North Wales Transport Commission

Final Report

December 2023

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The Commission

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Foreword

The Deputy Minister for Climate Change established the North Wales Transport Commission to provide recommendations to realise a sustainable integrated and multi-modal transport system in north Wales. We have assessed the problems, constraints and opportunities in the region and engaged with stakeholder groups to consider possible interventions.

This report sets out our final recommendations. We began our considerations by analysing journeys within and through the region by private vehicle, including where they begin and end, and how many there are and how that varies within the day, between days and between seasons. We also considered how public transport and active travel are currently used. We saw that their use is limited by inadequate public transport services and the absence of comprehensive active travel networks. We then considered the current programme of interventions to support travel by sustainable modes in north Wales, including schemes in the North Wales Metro programme.

Overall, we found that public transport service hours of operation should be extended, and frequencies of service increased. For buses this will be assisted by reforms made possible because of franchising. For rail, some infrastructure constraints need to be removed. For active travel, the programme of infrastructure enhancement needs to balance network expansion with quality enhancement of existing routes.

We place emphasis on coordination between public transport services to create a connected network with integrated timetables and ticketing in place.

Our recommendations are structured around better networks for bus, rail and active travel that offer plausible alternatives to travel by private vehicle. These recommendations are balanced with a recognition of the continued importance of the car in rural areas and actions that can be taken to make use of the private car more sustainable.

In addition, we make recommendations for freight, the visitor economy and achieving changes in behaviour. Our emphasis has been on making what is there work more effectively rather than proposing major new capital infrastructure. We have also been conscious of costs and budget constraints although we have not set out specific proposals for funding our recommendations.

We see our proposals as mapping a coordinated network of public transport and active travel into which individual projects can be inserted when funds become available either from the Welsh or UK government. We recognise the reality that completing this network will take time. Although we have set out many recommendations, we have also sought to identify priorities for intervention within different modes of travel.

The recommendations are ambitious. They will improve transport infrastructure and services and provide a significantly better range of travel options in urban and rural areas for residents, employees and visitors.

It is important to invest in sustainable transport in north Wales because of its importance to Wales and the north-west of England.

We are grateful to all stakeholders, elected representatives and members of the public who have helped us to shape this report and its recommendations.

LORD BURNS
Chair of the North Wales Transport Commission

Summary

In this report we recommend actions to design and deliver a public transport and active travel network for north Wales that can provide for the journeys that people currently make by car. Providing the network on its own is not enough and services should meet people's needs and expectations. This means easy interchange between modes of travel, integrated timetables and ticketing, and competitive pricing. For active travel, it means high quality, comprehensive and safe networks for everyday walking and cycling journeys.

We set out a series of recommendations to make this proposed network and the services it provides a reality. We prioritise those recommendations that would create the most effective and reliable networks and services and create the most significant reductions in carbon emissions. We have built on the good work already being carried out by the Transport for Wales (TfW) North Wales Metro team, and they have provided us with valuable support.

These recommendations do not ignore the role of cars in people's lives. For many people, particularly those in rural areas, cars will continue to be the main way they make many journeys. With continuing decarbonisation of electricity generation and better battery efficiency, electric cars will have an ongoing role to play. Investment in public transport and active travel will help travel become more efficient in areas where congestion is an issue, such as urban areas - but there are also opportunities for improving alternatives to car use in rural areas, including more flexible bus services, e-cycles and more car clubs to make car use more efficient.

Our report is structured as follows:

Part 1: The Case for Change
This part of our report sets out why we believe improvements are required to the transport network in north Wales to improve people's daily lives.

Part 2: A Better Network – Primary Changes and Improvements
In this part of our report, we detail the major improvements we have identified for north Wales, beginning with those for public transport (rail and bus) and followed by the recommendations for active travel and road transport. These are brought together with a set of recommendations to improve integration including transfers between modes, and measures aimed at enhanced ticketing, fare structures and branding.

Part 3: Planning and Management
We have considered how changes to land use planning, digital connectivity, and changing travel behaviours could bring a benefit to the transport network, and this is set out in this section of our report.

Part 4: Conclusion and Next Steps
In the final part of our report, we provide a summary of our recommendations and set out next steps to deliver short-term priorities across north Wales.

Rail

Our recommendations for rail take account of the recent UK Government announcement that £1 Billion will be made available for the electrification and upgrade of the North Wales Main Line.

We agree that the North Wales Main Line and its interchanges are critical to rail in the region, and this report sets out a multi-stage set of interventions that are necessary as steps to reach the goal of electrification, providing a route to a complete rail network for north Wales.

We have identified benefits available from short-term investments in rail that should be prioritised. The North Wales Main Line serves many of the areas of higher population density. It can support many of the journeys that people make, as well as high volumes of freight movements. The main problems at present are low frequency and lack of reliability that combine to create a poor quality of service. The infrastructure required to solve these problems includes the removal of the capacity constraint at Chester station and other track and signalling enhancements.

We judge the Borderlands line as having potential to provide an important direct connection between the cities of Wrexham and Liverpool and creating an important connection to the North Wales Main Line at Shotton. A station at Deeside would provide access from both Wrexham and Liverpool conurbations to Deeside Industrial Park and would significantly improve access to jobs. The full potential capacity of the line requires improved signalling, the key constraint of access to the Padeswood Cement Works to be removed, and the continuation of the line northwards to create direct services beyond Bidston into Liverpool. The innovative Merseyrail Class 777/1 battery electric multiple units have the potential to be used on the line and would help decarbonise rail services.

The full benefit of enhancements to both the North Wales Main Line and the Borderlands Line would be achieved through investment at Shotton station to make it an easy interchange between the two lines. In addition, there are signalling and double tracking enhancements that would be of value on the Shrewsbury-Wrexham-Chester Line and options should continue to be considered for capacity enhancements, increased service frequencies and patronage building measures on the Conwy Valley and Cambrian Coast Lines.

We see these as the main priorities for rail in the region rather than reopening lines and stations, but we recommend safeguarding these for future use.

Bus

There is potential for significant enhancement to bus patronage resulting from a major reform of the bus network made possible because of franchising. These reforms could have a huge impact on the delivery of the bus service network in both urban and rural areas. There is the potential for simplification of routes, improved hours of operation, more regular and frequent services and better connectivity with rail, as well as the provision of modern decarbonised bus fleets along with improved accessibility. There can also be much simpler and cheaper fares and ticketing options.

In preparation for franchising, much can be achieved by partnership working between TfW and local authorities. In addition, we would also like to see express bus services to provide enhanced cross-border access to England and North-South movement within Wales.

Active Travel

We are persuaded there would be significant increases in the number of people walking and cycling for everyday journeys if appropriate quality active travel networks were in place. We therefore see delivery of a programme of active travel infrastructure enhancement as critical to achieving this.

The overarching challenge is to create networks that are comprehensive, and of appropriate quality, and with separation from cars and between pedestrians and cyclists. It is also challenging to prioritise investment decisions, especially for local authorities which are balancing many competing priorities.

Decisions should be based on maximising the number of people able to use active travel in their daily lives. Other challenges include creating high quality routes that cross local authority boundaries, the lack of multi-year capital funding, resource and capacity (particularly within local authorities) and the need for dedicated revenue funding for maintenance of current pavements and paths. The Active Travel Fund is the main source of funding for delivery, but we recommend that governance, leadership and collaborative delivery of the active travel programme be enhanced.

The Car and Road Transport

The private car will continue to have an important part to play in how people travel, especially in rural areas. Those who cannot travel by public transport or active travel should be helped to make the switch to Electric Vehicle (EV), including better access to charging infrastructure.

We also recognise the importance for the region of a resilient and safe strategic road network for the movement of goods and people and the provision of good public transport services.

However, there are many opportunities to reduce the length and number of journeys people are undertaking by car. This can be achieved by managing parking at origins and destinations and promoting shared mobility.

We have also considered freight movements in north Wales, in particular the need to consider sustainable freight practices to support port traffic and Ynys Môn's Freeport status. We note the North Wales Main Line has an unused allowance for an hourly freight train and so there is the line capacity for switching freight to rail from road.

There will also be a need to provide heavy goods vehicle fuelling and charging stations for emerging zero carbon forms of road freight. There is potential for efficiencies for some goods deliveries using rail based express parcels services, consolidation centres and e-cargo bikes.

Integration Between Modes

The principle of integration of timetables and ticketing between modes lies at the heart of the concept of a travel network. It is particularly important to consider the potential for coordination between rail and bus services to create the connections people need to make the whole of their everyday journeys by public transport. Integrated systems that provide door to door information and tickets are required and include the co-location of services at 'mobility hubs' and integrated, internet-based information and ticketing applications.

Good access to public transport by walking and cycling is also necessary and can be made possible by an extensive network of active travel routes.

Finally, we have considered opportunities for rail and bus enhancement in the context of wider programmes of regeneration at Wrexham Gateway, Bangor Gateway, at Holyhead and in the context of the Ynys Môn Freeport.

Rural Issues

Travel patterns and services that will work effectively and efficiently in rural areas are different from those needed in urban areas. We recognise that the car is, and will remain, important in these areas, but we have seen that many rural areas have been able to improve access to public transport and active travel. There are lessons that can be learnt from these case studies and applied in rural north Wales.

Our recommendations address transport issues in the rural areas of the region with the aim of significantly enhancing travel opportunities by bus and demand-responsive transport. We also recommend further development of car clubs.

The Visitor Economy

The visitor economy is important to north Wales. The varied nature of the visitor travel patterns can be challenging to accommodate on transport networks. People may stay multiple nights or travel for a day, and their means of travel will partly be determined by their length of stay. Also, many visitor destinations are in remote locations and more difficult to service with public transport or active travel.

Excellent developments have already begun in Eryri National Park to provide sustainable means of access with the Sherpa'r Wyddfa bus service, associated parking management and park-and-ride facilities.

Effective marketing and accurate information are an important part of ensuring that visitors are aware of, understand, and ultimately use such services.

The coastal towns are a major part of the visitor economy and they, and their attractions, will benefit from the improved public transport and active travel provision we propose.
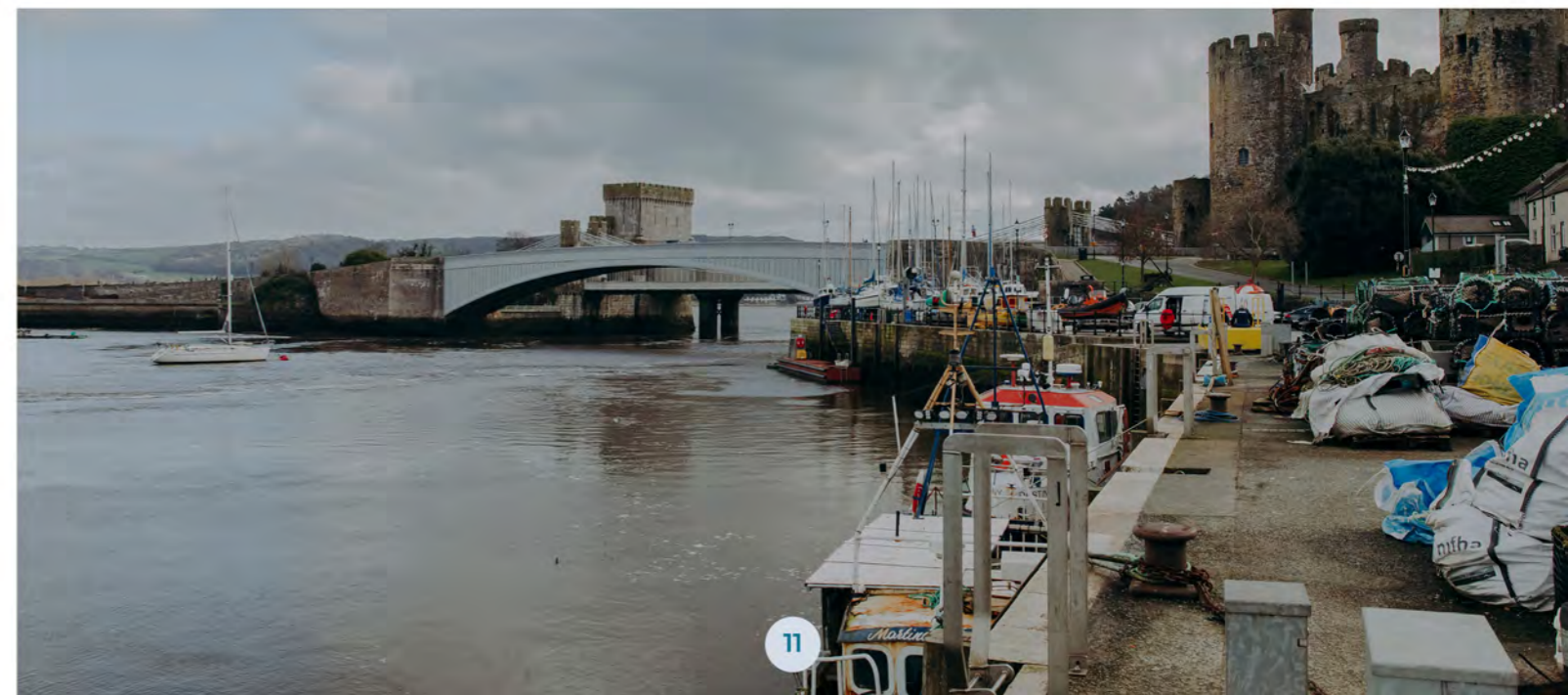
Governance

Finally, successful delivery of infrastructure and transport services requires effective and efficient governance structures. There are several bodies relevant to the region - local authorities, TfW, the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC), Network Rail and UK Government.

Beyond the region, authorities in the north-west of England are relevant and include those covering Chester, Liverpool and Manchester.

To deliver the recommendations in this report, Welsh Government will need to consider how best to bring together these organisations to work together effectively.

Resilience of the Menai crossings

Following the publication of the Roads Review Panel's 'The Future of Road Investment in Wales[1]' on February 14th, 2023, our remit was extended to consider how the connections (The Menai Suspension Bridge and Britannia Bridge) to and from Ynys Môn can be made more resilient.

We were asked to provide options that align with the purposes and conditions for investment in roads set out in the Welsh Government's response to the Roads Review Panel's recommendations. Our considerations have been in the context of the necessary repairs to the Menai Suspension Bridge, which commenced in 2023, and recurrent incidents and bad weather events that affect the crossings.

Our supplementary report on the Menai crossings ('Improving the Resilience of Connections Across the Menai Strait') provides recommendations to improve the resilience of the existing infrastructure and includes measures to manage traffic and improve alternatives to driving across the bridges including public transport and walking and cycling.

Interventions would be best implemented in a phased way to allow government, the relevant authorities and stakeholders to evaluate the impact of initial interventions and whether further interventions are required.

1 - Roads Review Panel Recommendations

Part 1: The Case for Change

Developing a more effective, more sustainable transport network in the region is not an end in itself; it must make changes that improve people's daily lives. We have identified that the current network does not adequately serve the people of the region and that this is contributing to poor outcomes, including limiting access to employment, ill health, negative environmental impacts (noise, pollution, air quality, road traffic accidents) and social exclusion. This is the why the Commission believes the transport network can, and must, change.

To do so most effectively we have considered how transport can be improved as an integrated network responding to the unique issues and opportunities that people in the region face. As we have visited the region and received feedback from its residents, organisations, and businesses, we have identified characteristics of the region that have helped us to identify the case for change.

The Economy and Cross-border Travel

There is a significant demand for public transport journeys by tourists across north Wales. We therefore believe that an effective network of bus and rail services to support journeys associated with the visitor economy can have a significant impact in the region. Even if people arrive at a destination by car, they should be able to access attractions by active travel or public transport. Coastal locations such as Prestatyn, Rhyl, Towyn and Llandudno are a huge part of the north Wales economy and visitors to these destinations are part of the continued success or regeneration of those places.

Many visitor attractions would benefit from the opportunity to improve public transport and active travel access, allowing more people to access these locations, including people without access to a car. The region has the lowest economic inactivity rates and the highest rates of economic activity of all the regions of Wales**2/3**. Despite this, there are economic challenges, such as the impact of seasonal fluctuations in tourism and pockets of deprivation and poverty. North Wales is also the region in Wales with the largest number of daily cross-border movements to and from England and improving cross-border public transport services is a priority in our recommendations.

2 - Economic inactivity rates (excluding students) by Welsh local area and year (gov.wales)

3 - Economic inactivity rates (excluding students) by Welsh local area and year (gov.wales)

The north-east of the region has strong connections to north-west England, with a larger daily Wales-to-England flow than along the M4 corridor. Being adjacent to the border means this sub-region has different travel patterns in terms of destinations, with a lot more cross-border travel. Just under one fifth of journeys from the eastern sub-region are cross-border, and the north-west of England - Merseyside, Manchester and Warrington - is a destination accounting for 15% of all journeys.

Chester's proximity is important as a gateway for north Wales and has strong links to the north-east Wales economy. Therefore, suitable transport infrastructure and services to Chester are an important consideration. Economic factors, notably job opportunities close to the border, influence the commuting patterns between north Wales and England. Better bus and rail options will bring more job opportunities within people's reach, both for those in north Wales and in the north-west of England, by providing access to major employment centres on both sides of the border. As this report was being completed, UK government announced an investment zone for Wrexham/Flintshire, which we welcome. An investment zone will benefit people in north Wales in terms of employment, skills and training benefits by helping to deliver a well-functioning public transport and active travel network.

The economic profile and industrial mix of north Wales is diverse:

- It is home to a busy port at Holyhead, which brings freight and passenger traffic flows across the region. The predominant flow of road-based freight within the region is east-west, along the A55 from Holyhead in the west to the A494 and the English border. There are also freight movements south from the A55, through Wrexham and towards the Midlands.

- There are several industrial estates that act as major employment centres, including Deeside and Wrexham, where manufacturing dominates. We have found that public transport and active travel options to these employment centres are wanting – not least due to how these places have been designed with private vehicles as the main mode of access.

- Agriculture remains an important part of the economy in rural areas, which are often less well served by public transport, and levels of car ownership are high. Many farmers have diversified their business to supplement their income, branching out to provide tourism and visitor services such as accommodation, cafes, farm shops and outdoor activities.

- North Wales is home to several energy-related developments. Wind and solar farms and hydroelectric or tidal power stations are emerging as major contributors to the region's economy.

- The public sector is a major employer, particularly in the north-west of the region. The Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board alone employs 17,000 people. Higher and further education establishments include two universities - Bangor and Wrexham – as well as two large further education colleges, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, and Coleg Cambria.

- Tourism is a significant contributor to the economy of north Wales, but it also contributes to congestion at weekends and during seasonal peaks. The location of tourism sites and lack of public transport options to travel to and from these locations results in significant reliance on private car travel. Some major attractions also suffer from illegal and inconsiderate parking due to excess demand for limited facilities, impacting local communities.

Governance

Successful delivery of infrastructure and transport services requires governance to be effective. The Wales Transport Strategy, Llwybr Newydd, provides the basis for parties in the region to create better travel options. A key cross-boundary delivery mechanism is the CJC comprising the six local authorities and Eryri National Park Authority.

The North Wales CJC is responsible for **strategic development planning, regional transport planning and promoting the economic well-being of the region.** It is responsible for developing a Regional Transport Plan that will replace local transport plans previously prepared by individual authorities.

In addition to cross-boundary working within Wales, the governance of transport in north Wales also requires good cross-boundary working with English transport planning bodies. This cross-boundary working is crucial because of the significant cross-border travel that takes place. It is essential that in developing its regional transport plans, the North Wales CJC works closely with English authorities such as the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and Cheshire West and Chester Council. The CJC also offers an opportunity to integrate spatial and transport planning, thereby reducing car-dependent developments. We would like to see the CJC develop a framework for spatial planning in its area as part of the Regional Transport Plan, to encourage a reduction in car-dependent developments.

Funding

Our task has been to outline what is needed to provide efficient and effective public transport and active travel networks. We have developed recommendations that would maximise use of current infrastructure and have provided cost estimates for the largest capital interventions. It will be for the Welsh Government and the respective partner organisations to judge the pace at which the interventions can be funded along with the associated running costs. We have noted opportunities for efficiencies, for example integrating into mainstream bus networks some of the current bespoke (and expensive) transport contracts, for example for schools and social and health services.

The inter-connectedness of north Wales to North West England means that some interventions will require joint work on funding with English authorities. While many transport matters are devolved to Welsh Government, rail is not a fully devolved matter and therefore the UK Government, through the UK Department of Transport and Network Rail, are responsible not only for the development and management of rail infrastructure in north Wales, but also for matters that impact north Wales in England.

We welcome the UK Government's commitment to fund the upgrade and electrification of the North Wales Main Line. Further funding commitments by the UK Government, both for north Wales and in England, would be needed in the region and support the delivery of recommendations of Sir Peter Hendy's Union Connectivity Review[4].

4 - Union Connectivity Final Report

Rural Communities

North Wales is home to many sparsely populated, rural and semi-rural areas, and we have considered the travel needs of people living in those areas. The 2021 Census records close to half of the population living in built-up areas with a population of 10,000 or more, and the remaining half living in rural areas.

Travel patterns and transport services that will work effectively and efficiently are different in rural areas from urban areas. This section brings together discussion and recommendations focussing on travel and transport in rural communities. It is informed by examples in the UK which suggest that it is possible to give rural areas good alternatives for many journeys currently being made by car and give real travel options to people in rural areas without car access.

Rural areas of north Wales, generally further south than the coast on the mainland and including Ynys Môn, have significantly fewer regular public transport services. Many journeys made are local and of a short length, with about a third being less than 5km and more than two thirds being less than 15km. Most of these journeys are within the same local authority area or to a neighbouring area. Many journeys that start in rural areas have destinations in nearby urban areas. While journey lengths are longer in rural areas, this still represents a significant number of short trips.

Existing public transport services typically operate at relatively low frequencies, both in urban and rural areas, and have limited hours of operation. For example, less than a third of the population in the region are within walking distance of an hourly public transport service after 7pm[5]. This proportion will be lower for rural areas.

Journey times by public transport are often uncompetitive with cars, particularly in locations remote from the coastline. Low frequencies are a barrier to people regularly using public transport and encourage car ownership and use. We have examined examples in the UK (from Cornwall to the Scottish Highlands) and in other European countries where integrated, frequent and high-quality rural transport services have resulted in an increased use of public transport.

The public transport recommendations we make in Part 2 will, if adopted, significantly improve the options and transport services available for many of the rural areas in north Wales.

51%
Population lives in
URBAN SETTINGS AND BUILT-UP AREAS

49%
Population lives in
RURAL SETTINGS

5 - Travel to work, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

In the section on active travel, we discuss the opportunities for improving the walking and cycling network in rural areas. We have developed our recommendations knowing that:

Rural roads present several challenges: they can be narrow, motor traffic speeds can be high, and they may lack a footway and a cycle track.

Benefits can be realised from comfortable and attractive routes for walking and cycling that link villages to their nearest larger settlement that has services and onward transport connections.

There is potential for longer distance routes which have benefit for local people's day-to-day travel, and for the visitor economy for leisure. Increased availability of e-cycles could be a significant enabler for such longer distance travel.

There are fewer transport options available in rural than in urban areas and unsurprisingly rates of car ownership are higher. Even with better rural options and services, we acknowledge that the private car will continue to be important in rural areas. In our section on road transport in Part 2, we recommend ways in which people can be helped to cut single occupancy journeys and make the transition from petrol and diesel to plug-in or battery vehicles. There is a need to help people make the switch to EVs including access to charging infrastructure.

Even in rural areas, there are people who do not have access to a vehicle. Many rural areas have an older demographic profile. For example, in both Conwy and Ynys Môn over a quarter of the people are aged 65 years or more, the second and third highest percentages in Wales. Conwy has the highest percentage of people aged 90 years and over. While many older people may view their car as an aid to independence and mobility, there are also those who may no longer wish to (or be able to) drive. Buses are therefore a lifeline for accessing goods, services, healthcare and social settings for those living in rural areas, and particularly for those without access to rail services.

Digital connectivity helps people to maintain access to services (including banking and healthcare) and allows them to avoid the need for longer distance travel. There remain locations across the region, primarily in central and western rural areas, with poor digital connectivity. This is a significant barrier which can restrict the ability to work remotely, and to access goods and services and is further compounded by poor mobile telephone coverage in rural areas. We discuss this further in the section on digital connectivity in Part 2.

Freight

The Port of Holyhead is identified by Future Wales[6] as a Strategic Gateway for international connectivity. Added to this is the creation of a Freeport site on Ynys Môn, one of two in Wales. Depending on the nature of businesses attracted to the Freeport and its success, there may be further implications for freight movements in north Wales.

The Port of Mostyn also generates freight traffic, with much of its business now dedicated to the offshore renewable energy sector.

We would like to see Welsh Government work with the UK Government, Isle of Anglesey County Council and the North Wales CJC to ensure that sustainable freight practices are a central consideration in the development of proposals as part of Ynys Môn's recently granted Freeport status.

The Commission is supportive of the development of such a plan and would advise that specific consideration is given to the problems as follows:

Decarbonisation of freight and logistics networks, including greater use of rail freight.

The availability of alternative fuel charging stations for heavy and light goods vehicles

The impacts of deliveries on local communities (using for example, consolidation centres, area delivery and service plans, delivery lockers at hubs and e-cargo bikes).

In addition, we recommend that Welsh Government works alongside both the UK and Irish Governments to understand the impacts of Brexit on trade through Holyhead and reflect this within the Freight and Logistics Plan.
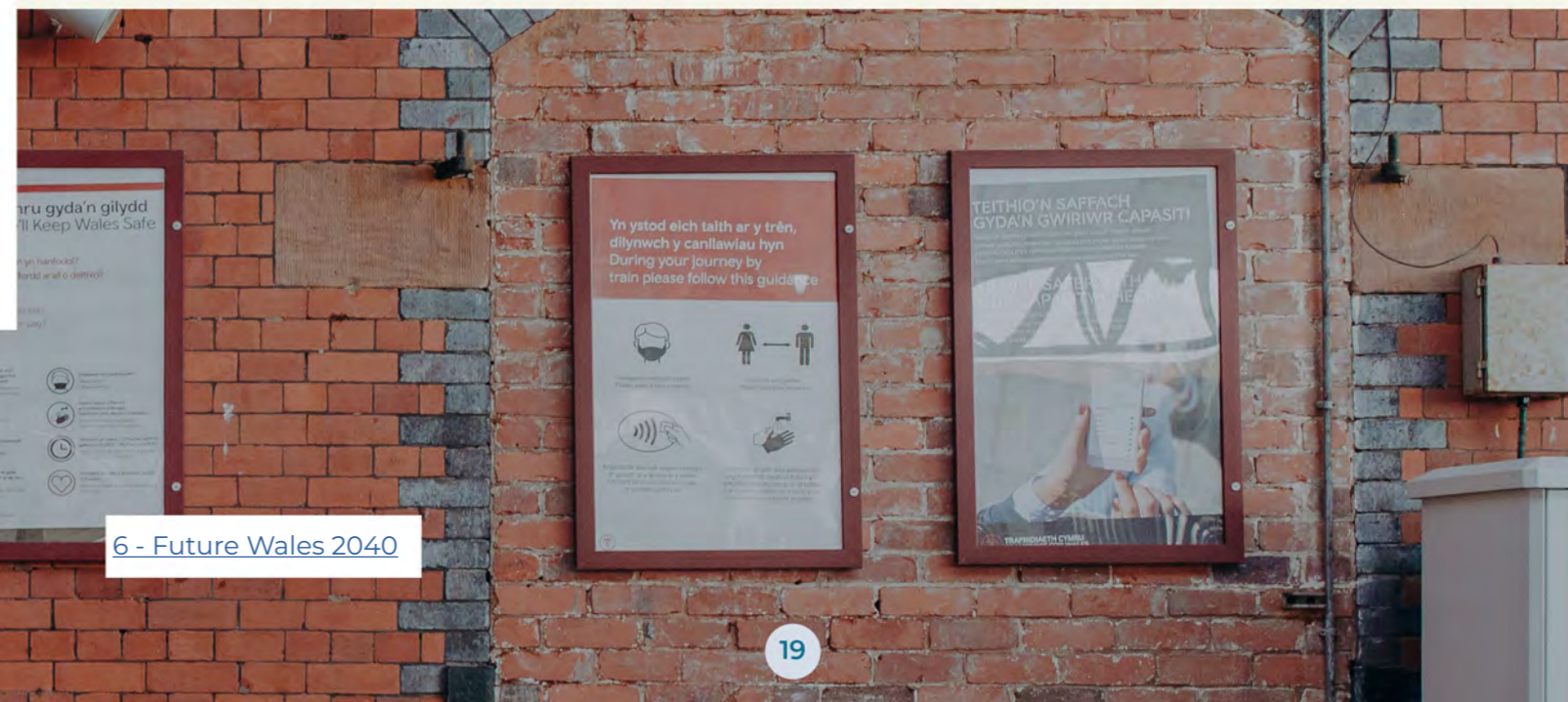
6 - Future Wales 2040

Part 2: Primary Changes and Improvements

Rail

In this part of our report, we detail the major improvements we have identified for north Wales, beginning with those for public transport (rail and bus) and followed by the recommendations for active travel and road transport.

Lastly, these are brought together with a set of recommendations to improve integration including transfers between modes, and measures aimed at enhanced ticketing, fare structures and branding.

Within north Wales the three more important interconnecting lines are the North Wales Main Line, the Borderlands Line, and the Shrewsbury-Wrexham-Chester Line. They all lie within the most densely populated areas of the region to the north and to the east of the region.

The North Wales Main Line connects Crewe in the east and Holyhead in the west. The Borderlands Line connects Wrexham to Liverpool via Bidston (through Deeside), and the Shrewsbury-Wrexham-Chester line connects north Wales to south Wales and Wrexham and other communities with cross-border destinations.

There are connections between the North Wales Main Line and the other two lines at Chester and Shotton.

The other two railway lines in the region are the Conwy Valley Line from Llandudno via Llandudno Junction to Blaenau Ffestiniog, and the Cambrian Coast Line, which connects Pwllheli with Machynlleth and from there onward to Aberystwyth to the south and Shrewsbury and the English Midlands to the east.

Despite these railway lines connecting settlements within north Wales, and the north-west of England and the English Midlands, we have found many train services have limited frequency and operating hours because of infrastructure restrictions.

In our Interim Report, we concluded that poor service frequency and operating hours were the principal issues that need to be addressed to improve rail. Our many conversations with stakeholders in the intervening time have reinforced this conclusion, and our priority has been to make recommendations that increase rail service frequency and operating hours and reduce journey times.

Funding for electrification of the North Wales Main Line was announced by the UK government in October 2023 and this will contribute to reducing journey times.

We prioritise actions that will release the full potential of the network to maximise passenger numbers. Our recommendations address physical infrastructure barriers to maximise the benefit of electrification. Importantly, the recommendations include improvement of the connections between the lines that will maximise the patronage benefits of electrification on the North Wales Main Line.

Firstly, we present recommendations relating to the North Wales Main Line. Secondly, we present recommendations about improvements to the Borderlands and Shrewsbury to Chester line. These are both important connecting lines to the North Wales Main Line and complete the network of rail in north-east Wales. Finally, we make recommendations for developing other lines in north Wales.

North Wales Main Line

Due to its role linking communities along the coast, we recommend proposals are developed to ultimately provide an electric train service frequency of **five trains per hour, including one express service** along the North Wales Main Line. Electrification will reduce journey times because trains can operate at higher speeds and have faster acceleration.

To achieve this level of service and shorter journey times, barriers need to be overcome along the length of the route. We set out the issues that need to be addressed, and a proposed delivery approach for an upgrade programme for the North Wales Main Line which optimises efficient and fast delivery, bringing benefits to passengers as a priority.

These are presented as:

A Chester station improvements

B North Wales Main Line improvements in three phases

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Crewe to Llandudno	**Llandudno to Bangor**	**Bangor to Holyhead**

Chester Station

Chester Station is a restriction for services along the North Wales Main Line as well as adjoining rail lines, including the Shrewsbury-Wrexham-Chester line.

Historical development of Chester has resulted in its current layout, consisting of three through platforms, and two bay platforms at both east and west of the station. Bay platforms are short terminating platforms, and trains depart in the same direction they arrived.

The layout constrains the movement of services through the station, particularly for north Wales to Crewe services along the North Wales Main Line. Although four trains per hour could operate on the existing layout, this is a significant challenge and would result in reduced service reliability, which is of utmost importance to rail users.

The proposals to ease the restriction at Chester Station improve capacity for future electrified services and allow for service frequency and speed enhancements along the North Wales Main Line. Addressing the constraints will also enable better connections to other lines including the Shrewsbury-Wrexham-Chester line. Whilst these improvements require significant investment outside north Wales, they are fundamental to unlocking the proposed North Wales Main Line improvements.

To address these constraints, a scheme is required to increase capacity ahead of electrification:

Improve signalling between Crewe and Chester.

Provide a new platform at Chester.

Increase the number of tracks on the approaches to the station.

Introduce new crossovers on the station approaches.

It has been estimated that the cost of delivering the improvements at Chester Station would be in the region of **£90-160 million.**
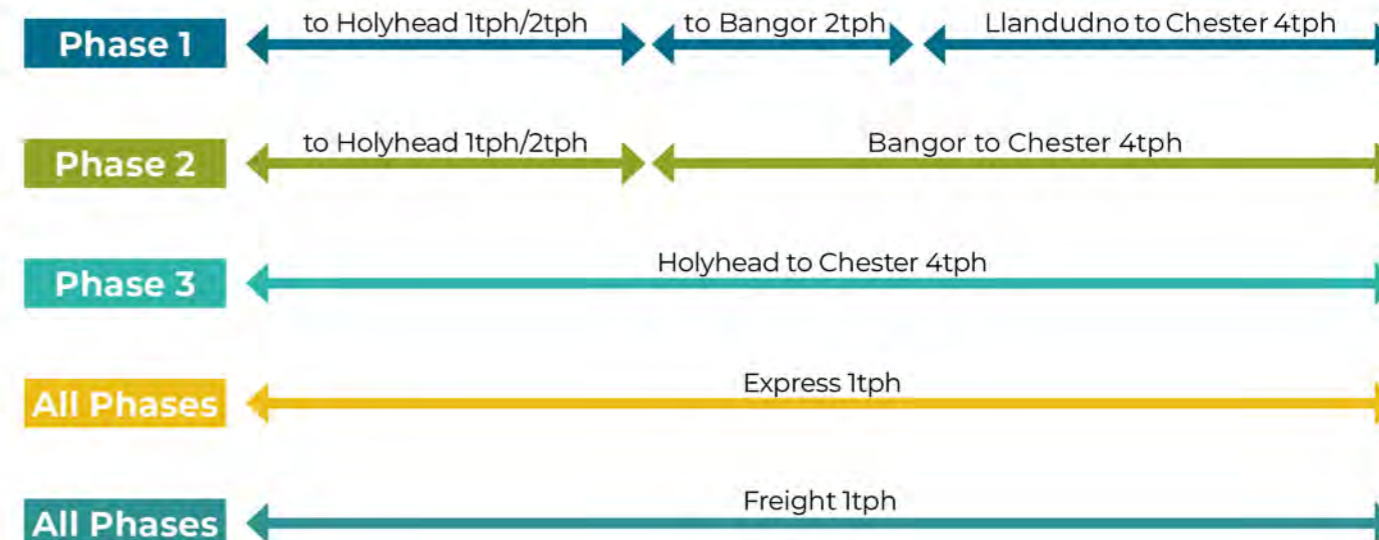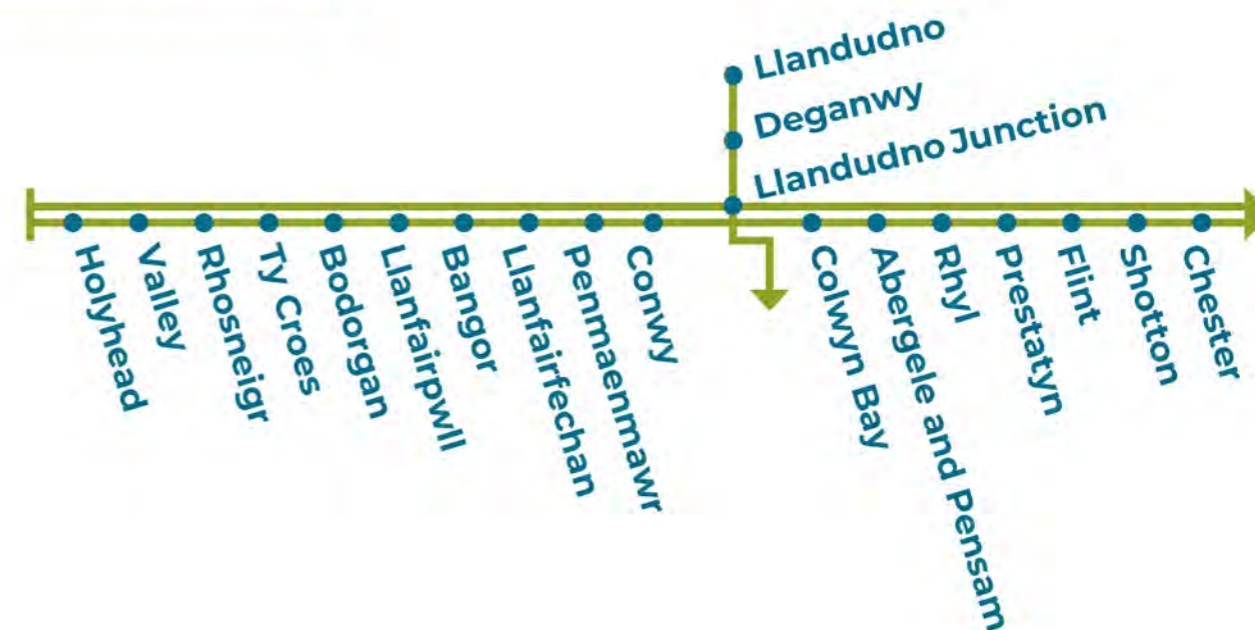
RECOMMENDATION:
Implement rail capacity improvements at and around Chester Station to enable electrification and five trains per hour, including one express service.

7 - Transport Focus - Rail Passengers' Priorities for Improvement

Phase 1 Crewe to Llandudno Junction

Studies undertaken for TfW on the North Wales Main Line improvements indicate that this first phase of improvements between Crewe and Llandudno Junction could achieve the greatest benefits in terms of passenger uplift and enhanced service provision. These improvements also enable an hourly express service to operate along the full length of the North Wales Main Line. The full length of the line can carry one freight train per hour.

North Wales Main Line

Phase	
Phase 1	to Holyhead 1tph/2tph · to Bangor 2tph · Llandudno to Chester 4tph
Phase 2	to Holyhead 1tph/2tph · Bangor to Chester 4tph
Phase 3	Holyhead to Chester 4tph
All Phases	Express 1tph
All Phases	Freight 1tph

We recommend concentrating initially on Phase 1 improvements to achieve the largest benefits for users in the short-term.

The improvements required within Phase 1 along the North Wales Main Line are summarised as follows:

Upgrades to level crossings.

• •

A new platform at Llandudno Junction.

• •

Improvements to track, switches and crossings, and signalling necessary for electric trains.

• •

Additional crossover to the east of Bangor[8].

The investment is required from the UK Government, which is responsible for rail infrastructure in north Wales. The planning work undertaken to date has estimated that an investment of around **£125 million** is required. The investment is moderate in relation to the significant benefits likely to be derived as a result, which include an increase in rail patronage, a reduction in time costs of travel along that line, and a reduction in emissions.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> Prioritise delivery of the North Wales Main Line Phase 1 infrastructure improvements between Crewe and Llandudno Junction to enable operation of five trains per hour, including one express service, and to reduce journey times.

[8] - While not located east of Llandudno, a crossover to the east of Bangor unlocks the 4tph frequency for Chester to Llandudno.

Phases 2 and 3 Llandudno Junction to Bangor and Holyhead

Significant infrastructure improvements will be required to achieve the desired rail service frequency along the North Wales Main Line to the west of Llandudno Junction. This includes, but is not limited to:

• Re-signalling between Llandudno Junction and Bangor.

• Addressing capacity constraints at the Britannia Bridge.

• Upgrading level crossings.

• Providing an additional platform at Bangor.

• Improvements to track, switches and crossings, and signalling necessary for electric trains.

Due to the significant infrastructure requirements to facilitate additional service frequency improvements to the west of Llandudno Junction, we recommend a phased approach to delivery along the North Wales Main Line.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> Deliver North Wales Main Line Phase 2 and 3 proposals to enable operation of five trains per hour, including one express service, between Crewe and Bangor (Phase 2) and Holyhead (Phase 3), and to reduce journey times.

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Electrification

Stakeholders have told us that rail electrification should be the ultimate aspiration for rail improvements in north Wales. It is also a long-standing ambition for Growth Track 360. According to Network Rail's 'Decarbonisation Network Strategy – Interim Programme Business Case' (July 2020)[9], the North Wales Main Line and Shrewsbury – Wrexham – Chester Line are considered suitable for electrification in the region.

The Prime Minister announced in October 2023 proposals for Network North[10] that included provision for £1 billion for electrification of the North Wales Main Line. The associated commentary suggests it would bring parts of north Wales within an hour of Manchester and will create more punctual and reliable journeys on the 126-mile route between Crewe, Warrington, Chester, Llandudno and Holyhead.

RECOMMENDATION:

Deliver electrification of the North Wales Main Line in a phased manner consistent with the infrastructure development Phases 1 to 3. To be ready for electrification, development work must be undertaken, and a business case established.

9 - Network Rail (July 2020) Decarbonisation Network Strategy – Interim Programme Business Case

10 - Department for Transport (2023) Network North: Transforming British Transport

Borderlands Line

The Borderlands Line connects Wrexham in the south to Bidston on the Wirral in England to the north. There is currently an hourly service. The route is designated as 'congested infrastructure' by the Office of Rail and Road because of constraints the infrastructure places on timetabling.

We believe there is significant potential for patronage increase on the Borderlands Line with a frequency of four trains per hour and shorter journey times. This is because it would create better connections between Wrexham and Liverpool (beyond Bidston), better connections at Shotton to the North Wales Main Line, and better access to Deeside Industrial Park. It would also create better connections to the rest of the Wirral by connecting at Bidston to the line to West Kirby, which has four trains an hour.

The improvements would enable a large increase in rail commuting to destinations along the full length of the route between Wrexham and Liverpool. This helps create the good economic case for improvements. There is significant interest in improving the line amongst rail user groups[11].

We therefore consider improvements to the Borderlands Line to allow for four trains an hour to be a priority. Network Rail's Wrexham to Bidston Congested Infrastructure Capacity Enhancement Plan of July 2023[12] identifies three phases of enhancement as follows:

- **Phase 1** – Two passenger services per hour (one calling at all stations and one limited-stop) in addition to an hourly freight path.

- **Phase 2** – Two passenger services per hour (both calling at all stations) in addition to an hourly freight path.

- **Phase 3** – Four Passenger services per hour (calling at all stations) in addition to an hourly freight path.

Phases 1 and 2 require improvement at Padeswood Cement Works, and Phase 2 requires signalling improvements. Phase 3 entails further signalling improvements to achieve a minimum headway of seven minutes. A summary is provided below of the improvements required to enable **four trains per hour** to operate on the Line.

11 - Rail User Groups Open Letter - Borderlands Line
12 - Wrexham to Bidston Congested Infrastructure Enhancement Plan

Padeswood Cement Works

The primary constraint to the delivery of increases in service frequency on the route is freight traffic at the Padeswood Cement Works. Any increase in rail service frequency along the Borderlands Line cannot be implemented until the capacity constraint at the cement works is addressed.

The existing sidings restrict capacity along the line for both passenger and freight services. Freight services entering the works stop on the Down Main Line and reverse into the sidings. Longer trains need to be split and the main line may be blocked for up to 40 minutes. We have studied the proposals to address this issue, which are summarised in Network Rail's Wrexham to Bidston Congested Infrastructure Capacity Enhancement Plan of July 2023[13] as follows :

- Provide direct access to the sidings from the main line, eliminating shunt moves on the main line.

- Incorporate 24 cement wagons (supporting 2,400 tonne operation).

- Optimise the turnout speed, to enable timely access and egress.

We understand that these works would cost in the region of **£35 million**.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> Remove the rail capacity constraint at the Padeswood Cement Works south of Buckley Station on the Borderlands Line.

We were disappointed to learn that Flintshire County Council's two applications for Levelling Up funding to UK Government to implement a scheme at the Padeswood Cement Works were unsuccessful. **To ensure this essential infrastructure improvement is delivered, we urge the Department for Transport, in collaboration with Welsh Government, to reconsider this decision and unlock funding for this scheme as a priority.**

Heidelburg Materials (formerly Hanson) operates the cement works and plans to invest around £400 million to construct a carbon capture facility and reduce the impact of their operations on the environment[14]. There could therefore be an opportunity to increase rail freight movements and work collaboratively with Hanson whilst developing a scheme to address the capacity constraints at the Padeswood Cement Works.

13 - Wrexham to Bidston Congested Infrastructure Enhancement Plan

14 - Padeswood Carbon Capture and Storage

Infrastructure Improvements

The other infrastructure improvements required on the Borderlands line to enable four trains per hour and reduced journey times are as follows:

Re-signalling	Level crossing improvements	Line speed improvements

A service frequency of two trains per hour would require intermediate block signals to be inserted to reduce headways. A service frequency of four trains per hour requires seven-minute headways and significant re-signalling of the whole line. We believe that the additional signalling works are a worthwhile investment to increase frequency and enhance the attractiveness of the line for potential users.

The Network Rail Congested Infrastructure Enhancement Plan notes that higher line speeds up to 60mph between Wrexham and Bidston are relatively easy to achieve and would facilitate significant performance benefits.

A significant additional benefit of the four trains per hour along the Borderlands Line is that at least two of the four services could continue beyond Bidston along the northern branch of the Wirral Line and under the River Mersey to Liverpool. **This would therefore create access to Liverpool from Wrexham without interchange at Bidston.** In conjunction with the line speed improvements, the journey time between Wrexham and Liverpool would be approximately one hour.

These direct services to Liverpool would be transformational for the region and are strongly supported by stakeholders. With an interchange at Shotton and the electrification of the North Wales Main Line, these services will enable quick and easy access to Liverpool for populations across north Wales and the southern side of the Wirral.

The overall estimated cost to implement the infrastructure improvements to enable four trains per hour to operate along the Borderlands Line is in the region of **£377 million** broken down as:

- Phase 1: Padeswood Cement Works – £35 million.

- Phase 2: Two trains per hour Wrexham to Liverpool – £255 million.

- Phase 3: Four trains per hour Wrexham to Liverpool – £87 million.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> Implement infrastructure improvements on the Borderlands Line to achieve four trains per hour and reduce journey times, including two direct trains to Liverpool.

Merseyrail

We have heard from stakeholders how close collaboration with the Liverpool City Region and Merseyrail is important to ensure provision of an integrated multi-operator service network. On this basis, we recommend strengthened collaborative working with both as proposals on the Borderlands Line are developed and implemented. This will maximise the value of the Borderlands Line, and integration with the wider regional rail network including access to Liverpool.

Some stakeholders have also stated that the Borderlands Line should be electrified. The alternative is the use of battery electric multiple units. Merseyrail is introducing Class 777/1 Battery Electric Multiple Units to their network and for access to Liverpool, the Borderlands Line could use the same or similar stock.

Charging points or sections of third rail electrification would be needed on the Borderlands Line to recharge the Class 777/1s. The Commission supports electrification, including the use of battery powered trains, of the Borderlands Line in a form that would allow access to Liverpool.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> Work with Liverpool City Region and Merseyrail to maximise the integration of services between the Borderlands Line and Merseyrail network.

Deeside Industrial Park Station

Several potential new stations have been considered in the region as part of TfW's North Wales Metro programme. Of these, we are of the view that the proposed station at Deeside Industrial Park has the best case for being introduced.

The station would be located on the Borderlands Line between Hawarden Bridge and Neston stations. It would serve the Deeside Industrial Park, which is one of the UK's largest employment areas with approximately 9,000 workers. The Industrial Park is a national hub for advanced manufacturing, and includes several power stations, the regional waste-to-energy plant and numerous large, medium, and small industrial and logistics enterprises. It provides high quality employment not just locally, but also for people from across north Wales and the north-west of England.

Despite the Industrial Park's significance, there is very poor connectivity by public transport to the site and a large proportion of workers travel by car. This lack of public transport access contributes to problems in recruiting and retaining employees.

We therefore consider that the introduction of a station at Deeside Industrial Park is important both to the industrial park and the region. The proposed station has potential to become an important destination on the Borderlands Line.

Although we are supportive of introducing a new station at Deeside Industrial Park, we would like to see the parking elements in the current station proposals reconsidered and further consideration given to providing enhancement to the active travel network in the area and shuttle bus services. This would enable users to travel sustainably to and from the station to locations within the Park and the nearby Garden City housing development. The estimated cost of delivering the station is **£20-25 million.** Further on in this report, we will also consider bus services and travel planning for the industrial park.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> Provide a station in Deeside Industrial Park on the Borderlands Line with supporting active travel and public transport access to the station.

Shotton Interchange: Connecting the Borderlands and North Wales Main Lines

The current Shotton station provides access to both the north-south Borderlands Line (higher-level platforms) and the east-west North Wales Main Line (lower-level platforms). The two lines do not connect. The platforms are separated by approximately 150m with the Borderlands Line platforms being south of the rail line crossing point and the North Wales Main Line platforms being slightly west of the crossing point. The connecting pedestrian route is sub-standard and without step-free access.

We understand that an options selection study has been completed to investigate solutions to address these connection and access issues. The study identified two options, which would involve either relocating or extending the Shotton high-level platforms on the Borderlands Line further to the north.

Shotton station is in an urban area, and we **do not support proposals that would increase car access and parking at the station.** We support better active travel and public transport access to the station, noting the demand for active travel movement over the railway line between Shotton high Street and Deeside Industrial Park. These proposals would help moderate demand for car travel on Chester Road West (B5129) and the A494, which is a congested part of the road network.

The estimated cost to deliver improved access at Shotton Interchange is estimated to be around **£40 million**, with a further estimated cost of £18 million for the proposed active travel bridge.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> Develop and implement proposals at Shotton Station to create a high quality and fully accessible interchange between the Borderlands Line and North Wales Main Line to improve active travel and public transport access.

Shrewsbury – Wrexham – Chester Line

The Shrewsbury–Wrexham–Chester Line serves communities including Chirk and Ruabon and connects to the North Wales Main Line at Chester and to the Borderlands Line at Wrexham. The line is also part of the rail network that connects north and south Wales and is therefore of importance for longer-distance rail journeys and for freight.

Improving resilience, line speeds, and service frequencies on the Shrewsbury–Wrexham–Chester Line is important to ensure the effectiveness of the network for both short- and long-distance journeys. We believe that there is a case to increase the passenger service frequency along the Shrewsbury–Wrexham–Chester Line to **two trains per hour.** There are two constraints that need to be overcome.

The primary constraint to achieving the desired service frequency and reduced journey times is the current signalling capacity at Gobowen. The estimated cost of addressing this is expected to be in the region of **£30 million.**

In addition to the signalling improvements required at Gobowen, we understand that there is an additional capacity constraint between Wrexham and Chester, where the line is currently single-track. Dual tracking this stretch of rail would cost in the region of **£60-100 million.**

We recommend that these capacity constraints are addressed to enable a service frequency of two trains per hour to be achieved, alongside reduced journey times where possible.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> Implement a signalling improvement scheme at Gobowen on the Shrewsbury-Wrexham-Chester Line and dual tracking between Wrexham and Chester to address capacity constraints to enable two passenger trains per hour and freight services to operate effectively and reliably.

Conwy Valley and Cambrian Coast Lines

The Conwy Valley and Cambrian Coast Lines can play an important role in enabling journeys by sustainable modes in rural areas in the west of the region. They also play an important role in relation to the visitor economy.

The lines also experience physical challenges in the form of flooding and the effects of coastal erosion. The Conwy Valley line has had a series of flood protection works installed in the last few years between Tal y Cafn and Llanrwst and the Barmouth Viaduct on the Cambrian Coast Line is being restored with a £30 million investment in 2023/24. Providing more regular services and journey time improvements along the Conwy Valley and Cambrian Coast Lines should continue to be considered. Major improvements may not be financially viable, but there may be the potential for increasing service frequency and train capacity above current levels, especially during the summer season.

Whilst these improvements are further investigated, we recommend the introduction of bus services that complement rail services to places along these corridors. These services are described as part of the bus network proposed in the bus section of this report.

The introduction of complementary bus services would improve public transport availability and assist in building patronage. The evaluation of such additional services will provide evidence about the potential demand for additional rail services on the existing lines.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> Continue to consider line capacity enhancements, increased service frequencies and train capacity enhancements on the Conwy Valley and Cambrian Coast Lines.

15 - ScotRail Highland Explorer

Tourist Timetables

Both these rail lines run through areas of north Wales where the visitor economy is particularly important. This includes linking to key settlements and attractions in locations such as Betws-y-Coed, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Barmouth, Harlech, and Porthmadog.

There are therefore opportunities to introduce seasonal service changes to increase capacity and/or frequency. This may be through introducing additional carriages, which could improve the attractiveness of rail services on both lines for both tourists and locals, or running additional services where the current capacity of the lines allows it. We note that in Scotland tourist carriages have been introduced on scenic lines[15]. This summer, the Cambrian Coast line saw the return of four-carriage for the first time in six-years following a collaboration between TfW and Network Rail. We would like to see more of this type of initiative.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> Develop a plan for further increases of service capacity during the peak visitor season on the Conwy Valley and Cambrian Coast Lines.

Future Rail Network

Key:
- Four trains per hour or more
- Two trains per hour or more
- Two trains per hour or fewer
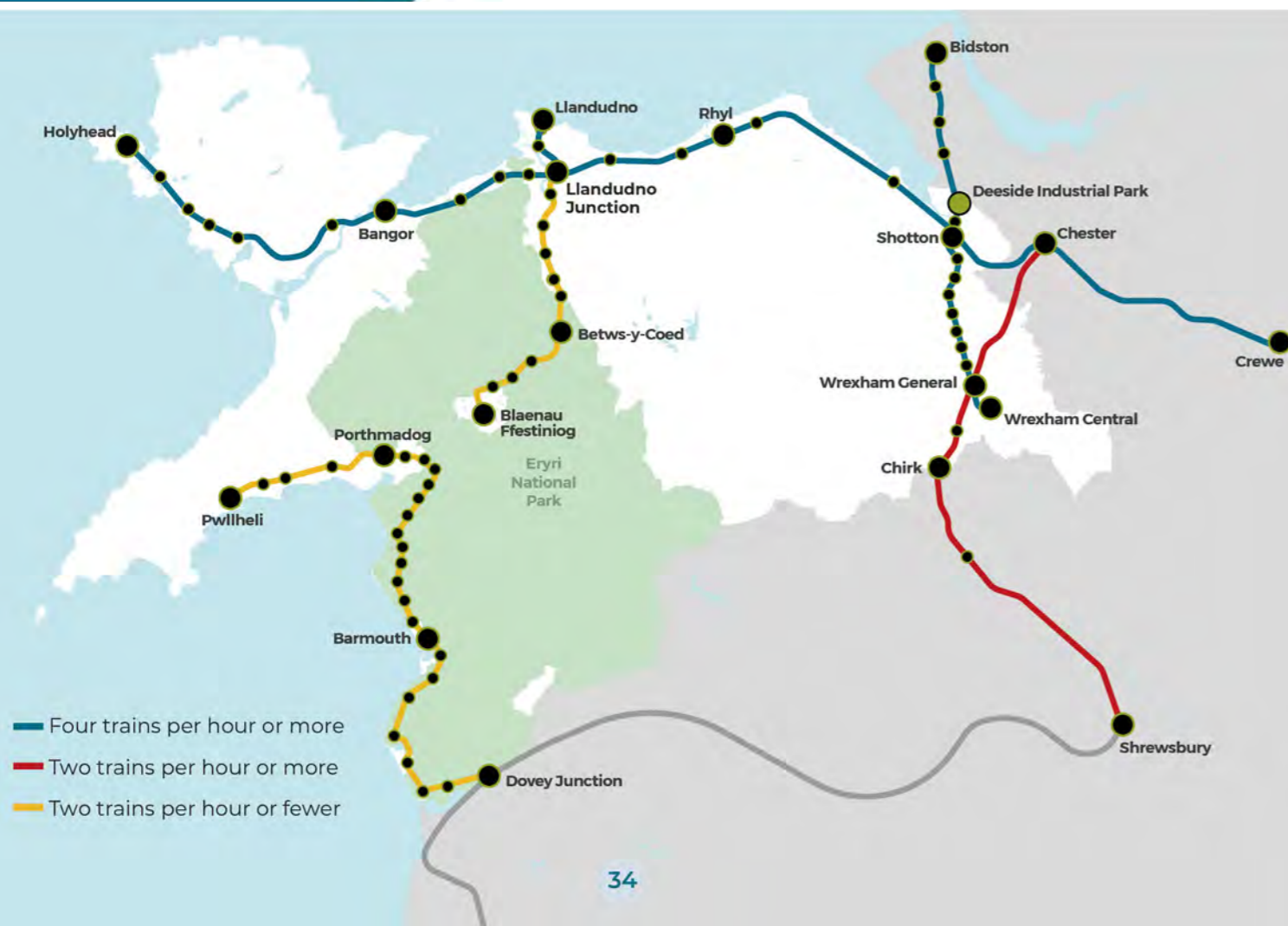
Rail Fleet

Reliability on rail services for north Wales is currently poor, but we expect this to improve as new trains are introduced. A reliable service must be the foundation of attracting people to rail. Stakeholders have noted that the current rolling stock in the region is of poor quality and does not meet the needs of the population. For example, trains operate at capacity during weekends on the North Wales Main Line and the Shrewsbury-Wrexham-Chester Line. This is due to the demand for retail and leisure trips within the region.

TfW is carrying out a phased rolling-out of a new fleet of trains across Wales, which has been subject to some delays. While we understand the reasons behind these delays, we recommend that more consideration is given to re-allocating the rolling stock for north Wales to ensure that enhanced capacity trains are provided for busy services, so that more rail users have a good journey experience.

New trains will also need to be purchased and introduced to achieve the increased service frequencies recommended earlier in this report. In the longer term, electrification of the North Wales Main Line will mean a fleet of electric trains is required for that line.

We would also like to see more flexible storage spaces available on trains, to allow luggage, cycles, and/or buggies to be stored safely and to create more family-friendly and accessible trains.

Any investment in a new rail fleet for north Wales should take into consideration the nature of journeys in the region, in particular noting:

Commuting journeys along the principal rail lines.

Longer-distance journeys along the North Wales Main Line and Shrewsbury–Wrexham–Chester Line that require storage space for luggage.

Tourist trips along all routes, except for the Borderlands Line, where storage space for luggage is important.

First and last-mile journeys by cycle.

The need to improve accessibility to the rail network.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> Improve the allocation of the rail fleet in north Wales in the short term to ensure rolling stock meets user needs for the types of journey people are making and procure additional trains including an electric fleet for the North Wales Main Line in the medium term.

Reopening Rail Lines

We do not support reinstating rail lines in north Wales at present. There is some interest in the reinstatement of the Amlwch – Gaerwen and Bangor – Porthmadog rail lines. We have considered the case for reinstating these rail lines and do not believe that these interventions are the most effective use of public funds, compared to the other recommendations we have made. However, where development has not already taken place, we do believe it is prudent to safeguard previous rail routes across the region.

Consideration should be given to introducing longer-distance routes for active travel along these former rail alignments. This would safeguard the route from other developments and provide attractive commute, leisure, and tourist opportunities along relatively flat routes between population centres.

On that basis, we support the creation of an active travel link between Amlwch and Llangefni in line with low carbon modal shift, travel to work and leisure. There are many good examples in the UK and wider of disused railway lines being preserved and redesignated for active travel for the benefit of communities and visitors.

In addition to this, we recommend that bus routes, integrated with the railway network, are introduced along both the Amlwch – Gaerwen and Bangor – Porthmadog corridors. We believe that this will enable communities in these areas to travel effectively by public transport, at a significantly lower cost compared to the reinstatement of the rail lines.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> Safeguard former rail lines from future development and develop walking and cycling routes along them where appropriate, with high quality bus services for the communities alongside them.

New Stations

Apart from a proposed station at Deeside Industrial Park, we have not recommended other new stations are developed in the region at present.

We have considered all the station projects identified for development across the north Wales rail network to identify and prioritise those projects that can make the biggest impact to improving the north Wales public transport network.

This does not mean that other projects are without merit, and there are new station developments included in the current National Transport Development Plan that may still go ahead on a case-by-case basis. We however recommend that the proposals set out within our report are prioritised in relation to the rail sector to achieve the largest benefit in north Wales.

Rail Freight

We have concluded that carriage of freight on rail can play a greater role in the region. Due to the reduction in scale of traditional bulk industries, such as coal, slate, and steel, the region currently has a relatively limited rail freight market. This is reflected in a total of between two and three daily rail freight journeys being made along the North Wales Main Line, despite a currently reserved hourly allowance for rail freight services. There has however, been a new freight service recently commence from the Penmaenmawr quarry rail freight terminal.

There are also options for using trains for high-speed parcel deliveries. Light logistics (parcels) rail services have begun in recent years, for example, between London and Glasgow. These can serve business-to-business and business-to-customer deliveries. Parcels are taken for final delivery by cycle and van couriers. This kind of service may have advantages over road transportation including speed and the urban centre destination avoiding congestion. It requires investment in facilities and the creation of the network.

In the longer term, such a service may offer opportunities to reduce road freight in this sector and station development plans should allow for this.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> Consider locations for and methods to develop rail based light logistics freight services.

Buses and Coaches

In our Progress Statement and Interim Report, we identified problems with the current bus network's hours of operation, frequency of services, lack of simplicity of use, reliability and punctuality. We concluded that the existing deregulated bus network does not work well in the region.

There are many bus services that operate at low frequencies, which makes them unattractive. Timings are typically not coordinated to enable people to make connections to other buses or trains, and hence many journeys are impractical by bus. Bus services are often difficult to understand and use, and this is especially true for people who currently do not use buses. Usually journey times are long in comparison with the car.

There are several reasons for the poor state of the bus network, including lack of funding and historic car-based development planning that have resulted in car-centric travel behaviours that have reduced or at least not favoured bus patronage.

Many stakeholders have told us that the current bus network and services have a reputation for poor performance, reliability and value for money. They suggested that improvements require collaboration between the public and private sectors, including the bus and coach operators, and the communities the network serves. Bus travel is recognised as not being competitive with car travel, and 77% of respondents to our public engagement survey thought that current bus services are not effective in serving the needs of the population.

We recognise the benefits of high-quality bus and coach services and the contribution they make to the priorities of the Welsh and UK Governments. They are important for those without access to a car.

High quality bus and coach services can transport people in both rural and urban areas, across the English border, and connect to rail stations. Good bus services provide many wider social benefits such as stronger community ties and improving access to job opportunities[16].

We recommend a set of regional bus services which connect the more major settlements in the rural areas of north Wales that will complement the longer-distance Traws Cymru services. We recommend an extension to the hours of operation of, and additional routes for the Traws Cymru services.

These services need to be integrated with local bus services designed by local authorities. The network will be completed by an expansion of the Fflecsi demand responsive services in the region. We also recommend coordinating scheduled local services with demand responsive transport, community transport services and current bespoke transport contracts (for school travel, patient transport and social services) to create better options for people in rural areas.

The supporting infrastructure for bus services is quicker and cheaper to implement than rail infrastructure and can therefore deliver better transport in the short term.

We have concluded that an effective and comprehensive bus network is essential for achieving modal shift targets in north Wales, and that a good bus network will help people, communities and the economy.

16 - Greener Journeys – Why we need to get the bus and talk more

The Introduction of Franchising

The Welsh Government is working to introduce legislation for franchising bus service provision. This legislation will enable public authorities to design systems that maximise the socio-economic value of a network, as well as enabling integration of timetabling and ticketing. The proposals will bring bus services under public control, and mirror similar developments in Manchester[17] and Liverpool[18] and the position that already exists in London.

Bus services will be planned and specified within available funding limits by local authorities, regional Corporate Joint Committees, TfW and Welsh Government. Operators will bid for contracts let on Welsh Government's behalf by TfW to run the specified services[19]. The legislation proposes that local authorities could run their own bus services, which is currently prohibited except in specific circumstances. Centralised planning will mean that the network and services can be made attractive to a wide range of potential travellers and better adapted to travellers' needs. In particular routes can be designed to meet the needs of customers rather than an emphasis on competition for those that are profitable.

Our stakeholder engagement revealed there was broad support for the forthcoming legislation. Respondents acknowledged that it is a significant opportunity to address current bus service issues. A consistent concern was in relation to the available funding for a franchised network of bus operations.

We understand that funding for the proposed franchised bus network is an issue. Potential reductions to current bus subsidies already pose a risk that some services will be curtailed. An improved bus network requires significant additional funding compared to current service provision, and a franchise model would require multi-year funding which has not been offered for bus subsidy in the past. Such multi-year funding would provide certainty for the travelling public, authorities and operators. Therefore, planning for the delivery of franchising should start ahead of the legislation coming into force and should be given impetus by providing multi-year funding. Preparations may include making changes to existing bus services where possible, with the public sector and operators working together.

RECOMMENDATION:

We support the proposed legislative changes to allow bus services to be franchised and we recommend that local authorities and TfW prepare for and implement changes to bus services prior to and in preparation for franchising and that Welsh Government provides multi-year funding to support these services.

17 - Greater Manchester Combined Authority – Bee Network Launch

18 - Liverpool City Region's buses to be brought under public control

19 - Welsh Government, rather than local authorities, would be the 'franchising authority'. It would take the revenue risk, receiving fare income and paying operators a fee.

Scheduled Bus services

TfW 'Bus Transformation Network' Proposals

TfW has already considered the requirements for a revised bus network and developed proposals for a 'Bus Transformation Network'. The planning of the proposed network included consideration of the following:

- The existing network and patronage, including exploration of strengths and weaknesses with local authorities and operators.

- The creation of a single unified network of services which is intuitive, easy to understand, and coordinated.

- The optimisation of routes and rationalisation of services to achieve higher frequencies and more consistent timings.

- The development of core services with higher frequencies, longer operating hours, and with better connections to other buses and to rail.

- The development of secondary and feeder services with regular, consistent 'clock-face' departure times where possible.

This Bus Transformation Network would have higher frequencies and longer hours of operation, which will allow for a higher number of journeys that better fit with people's travel needs and that will be more attractive for everyday travel use. Although the proposals are still under development, we have considered them in detail and note that they are a good basis for a north Wales bus network.

We have built on these proposals further in line with the principles for bus provision set out below.

Aims of the 'Bus Transformation Network'

Make buses more attractive for everyday use by the people of Wales

Better co-ordination, more regular timings, and more services in the evenings and at weekends

Better connected networks that allow people to realistically use buses for many journeys

Better integration between bus services, with trains, and with better access on foot and by bicycle

Principles for Bus Provision In North Wales

We have developed our proposals for bus service provision based on our analysis of travel origins and destinations, feedback received from the public, and TfW's proposals for the Bus Transformation Network.

Our public engagement highlighted the need for higher bus frequencies, extended operating hours, and the provision of direct services between important locations. Many respondents noted the importance of rural bus services.

We have determined that services should include a combination of regional bus services, local bus services, coach services and Dynamic Demand Responsive Transport (D-DRT) services. In addition, we see value from efficiency savings through the integration of the delivery of education, patient and social services transport services and community transport services.

The north Wales bus network will be delivered in partnership between TfW, local authorities, the North Wales CJC and bus operators, in consultation with the public and employers.

To build on the good work TfW has already undertaken, we have identified the following principles for implementing an enhanced bus network at the regional level within north Wales:

Services should have a high frequency and long operating hours.

Consistent departure times for services should be provided (e.g., 15 and 45 minutes past every hour).

Sunday timetables should be as close as possible to weekday frequency to support commuting, leisure and visitor economy demand.

Where different services share a route, they should be coordinated to provide a well-spaced timetable.

Emphasis should be placed on minimising journey times between the origins and destinations with the most demand.

Services should take direct routes that remain the same throughout the day.

Services should be routed via transport interchanges and railway stations.

The regional bus services should be integrated with local bus services and dynamic demand responsive transport.

Vehicles should be comfortable for long journeys.

Regional Coastal Bus Network

We propose a series of routes which lie generally to near to the coast with a frequency of two to four buses per hour. This is based on our analysis of existing movement patterns in the region by all modes derived from the North Wales Transport Model and other data sources. Our proposals build on TfW's Bus Transformation Network core routes. The routes are shown in blue in the following figure.

The important corridors are between Caernarfon and Llandudno and Llandudno and Rhyl and the network in the Wrexham, Mold and Deeside area. Importantly, we are suggesting that some services cross the border with England to connect Chester into the network. Other destinations as part of this network include Ruthin, Porthmadog, Pwllheli, Llangefni, Amwlch and Holyhead.

We have heard from several stakeholders that making journeys by public transport to employment areas in north Wales is difficult. This is due either an absence of services, including services connecting to rail or other bus services, or lack of timetable coordination. On this basis, we think that frequent bus services should be provided to large employment sites and transport interchanges and railway stations, including, for example, the Wrexham and Deeside industrial parks, the major hospitals and the major business parks including Parc Menai and St Asaph.

The services should stop at locations where there is most demand, and the stopping patterns need to be developed through further detailed work. The pricing and frequency of the service should be designed to make it competitive with the car.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend the introduction of a network of regional coastal bus services with a frequency of two to four buses an hour extending into the evenings that link major settlements, employment sites and transport interchanges.

Regional Rural Bus Network

We think that a network of rural bus services should be implemented in rural north Wales with a frequency of a bus per hour, as shown in red in the following figure. The operating hours should extend into the evening to allow for activities later into the day. This network has been developed using a combination of our analysis of current journeys in the region and feedback from stakeholders. It generally connects the same places as the rail network and the Traws Cymru network but is designed to increase frequency of service.

The proposed Regional Rural Bus Network connects with the proposed Regional Coastal Bus Network, creating a comprehensive regional network of bus services.

Such a network of regional rural bus services would allow for longer distance travel by bus between more isolated settlements and employment areas, and key services. These rural services should use high quality buses providing the following:

- Suitably comfortable seating for longer-distance journeys.

- Digital connectivity (e.g. Wi-Fi).

- Storage space for luggage and cycles where appropriate.

The nature of the service provision and quality of the buses need to create a realistic alternative to travelling by private car.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend the introduction of a network of regional rural bus services with an hourly service frequency extending into the evenings that link rural settlements and are operated by a fleet of buses that are comfortable for longer journeys.

Network map of proposed regional bus services
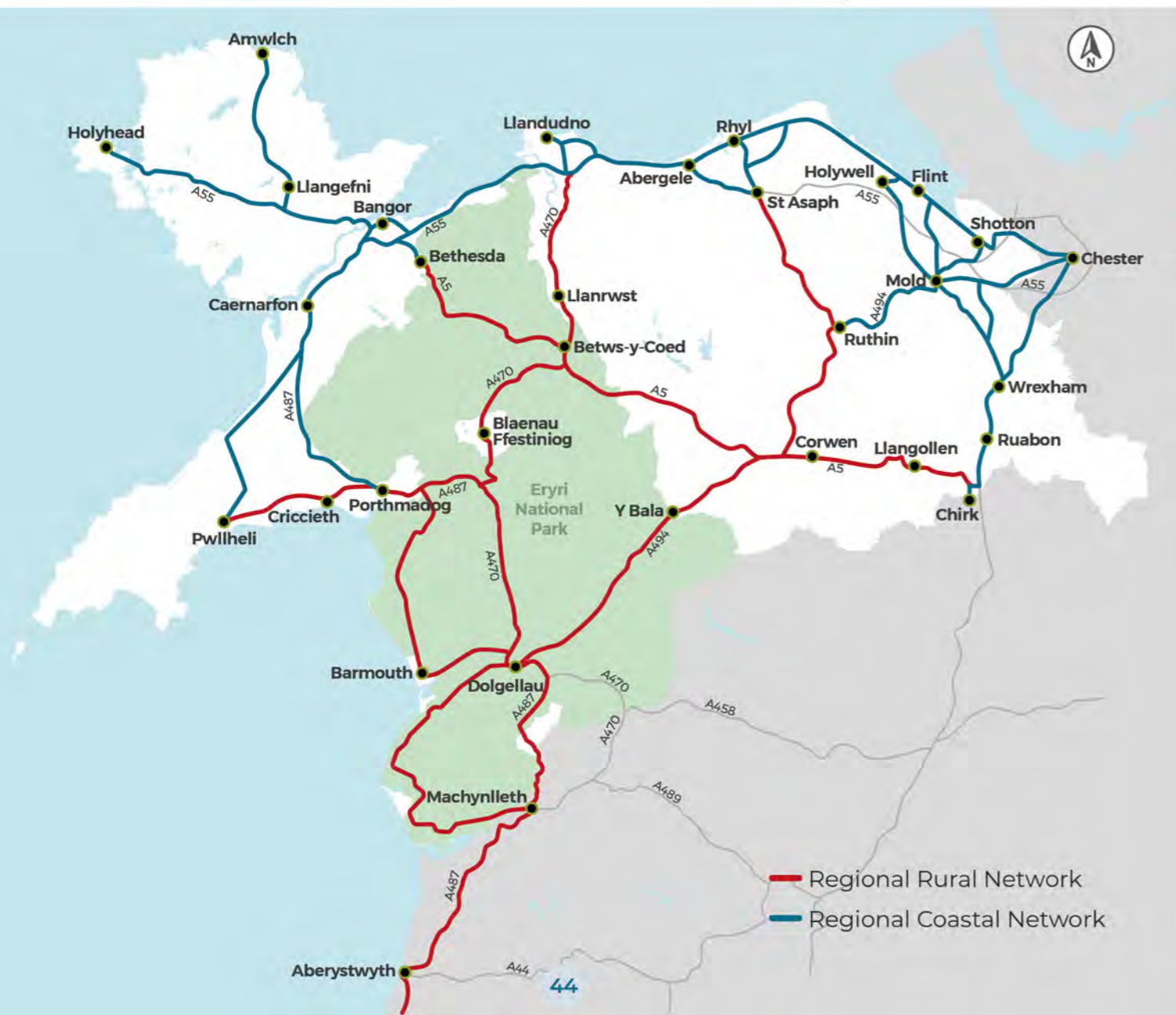
Traws Cymru Service Enhancements

Five Traws Cymru services currently operate in north Wales. Stakeholder feedback suggests Traws Cymru services have been well received. Evidence of this is the 80% greater passenger numbers on the T8 Corwen to Chester (via Ruthin and Mold) service compared with the predecessor services on this corridor (1, X1, 55).

We support expansion and enhancement of Traws Cymru services. Traws Cymru services are operated and managed by TfW, and we recommend the Traws Cymru proposals in the Bus Transformation Network should be prioritised due to their deliverability in the short-term.

Existing Traws Cymru services operate mainly from 6am or 7am to 7pm or 8pm. We suggest the service hours are extended and, where there is demand, service frequencies are increased. We also support additional routes where there is demand. In many cases, the Traws Cymru services work similar routes to the proposed regional rural bus network and the service patterns need to be coordinated.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend the proposed Traws Cymru enhancements to routes, service frequencies and hours of operation are carried out in the short term.

Local Bus Services

The regional bus networks do not fulfil all the public transport requirements of every community. Gaps in bus provision need to be filled by local scheduled bus services and supported by demand responsive transport services and community transport services.

Local authorities, working in collaboration with the North Wales CJC are currently responsible for local bus services. They will need to work with their local communities and employers in the public and private sectors to develop an effective network of local bus services. Some of these local bus services will also act as feeder services to the regional bus network.

On the basis that the bus network needs to be developed as a whole, we think that TfW has an important role to play in assisting local authorities in the planning of local bus networks.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend local bus networks are developed in preparation for franchising by TfW and local authorities working collaboratively with their communities and employers.

Demand Responsive and Community Transport Services

Scheduled bus services can serve a large proportion of the population across north Wales. However, partly due to the rural nature of region, some locations will need supplementary public transport provision, such as demand responsive and community transport services.

Dynamic Demand Responsive Transport (D-DRT)

A demand responsive transport (DRT) service is a flexible service that provides shared transport to users who specify their journey and required time of pick-up and drop-off. A DRT service has defined pick-up and drop-off points and needs to be pre-booked. Dynamic Demand Responsive Transport (D-DRT) refers to a service where routes are adjusted in real-time to accommodate pick-up requests made up to a few minutes before the start of the journey. Some DRT services have fixed start and end points and vary the route according to the (dynamic) demand.

TfW, in partnership with bus operators, has been running a pilot of D-DRT services called 'Fflecsi' across Wales. **The service operates in north Wales in:**

Buckley	Llŷn Peninsula
Conwy Valley	Prestatyn
Denbigh	Ruthin
Holywell	

Patronage data shows that the Fflecsi services have been successful. All north Wales Fflecsi services show an increase in the number of completed journeys in later months compared with earlier months. The Conwy Valley service has the largest number of completed journeys and has experienced a 50% increase in ridership.

Despite its success in terms of patronage and patronage increase, we acknowledge that Fflecsi services have larger operating costs compared with scheduled bus services, largely driven by back-office requirements. Whilst we are supportive of D-DRT services in rural areas, we understand that Fflecsi pilots in urban areas in Wales have had mixed results. We understand that, although the demand for the scheme was significant, Fflecsi services in Newport often competed with local bus services. Hence, care should be taken where Fflecsi services overlap with scheduled bus services.

We are persuaded that D-DRT services can play an important role in supplementing the public transport particularly in rural north Wales and at the edge of urban areas. The services can be effective in providing access to the ultimate destinations and the rest of the public transport network for people living in more isolated communities. TfW has been investigating the potential for additional D-DRT services as part of their Bus Transformation Network proposals.

We have received feedback from stakeholders that any further proposed Fflecsi services should be developed with community input. We agree that this is important because local people have valuable knowledge about travel needs, and issues in relation to possible exclusion of people who are not digitally enabled and how this may be overcome.

We think the existing pilot Fflecsi services should be reviewed and consolidated. Any changes to the service should be based on lessons learnt from the pilot and experience elsewhere (including the Rural Mobility Fund[20]). We also think that additional Fflecsi services should be introduced and developed in partnership with local communities. The engagement with communities should follow a consistent and transparent process for community engagement, co-production and commissioning. All further developments of Fflecsi services should be designed to meet local travel needs, complement the proposed Bus Transformation Network and support access to the wider public transport network.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend making suitable pilot Fflecsi Dynamic Demand Responsive services permanent, and introducing additional Fflecsi services in other areas where experience from the pilot and other schemes suggest they would be a good complement to scheduled bus proposals. Schemes should be designed with local community involvement.

Community, Education, Patient, and Social Services Transport

Community Transport services are locally run and managed transport services for specific groups or communities, often comprising of people who cannot use conventional public transport services. The services are flexible and accessible and often are community-led initiatives that are satisfying an otherwise unmet need. It is often the only means of transport for vulnerable and isolated people, as well as older people and disabled people[21].

By supporting Community Transport services, Welsh Government and local authorities can ensure that the benefits of the bus network proposals are experienced by all.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that TfW and local authorities collaborate with communities, particularly in rural areas, to help fund and deliver community transport services that meet otherwise unmet need.

20 - Rural Mobility Fund Evaluation: Interim Report

21 - Community Transport Association – What is Community Transport?

We have noted that councils and public bodies in north Wales are spending significant sums of money on transport contracts for education transport, non-emergency patient transport and social services. Several local authorities in the UK are taking steps to integrate these separate services, including in rural areas.

We think there is an opportunity to trial a contract that comprehensively delivers all these transport services in what we are calling a 'total transport services contract.' This would require the joining up of budget streams and fleets.

The purpose of such a total transport services contract would be to provide a better service to the public and to reduce duplication of resources. This latter will be possible because the current multiple fleets of different mini buses could be consolidated into one fleet and put to multiple uses.

Such an approach has been discussed frequently, but it is challenging to put it into effect. One reason it has been challenging to put into effect is because of the existing set-up of services. The franchising legislation potentially offers the opportunity to bring together in a single local contract all publicly supported transport services, including education transport services, patient transport services, and social services transport services, and potentially community transport services.

The savings because of this increased efficiency of such a total transport services contract could be important in helping the affordability of franchising. Whilst this is a decision for Welsh Government and local authorities, we think that Ynys Môn is a suitable location for a pilot.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend a pilot is run and evaluated of a 'total transport services contract' that pools budgets and fleets to provide the services for education, patient, social services and community transport.

Cross-border and North-South Coach Services

Cross-border Bus and Coach Services

The Bus Transformation Network, either prior to franchising legislation or under new franchising arrangements, needs to accommodate bus services that cross the border into England. The Liverpool City Region and Cheshire will benefit from Welsh bus proposals if there are bus services that serve destinations in those areas.

We have been advised that there are several coach operators that provide private contracted services across north Wales for parties to access retail and leisure destinations in England and north Wales. There is one National Express coach a day that operates between Llandudno and Manchester.

North-South Wales Coach Services

There is political and public support for improved public transport services between north and south Wales – we also support this ambition.

There are plans under development to introduce scheduled coach services between Bangor and Carmarthen. Planning work is based on the concept of a 'Traws Cymru Express' coach service, estimated to take four hours and twenty minutes compared with the current five hours and fifty minutes that the Traws Cymru T1 and T2 bus services take. This one-and-a-half-hour journey time reduction is significant. The coach service will need to be supported by enabling infrastructure at interchanges along the route. **Patronage estimates suggest that the service will be able to operate with virtually no revenue support.**

As a result of the patronage estimate for the Bangor to Carmarthen coach, we endorse consideration of further north-south coach services. These could include extending the Carmarthen service to Swansea, and the introduction of direct services from Cardiff to destinations in north Wales.

Coach services should be developed in ways that ensure integration with the bus and rail networks to maximise interchange opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that the current proposal for a coach service between Bangor and Carmarthen is progressed together with its required interchange infrastructure. In addition, we recommend a study is undertaken of other potential north-south and cross-border coach routes.

Providing Priority for Buses

Priority infrastructure for buses is an important element in ensuring bus journey times are as short as possible and as consistent as possible to the point where they are competitive with the private car. Although motor traffic congestion is not as widespread in north Wales as other regions of the UK, there are areas where congestion has an impact on bus services and therefore providing priority in these locations would improve the attractiveness of travelling by bus.

The creation of priority may require the reallocation of road space away from private vehicles. We have heard from stakeholders how this has often been a barrier. The Wales Transport Strategy (Llwybr Newydd) prioritises public transport journeys over private car journeys. On this basis, bus priority schemes should be progressed even where it requires reallocation of road space.

TfW, in conjunction with the local authorities and bus operators, has studied locations where buses are subject to motor traffic congestion. In addition to the schemes set out in the North Wales Joint Local Transport Plan[22], the study identified a further seventeen packages of bus priority measures and seventeen individual interventions. We propose that these bus priority proposals should be implemented.

Further analysis is required of the proposed network of bus services to identify locations where further bus priority measures may be needed. These may be on either the local or trunk road networks, and the involvement of both the North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agent (NMWTRA) and Welsh Government SRN division will be needed.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that local highway authorities and NMWTRA on behalf of Welsh Government) implement bus priority proposals and review proposed bus service improvements to identify and implement further required bus priority measures.

22 - North Wales Joint Local Transport Plan 2015

Tourist Bus Services

We are impressed by the work of Eryri National Park, Cyngor Gwynedd and partners relating to the management of parking and the provision of public transport for visitors to the national park. This includes the Sherpa'r Wyddfa bus service, a park-and-ride linked with parking management at Pen-y-pass, and the enforcement of parking restrictions on roads. A review undertaken by Partneriaeth Yr Wyddfa in 2020 identified Llanberis, Betws-y-Coed, Beddgelert, and Bethesda as 'gateway villages' to the National Park.

The Sherpa'r Wyddfa bus services provide a way of travelling sustainably once visitors have arrived in the National Park. These services have been developed to meet visitor demand, operating within and surrounding the Eryri National Park. The Sherpa'r Wyddfa services have their own brand and website, with operation supported by promotional leaflets, bus stop flags and social media content.

There are currently four Sherpa'r Wyddfa routes operating in the region:

S1 Caernarfon – Llanberis – Betws-y-coed.	S2 Bangor – Llanberis – Pen-y-pass.
S3 Beddgelert – Caernarfon – Dinorwig.	**S4** Pen-y-pass – Beddgelert – Porthmadog.

We have received good feedback in relation to the Sherpa'r Wyddfa services and understand that ridership and revenue has increased by about 40% between 20221/22 and 2022/23. There was feedback that the current services could be better integrated with the wider bus and railway networks. This is particularly important at Bangor Railway Station – a key interchange - as this could enable day trips to be effectively undertaken by public transport to Eryri National Park from a wider catchment area.

We therefore recommend that the current Sherpa'r Wyddfa scheme is supported through multi-year funding for the services where required. Alongside this, investigation should be undertaken into ways to further integrate the current services with the proposed core bus network and railway network.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend making the Sherpa'r Wyddfa bus services permanent, provide long term funding for them and investigating how services can be integrated further with the wider bus and railway networks.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend the creation of a partnership where Sherpa'r Wyddfa and other public transport services can be supported by innovative sources of funding including parking revenues if available and appropriate.

The Sherpa'r Wyddfa services are successful in supporting tourist journeys by bus in and around Eryri National Park, but the visitor economy is important in many other areas of north Wales.

We have concluded that it is possible to mirror the success of the Sherpa services in other parts of the region. This does not mean that the services should be replicated exactly, as different models will work for different locations and markets.

New tourist transport options could be marketed effectively to reflect the specific areas of north Wales they serve and could contribute significantly to reducing the impact of the visitor economy on the environment.

Although the location of public transport tourist networks should be further investigated in conjunction with the local authorities in the region, we have noted the importance of each of the following locations:

Dee Valley and Clwydian Range Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the North East Wales National Park Designation Project covering a similar area.

Llŷn Peninsula, especially in relation to the Wales Coast Path.

North Wales Coastal resorts such as Rhyl, Prestatyn, Towyn and Llandudno.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend an investigation of the benefits of seasonal and tourist bus services, like the Sherpa'r Wyddfa, in other locations in north Wales to support the visitor economy and promote integration with wider rail and bus networks.

In our interim report, we noted Welsh Government's plans to give local authorities the ability to introduce and operate a discretionary visitor levy. Should a local authority choose to introduce a levy in the future, we remain of the view that improving local transport infrastructure and services should be a key beneficiary of revenues. The proposed transport partnership for the National Park, which we recommend above, could be developed to make use of such a levy.

Providing for Active Travel

Issues with Active Travel

Despite the potential, levels of active travel remain low, with many short journeys being made by car. There are also relatively few people who walk or cycle to stations to complete longer journeys by public transport.

Active travel is often unattractive, not convenient, and perceived as not being safe. The extent and quality of active travel infrastructure must improve if travellers are to rely less on their cars. Evidence suggests that more people walking and cycling contributes to policy goals such as increasing town centre viability, placemaking and improving health and well-being[23].

Active travel networks in north Wales are under-developed and disjointed, with infrastructure often missing where it is most required; for example, at junctions and crossing points. Footways are sometimes not well maintained or non-existent, and restricted or blocked by drivers parking vehicles on them.

An important part of the network is National Cycle Network Route 5 (NCN5) along the north Wales coast between Chester and Holyhead. It has connections to Deeside Industrial Park and beyond to the Wirral. Parts of the route require cyclists to share carriageway with motor traffic, and hence it is not attractive or comfortable to use.

Rural roads can often be unattractive for walking and cycling, especially where there are no footways, or only narrow footways, no cycle tracks, and narrow roads with a high speed limit. Active travel route development in rural areas can be challenging because of the limits of the highway boundary, the costs and time penalties associated with acquiring land, and impacts on hedgerows and wider biodiversity.

Benefits can be realised from comfortable and attractive routes for walking and cycling that link villages to their nearest larger settlement that has services and onward transport connections. There is potential for longer distance routes which have benefit for local people's day-to-day travel, and for the visitor economy for leisure. Increased availability of e-cycles could be a significant enabler for such longer distance travel.

23 - Why healthy travel? - Healthy Travel Wales

The Potential for Walking And Cycling

We have identified that a high proportion of local journeys in the region could be walked or cycled. The increasing prevalence of e-cycles would allow for a wider range of cycle journeys to be undertaken. There is limited good quality pedestrian and cycling infrastructure in the region and this makes active travel unattractive and levels of active travel remain low.

Design and implementation needs to facilitate independent walking, cycling and wheeling for everyone, including secondary school age children, someone pushing a double-buggy, people riding adapted cycles, and less-experienced cyclists. This requires a continuous network of well-maintained routes where pedestrians and cyclists are separated from each other and from motor traffic, particularly at junctions. Existing proposals for extending the active travel network in north Wales would create over 1,100 km of route.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> Priority should be given to the construction of junctions, crossings and other infrastructure that have the greatest potential for creating the most increase in use, these could be new or upgraded existing facilities.
>
> These may typically be in urban areas, but in rural areas enhancing safety and providing routes connecting smaller communities to larger settlements is important.

There are often physical constraints in urban areas that can lead to design compromises that favour allocation of road space to people in private motor vehicles. Reallocating space in urban areas that prioritises people walking and cycling is in line with the Wales Transport Strategy sustainable transport hierarchy and supports placemaking.

The case for routes in rural areas is about creating access by active travel to work, goods and services, and public transport for onward journeys. Additionally rural active travel infrastructure should reduce risk and enhance cohesion between adjacent communities. Well-surfaced footways and cycle tracks need to be installed adjacent to the carriageway.

The Commission appreciates the potential for long-distance leisure cycle riding both for local people and to support tourism in the rural economy. There is value in developing leisure routes connecting to the National Cycle Network and Traws Eryri, and further developing the Conwy Valley route. These routes need to be appraised differently to routes used for everyday journeys.

Improving Infrastructure Delivery and Maintenance

Leadership and Management of New Infrastructure Delivery

Local authorities, as the highway authority, have the powers and duties to improve active travel infrastructure. The North Wales CJC has a role in coordinating planning, design and delivery of active travel routes that span two or more local authority areas. Many active travel routes connect with the Strategic Road Network, managed by NMWTRA on behalf of Welsh Government. TfW provides advice and support to Welsh Government and administers the Active Travel Fund programme for the Welsh Government.

Welsh Government is currently finalising the national Active Travel Delivery Plan. The Plan will clarify requirements and actions to meet targets. The 2022 Cross-Party Report on Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, sets out issues relating to delivery of the Active Travel Act nationally. We agree with the thrust of the findings of the report, in particular the need for the establishment of delivery units. The purpose of these units would be to increase the speed of active travel infrastructure delivery by assisting local authorities that are struggling with design and procurement resources.

Planning and design decisions need to comply with the Wales Transport Strategy sustainable transport hierarchy. In some cases, this may mean additional land is needed. Local authorities have powers to compulsorily purchase land and associated costs are eligible Active Travel Fund expenditure.

Many of the active travel aspirations in north Wales, particularly towards the West and South of the region, are reliant upon interface with the Strategic Road Network. We have noted recent active travel improvements to this strategic network, for example, at Abergwyngregyn, Dolgellau and Queensferry, and support the continuation and acceleration of pace of such improvements. We propose that TfW's remit be expanded to provide leadership and management, to supplement planning, design and procurement capabilities in highway authorities in relation to active travel.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend that a North Wales Active Travel Unit is established to work with local authorities, the North Wales CJC, Welsh Government Strategic Road Network division and the NMWTRA to deliver active travel networks that are ambitious, in line with the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy and are delivered at pace.

Funding

The main source of funding for active travel is the Active Travel Fund[24]. Funding available for the 2023-24 financial year is £50 million, with a wider Welsh Government active travel budget of £70 million, which is approximately £22 per person in Wales[25].

We see the benefits of local authorities focusing on the development of multi-year programmes of investment by setting out the schemes they will be seeking to deliver in the coming years. This approach can use the core allocation of active travel funding designed for minor works and the development of projects prior to construction. Such an approach will help prioritise and pool resources and provide a structured and focused approach to active travel route development over the coming years.

High quality walking and cycling networks need to be developed by local authorities through collaborative working across the authority including planning, economic development, education, housing, and public health departments. Once in place, there may be a need for active travel promotion.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend that local authorities develop multi-year delivery programmes for their active travel schemes and engage all relevant departments in scheme development and delivery.

24 - Active travel fund: guidance and application forms | GOV.WALES

25 - Clean Air Day Announcement – Boost for Active Travel

Route Prioritisation

Routes that have the greatest potential to increase walking and cycling for everyday journeys should be prioritised. Local authorities should consider the size of additional demand for walking and cycling that their proposed routes could create. TfW is currently developing a prioritisation assessment tool to assist local authorities with identifying the highest impact routes.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend that TfW's method for route prioritisation is adopted by local authorities and TfW to target investment to maximise use of the active travel network.

Walking and cycling for commuting trips to major employment sites could be made more attractive by the creation of networks of safe and comfortable routes. Locations that could benefit include the north coast, between Wrexham and Wrexham Industrial Park, between Connah's Quay / Shotton and Deeside Industrial Park, and between Bangor and Parc Menai. Access to employment would be improved for everyone, but especially those workers who do not have access to a vehicle (52,000 households in north Wales, which is 17% of the total).

Improvements to the active travel network should also include improvements to existing infrastructure to make them compliant with current standards; for example, by improving crossing points and removing barriers at accesses to routes.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend that high-quality active travel routes should be prioritised using TfW's prioritisation method to target investment to schemes that maximise volume of use of the network and link population centres with major employment sites.

Maintenance of the Network

We have heard from stakeholders how active travel routes, especially routes away from roads, are poorly maintained and this discourages and sometimes prevents their use. Maintenance issues include overgrown vegetation which narrows routes, poorly maintained street-lighting, and poor surfacing. Limited local authority budgets may be causing revenue funding for highway maintenance to be directed mainly to, or only to, maintenance for motor traffic routes.

In some cases, concerns about future maintenance liabilities have led to design compromises, for example, the use of hard verges rather than grass verges. Such compromises can lead to routes being less attractive, potentially reducing use and the wider benefits of placemaking, well-being, sustainable drainage and ecological value.

The Commission thinks that maintenance of active travel routes should be improved. We agree with the Cross-Party Group on the Active Travel Act that more revenue funding is needed. Sometimes the responsibility for maintaining active travel routes is unclear. To reduce this risk, local authorities should define maintenance responsibilities as part of infrastructure delivery plans. This should be a requirement of Active Travel Fund grant awards.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend that local authorities are required to set out how they plan to manage and maintain active travel networks as a condition of receiving Active Travel Fund grants.

Wider Policy and Interventions

Active travel infrastructure development, and enabling and encouraging use of that infrastructure, will be best achieved in the context of a series of wider policies and interventions. These include wider land use and transport planning policy in an updated Technical Advice Note (TAN) 18, 20 mph urban speed limits and School Streets.

Land use planning and transport planning policy is discussed further within the Part 3: Planning and Management section of this report.

Use of the Active Travel Act Guidance is a requirement of Welsh Government funding. Some active travel infrastructure is funded directly by local authorities or Section 106 agreement developer funding, and some infrastructure is built by developers and then adopted by highway authorities under a Section 38 agreement. We agree with Recommendation 45 of the Cross-Party Group on the Active Travel Act that the Act should be amended to require use of the Active Travel Act Guidance for all active travel infrastructure, however funded.

Types of Scheme

Urban Schemes

We support high quality and high impact schemes in urban areas. However, there is relatively little delivery of best practice active travel schemes in urban areas in the region. The Commission would like to see delivery of several exemplar schemes that develop innovations in street design and are feasible on streets with 20mph limits. These schemes should be delivered in conjunction with measures that empower people to change how they perceive and use active travel.

The Commission has studied the development of the 'Dee Gardens' housing development at Garden City and we think there is an opportunity to develop an exemplar that connects the development to Deeside Industrial Estate and Shotton. Alternatively, the Roads Review Panel suggested the creation of an exemplar residential and employment development as part of a Wrexham-wide strategy to reduce motor traffic.

There are existing routes in urban areas that could be upgraded to prioritise walking and cycling. Where it is safe and appropriate to do so, improvements for active travel could be made by making more efficient use of carriageway space, for example, re-purposing hatched areas of carriageway, and dividing in a different way wide single carriageways and dual carriageways. In addition, **physical preventative measures should be introduced at locations where there are important footways on which drivers habitually park.**

We think there are opportunities in Rhyl and Prestatyn, Wrexham, Greenfield and Flint, and Caernarfon. More targeted improvements can also be implemented by prioritising pedestrians and cyclists at junctions and crossings, including where possible the restriction of some vehicle movements.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend the development of exemplar urban active travel schemes in north Wales that connect communities and housing developments to urban centres and employment sites.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend a programme of works is instigated to implement changes to the existing highway network in urban areas to re-allocate road space and prioritise junctions for people walking and cycling.

Rural and Inter-Urban Schemes

The rural active travel network can and should be expanded and some of the routes will be valuable inter-urban routes. While the goal is a network of routes where pedestrians and cyclists are separated from each other and from motor traffic, in rural areas, it is more likely that routes are shared by pedestrians and cyclists.

As with urban routes, the development of rural routes should be prioritised based on those that will have the highest volume of use. In addition, creating safe conditions is important. The routes most likely to be prioritised will be those that connect smaller communities to their local larger settlement where people can access goods and services and onward public transport connections.

Some schemes may be developed with partners, such as upgrading and completing missing sections of (NCN5) along the coast, and the creation of links to nearby destinations. Creating a network of routes joining to NCN5 may be used as an exemplar of how networks may be created. It could be a catalyst to unlock further development of the NCN in the region.

We think there is the potential for a longer distance inter-urban route that would connect the urban active travel networks of Deeside and Wrexham. This would follow the Alyn valley and have connections to Buckley and Mold. This potential has already been identified in the Mersey Dee Alliance Active Travel Study.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend planning and developing the rural network of routes that connect with National Cycle Network Route 5 on the north coast, and an inter-urban route between Deeside and Wrexham.

There is a large network of rights of way in the region, including footpaths and bridleways. However, the network is not as fully connected as it could be, and some routes connect with or follow high speed roads with no footway or suitable crossing. Routes are not suitably surfaced, lit or signposted for use for everyday journeys. Some routes for horses will not be suitable for resurfacing but will continue to be good at supporting equestrian and foot and cycle leisure use.

We think that some parts of the rights of way network, with improvements, would create an important part of the everyday active travel network. Improvements to some rights of way are identified on local authorities' Active Travel Network maps.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend that routes forming part of the rights of way network are improved to a standard suitable for everyday active travel journeys where that would increase everyday active travel use.

More use can be made of country lanes to extend the active travel network. In England, under the Quiet Lanes and Home Zones Regulations (2006) local authorities can designate roads for which they are responsible as Quiet Lanes. Quiet Lanes are designed to enable walkers, cyclists, horse riders and mobility impaired people to enjoy country lanes in greater safety.[26]

There are a few examples of Quiet Lanes in Wales. While mentioned in the Active Travel Act Guidance, local authorities are reluctant to introduce Quiet Lanes without regulation applying to Wales.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend implementation of Quiet Lanes by local authorities where this will help create a more extensive active travel network, and therefore the ability to designate Quiet Lanes in Wales should be formalised.

The Active Travel Fund can be used to fund rural routes, but only one of the four main scheme applications each year by a local authority can be classed as 'rural'. This restricts options for largely rural areas, such as Ynys Môn and Gwynedd. Unless the funding rules change, additional funding methods need to be used to deliver rural active travel and leisure routes. We have noted elsewhere in the report the need for visitor attractions and the national park authority to promote active travel. We suggest Active Travel Fund rules remain as they are and further consideration is be given to options for rural active travel funding, particularly in relation to visitor destinations.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that funding streams additional to the Active Travel Fund are investigated so that active travel routes can be developed to visitor attractions.

26 - Campaign to Protect Rural England's Guide to Quiet Lanes

Trunk Road Schemes

There have been some notable developments for active travel linked with the trunk road network recently. In our conversations with stakeholders, several have noted that the pausing of road schemes following the Roads Review has had the unintended consequence of halting the development of the active travel elements of those projects. We have undertaken a review of the paused schemes and have identified the following schemes where the active travel components should be considered for further development. These relate to the former A483 Wrexham Bypass J3-J6 scheme, the A55 J14-J16 scheme and A55 active travel crossing closures.

We think that proposals need to be developed for active travel at these locations, recognising that the original proposed active travel components may not be feasible in the absence of the originally proposed scheme. Active travel at these locations needs to be planned and designed to enhance the extent and quality of the overall network of active travel. These schemes need to be promoted by local authorities, Welsh Government's Strategic Road Network division and NMWTRA.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that high impact active travel components of schemes paused by the Roads Review are developed in line with the Review Panel's recommendations.

Interchanges with Public Transport

Walking and cycling are important parts of longer journeys made by public transport. It is important to ensure these first and last legs of public transport journeys have prioritised routes that are as easy, safe and as pleasant as possible as possible.

TfW is planning four 'gateway' projects in north Wales at Wrexham, Bangor, Eryri and Holyhead. Conwy County Borough Council is also planning a similar project in Colwyn Bay. These gateway projects will create better interchange between active travel and public transport. They are supported by complementary wider active travel infrastructure. The delivery of these high impact projects and routes should be prioritised.

Interchange between active travel and public transport is not limited to the gateway project locations; for example, there is interchange at Shotton with plans for improvements outlined in the rail section of this report. Bus and rail stations and interchanges should provide high quality travel information, wayfinding and signage, and plentiful, secure and covered cycle parking. These and other urban design features, developed through the processes of placemaking, will create quality places that people will enjoy.

The Commission supports TfW's bus and rail station improvement plans, discussed in the integration section of this report.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend that all bus and rail stations and interchanges are served by direct, high-quality pedestrian and cycle routes that have priority, and have more and better cycle parking.

E-cycles, Cycle Hire and E-scooters

E-cycle ownership has a transformative effect on the way people travel for everyday journeys, but there are barriers to ownership and use including cost, lack of secure storage, a greater maintenance requirement and lack of active travel infrastructure.

Loan schemes can help people understand and value the benefits and may lead some to purchasing and e-cycle. There is a case for financial support to increase e-cycle and e-cargo bike ownership.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend developing methods to increase e-cycle ownership, including loan and grant schemes.

There are no public on-street cycle hire schemes in north Wales. TfW has studied types of cycle hire scheme and appropriate locations for Welsh pilots. Consequently, Wrexham has been further investigated, and such a scheme could include e-cycles as well as ordinary cycles. Different financial models are available for e-cycle hire schemes and the benefits and disadvantages should be considered as part of scheme development. Schemes could be located at bus and rail stations and interchanges to create mobility hubs.

The TfW study recommended that smaller settlements could consider community cycle hire schemes, potentially connected to car clubs and mobility hubs.

To improve access to bikes and e-cycles, we support the development of hire schemes and community cycle hire schemes. The schemes could focus on a combination of low-income communities, students and/or rural communities.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend that a public cycle hire scheme is further investigated in Wrexham and other locations, and community cycle hire schemes are investigated for other locations in the region.

As noted in our Interim Report, we recommend that Welsh Government awaits the outcome of the UK Government's deliberations on e-scooter regulation. If private e-scooters are legalised by the UK Government, there may be actions that Welsh Government will need to take to enable the safe introduction of e-scooters onto the public highway.

The Car and Road Transport

Electric Vehicles and Charging Infrastructure

The electric vehicle market is maturing, but in Wales EVs represent only just over 1% of new registrations compared with nearly 3% for the United Kingdom as a whole[27]. At present grants and tax incentives are available for vehicle purchase and EV costs, but they are still an expensive purchase in comparison to diesel and petrol vehicles.

We support measures to help people in north Wales make the switch to EVs. We would like to see more consideration given to incentives for people to make the transition to EVs particularly in rural and remote areas.

A challenge for electric vehicle users is the availability of charging points and their associated infrastructure. We note the Senedd's Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee report

(March 2023) on Welsh Government's (EV) charging infrastructure strategy and action plan. The Committee expressed disappointment that there had been a lack of progress in delivery of the action plan and questioned the relevance of the strategy given the rise, for example, in use of EVs in commercial fleets[28]. We agree with this conclusion and would like to see the delivery plan reviewed.

We also note the Senedd report's concerns about the lack of electricity grid capacity to provide EV charging, particularly in rural areas. We recognise the importance of this matter in north Wales and ask that Welsh Government works with the National Grid to remove barriers to the expansion of the network.

Since the publication of the Senedd's findings, Welsh Government has announced additional funding for local authorities across Wales to increase the number of EV charging points[29]. However, we note that grants awarded to local authorities in the region vary considerably.[30]

We note the Welsh Government's existing workplace electric vehicle charging scheme which provides grant support to businesses to provide charging points. These grants should be promoted as part of travel planning partnerships in north Wales, as outlined in our Planning and Management section.

We are aware of good practice in Wales for provision of community electric vehicle charging hubs. For example, TrydaNi is a community benefit society that is a charge point operator for businesses and supports a network of five car sharing clubs across Wales.

In addition to directly funded schemes and private and third sector operator schemes, we think that charging point numbers can be influenced by local authority planning policy and parking standards.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend that parking strategy and standards and planning consents should ensure that new residential and non-residential developments provide sufficient electric vehicle charging points to meet future demand and incentivise electric vehicle uptake.

Replacing car journeys with public transport and active travel in rural areas is challenging. We recognise that the private car will continue to be the main way many journeys are made by many people. North Wales includes large areas that are rural or semi-rural.

27 - Senedd Research – Electric Vehicles
28 - The Welsh Government's EV charging infrastructure strategy and action plan (senedd.wales)

29 - Welsh Government Press Release - £15m Electric Vehicles Boost
30 - Welsh Government Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Transformation Fund Grants

Car Clubs

For drivers who do not own a car, car clubs can provide access to a car to make those journeys that are not possible by public transport. Car clubs can also reduce car ownership levels[31]. Lower car ownership reduces the number of trips by car and increases the number of trips made by other modes.

Car clubs require returns to the starting location or a slightly wider area than one location, and some offer one-way travel with drop-off at any location where it is legal to park. Peer-to-peer car clubs involve people offering privately-owned vehicles for rent via an online platform. Car clubs exist in north Wales. There are opportunities for car clubs to be located at railway stations, workplaces and mobility hubs.

The Commission is aware of car clubs in the Ogwen Valley (organised by Partneriaeth Ogwen), in rural Gwynedd (Arloesi Gwynedd Wledig), and in south Denbighshire (run by Partneriaeth Gymunedol De Sir Ddinbych). These examples show that car clubs can be effective in rural areas.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend increasing the number of car clubs through joint working with car club providers, including community car club providers, in urban and rural areas and at stations, in workplaces and at mobility hubs.

31 - CoMoUK Annual Car Club Report (2022)

Car Sharing/ Park and Share

By sharing journeys, travellers can reduce the cost of car travel. We think this has a role to play in both urban and rural areas in north Wales.

Minimising the number of people driving on their own to work can be supported through an increased number of car sharing schemes. Employers, via their travel plans, have a role to play in promoting and facilitating car sharing. Employers should be encouraged to promote and co-ordinate these schemes and incentivise those choosing to travel in multi-occupancy vehicles.

'Park and Share' car parks are locations where people can meet, leave one car and share another for an onward journey. They are of greater value in rural areas for longer onward journeys. The Commission is aware of existing park and share car parks at Gaerwen and LlanfairPG, on Ynys Môn. They should be considered for other locations, especially where it is known that informal car sharing already takes place.

In 2022, on average, each car club vehicle in the UK replaced 22 private cars

Source: CoMoUK Annual Car Club Report 2022

Parking Management

The price and availability of parking is one of the major determinants of the level of car use. The provision of car parks has land, infrastructure and maintenance costs. The cost is rarely made visible to the car user, who is often being subsidised. If parking is free or cheap and easily available at destinations, more people will be encouraged to travel by car. Additionally, cheap or free parking can make driving cheaper than public transport travel.

Local authorities provide off-street parking, on-street parking, and through the planning process control the amount of privately available parking. Residents Parking Zones and some on-street parking and car parks are charged, others are free, as are workplace parking places. However, parking does have costs – provision and maintenance costs are paid for by the local authority or the employer even when no charge is made.

Some local authorities offer cheap or free car parking in town and city centres to encourage car access to compete with out-of-town shopping. Employers, including hospitals and further education premises, normally offer free car parking for employees, patients, and students, which can cause problems if demand for parking is greater than supply.

There are many locations where cars are parked on footways, and this can cause restrictions or blockages for pedestrians. The Commission welcomes the Welsh Government's proposal to tackle 'pavement parking' for safety and environmental reasons. Car parking supply and pricing is a mechanism to encourage the use of public transport and active travel. Although there are local factors and t this requires some local variation in approach, we think there needs to be consistency of purpose across the region in parking management, linked with the principles of the Wales Transport Strategy.

We have also considered the Workplace Parking Levy (WPL) and decided that this would not be appropriate in north Wales at the current time due to the lack of alternatives to the car. It should be reconsidered when public transport and active travel options have been improved. There are examples of innovative approaches to using revenue from parking charges to support public transport, and the Commission thinks that such examples should be reviewed by the Welsh Government to assess their applicability in north Wales. We also note that there is currently no guidance or standards at the national level for local authorities to consistently manage parking.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that Welsh Government produces guidance for local authorities on developing a parking management strategy, including all types of on-street and off-street parking and advice on charging.

Traffic Management

Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) include systems for speed management, adaptive signage, and signal control at junctions. ITS can support the safe and efficient flow of motor traffic and within that offer priority for buses and cycles to make better use of existing road capacity and improve safety. ITS may also be used to direct traffic away from areas where it has a disproportionate impact, such as through smaller rural communities or near schools.

Road Freight

The Commission has examined origin and destination data to understand freight movement patterns. We have found that freight trips are primarily focused along the coast, which matches the principal population centres in the region and the existing principal highway network. There are some concentrations of freight flows in Deeside and Wrexham, and this is linked with major manufacturing sites and industrial estates, including Airbus, JCB, and Iceland.

We are aware of the closure of the Holyhead Roadking (truck stop) site a mile from the port to facilitate a new customs site. Stakeholders have shared with us the impact of this closure on local communities and the well-being of truck drivers. Given the volume of (HGV) traffic, there are a lack of freight facilities, such as lorry parking, fuelling stations, rest and welfare sites, and shops and café facilities.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend development of a network of suitable HGV road-side facilities in the region.

In addition to long-distance HGV movements, there are also a significant number of short-distance freight movements within north Wales. These shorter-distance movements impact more on urban areas and are primarily undertaken in light goods vehicles (LGVs) such as vans. This increase in LGV mileage is predominantly led by trends such as online shopping, and it is possible that more could be done to shift goods to sustainable modes or zero-emission vehicles. We recommend the forthcoming Freight and Logistics plan for Wales include options for this as above.

Integration

While public transport service improvements will positively influence travellers' choices, initiatives that create a unified, easy-to-use system help further. These initiatives include accurate and available timetable information, easy to use ticketing and payment methods integrated across modes (such as tap-on / tap-off systems), and simple fare structures (such as flat rates and zonal systems), coherent branding and wayfinding, better stations and stops, and integration with other non-public transport modes such as active travel and access by car.

Bus and Rail Service Timetabling

We have heard that people in north Wales currently experience timetables where connections between trains and buses are not coordinated. This has the effect of increasing vehicle mileage because people may use the car for the first and/or last legs of a journey rather than another form of public transport, or because the absence of appropriate connections will make a journey by public transport too long for the journey time available.

Our proposed improvements to buses and trains will create increased frequencies, with departures at the same minutes past each hour. Part of that planning process for increased frequencies will need to focus on **the integration of timetables within mode and between modes.** The proposed legislation to introduce bus franchising will create the planning mechanism to coordinate timetables, but opportunities should be taken to develop integrated timetables ahead of bus franchising legislation coming into force.

Timetables with increased frequency and integration within and between trains and buses will make journey planning easier for travellers and help stimulate demand.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend that TfW, local authorities and bus operators should work together ahead of bus franchising to develop and introduce timetables with increased frequencies and better interchange possibilities.

Integrated Ticketing and Bringing Services Together

To achieve a fully integrated public transport network across north Wales, a comprehensive effective multi-modal ticketing system is required. The 1bws daily ticket was introduced in the summer of 2021. It allows travel on all bus operators in the region. This was extended in September 2023 to include weekly tickets. There are, however, few integrated bus and rail tickets available.

We have been advised that TfW is working with Welsh Government to provide 'tap-on/off' card readers on all buses in the region. These readers make use of contactless technology and ensure that a users' payments are capped so they will not pay more than the maximum within a day for multiple journeys.

In addition, TfW is taking steps to integrate Traws Cymru bus service ticketing with its rail ticketing. The initial pilot, which created 'virtual stations' on bus routes, means the bus-leg of the journey is paid for by an end-to-end rail ticket.

Building on the Traveline Cymru service[32], TfW intends to expand its current app to provide a wider range of journey planning and ticketing services for a range of modes.

Integrated ticketing needs to encompass all public transport including Fflecsi services and, where possible, community transport. In the longer term, integrated ticketing could also include access to taxis, shared or hired cycles and other sustainable transport options.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend the development of fully integrated ticketing across rail, bus, and where possible community transport, using a digital platform and app. Welsh Government and TfW should set up the necessary processes with timescales for delivery of a digital platform and app that provides this full integration, once franchising has been introduced.

32 - Transport for Wales Traveline Cymru Announcement

Competitive and Affordable Fares

Alongside poor service frequency and coverage, we have heard how high fares often deter people from travelling by public transport. In combination with competitive journey times to the private car, the costs of public transport journeys should be comparable with private car journeys, which is often not the case in north Wales.

The 1bws ticket charges a flat fare of £6.50 for an unlimited number of bus journeys in a day and we would like to see this expanded to cover all operators and modes. In our Interim Report, we stated that we would consider the suitability of a pilot for a ticket covering all modes of public transport in north Wales with a maximum fare, supported by tap-on/off infrastructure. Having considered initiatives elsewhere, the needs of the region, the potential for modal shift, and potential social and economic benefits, we think that such an initiative is possible in north Wales.

The nature of the all-modes ticket could be based, for example, on the "Klimaticket" in Austria which costs €1095 (£960) a year, or £2.63 a day, for an unlimited number of public transport journeys within the country. It should also benefit from knowledge that can be gained from Cornwall, where the council introduced a simple fares structure for buses, covering all operators, with tap-on/off and caps in towns and in the county as a whole. Inclusion of local rail services is being planned.

We think a trial all-mode ticket should be operated from which lessons can be learned, and impacts evaluated.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend a maximum daily fare, supported by tap-on/off infrastructure for all bus and rail is trialled in north Wales to act as a pilot for a countrywide system.

On affordable fares, we note that the £2 fare cap introduced in England resulted in 35% of respondents to a post-implementation survey stating they made more bus journeys.[33]

We are aware of TfW initiatives to reduce fares for families; for example, when accompanied by an adult, under-11s can travel for free anytime on TfW rail services, and under-16s can travel for free off-peak[34]. Young people, 16-21 are eligible for discounted travel through Welsh Government's 'mytravelpass' website[35].

The Commission has noted that some places in other countries have free public transport, and in Wales there have been fares-free offers on Traws Cymru and in certain places including Swansea and Rhondda Cynon Taf. Evidence on the effects of these is varied, but this could be further explored as a method of encourage modal shift and reducing car use in north Wales. We also recognise that the fare structure for public transport in the region can often be complex and confusing. Any offers or pilot schemes should ensure that fares should be simple and easily understood.

33 - DfT Evaluation of the £2 Bus Fare Cap

34 - TfW – Kids go free on our trains

35 - Welsh Government – My Travel Pass Website

Branding and Wayfinding

An important element of successful public transport networks across the world is an effective brand. This has the effect of ensuring public transport services are visible for potential users, and which may then further attract people to use the services.

The Commission is pleased that the Traws Cymru bus and TfW rail services are effectively branded. There is the opportunity to provide a distinct and consistent brand for the enhanced core bus network that matches with the rail network. Detail within the branding could draw on well-known and distinct local characteristics and features, whilst maintaining consistency at the regional level. Furthermore, there is the opportunity to work with local and community organisations to develop placemaking and wayfinding at, and to and from, bus stops. Whilst this is less likely on its own to create additional patronage, it may improve awareness of the existence of the bus network and increase knowledge of and pride in local assets.

Wayfinding has implications for disabled people and provision should help improve accessibility of public transport for disabled people.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend placemaking and wayfinding at stations and bus stops that is undertaken in consultation with local and community organisations, including disabled people's organisations.

Bus and Railway Stations as Gateways to Towns and Cities

As noted above, the North Wales Metro programme includes 'gateway' projects under development at Wrexham General, Bangor, and Holyhead railway stations. The gateways aim to improve user experience through better facilities and interchange between bus, train and active travel. The Commission notes the commitment to deliver these projects as set out in the National Transport Delivery Plan (actions NWM 3A, 3B, and 3D).

These gateway projects should improve bus provision and active travel routes between the station to the town or city centre; we have reviewed research showing that time and spend in centres is partly dependent on the attractiveness of the entrance to the settlement[36]. The Commission supports stations becoming community hubs, in line with the aspirations of Future Wales; for example, the community fridge at Tywyn Station[37].

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that mobility hubs are created at rail stations, prioritising those that are redeveloped.

36 - Campaign for Better Transport – Fixing the Link

37 - Ffrij Tywyn

The Commission welcomes the fact that TfW has developed station improvement plans for the largest railway stations across the region and supports their development at other stations across the region.

There are opportunities to make stations mobility hubs, with a full range of transport options hosted with community facilities.

We suggest the following features are considered at stations and especially 'gateways':

Provision of good public Wi-Fi as standard at stations to improve access to real time information and online booking and travel planning services.

Effective physical integration between modes including active travel with improved connectivity between town/city centres and bus and rail stations.

Better signposting and information for travellers, including by active travel so that switching modes is easy.

More and better cycle parking that is accessible, covered, easy to locate and use, safe and secure, along with provision over time of charging facilities for e-cycles and e-cargo bikes.

Full accessibility, to support people with disabilities and those carrying luggage, buggies, sports equipment etc.

We support local mobility hubs, especially in villages and rural areas. These bring together public transport with local facilities and active travel opportunities, so they could include for example a bus stop, cycle hire (including e-cycles), cycle parking, local information, car parking and electric vehicle charging points. Local mobility hubs should be developed with local communities who can influence services provided depending on specific local needs. Such hubs can also be a feature of supporting rural tourism.

Integration with Active Travel and Car Access

The Wales Transport Strategy places walking and cycling above public transport in the sustainable transport hierarchy. Access to public transport should be given consideration in relation to that hierarchy while also recognising that provision of car parking in addition to active travel routes could make a difference to demand for public transport, particularly in rural areas.

The Commission is aware of a study undertaken in 2021 by TfW investigating potential park-and-ride sites in north Wales. The study considered two types of park-and-ride sites, which may be characterised as origin-based and destination-based:

Origin based. Sites where people drive or cycle a short distance to a stop or station, then use public transport for most of their journey (for example from home to a local station for a commute).

Destination based. Those where most of the journey is undertaken by car, with the journey being completed by public transport (for example, driving to the outskirts of a town and completing the journey on public transport).

Destination based sites can encourage long distance car travel. To reduce car mileage, origin-based park-and-ride sites offer better opportunities, although we acknowledge that destination-based sites better fit some tourist destination towns. Rural tourism can be well served by the development of Gateways (as described above) and bespoke or seasonal public transport services, such as the Sherpa'r Wyddfa in Eryri National Park.

Within north Wales, the study suggested that origin-based park-and-ride sites would typically be at railway station car parks. However, of greater importance than providing car-based park-and-ride sites is the need to further develop the active travel network and provide appropriate walking and cycle connections at stations and stops.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that park-and-ride sites should in general be provided only after active travel networks and cycle parking are developed and where the public transport leg is the longest part of the journey.

Tourism Hubs

Tourism Hubs are specific locations where tourists can access sustainable transport modes, tourist information and other key services. Hubs can be run by community-led non-profit organisations, where any profits from their operations may be used in the community during the off-peak months. These hubs might offer cycle and e-cycle hire, have control of parking charges and traffic as well as public active transport incentives. Placed at tourist focal points, a tourist hub can improve the experience for visitors, while also promoting the local area and businesses.

We have also considered the multi-country Alpine Pearls initiative that provides opportunities for visitors to enjoy a car free holiday. It operates shuttle buses, activity-specific buses, electric car, cycle and e-cycle hire. Guest cards, such as the Julian Alps Bohinj Card[38] at €30 for 5 days offers free bus and train travel, free parking, free entrance to attractions in the area and discounts on local goods and services.

It is important that more visitors can move around the region using public transport and active travel and we would like to see more done in north Wales, using the ideas of physical hubs and bundled packages of benefits. These initiatives could be developed in partnership with major attraction owners, Go North Wales, Visit Wales and CADW.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend joint working between transport service providers and tourist related businesses to develop a guest card that offers visitors a package of sustainable travel offers, attraction entrance and goods and services discounts.

38 - Julian Alps: Bohinj Card - Bohinj - uradna stran destinacije - TNP, Julijske Alpe, Bohinjsko jezero

Part 3: Planning and Management

Land Use and Planning

The Commission has been struck by the extent to which the patterns of land use and previous planning decisions have made it difficult to access significant parts of the region without a car. Out-of-town shopping and food outlets, business parks, new housing and low-density development have undermined high streets and moved development away from public transport routes and stations to places that are only accessible by car. These developments have often been accompanied by free car parking.

This leads to traffic congestion in and around these developments, locks people into dependence on car use and excludes people without car access from these places and the jobs and facilities they offer. The Commission has noted that much of this development has occurred incrementally, but that this approach to development is contrary to the current national development framework, Future Wales: the National Plan 2040.

Welsh Government should seek ways to constructively challenge and support local authorities to help them avoid car-based and car-dependent development in the future.

The Welsh Government's Technical Advice Note (TAN) 18[39] provides guidance on integration of land use and transport planning, location of developments, regional transport plans, parking and design of developments. We understand that this document was last updated in 2007 and predates Welsh Government's climate emergency declaration, Llwybr Newydd and many other policies.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend Welsh Government reviews TAN18 guidance to ensure policy intent translates to implementation and that the review leads to inclusion of specific guidance on planning for active travel, provision for buses, and scale of provision of car parking.

39 - Technical advice note (TAN) 18: transport | GOV.WALES

Digital Connectivity

Digital, as well as physical, connectivity is important. Recent advances in the speed and capacity of digital connectivity have enabled significant opportunities in choice of business and home location, and in some cases will reduce the need to travel.

There are locations in the region, primarily in central and western rural areas, with poor digital connectivity. This is a barrier to remote working and access to goods and services.

Digital connectivity helps people maintain access to services (including banking and healthcare) and allows them to avoid longer distance travel. On-line grocery shopping can also reduce car mileage travelled, but delivery services need to be made by sustainable transport to be fully effective.

Whilst providing effective digital connections and services is important, ensuring people across north Wales are digitally literate is equally as important.

There is a higher proportion of digitally excluded people in older age groups and with disabilities. It is important to improve their digital literacy or support they can be given. This is relevant in north Wales because approximately 23% of the population are aged 65 and above[40], compared with 21% in Wales. Conwy has the highest proportion of people aged 65 and over in the country (28%).

Planning for accessibility should recognise the contribution of digital connectivity in reducing the need to travel and while still providing access to goods and services and the ability to working at or near to home.

7% OF PEOPLE IN WALES ARE NOT ONLINE

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend support for digital literacy schemes, such as the Digital Communities Wales programme,[41] and would like to see campaigns to raise awareness of their existence.

40 - Population estimates by local authority and year (StatsWales)

41 - Digital Communities Wales Website

Enabling Changes in Travel Behaviour

Travel decisions are made based on sometimes limited knowledge of options and costs. Changing the way a journey is made can be difficult without good information, and sometimes incentives, to try an unfamiliar route, service or mode of transport.

Some travel, such as commuting or travel to school, is similar every day and can become a habitual. Other types of travel, such as a leisure or shopping trip, may need considerable planning. By providing information, education and incentives, it is possible for local authorities to influence decisions on both habitual and one-off trips. This may include making travellers aware of implications on their health and the environment.

Behaviour-based approaches to support modal shift recognise issues of time and cost and also people's habits and preferences. These types of intervention support increased use of infrastructure improvements and transport services. These interventions include temporarily discounted tickets for new services, have cycle and e-cycle try-out events and loan schemes, working with children at school to encourage walking and cycling, working with employers to create cycle parking, showers and bus and train ticketing incentives and working hours, and working with event organisers on event timings and ticketing.

Collaboration & Partnerships

Effective partnership working between the public and private sectors is essential to lead and manage changes in travel behaviours. Collaboration across the border with English authorities is important for cross-border service provision. Many of the priorities identified and recommendations made by the Commission can only be delivered if organisations work collaboratively across the border.

There is also scope for learning to be shared - for example, the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has recently consulted on its plan for franchising bus services. Cheshire West and Chester, with the Department for Transport, are currently piloting e-scooters in Chester.

As a good example of cross-border collaboration, Growth Track 360 is an alliance of business, political and public sector leaders working towards the goal of securing £1 billion of rail investment in north Wales and Cheshire over 20 years. This group has previously secured improvement in rail services for north Wales as well as commitment to future investment.

Strategic Transport Partnerships

We have identified two large travel-to-work areas: the Deeside and Wrexham Industrial Parks and employment areas (which are private sector dominated), and the Bangor/Ynys Môn/Caernarfon employment area (which is public sector dominated).

In the north-west, where the employment cluster is public sector and education dominated (Bangor University, Coleg Llandrillo Menai, Ysbyty Gwynedd), there is an opportunity to create a public sector model of best practice in relation to travel planning. With the private sector dominated north-east, we would hope to see smaller employers benefit from the examples and practices of the large employers, both through the supply chain and through demonstration of business benefits –for example adopting different approaches to travelling to work.

Both the north-east and north-west employment areas could benefit from strategic partnerships working to develop and deliver initiatives to encourage better travel choices. **These partnerships should be set up and facilitated by Welsh Government to undertake the following:**

Identifying issues for employee travel - for example, availability of public transport, availability of active travel routes, traffic congestion, availability of parking space, safety of travel at unsocial hours as a result of shiftwork.

Identifying operational transport issues for businesses and organisations - for example supply chains and labour markets - both can be improved with appropriate transport initiatives.

The two partnerships may require differences in approach. For example, actions could be:

Public sector - collaboration between employers and transport providers to pilot or pioneer behaviour change initiatives, and to work with health authorities to develop and monitor healthy transport initiatives.

Private sector – collaborations between employers, local authorities and transport operators to develop changes in practice, to offer incentives and salary sacrifice schemes for cycle and electric vehicle purchase.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend that Strategic Transport partnerships for organisational travel planning should be developed by the Welsh Government working with local authorities, the North Wales CJC and major employers in the employment areas in north-east Wales (Deeside and Wrexham) and north-west Wales (centred on Bangor).

Travel Planning & Healthy Travel Charters

A combination of Travel Plans and Healthy Travel Charters developed for organisations across the region can support people to embed sustainable travel behaviours. Public Health Wales has run the scheme in south Wales for several years, but there is no scheme in north Wales.

We welcome the commitment in the National Transport Delivery Plan to produce tailored Travel Plan guidance with an effective support programme for their roll-out. Businesses and organisations across Wales can sign a Healthy Travel Charter, outlining the commitments of organisations over the next two or three years to supporting sustainable transport initiatives. We consider this to be an important step in supporting modal shift across the region through committing organisations to sustainable transport targets.

We have noted that Healthy Travel Wales[42] is currently developing a charter for north Wales and would encourage organisations to sign-up to this when available.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend that employers in north Wales are given the option to sign up to a Healthy Travel Charter, following the south Wales model.

Schools

Student travel and escort travel contributes to motor traffic congestion at peak times. Local authorities can play a role in providing advice to schools and parents on sustainable travel to school options and can support children to develop their cycling proficiency. When added to local safety improvements and environmental works the impacts can be considerable.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**
>
> We recommend that local authorities should expand their work with schools and parents to encourage and support sustainable travel for children, parents and staff.

Teithio Llesol Cymru
Healthy Travel Wales

42 - Healthy Travel Wales

Reducing the Need for Travel

Welsh Government has set a target to reduce car mileage per person by 10% by 2030. It has also set a target for 30% of the Welsh workforce to work remotely on a regular basis. These targets support the decarbonisation targets set out in Net Zero Wales.

The mix of industry in north Wales means that many occupations are in sectors such as healthcare, tourism and manufacturing. These industries have a low lower propensity for remote working.

The 2021 Census data shows an encouraging shift in the number of people working at or near home.[43] While the average rate of remote working across the region is 21.8%, there are significant pockets of higher rates, including east Conwy, the north of Ynys Môn and rural Denbighshire, where over 30% of people work at or near to home on a regular basis [44].

Digital connectivity, discussed above, will assist with reducing the need to travel.

43 - Method of travel to workplace - Census Maps, ONS

44 - Travel to work, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

45 - Transport systems need to be made safe, healthy and sustainable (who.int)

46 - Woonerf: Inclusive and Livable Dutch Street (humankind.city)

47 - Sustrans – Helping people through the cost of living crisis and growing our economy

48 - Campaign for Better Transport – Fixing the Link

Management of Streets

We welcome the introduction of a default 20 mph speed limit in urban areas. Reducing the speed limit will make streets more attractive for people walking and cycling and enhance road safety[45]. It is expected that this will encourage more people to walk and cycle in communities in north Wales.

School streets, area wide traffic management and Dutch inspired 'living streets' (such as Woonerven[46]) have been used in many communities to reduce collisions and improve safety.
In some areas, such measures have been controversial.

Planners should collaborate with a wide range of people, including those in neighbouring streets, in re-designing streets to make them all-inclusive. Creating street environments that prioritising walking and cycling for short journeys can increase spending on high streets and within town centres[47,] as well as increase time spent within the urban environment[48].

Further Actions to Enable and Encourage Modal Shift

Service improvements, better integration and simplification of fare structures will make public transport more attractive. **In addition, other actions to enable and encourage greater sustainable transport use include:**

Improved marketing and social marketing through awareness campaigns for sustainable transport services.

Engagement with communities to demonstrate the benefits of reducing car usage.

Undertaking demonstrator, trial and other events such as offering free e-cycle loan and car-free days

Road User Charging

Road-user charging includes distance-based charging and congestion charging. It links the use of transport infrastructure with a payment and allows demand to be managed. Revenue raised may be used to support sustainable transport measures.

An independent review of road user charging was undertaken in 2020 by Derek Turner CBE, on behalf of Welsh Government. The report considered the potential merits of introducing road-user charging across Wales and concluded that it could be an effective measure to deliver a more equitable, efficient, and sustainable transport system.

The report noted that different approaches may be required in different parts of the country. It recommended that a National Policy Framework for equitable road-user charging should be developed This has led to a commitment with the National Transport Delivery Plan to develop a policy for fair road-user charging by 2026 (action BC4).

Cardiff Council has recently announced plans to implement a road user charging scheme[49], and there is an opportunity to learn from this in the Welsh context. We have considered the potential for introducing road user charging in north Wales to assist in encouraging people to use sustainable transport modes. One issue we note in one of the most congested parts of north Wales is the many cross-border movements. We do not consider there to be a case for introducing road charging in the region at this point in time, but we acknowledge that national policy on this matter will develop.

49 - Cardiff Council - Road user payment

Part 4: Conclusion and Next Steps

The publication of this report completes the work of the North Wales Transport Commission. It is now for Welsh Government to decide how to take forward the recommendations we have made.

We have been struck by the appetite for progress in north Wales, and we hope this report will provide a strategic plan from which delivery momentum can be gained and maintained.

Our purpose was to make specific recommendations to Welsh Government on ways to build sustainable travel and transport schemes in north Wales. This final section summarises our conclusions and recommendations, all of which contribute to delivering an efficient, high quality and sustainable transport network for north Wales.

All the internal work and technical material produced for and by the Commission will be made available to assist Welsh Government, TfW, local authorities, the North Wales CJC, Network Rail, the Department for Transport and any other relevant delivery bodies.

We have benefited from the work and engagement of many bodies, representative organisations, consultancies and individuals. We would like to extend our thanks to all those who have supported our work. Thanks are also due to our technical team, drawn from individuals in WSP, Arup, Jacobs, and TfW.

Next Steps

The network is designed to be operated as a whole, rather than as disparate elements, and any work undertaken should be done with this in mind as a guiding principle.

There is understandable interest in when different measures might be implemented and this is a matter for Welsh Government, TfW, local authorities, Network Rail and the Department for Transport. This report will also impact on the North Wales CJC's work to develop the regional transport plan for north Wales, which is due for approval by Welsh Government by the end of June 2025. We are keen that the gap between publication of this report and finalising the Regional Transport Plan does not impact progress.

Short Term Priorities

Should Welsh Government accept the recommendations, we have identified a number of priority pieces of work to be progressed at the earliest opportunity. Welsh Government should enable a multi-modal delivery team to provide leadership and coordination within the region to deliver the recommendations of the North Wales Transport Commission. We are aware that some of this work is in progress, and in some cases is well overdue.

These next steps reflect either:

A. **Priority: The strategic importance and effectiveness of the scheme to achieve the Commission's desired outcomes.**

And/or

B. **Deliverability: The ability to commence work at pace following publication of the Commission's recommendations.**

In identifying these actions, we hope to make sure that momentum on progress can be maintained.

Rail: Take forward work to:

- Address North Wales Main Line Phase 1 infrastructure constraints to enable five trains per hour, including one express service, to operate.
- Implement rail capacity improvements at and around Chester Railway Station to enable five trains per hour, including one express service, to operate effectively and improve cross border travel.
- Remove the rail capacity constraint at the Padeswood Cement Works to enable more frequent and reliable passenger services on the Borderlands line, to link north Wales to Merseyside.
- Implement a signalling improvement scheme at Gobowen and address capacity constraints to enable two trains per hour to operate effectively on the Shrewsbury-Wrexham-Chester line.

Bus: Develop and begin implementation of the enhanced bus network and frequencies developed by TfW and the local authorities, supported by a commitment to multi-year funding for the transformation bus network (including Fflecsi services), in advance of legislative changes relating to the franchising model.

Integration: Develop a pilot for a ticket covering all modes of public transport in north Wales with a maximum fare, supported by tap-on/off infrastructure.

Active travel: Prioritise:

- Development of the highest impact active travel routes, supported by a national prioritisation matrix, connecting key employment areas and population centres.

- Establish active travel delivery units in TfW to work closely with local authorities and expand the pace of network development.

Roads: Produce guidance for local authorities on developing a balanced parking management strategy, including all types of on-street and off-street parking.

Planning: Welsh Government to review and update TAN18 guidance to ensure policy intent translates to implementation. This should include guidance on car parking standards and design in new developments and support developments focussed on active travel and public transport rather than building in car dependency.

Enabling changes in travel behaviour: Develop strategic partnerships with local authorities and major employers at the Deeside and Wrexham Industrial and Bangor-Caernarfon- Ynys Môn areas to:

- Remove barriers facing employees travelling to and from these locations;

- Identify how public partners can support these employment areas; and

- See what businesses and organisation can do to promote sustainable transport.

Summary of Recommendations

🚆 Rail

1. Implement rail capacity improvements at and around Chester Station to enable electrification and five trains per hour, including one express service.

2. Prioritise delivery of the North Wales Main Line Phase 1 infrastructure improvements between Crewe and Llandudno Junction to enable operation of five trains per hour, including one express service, and to reduce journey times.

3. Deliver North Wales Main Line Phase 2 and 3 proposals to enable operation of five trains per hour, including one express service between Crewe and Bangor (Phase 2) and Holyhead (Phase 3), and to reduce journey times.

4. Deliver electrification of the North Wales Main Line in a phased manner consistent with the infrastructure development Phases 1 to 3. To be ready for electrification, development work must be undertaken, and a business case established.

5. Remove the rail capacity constraint at the Padeswood Cement Works south of Buckley Station on the Borderlands Line.

6. Implement infrastructure improvements on the Borderlands Line to achieve four trains per hour and reduce journey times, including two direct trains to Liverpool.

7. Work with Liverpool City Region and Merseyrail to maximise the integration of services between the Borderlands Line and Merseyrail network.

8. Provide a station in Deeside Industrial Park on the Borderlands Line with supporting active travel and public transport access to the station.

9. Develop and implement proposals at Shotton Station to create a high quality and fully accessible interchange between the Borderlands Line and North Wales Main Line to improve active travel and public transport access.

10. Implement a signalling improvement scheme at Gobowen on the Shrewsbury-Wrexham-Chester Line and dual tracking between Wrexham and Chester to address capacity constraints to enable two passenger trains per hour and freight services to operate effectively and reliably.

11. Continue to consider line capacity enhancements, increased service frequencies and train capacity enhancements on the Conwy Valley and Cambrian Coast Lines.

12. Develop a plan for further increases of service capacity during the peak visitor season on the Conwy Valley and Cambrian Coast Lines.

13. Improve the allocation of the rail fleet in north Wales in the short term to ensure rolling stock meets user needs for the types of journey people are making and procure additional trains including an electric fleet for the North Wales Main Line in the medium term.

14. Safeguard former rail lines from future development and develop walking and cycling routes along them where appropriate, with high quality bus services for the communities alongside them.

15. Consider locations for and methods to develop rail based light logistics freight services.

Buses and Coaches

16. We support the proposed legislative changes to allow bus services to be franchised and we recommend that local authorities and Transport for Wales prepare for and implement changes to bus services prior to and in preparation for franchising and that Welsh Government provides multi-year funding to support these services.

17. We recommend the introduction of a network of regional coastal bus services with a frequency of two to four buses an hour extending into the evenings that link major settlements, employment sites and transport interchanges.

18. We recommend the introduction of a network of regional rural bus services with an hourly service frequency extending into the evenings that link rural settlements and are operated by a fleet of buses that are comfortable for longer journeys.

19. We recommend the proposed Traws Cymru enhancements to routes, service frequencies and hours of operation are carried out in the short term.

20. We recommend local bus networks are developed in preparation for franchising by Transport for Wales and local authorities working collaboratively with their communities and employers.

21. We recommend making suitable pilot Fflecsi Dynamic Demand Responsive services permanent, and introducing additional Fflecsi services in other areas where experience from the pilot and other schemes suggest they would be a good complement to scheduled bus proposals. Schemes should be designed with local community involvement.

22. We recommend that Transport for Wales and local authorities collaborate with communities, particularly in rural areas, to help fund and deliver community transport services that meet otherwise unmet need.

23. We recommend a pilot is run and evaluated of a 'total transport services contract' that pools budgets and fleets to provide the services for education, patient, social services and community transport.

24. We recommend that the current proposal for a coach service between Bangor and Carmarthen is progressed together with its required interchange infrastructure. In addition, we recommend a study is undertaken of other potential north-south and cross-border coach routes.

25. We recommend that local highway authorities and the North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agent (on behalf of Welsh Government) implement bus priority proposals and review proposed bus service improvements to identify and implement further required bus priority measures.

26. We recommend making the Sherpa'r Wyddfa bus services permanent, provide long term funding for them and investigating how services can be integrated further with the wider bus and railway networks.

27. We recommend the creation of a partnership where Sherpa'r Wyddfa and other public transport services can be supported by innovative sources of funding including parking revenues if available and appropriate.

28. We recommend an investigation of the benefits of seasonal and tourist bus services, like the Sherpa'r Wyddfa, in other locations in north Wales to support the visitor economy and promote integration with wider rail and bus networks.

Providing for Active Travel

29. Priority should be given to the construction of junctions, crossings and other infrastructure that have the greatest potential for creating the most increase in use, these could be new or upgraded existing facilities.

    These may typically be in urban areas, but in rural areas enhancing safety and providing routes connecting smaller communities to larger settlements is important.

30. We recommend that a North Wales Active Travel Unit is established to work with local authorities, the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee, Welsh Government Strategic Road Network division and the North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agent to deliver active travel networks that are ambitious, in line with the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy and are delivered at pace.

31. We recommend that local authorities develop multi-year delivery programmes for their active travel schemes and engage all relevant departments in scheme development and delivery.

32. We recommend that Transport for Wales' method for route prioritisation is adopted by local authorities and Transport for Wales to target investment to maximise use of the active travel network.

33. We recommend that high-quality active travel routes should be prioritised using Transport for Wales' prioritisation method to target investment to schemes that maximise volume of use of the network and link population centres with major employment sites.

34. We recommend that local authorities are required to set out how they plan to manage and maintain active travel networks as a condition of receiving Active Travel Fund grants.

35. We recommend the development of exemplar urban active travel schemes in north Wales that connect communities and housing developments to urban centres and employment sites.

36. We recommend a programme of works is instigated to implement changes to the existing highway network in urban areas to re-allocate road space and prioritise junctions for people walking and cycling.

37. We recommend planning and developing the rural network of routes that connect with National Cycle Network Route 5 on the north coast, and an inter-urban route between Deeside and Wrexham.

38. We recommend that routes forming part of the rights of way network are improved to a standard suitable for everyday active travel journeys where that would increase everyday active travel use.

39. We recommend implementation of Quiet Lanes by local authorities where this will help create a more extensive active travel network, and therefore the ability to designate Quiet Lanes in Wales should be formalised.

40. We recommend that funding streams additional to the Active Travel Fund are investigated so that active travel routes can be developed to visitor attractions.

41. We recommend that high impact active travel components of schemes paused by the Roads Review are developed in line with the Review Panel's recommendations.

42. We recommend that all bus and rail stations and interchanges are served by direct, high-quality pedestrian and cycle routes that have priority, and have more and better cycle parking.

43. We recommend developing methods to increase e-cycle ownership, including loan and grant schemes.

44. We recommend that a public cycle hire scheme is investigated in Wrexham and other locations, and community cycle hire schemes are investigated for other locations in the region.

The Car and Road Transport

45. We recommend that parking strategy and standards and planning consents should ensure that new residential and non-residential developments provide sufficient electric vehicle charging points to meet future demand and incentivise electric vehicle uptake.

46. We recommend increasing the number of car clubs through joint working with car club providers, including community car club providers, in urban and rural areas and at stations, in workplaces and at mobility hubs.

47. We recommend that Welsh Government produces guidance for local authorities on developing a parking management strategy, including all types of on-street and off-street parking and advice on charging.

48. We recommend development of a network of suitable heavy goods vehicle road-side facilities in the region.

Integration

49. We recommend that Transport for Wales, local authorities and bus operators should work together ahead of bus franchising to develop and introduce timetables with increased frequencies and better interchange possibilities.

50. We recommend the development of fully integrated ticketing across rail, bus, and where possible community transport, using a digital platform and app. Welsh Government and Transport for Wales should set up the necessary processes with timescales for delivery of a digital platform and app that provides this full integration, once franchising has been introduced.

51. We recommend a maximum daily fare, supported by tap-on/off infrastructure for all bus and rail is trialled in north Wales to act as a pilot for a countrywide system.

52. We recommend placemaking and wayfinding at stations and bus stops that is undertaken in consultation with local and community organisations, including disabled people's organisations.

53. We recommend that mobility hubs are created at rail stations, prioritising those that are redeveloped.

54. We recommend that park-and-ride sites should in general be provided only after active travel networks and cycle parking are developed and where the public transport leg is the longest part of the journey.

55. We recommend joint working between transport service providers and tourist related businesses to develop a guest card that offers visitors a package of sustainable travel offers, attraction entrance and goods and services discounts.

Planning and Management

Land use planning

56. We recommend Welsh Government reviews TAN18 guidance to ensure policy intent translates to implementation and that the review leads to inclusion of specific guidance on planning for active travel, provision for buses, and scale of provision of car parking.

Digital Connectivity

57. We recommend support for digital literacy schemes, such as the Digital Communities Wales programme, and would like to see campaigns to raise awareness of their existence.

Enabling Change In Travel Behaviour

58. We recommend that Strategic Transport partnerships for organisational travel planning should be developed by the Welsh Government working with local authorities, the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee and major employers in the employment areas in north-east Wales (Deeside and Wrexham) and north-west Wales (centred on Bangor).

59. We recommend that employers in north Wales are given the option to sign up to a Healthy Travel Charter, following the south Wales model.

60. We recommend that local authorities should expand their work with schools and parents to encourage and support sustainable travel for children, parents and staff.

Annex 01

Our Process and Ways Of Working

The North Wales Transport Commission was established in March 2022. It is a panel of independent commissioners tasked with recommending how to build a sustainable and integrated transport system for north Wales. The Commission has met frequently as a group to analyse and discuss a broad range of transport issues across north Wales.

We were tasked with considering the problems, opportunities, challenges and objectives for realising a sustainable integrated transport system in north Wales.

In line with our terms of reference we have taken a multi-modal approach, looking at all of north Wales to consider how modal shift can be achieved in both urban and rural areas, using the collaborative approach taken to the South East Wales Transport Commission, by:

- Analysing frequent journeys taking place within and through the region by road, including where they begin and end, at different times of the day and within different seasons, including freight.

- Analysing how public transport and active travel are used within and through the region, and where those journeys begin and end. This may include journeys that start and end outside north Wales.

- Considering where the absence of public transport, car ownership or safe active travel corridors creates significant issues in communities.

- Examining the current programme of interventions to support people in north Wales to achieve a mode-shift, including the north Wales Metro programme and other relevant activity already taking place in the region to support active travel.

Throughout our work, we have:

- Been open to the views of the public and stakeholders including, business groups, social partners, environmental groups, transport users' groups and local and national political representatives.

- Considered the needs of current and future generations, considering immediate problems and future trends, such as the impact of low carbon alternative fuels and emerging transport-related technologies.

- Considered social, economic, cultural and environmental issues.

- Considered how to encourage positive behavioural responses from travellers to an enhanced multi-modal network of travel opportunities in north Wales.

- Been considerate of innovative interventions and funding solutions, including consideration of governance, costs, financing, planning approach and programme / project management, and any need for improvements.

- Operated independently of the Welsh Government. The Commission has been served by a Secretariat who support both the running of the Commission and delivering its work.

Guiding Principles

The Commission's starting point was that travel patterns in north Wales need to change, and that change is possible.

Public transport and active travel in Wales can be better than the current services available, and it must improve if we are to see people rely less on their cars - particularly for shorter journeys.

We are aware of the big differences between the transport challenges faced by urban and rural communities, and we have given emphasis to both in our analysis and recommendations.

For the urban community the challenge is how to get the best out of the existing infrastructure, enabling journeys to be made by a combination of rail, bus and active travel, with integrated ticketing and timetabling. Investing in existing infrastructure to make it work better comes first, with new infrastructure only being recommended if the current infrastructure cannot be improved to the standards required to meet priorities.

For the rural community, designing an efficient, practical bus network that meets the needs of residents is crucial. The car will continue to have an important role alongside the bus network, but they need to work together. We are convinced that demand response transport has a role to play in making sure that services are available at the time of day that people need them.

We understand the seasonal challenges from having many important visitor attractions in the region. It is important that the visitor economy can thrive without putting undue pressure upon the travel needs of residents. These are the principles which we have applied across our work and final recommendations.

Policy Context

Alongside our terms of reference, the Commission's recommendations consider the relevant policies Llwybr Newydd: The Wales Transport Strategy, the Welsh Government's response to the Roads Review and the Union Connectivity Review.

In undertaking our work, we have drawn on the five ways of working set out in the **Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:**

- **Long term -** We have looked at potential future scenarios as well as the current situation.

- **Prevention -** We have considered how better transport can improve or prevent problems such as social isolation, lack of employment opportunities and poor access to goods and services.

- **Integration -** We spent time looking at the ways in which better transport can deliver for other aims, such as improving health, air quality and helping to meet climate change goals.

- **Collaboration -** We have established relationships with a wide range of stakeholders across central government, local authorities, stakeholder bodies and other representative organisations.

- **Involvement -** We have engaged with the people who use and experience the transport network each day through correspondence, meetings and our public survey.

Llwybr Newydd sets out the Welsh Government's vision for 'an accessible, sustainable, and efficient transport system'. It is underpinned by three priorities:

1. Bring Services to people in order to reduce the need to travel.

2. Allow people and goods to move easily from door to door by accessible, sustainable transport.

3. Encourage people to make the change more sustainable transport.

These priorities support the Welsh Government's wellbeing ambitions, comprising people and communities, the environment, the economy, and Welsh language and culture.

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A Prosperous Wales

A Resilient Wales

A More Equal Wales

A Healthier Wales

A Wales of Cohesive Communities

A Wales of Vibrant Culture & Thriving Welsh Language

A Globally Responsible Wales

The Future of Road Investment in Wales[50] was published in February 2023 alongside the National Transport Delivery Plan (NTDP). Welsh Government's response to the review, along with NTDP, emphasises support for modal shift and carbon emission reduction and we have focused on this when considering the strategic interventions needed for better transport provision across the region, and the steps that can be taken to achieve better networks, more useable services and fewer people travelling by private car. Therefore, existing roads should work to the maximum of their potential for:

- Walking and Cycling,

- Public Transport,

- Ultra-low Emissions Vehicles,

- and then Other Private Motor Vehicles.

Full use of the capacity of existing infrastructure is a theme that the Commission follows across all modes.

The Union Connectivity Review Final Report recognised north-east Wales as part of a discrete cross-border economic area and noted that the North Wales Main Line is a key route for communities and businesses to the North West of England. The report recommended improving connectivity between north Wales and North West England on the North Wales Coast Main Line for faster journey times, more resilience and capacity. The report also raised the need for UK Government to collaborate with the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the need for an appropriate level of funding.

Lastly, as well as the North Wales Metro plans, we have also considered the projects and programmes included in the National Transport Development Plan that relate to north Wales.

The commission has considered this wider policy context in the development of its recommendations, concluding that significantly more can be made of the existing transport network. We recognise that improving the network is not an end in itself, and the network must serve to make people's lives better. We believe that providing a sustainable transport network that reflects the places people want to go, when they want to go, in a convenient and cost-effective way is at the heart of this.

Evidence

Our understanding of problems and opportunities in the region has been refined through site visits, specialist advice, research and stakeholder briefings.

1. **Data Analysis and Modelling -** The Commission's work has been informed by the analysis of a significant amount of data and analysis. We have been presented with technical studies and transport modelling carried out on our behalf, along with the considerable number of previous studies that have been undertaken in the region to identify the issues and opportunities relating to transport.

   This helped us both understand the problems in the region, and how people already travel.

2. **Site Visits -** The Commission visited different parts of the region to understand local areas and the ways in which issues and solutions must be tailored to suit the specific needs of communities. Each site visit was based at a key location that allowed us to travel extensively in the region – seeing places in person to understand issues better. We made four visits based in Wrexham, Llandudno and North East Wales, Bangor and Menai Bridge. We met local representatives and officials.

3. **International Best Practice** – We wanted to know what has been achieved internationally and within the UK in regions similar to north Wales, which has a diverse economy, a sometimes-challenging topography and significant rural areas. We commissioned a desktop review to provide evidence. The review allowed us to understand what the components of an integrated sustainable transport network should be, to demonstrate delivery is possible, and to learn lessons for north Wales.

4. **Stakeholder Engagement -** One of our priorities has been to ensure we speak to stakeholders throughout the process to refine our knowledge and understanding of the issues, challenges and opportunities facing the region. We have spoken with people who live in and are familiar with north Wales. Listening to local people and organisations has greatly improved our understanding of the issues.

Following publication of our Progress Statement and subsequent Interim Report, we carried out two periods of consultation with politicians, local authorities, business, organisations, and the public. These consultations comprised of the following:

- Discussions with elected members and senior officials – meetings have been held with elected members of the Senedd, Members of Parliament and local authorities.

- Representatives from Eryri National Park, and Ambition North Wales joined meetings of the Commission to discuss their aims for transport, issues that are faced and potential effective solutions.

- Requesting feedback and evidence from a broad range of interested parties -sending the Progress Statement and Interim Report to over 80 organisations and businesses.

- Secretariat Engagement – our secretariat has met or corresponded with many individuals and organisations from industry, government, public and third sector organisations.

- Online survey – As part of this we undertook an online survey and received 268 responses from the public and local businesses.

A summary of the process of stakeholder engagement, and our findings is presented in Annex 2.

Annex 02

Stakeholder and Survey Report

Following the publication of its interim report, the Commission continued to meet stakeholders to discuss the draft recommendations. The Commission also received written responses from stakeholders and a survey was launched to gather the views of the people and businesses of north Wales. The public survey received 268 responses (253 from individuals and 15 from organisations/businesses). Meetings were held by the Chair, Commissioners and/or the secretariat. Feedback was received from 24 organisations as part of these meetings and through written responses.

The majority of stakeholders were supportive of the Commission's recommendations in the Interim Report.

The survey shows that the people of north Wales are unhappy with the current state of transport in north Wales. Asked whether existing services were effective in serving the needs of the north Wales population, 80% disagreed for rail, 77% disagreed for bus, and 57% disagreed for Active Travel.

Of those who responded to the public survey and had read the Commission's interim report 48% felt the Commission's recommendations effectively represent the priorities for rail in north Wales. Similarly, the results were 68% for bus, 51% for active travel, and 71% for integration.
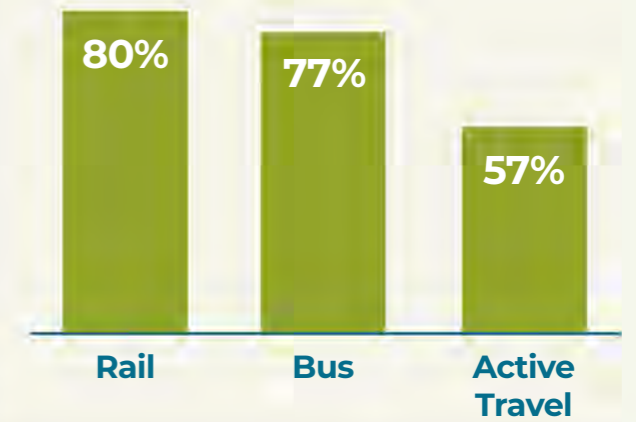
268 **Public Survey Responses**

253 Individuals
15 Organisations

24 **Meetings**

With elected representatives and organisations
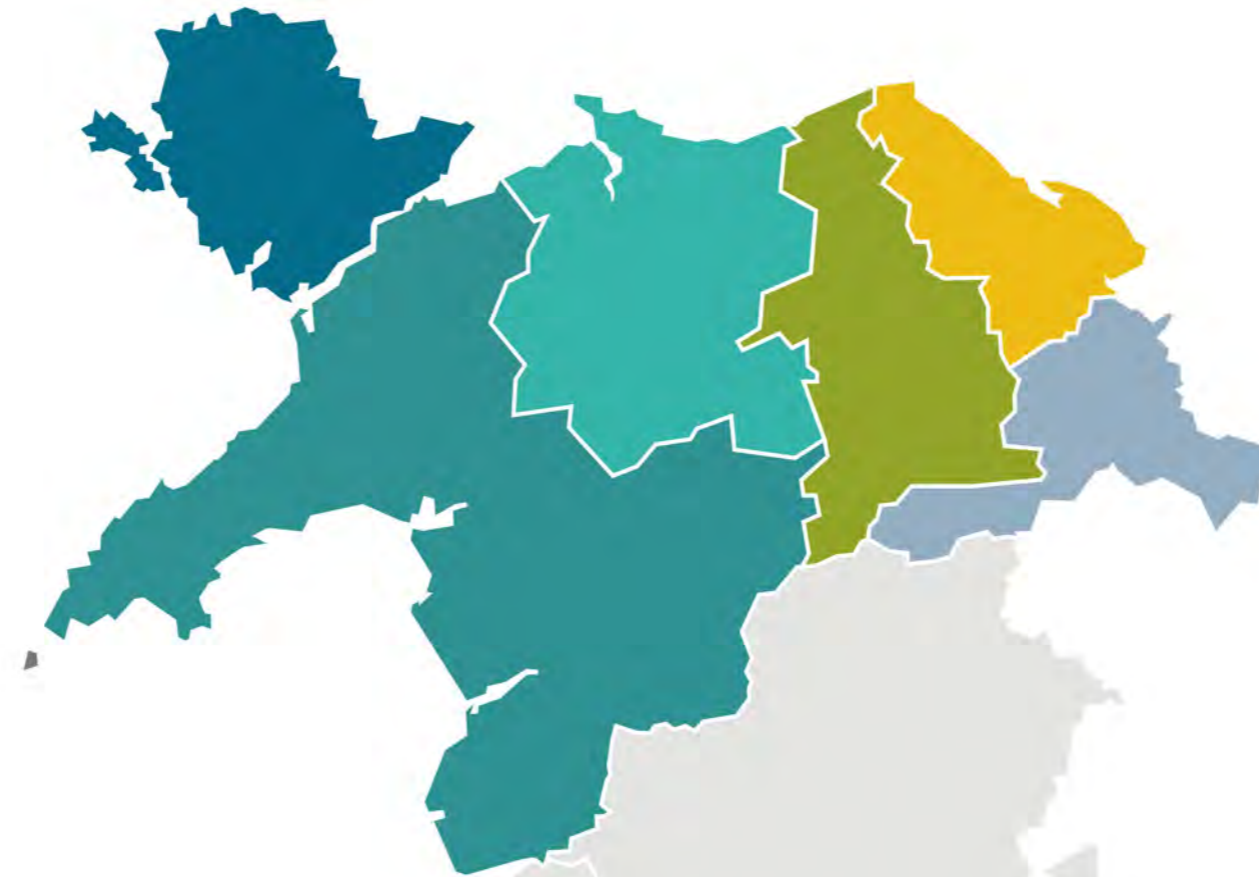
Respondents that do not think existing services are effective in serving the needs of the population

80% Rail
77% Bus
57% Active Travel

Key Themes

Finance

The Car and Road Transport

Freight

Cross-border Transport

Delivery

Rural

Integration

Resilience of the Menai Crossings

Public Transport

Active Travel

The Visitor Economy

100

101

Key Themes from Stakeholder Engagement

Finance

There was concern about finances and current budget constraints, particularly for revenue finance for maintaining infrastructure such as active travel paths and maintaining bus routes once established.

These concerns are based in fact and there is no doubt that the recommendations in this report will require both the Welsh and UK Governments to make decisions on investment in transport in north Wales that address what many view as historic under-investment.

Delivery

Some respondents indicated that they would like to see specific suggestions from the Commission about how recommendations should be delivered. For example, greater detail on how rail recommendations would be delivered given that several key issues relate to infrastructure in England. Several noted that a delivery unit, like the Burns Delivery Unit in the south-east, should be set up to deliver the final report's recommendations.

Public Transport

There was wide agreement that public transport in north Wales was not good enough in terms of frequency, operating hours and cost. This was also supported by the results of the public survey.

Cross-border Transport

Many respondents emphasised the need for Welsh Government, Transport for Rail, Network Rail, UK Government, and others to work together. There was recognition of the fact that tackling transport issues in north Wales will require action in England.

Some respondents had concerns about cross-border bus services and how they would work under Welsh Government's proposed franchise model. The Commission acknowledges these concerns and points out that the Bus Transformation Network, either prior to legislation or under new franchising arrangements, needs to recognise cross-border movements, ticketing, and quality of service. Large areas across the border will be affected by Welsh proposals and need to be considered to ensure that end-to-end journeys can be made by public transport across the wider region.

The Car and Road Transport

Some respondents felt that the Commission did not give enough consideration to the impacts of the Roads Review and the role of the car in north wales. It was also felt that the Commission should recognise the importance of roads in enabling better public transport and active travel, and the car to rural communities.

We have sought to address these concerns in this report with separate sections on these regionally significant issues and a new section on the role of the car and roads.

There were mixed responses to the idea of road user charging. Many were in favour, but a sizeable minority were opposed to any measure that would penalise drivers. This report considers road user charging more in a future context, rather than making recommendations for immediate action.

Rural

Respondents noted the transport challenges of rural communities and wanted to see the Commission recognise the importance of roads to rural communities.

Active Travel

As noted above, there was some serious concern about funding for the ongoing maintenance of active travel paths.

Some stakeholders were also concerned that the active travel component of projects halted following the roads review could be lost. Stakeholders also believed that delivery of active travel had not met the aspirations of the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013.

Resilience of the Menai Crossings

Some stakeholders felt that a third crossing was the only option, with the other options historically suggested being insufficient to maintain the island's resilience. However, other stakeholders made suggestions for improving the resilience of the existing crossings, such as: doing more to support rail west of Bangor; using road user charging to smooth out peaks in demand; and three-lane tidal flow on Britannia Bridge.

Key Themes from Public Survey

The following is based the responses received to open-ended questions, allowing us to gain a better understanding of the public's view on public transport in north Wales and the Commission's Interim Report.

Public Transport

Most respondents highlighted that there is a lack of confidence when using public transport services at present, with little trust in its reliability. Respondents felt that the cost of public transport is high compared to the cost associated with using a car and this needs to also be addressed.

Rail Services

Respondents highlighted that train services should be more frequent and operate longer hours, particularly into the evenings. Alongside this it was suggested that the current rail fleet capacity is insufficient, with train services at present not providing enough space for passengers, and that more carriages should therefore be provided to meet demand.

There was also public support for reopening previously existing stations and rail lines. Reopening the Bangor – Caernarfon line was most mentioned. Some people also highlighted that areas in north-west Wales (Holyhead, Ynys Môn, Gwynedd) are under-served, and that the frequency of train services in these rural areas with limited areas should be increased.

Respondents were also supportive of more direct services to key locations such as London, Cardiff, Manchester, Liverpool and nearby airports, with north-south Wales connectivity noted several times as being important. Respondents also suggested upgrading station facilities, such as parking provision and toilets, and ensuring that stations are accessible for all, as well as for improving connections between modes.

Bus Services

Many respondents suggested that buses should be more frequent and reliable, as current services do not meet expectations. Complementing this, respondents suggested that operating hours should begin earlier in the mornings and continue to run later in the evenings, whilst enhanced Sunday services should also be considered. In the context of increased operating hours, respondents often highlighted how this was particularly relevant for rural areas, alongside increased service frequency, due to the longer distances for journeys in these areas.

It was also highlighted that routes could be more direct, reducing journey times, and should capture where people really want to go. To support this, respondents wanted to see timetables better coordinated with other modes, to support end-to-end journeys by sustainable modes.

Active Travel

Most respondents wanted to make active travel routes in north Wales safer. Respondents felt that the existing routes are not as safe as they could be, and that any new routes should prioritise safety in their design. There were also a number of responses that suggested that routes should shield pedestrians and cyclists from road traffic, primarily through physical separation.

For the active travel routes that currently exist, respondents also suggested improved maintenance, to ensure that active travel infrastructure is well-lit, clear and of good quality. It was suggested that existing routes should also be better connected to each other, to create a more comprehensive and thus safer network. Some respondents also highlighted that improving current active travel routes, and providing new routes, could support the visitor economy.

The geography of north Wales was commonly referred to as one of the main reasons why people avoid walking or cycling, especially for those users with accessibility needs and those of an older age. Respondents said that for those with accessibility needs, depending on walking and cycling is not realistic, so other modes should be focused on as a priority.

Integration

Respondents highlighted that they would like to see integrated timetabling between public transport modes, so that there are minimal waiting times when interchanging. Respondents wanted this improved integration to be supported by more reliable services, so that they do not risk being stranded at interchange points. They also suggested that this should be supported by an affordable, integrated ticketing option that covers all modes, is well advertised, easy to understand and is available in-person and online.

Some respondents also noted the importance of fully integrating transport modes across the Welsh-English border. It was noted by some that ticketing options should cover journeys across the border, as many people travel to work in areas such as Chester and Merseyside.

To improve integration with active travel modes, some respondents also highlighted the importance of providing secure cycle storage at destinations and on bus and rail services. The current facilities for cycle storage on services was noted as being particularly poor.

The Car and Road Transport

Road infrastructure improvements were also highlighted by respondents as being important to alleviating congestion, particularly along the A55.

Freight

A significant number of respondents agreed that current road freight presents a concern that needs to be addressed. They highlighted that moving freight to rail would bring significant benefits as this could reduce congestion on key highway routes and reduce the impact of transport on the environment.

The Visitor Economy

A number of respondents also commented on how visitors find it difficult to connect between major attractions by sustainable modes, and that alongside introducing more services that allow this, there should be one source point where all transport information (digital and physical) can be found so that visitors can easily comprehend the service offering. It was mentioned that there should be a focus on how to change the perception that people require a car as a visitor to the region and that car-free holidays could be promoted through measures such as rail and bus transfers to tourist hotspots, and park-and-rides.

Resilience of the Menai Crossings

Some respondents also outlined their support for a Third Menai Crossing, and highlighted improvements to the A55 as being important to the region as a whole. Others also reiterated their support for the reintroduction of railway lines across the region.