.

All new roads need to contribute towards achieving modal shift – both to tackle climate change and to reduce congestion on the road network for freight. We are developing a Freight Plan which will explore options for modal shift for freight as it often currently impractical to use sustainable modes. As a result, the Welsh Government will continue to consider road investment in roads (both new and existing) in the following circumstances:

1. To support modal shift and reduce carbon emissions. This is about ensuring that future roads investment does not simply increase the demand for private car travel. Instead, we need to deliver schemes that contribute meaningfully to modal shift, which will require different approaches in different parts of Wales.
2. To improve safety through small-scale changes. Safety on the road network must be paramount. Investments for safety should focus on specific safety issues to be addressed (rather than wider road improvements and increases in road capacity). Speed limits should be considered as one of the primary tools for improving safety.

3. To adapt to the impacts of climate change. Climate change is already having an impact on our road network and is likely to become an increasing issue in future decades. Road investment can be justified to adapt for these circumstances to ensure roads can continue to function and contribute meaningfully to modal shift.
4. To provide access and connectivity to jobs and centres of economic activity in a way that supports modal shift. In particular, new and existing access roads will be necessary to connect new developments, including Freeports, to the existing network. The location of new developments needs to be consistent with Future Wales / PPW11, which includes the principle of maximising the opportunity of access by sustainable means and should be designed to prevent 'rat-running'.

In developing schemes, the focus should be on minimising carbon emissions, not increasing road capacity, not increasing emissions through higher vehicle speeds and not adversely affecting ecologically valuable sites.

We will consider these tests alongside our commitments in the Well-being of Future Generations Act through our transport plans which set out the policies, funding and schemes we will develop to deliver Llwybr Newydd, the Wales Transport Strategy.

Welsh Government funded road schemes

The Roads Review panel report provides specific recommendations on the pipeline of Welsh Government supported road schemes. Welsh Government will not be responding to the recommendations on an individual basis. The failure of the UK Government to provide additional capital for investment in public infrastructure projects just as the UK economy enters recession, places limitations on the number of roads schemes which can be progressed. The schemes which can be taken forward are set out in the National Transport

Delivery Plan. The development of other schemes will be considered in future funding rounds, subject to meeting the agreed tests for future road building and our commitments in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

A small sample of three land development schemes (Celtic Business Park, Fishguard, Llanfrechfa, Cwmbran, Warren Hall, Flintshire) were reviewed due to Welsh Government involvement via land ownership or funding. Whilst some comments are made on these developments, the Panel does not make recommendations on whether or not these individual schemes should proceed. Instead, this sample has been used to inform the Panel's advice on future road investment. To aid implementation of these and other economic development schemes, we have asked Councillor Anthony Hunt and Councillor Llinos Medi to lead a group to develop guidance on delivering place based economic development enabled by transport solutions that support the growth of a prosperous, green, and equal economy and are consistent with the future tests for road building and the Wales Transport Strategy.

Summary

Our transport system is one of the most important national assets we have. It connects people to one another, binds communities together and enables businesses to grow and expand for provision of a vibrant economy. It's one of the most powerful and dynamic tools for community cohesion, social justice and inclusive economic growth that we possess. Of course, we will still invest in roads: we will still need to provide connections to support sustainable social and economic development, but this must be consistent with Welsh Government policy to prioritise public transport and active travel as well as support decarbonisation, modal shift and improve safety, recognising that needs vary across different parts of Wales.

Reducing and re-prioritising our investment on new road schemes and

increasing our investment in sustainable modes will assist modal shift, but it will also deliver wider benefits. These include less air pollution, more successful town and neighbourhood centres and a transport system that is accessible and fair for all. We recognise that this is a big and difficult change, that it won't happen overnight, and it requires us to work collaboratively, across government and beyond.

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