

Dear Sirs

Inquiry into value for money of Motorway and Trunk Road Investment

Thank you for the opportunity to provide views to the above Inquiry.

I am writing on behalf of Pembrokeshire County Council. We recognise that for Pembrokeshire to have a competitive, productive and sustainable economy, that an important factor is access and connectivity. The strategic trunk roads are therefore regarded by ourselves as vital arteries to support this key outcome.

In providing views for this Inquiry it is stressed that comments are provided in a constructive fashion. We have good working relations with officers representing Welsh Government.

I would also note that we are a service provider to Welsh Government for trunk road maintenance. We are partnered with Carmarthenshire in the Western Area Partnership, providing operational services to the Government's Agent, South Wales Trunk Road Agency, on aspects such as: routine highway maintenance, emergency response (accidents, etc), lighting, and winter maintenance.

In response to the specific matters, I provide comments as follows:

1) Whether the Welsh Government's approach to delivery of major trunk road projects provides value for money:

a. *The effectiveness of Welsh Government planning and costing of schemes.*

There is scope to increase dialogue in terms of, say, a briefing, or other form of information, to provide regular update on the progress of schemes or programmes. In addition, there is scope to increase structured opportunities to have discussion between WG and ourselves on matters such as: network issues, forward planning or community/user concerns. Examples of some recent issues in our specific locality:

- Improvement of A40 Llanddewi Velfrey – clarity on delivery programme would be valuable.
- A477 Fingerpost Junction – despite recent improvement we continue to receive observations which might be useful to raise with WG through meeting
- Merlins Bridge Roundabout – capacity issues: an update on any studies / proposals would be useful.
- Potential for dualling A40 – Ministerial announcement in November 2014: it would be useful to have a briefing on the review work being commissioned.

Such an approach could help in a number of ways, such as: exchange of information about developments/events that impact on highway, review of traffic "hot spots", and better understanding of project plans. There is also the situation that network issues on the trunk road can often overspill and

affect county roads (and vice-versa), and effective and dynamic working relationships could greatly assist in helping to clarify issues, address concerns and provide information.

The means by which aspirations for Trunk Road improvements are considered and developed could be examined. As noted early it is vital to ensure that all economic priorities in South West Wales are maximized and that the Enterprise Zone / City Region is well connected. A joint Local Transport Plan is in the process of being finalised, but there was specific guidance that trunk aspirations should not be included. It is therefore felt there is scope for much closer planning between local and national transport strategy. The local/regional priorities arising from, say, Enterprise Zone or City Region approaches, have impacts on both strategic and local networks and integrated planning would seem worth considering in greater detail.

b. The approach to project delivery and evaluation of projects.

There is considered to be potential for more “outcome” focussed evaluation on some major projects. For example, the A40 Penblewin to Slebech Park improvement was opened in 2011; it would be useful to have evaluation information as to whether the scheme objectives have been met. Not only would this be good practice from a project delivery perspective, but it would help provide useful information for planning future projects, especially in our locality, where potential for dualling of A40 is being reviewed.

c. How the Welsh Government could improve its approach to planning and delivery of schemes.

Some key points, already referenced in detail earlier are:

- Integration between local and National plans, particularly in terms of links with economic regeneration proposals
- Regular exchange of briefings/information on programme development
- Dialogue between key parties to identify network constraints and key emerging issues.

2) The extent to which the current approach to routine maintenance and improvement of the network via Trunk Road Agents has delivered value for money.

The comments in this section are given in the context of our involvement of a service provider under the Western Area Partnership.

We believe the current arrangements demonstrate a clear and collaborative approach to operational delivery. One of our cross cutting principles is customer focus. Recognising that the trunk road network is vital to the people and economy of Pembrokeshire means that having an active role in maintenance

gives us a vested interest in providing high quality infrastructure. Another key principle of the Council is Value for Money. Some specific examples of “added value” in this approach are: services are delivered by local people who understand local issues, including factors that might affect the wider local network (for example road closures); access to local resource pool to respond efficiently to service demands (for example: traffic accidents); flexibility in resource demand (for example: able to direct the County’s winter maintenance resources at trunk road as a first priority).

The ability to manage resources as part of wider local highway maintenance team means that efficiencies are achieved. For example: we have locally available resources that can be deployed to manage situations such as: traffic accidents, flooding, winter maintenance. We are concerned that such financial efficiencies would be jeopardised by a move away from the current collaborative model.

As well as financial efficiency, we consider that there are substantial benefits in terms of resilience. The availability of local resources means access to a local resource pool that can be quickly deployed. A particular concern at present is the proposal to have dedicated trunk road winter maintenance routes. From a financial perspective, the current routes are co-ordinated with our own which minimises “dead runs”. Under the new proposals, there is potential for significantly more “dead run”, which we believe may equate to inefficiency. In addition, we are concerned about the wider issue of network resilience. We can currently deploy our wider resources to keep the vital trunk road network open and reduce vulnerability.

The current arrangements also ensure that the works undertaken are being carried out by directly employed locally employees, local resources, or by local contractors. This ensures that the local economy is supported in terms of jobs.

It is considered that there might be potential to review the procurement approach for certain specialist activities, such as re-surfacing. An approach that adopted a “lotting strategy”, perhaps with lower aggregated values, or geographical lots, might allow more local or regionally based suppliers to win work. Not only would this support indigenous businesses and local SME’s, there is considered to be potential for significant cost savings by procuring work “locally”.

3) How the maintenance and improvements functions delivered by Trunk Road Agents can be improved, in the context of the ongoing Welsh Government review of these agents.

Some suggested improvements are:

- Notwithstanding what, we believe, are substantial economic and efficiency benefits in a collaborative approach between ourselves and the Trunk Road Agency, there are clearly opportunities, in the context of budget cuts, to review existing arrangements and costing structures to identify whether there

are ways of doing things differently and achieving savings. This work has already started.

- Develop collaborative working to secure efficiencies – take advantage of the efficiencies available by having a local resource where the strategic objective of the organisations all focus on the customers in the locality.
- Develop procurement approaches that give maximum opportunities for local suppliers, for example: through the lotting or geographical strategy.

I hope this feedback is of assistance to your Inquiry.

Yours faithfully,

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