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National Assembly for Wales
Public Accounts Committee
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*Gofynner am/
Please ask for:*

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Dyddiad/Date:

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Dear Sir

Inquiry into value for money of Motorway and Trunk Road Investment

Thank you for the opportunity to provide views to the above inquiry on behalf of Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service (MAWWFRS). We recognise that for our six constituent authorities to have a dynamic and sustainable economy an important factor is access and connectivity and the effectiveness of the motorways and trunk roads are thus critical in this regard.

MAWWFRS covers approximately 4500square miles of varying trunk road networks from motorway/dual carriageways to rural single carriageways. Single carriageways also vary from heavily wooded sections to high mountain passes and coastal sections and these all present differing challenges for crews responding to road traffic collisions (RTC).

MAWWFRS continues to employ a multi-agency approach to reducing the number killed or seriously injured on the roads. MAWWFRS works in partnership with key stakeholders to educate road users, engage vulnerable groups, and contribute to the wider road safety agenda. MWWFRS also plays a proactive role in facilitating multi-agency data sharing and the development of progressive methods of identifying engineered solutions to these complex issues.

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

Guidance for Fire and Rescue Services

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 represented the most significant legislative change in the operation of the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) in over 50 years. The Fire Services Act 1947 focused on preparing Fire and Rescue Authorities to respond to fires, with no responsibilities or duties placed upon them in relation to RTCs or other emergencies. Over time society's expectations and public demands have resulted in the role of the FRS evolving and changing and the 2004 Act sets out a much broader range of statutory duties.

In particular, the new Act recognised that the FRS is a primary rescue service at RTCs and Part 2, section 8, of the Act places a statutory duty on FRS to prepare for rescuing people from RTCs.

This recognition reflects the increasing workload on FRS, partly attributable to their attendance at RTCs. The statutory changes also reflected the contribution made by Fire and Rescue Authorities over the years to ensure that FRS were able to assist and effect an efficient extrication of casualties even though at the time there was no statutory duty to do so.

The FRS therefore has a key role to play with our partners in preventing RTCs and the resultant damage to human life, in the same way as it does to reduce fire related deaths and injuries, engineering and investment in the road transport network is critical to this. The operational and tactical guidance for dealing with RTCs is both detailed and technical, identifying the associated risks and procedures for crews attending incidents of RTC. The strategic guidance however is less so and projects such as the multi-agency CLEAR initiative which is a joint initiative between the Department for Transport (DfT), Highways Agency (HA), Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) and Association of Ambulance Chief Executives (AACE) in England has to date not been pursued in Wales.

The initiative included objectives to implement measures, including the use of innovative laser scanning equipment, to reduce congestion and costs associated with motorway closures following incidents.

Impact of road traffic collisions

Whilst the impact of any RTC on the immediate road network is usually clearly visible to all, it must be considered, particularly in the rural areas of the country the impact that occurs on the surrounding network.

The roads that serve as the diversionary routes off the main trunk road are often of very little classification and often become gridlocked due to lack of passing spaces for large heavy goods vehicles (HGV) and public service vehicles (PSV). This can be problematic for emergency services attempting to respond to other calls in the area. It may be considered that an element of investment into pre-emptive work in the area of diversionary routes, enabling swifter implementation of the routes may be better than a continual reactive response to such occurrences.

Road traffic collisions do not have a single cause. They result from a number of contributory factors that combine in a way that leads to a road user failing to cope in a particular situation. Road safety directly involves all road users, whether on foot or in a vehicle and the impact of road traffic collisions can cause immense human suffering and distress.

The approach to accident management

Various documents, policies and procedures remind practitioners of the requirement to gather, preserve and secure evidence at the scene of collisions whilst always being mindful of the economic, social and other impacts of protracted road closures and of the need for the police, Highways Agency and others to properly 'inform' those affected by a closure.

The CLEAR programme in England claims to have been successful in embedding an understanding of the importance of free flow on the strategic road network, recognising the need to balance evidence gathering with reopening roads and it has brought Government closer to the motorway responders and other partner agencies who have responsibilities in this area.

Co-ordination of response

Whilst there is a good tactical understanding at the scene of an RTC about the roles and responsibilities of the emergency services in responding to and managing serious incidents, the effective 'choreography' and 'combination' of the assets, capabilities and resources of multiple partners on scene is based on the foundation set by the JESIP programme.

The structured programme of work to over 100 organisations ran until September 2014 and had a number of strategic objectives as laid out below:

- To establish joint interoperability principles and ways of working (joint doctrine)
- To develop greater understanding of roles, responsibilities and capabilities amongst tri-service responders
- To improve communication, information sharing and mobilisation procedures between services including their control rooms
- To implement a training strategy for all levels of command
- To implement a joint testing and exercising strategy for all levels of command to ensure lessons identified progress into learning and procedural change

Whilst not specific to RTCs and applicable to all multi-agency serious incidents the impact of JESIP will be to provide a consistent joint emergency services response to incidents wherever the incident may take place across the country. Notably though the JESIP programme does not include any agencies outside that of the tri-services, particularly with regard to the trunk road networks, the absence of the Welsh Government's Transport Officers in the multi-agency learning that is taken from the programme.

Police, Fire and Ambulance Services are trained in the application of joint command decision and assessment models. They now better understand the roles and responsibilities of their peers in each service which leads to a coherent and commonly understood way of working. Debriefs which are held immediately after an incident also offer learning opportunities and the potential to escalate the debrief process to a multi-agency formal process should the need arise.

Workshops such as those run via the JESIP programme, which include "Table Top" joint training exercises to test hypothetical scenarios to tease out best practice are always beneficial in harmonising any multi-agency response at live incidents.

Use of Screens

Incident screens, which aim to help reduce the impact of 'rubbernecking' by screening off an incident, were deployed seven times during the Olympic period on behalf of the Highways Agency. Incident screens have been introduced by the Traffic Officer Service in England with the first phase rolled out during 2013.

The screens were however first introduced in England during early 2012 but there is little empirical evidence available to support the premise that this approach has a significant beneficial effect in improving traffic flow and reducing further accidents in and around the scene. Whilst it is accepted that the screens will obscure the scene of operations any additional positive gain, such as reducing 'rubbernecking' and ensuring that the flow of

traffic keeps moving is debatable and requires further research to support either way. This measure is critical for the Welsh economy as even small reductions in the traffic build up can have a significant effect for the economy.

It can be argued that the slow-down on the opposing side of the carriageway happens when approaching drivers see any activity, particularly a mass of blue lights ahead and thus reduce their speed accordingly. Often from a distance it is not always even possible to identify on which side of the motorway the problem lies. This has a cumulative effect of reducing the average speed, which then may indeed be exacerbated by everyone having a good look. It again could be argued that it is a natural reaction to slow when blue lights are seen, as they generally indicate a potentially hazardous situation.

The information is provided in a non-biased form and I hope that the Committee are able to find some of the points beneficial to the inquiry into value for money and trunk road investment.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Quin', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

R Quin
Director of Risk