

Edwina Hart MBE CStJ AC / AM  
Gweinidog yr Economi, Gwyddoniaeth a Thrafnidiaeth  
Minister for Economy, Science and Transport



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref p-04-556  
Ein cyf/Our ref EH/03486/15

William Powell AM  
Chair Petitions Committee

[committeebusiness@Wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:committeebusiness@Wales.gsi.gov.uk)

22 October 2015

Dear William,

Thank you for your letter of 6 August regarding Petition P-04-556, No to Junction 41 closure. I apologise for the delay in responding. I have addressed the petitioner's letter entitled 'No to Closing Junction 41' in Annex 1 attached.

Please find below my response to your further queries in your letter of 6 August enclosing the petition.

Firstly as a point of background it is important to note that the completion of Harbour Way, the final part of the Neath Port Talbot Peripheral Distributor Road, which provides a dual carriageway road accessing Port Talbot, the docks and local business parks, enabled the consideration of closure of a number of slip roads.

The road provides a good standard alternative route to the M4 for local traffic, further enhanced by the recent opening of the Baglan Energy Park Bridge, completed with £8m Welsh Government funding. The fact that the completion of the Peripheral Distributor Road (PDR) would allow M4 junction closures was noted in Neath Port Talbot Council's case for ERDF for funding the PDR.

To inform my decision on whether to maintain the closure in the interim period, pending issue of the final report, I was presented with an analysis of the initial results which are summarised below:

- a. Data to the end of January 2015 shows that the traffic flow on the M4 westbound has improved, giving a monetised journey time benefit of £244,000 per annum.
- b. Traffic data for the local road network shows an improvement overall, with a monetised journey time benefit of £119,000 per annum.
- c. Of the other measures, car park use is the one most likely to be directly affected by the trial closure. Once annual trends are accounted for, early results show that the trial closure has had little impact.
- d. Footfall surveys completed for Welsh Government provide a limited data set as historical data is not available. Footfall trends have been compared for weekdays and weekends when the slip road remains open; the trends are similar and do not indicate that the closure has had a significant impact.

At the time, my officials were in the process of gathering and analysing the final stage of data for the trial, and maintaining the part-time closure under the experimental order.

At that time the option remained to continue with the part-time closure during the public consultation. Subsequently, I decided to lift the closures whilst further analytical work was completed.

Improvement of the M4 as the key strategic road transport route in South Wales is one of the main objectives in the National Transport Finance Plan 2015.

No decision has been made to close Junction 41 permanently.

I look forward to receiving the group's full response on their evaluation of the Final Evaluation Report produced by South Wales Trunk Road Agent.

*Edwina Hart*

## **Annex 1**

For ease of reference, answers are set out using the same titles as the petitioner's letter.

### **1 Reduced Average Journey Times (objective 2)**

As stated in the final evaluation report into the trial (the report), the primary measure for the trial was the balance of overall monetised journey time on the westbound M4 and key local roads. The result showed that the overall balance was positive. As such, the conclusion made was that the trial met the primary measure of improving the journey times on the M4 without significant impact on the local road network.

The figure given in March 2014 for the anticipated improvement in traffic flow on the M4, was based on traffic modelling undertaken for the full time closure of both the westbound on-slip and eastbound off-slip originally proposed. The report details the changes in traffic flow on all routes monitored before and during the trial.

With regard to the analysis of changes to average journey times reported in the Executive Summary, the benefit arising from the saving in journey time is accounted for in the primary measure referred to above.

### **2 Objective 3 To reduce the accident rate between J38 and 42 during peak periods**

As stated in the report, Personal Injury Accident data (objective 3) is collected by the police and there is usually at least a six month time lag before this data is made available. An assessment will be completed when the information is available.

### **3 Objective 1 Journey Time Reliability**

The effect of the Average Speed Enforcement system (objective 1) was assessed using data for the eastbound carriageway, which was not subject to junction closures. The analysis and conclusions are set out in the report.

The use of journey time data sourced from satellite navigation systems such as that available from TomTom is conventional industry practice and is recognised as providing more than adequate level of accuracy for the types of roads monitored for this trial.

### **4 Secondary Impacts**

The trial measured the effect of the junction closure on key local roads. Supplementary monitoring took place for queue lengths, air quality, town

centre footfall and car park ticketing in order to provide additional information in considering the way forward.

The evidence presented in the report supports the statement that the trial slip road closures did not adversely affect the majority of key routes through Port Talbot. The report acknowledged that some localised issues were evident in the areas where the planned mitigation works were not completed by the local authority.

## **Air Quality**

As stated in the report, the corrected result for the annual air quality figure for site 61 is close to exceeding the long term air quality objective for NO<sub>2</sub>. However, the site is not located where there is public exposure, being 25m away from the frontage of the nearest property, where concentrations would be much lower.

An estimate of the effect on air quality on the M4 was undertaken in accordance with the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Air Quality Screening Spreadsheet. The assumption that the percentage of HGVs remains the same for pre-closure and post-closure scenarios is valid.