

Enterprise and Learning Committee

EL(3) 30-08 (p3) : 3 December 2008

Cyswilt Amgylchedd Cymru



27 Heol y Wig / 27 Pier Street, Aberystwyth, SY23 2LN (: 01970 611621 (: enquiry@waleslink.org
Cadeirydd / Chair : Russel Hobson Cyfarwyddwraig / Director : Susan Evans www.waleslink.org

The National Assembly for Wales Proposed Draft (Legislative Competence) (Traffic Free Routes) Order 2009

Wales Environment Link welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence. We have focused our response on the consultation questions in Annex 2: 'Traffic Free Routes LCO - Consultation letter questions'.

Wales Environment Link (WEL) is a network of environmental and countryside Non-Governmental Organisations in Wales, most of whom have an all-Wales remit. WEL is officially designated the intermediary body between the government and the environmental NGO sector in Wales. Its vision is to increase the effectiveness of the environmental sector in its ability to protect and improve the environment through facilitating and articulating the voice of the sector.

Wales Environment Link believes that climate change is the greatest single threat to the environment and human population of Wales. It is essential that action is taken to minimise harmful impacts on the environment and enable environmental assets to adapt to changing conditions. A sustainable Wales is one prepared for future climate change. Action on climate change is an essential element of sustainable development and one requiring strong leadership by the Welsh Assembly Government.

What are your views on the general principle that legislative competence in the area identified in Matter 10.xx be conferred on the Assembly?

Wales Environment Link supports the proposal to confer legislative competence on the Assembly in this regard. The order has the potential to position Wales as a leading practitioner of sustainable transport, and is a practical response to the challenge of climate change.

For generations transport policy has been predicated on the assumption that the number of car journeys will increase and the role of Highways Authorities was to provide for that growth with extra road capacity. As long ago as 1994, the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution described traffic growth as "possibly the greatest environmental threat facing the UK". Since then, road traffic has continued to increase - volumes have almost doubled in the last 20 years, and are forecast to double again in the next 30 years.

More cars on the road lead to more congestion, pollution and noise. Transport is now the fastest growing generator of air pollutants and CO₂. Private car use accounts for 13% of all UK carbon emissions, and is expected to continue rising.

Until recently overall scientific consensus had been that we need to stop global emission levels rising, to keep atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ at their current levels. However, recent work by NASA scientist James Hansen and others concludes that we need to go much further and reduce current atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ to avoid dangerous changes from, for example, melting ice sheets, increased sea levels and to avoid ocean acidification. This means that we actually need to reduce current global emission levels - not just stop them growing.

Government policy across the UK focuses primarily on technological fixes such as developing 'cleaner' cars or bio-fuels, but this is not enough. The 'Visioning and Backcasting for UK Transport Policy' study (Robin Hickman and David Banister, 2005) showed that for governments to reduce carbon emissions by 60% by 2050 (the UK target is now 80%) then up to two-thirds of this reduction will only be achieved if there is a shift in travel behaviour towards more sustainable modes of transport. Emerging climate change science shows that we need to be going even further and moving towards zero carbon transport.

Prioritising walking and cycling and reducing distances travelled will be critical to achieving this and the broad range of organisations that supported the petition submitted by Sustrans Cymru demonstrates the wide support for the principle of placing a duty on Government to develop and maintain a network of traffic free paths.

What are your views on the terms of the proposed Order? For example, are they too narrowly or too broadly drawn? If necessary how should the proposed Order be re-drafted and why?

It is important to allow flexibility at the Assembly Measure stage. It is vital that any Measure which flows from the LCO is also applicable to on-road provision. In some urban areas it may be difficult to create new infrastructure and it is important therefore that measures are developed to utilise existing highway space for walking and cycling.

Would the terms of the proposed Order allow for the development of traffic free routes in Wales by means of Measures?

We note that the draft LCO refers to the development and maintenance of networks of highways. Many of our members supported the petition sponsored by Sustrans calling for a network of 'traffic free paths'. We believe it is critical that the LCO allows for the development of disused railways and other green corridors into paths for walkers and cyclists, and would like to be reassured that the use of the term 'highways' does not restrict this in any way.

The proposal is "Provision imposing duties on highway authorities in Wales in relation to the development and maintenance of networks of highways for the use of users other than motor vehicles." What are your views on this?

Aside from our concerns about the way the term 'highways' could be defined, we welcome the provisions to allow the development and maintenance of a network. We believe these three elements are critical to encouraging people to travel more actively. To encourage people to replace car journeys, the alternative must be perceived to be more convenient. Paths need to provide an attractive alternative to the car, for short journeys in particular. They need to be well maintained, signposted and direct. And they must form a network, rather than the current practice in many instances where short pieces of colored tarmac next to a busy road suddenly stop. The imposition of a duty is particularly important in order to encourage highway authorities to consider provision for pedestrians and cyclists is key part of their role.

The new duty must be in addition to existing activities to promote walking and cycling not instead of. Any extra responsibility for example on local authorities must be accompanied by new money and resources. Local Authorities have a poor maintenance track record and it is important that this new duty does not detract from existing obligations to maintain the Rights of Way network.

Should the terms 'development' and 'maintenance' be defined?

We believe these terms are widely understood.

The following organisations support this document:

Cambrian Mountains Society
Cymdeithas Eryri Snowdonia Society
Friends of the Earth Cymru
Groundwork Wales
Keep Wales Tidy
Open Spaces Society
Ramblers Association Cymru
RSPB Cymru
Sustrans
WWF Cymru