

P-05-955 - Objection to proposal by Costain to implement Option B in the rerouting of the A465 at Brynmawr

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 12 Mai 2020
Petitions Committee | 12 May 2020

Reference: RS20/12394-1

aiIntroduction

Petition Number: P-05-955

Petition title: Objection to proposal by Costain to implement Option B in the rerouting of the A465 at Brynmawr

Text of petition: For the reasons below, we the undersigned, object to the proposal by Costain to implement Option B in the rerouting of the A465 at Brynmawr. Costain favour option B and intend that it will be implemented in April 2020. There will be no entrance or exit to or from Brynmawr from the Western Valley. Option B will dramatically increase the already excessive volume of traffic through Beaufort Village and Brynmawr as drivers heading West have no way of getting onto A465 from the Western Valley areas. ,e.g Nantyglo, Blaina, Abertillery, Aberbeeg, LLanhilleth, Blaenavon etc. There will be implications for traders in both Beaufort and Brynmawr as the already struggling towns will be bypassed by traffic travelling from the East. The environmental impact on both towns will also be unacceptable due to the increased carbon emissions from slow moving traffic which, during peak times is



already at a standstill. The road through Beaufort has a 7.5 tonne weight restriction; however, heavy traffic in excess of 7.5 tonnes will not be able to access the A465 without travelling through Beaufort and Brynmawr Public transport will have a detour of up to 6 miles to access the A465.

1. Background

Under the Highways Act 1980, the Welsh Government is the highway authority for the Welsh trunk road and motorway network. This includes the A465, commonly known as the 'heads of the valleys' road, which runs from Abergavenny to Neath.

A465 Section 2

The Welsh Government is undertaking a project to dual 40km of the road between Abergavenny and Hirwaun. The project was split into six sections to enable a phased delivery, and includes a scheme to widen the road between Gilwern and Brynmawr - known as section 2 of the project. The Welsh Government has published an overview of the scheme and a number of documents relating to it.

This section of the project involves converting 8km of the road to 2 lanes in each direction. It was awarded by the Welsh Government to Costain in June 2011.

A public inquiry was held in March 2014 and in October 2014 the Welsh Government issued a decision letter confirming the Orders for the scheme.

The scheme was originally due for completion in 2018. The Welsh Government's website now states that it will be completed in Spring 2021.

In February 2020, the Wales Audit Office (WAO) published a report into the scheme. This stated that it:

...will cost the public purse around £100 million more than estimated at the start of construction and take more than two years longer than expected to complete.

There has also been a legal dispute between the Welsh Government and Costain as reported in the media.

Temporary road layout options

This petition concerns changes to the temporary road layout already in place around the Brynmawr roundabout to allow for certain aspects of work to take place. In his letter to the Chair of the Committee, the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales describes the proposal as:

... a significant change in the temporary road layout...which is essential to the completion of the project.

As outlined in the Minister's letter, two options have been considered for the temporary road layout. He states:

...consideration of options has identified that there is no solution that does not involve disruption in the area...two main options were identified as the most likely to meet the project requirements, option A and option B.

The Minister considers that "option B is the optimum solution overall".

The petitioners raise concerns regarding the impact option B would have. The Minister's letter to the Chair states that under this proposal, the westbound exit-slip road from the A465 into Brynmawr would be closed until near the project completion date and the westbound entry-slip road onto the A465 would be closed for 3 months. The petitioners are concerned over the impact this would have on trade in Brynmawr, over the possibility of heavy vehicles passing through Beaufort, and the congestion and delays the diversion would cause.

The impacts of the proposal have also been reported in the media.

In his letter to the Chair, the Minister states:

...the traffic modelling carried out indicates that motorists would travel into Brynmawr quicker under option B...Option B is anticipated to improve journey times as a whole and reduce the incentive for rat-running as predictability improves. The diversion route should take 7 minutes.

The Minister also outlines that there is a 7.5 tonne weight restriction for vehicles traveling through Beaufort and that signing to make drivers aware of this has been "reinforced".

Public consultation

Public exhibitions were due to be held in March 2020 to outline the impacts of the two options after which the Welsh Government:

... [hopes] that a number of those who have signed the petition will understand why option B is the optimum solution overall.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, these events have been delayed. However, in his letter to the Chair, the Minister states that changes "will not occur" until this engagement has taken place.

In March 2020, a statement was posted on the official Twitter account for the project regarding the postponed public consultation events. It stated:

We are currently exploring alternative methods to communicate the options and we will publicise these as soon as is possible in the current circumstances and at the latest by mid-April.

As of the 29 April, at the time of writing this brief, no further information on the events was available.

2. Welsh Government and Senedd Action

On 19 February 2020, the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales issued a written statement providing the latest position on the section 2 scheme.

Whilst the temporary road layout options for this aspect of the works have not been debated in the Senedd, there have previously been a number of questions raised regarding the overall scheme. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) also plans to conduct an inquiry into the scheme due to the project going over budget and being significantly delayed.

Most recently, the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on construction work leading to further project delays was **raised in Plenary**. The Minister stated:

I think we have seen construction in a number of areas being maintained in order to support the health and economic effort that's under way right now...the A465 as well—a vital piece of economic infrastructure that will be at the heart of the regional economy and the resurgence from coronavirus in the years to come.