



Darren Millar AM
Chair
Public Accounts Committee

19 October 2015

Dear Mr Millar

Thank you for your letter of 21 September on behalf of the Committee regarding further information on the report into Value for Money of Motorway and Trunk Road Investment.

Responses to your questions are outlined in the attached annex.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Price," with a comma at the end.

James Price



Recommendation 3

The Committee would welcome further detail on how the Welsh Government meets the exportations. For example, we felt that a more specific commitment on the timetable of completion of the WelTAG consultation process and exactly when it is expected that the revised guidance will be issued and implemented.

Response

The draft guidance will be produced by the end of 2015. A twelve week consultation will follow in the spring of 2016 with a view to implementing the revised guidance later in 2016 following consideration of the responses received to that consultation.

Recommendation 4

The Committee would welcome an update on the outcome of the review of lower value contracts to investigate opportunities for the optimum use of ECI principle early in 2016.

Response

The review has concluded that there are benefits to early engagement of the supply chain and that lower value contracts could benefit from early engagement with contractors. As a result, guidance will be amended such that early contractor involvement procurement route should be considered for construction contracts independent of value.

Recommendation 5

The Committee noted that you will provide a further update later in the autumn on the street work's strategy which is scheduled to be published in 2015. The response did not address the Committee's concern about the pace of development of the strategy and remains unclear as to the extent to which the draft strategy covers issues relevant to major projects on the trunk road network.

Response

The pace of development of the Street Works Strategy has been proportionate to the task of engaging stakeholders and identifying all the issues that need to be addressed. Those relevant to major projects are covered but there are others of equal importance. The draft document will be consulted on in November.

Recommendation 6

Whilst acknowledging that the Welsh Government has a programme in place to monitor the condition of the motorway and trunk road network, the Committee wishes to receive more detail on the reasons for the deterioration of the motorway and trunk road network and confirmation of expectations regarding the Welsh Government's plans to improve the condition of the network, for example, with regard to the annual programme of work. The Committee was disappointed to learn that the number of defects identified on trunk roads has dramatically increased and that your stated target of not more than eight per cent of the network length requiring maintenance since 2010 has not been met and wishes to receive your comments on this.

Response

Whilst the target of not more than 8 per cent of the network requiring maintenance has not yet been achieved, there is evidence that the Welsh Government's strategy of close monitoring and targeted investment is effective. The percentage of trunk roads requiring maintenance fell from 14.3 per cent at the end of 2013 to 10.2 per cent at the end of 2014. It is too early to predict whether the investment in the current year will result in the target being met. However, the trend is now heading in the right direction.

Recommendation 7

The Committee was unclear on how the Welsh Government's proposed action will address this recommendation and similarly the future prioritisation of expenditure is not clear. I have written to the Chair of the Enterprise and Business Committee asking that that Committee considers this issue as part of its budget scrutiny.

Response

The comparison of the relative contribution that maintenance compared to improvement can make to the required performance of a transport corridor provides a way of informing the balance of investment between each.

Recommendation 13

The Committee wishes to seek clarification as to why the Welsh Government partially accepted this recommendation.

Response

This was only partially accepted because an effective information management tool for trunk road improvement projects has already been implemented. However, as previously indicated, this will now be brought into the Welsh Government's Integrated Road Information System (IRIS) along with all the other systems for managing and maintaining the motorway and trunk network.

Recommendation 14

The Committee was pleased to learn of the commitment made to a study looking at the capability and competence of the construction sector. However, we would welcome confirmation that the study will also consider the wide range of non-construction specialist skills require for major projects and maintenance of the motorway and trunk road network. In addition, it was unclear as to whether the work described would also consider the public sector perspective referred to in the recommendation.

Response

We can confirm that the study will also consider a range of non-construction specialist skills and consider the public sector perspective.

Recommendation 16

The Committee felt that it would be sufficient for its successor Committee to receive a single update following the conclusion of the anticipated three-year trial. In addition, the Committee would welcome an explanation of the policy change on undertaking a trial to erect screens on the A55 following accidents.

Response

The trial of incident screens has been an all-Wales trial, not specific to the A55. No policy change has driven this trial, more an operational opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of such devices which are being provided by Highways England. With regards to the A55, the trial will coincide with the implementation of emergency crossing points and hardened verges, all aimed to increase the resilience of the network.

Recommendation 17

The Committee wishes to receive further details on how the Welsh Government intends to engage further with road users and clarification on the implication that you intend putting in place arrangements to replicate the work of Transport Focus in England.

Response

The traffic Wales service is being used to provide further proactive works information (A55 tunnel refurbishment as an example) and maintain an information line, email and twitter accounts to provide engagement with road users in line with the original recommendations. There will be on going engagement with users, passengers and characteristic groups through a number of means such as the Public Transport Users' Advisory Panel.

Recommendation 18

The Committee wishes to learn as to why the Welsh Government's presence at the exiting forums has been restricted of late.

Response

Officials have been and will continue to meet with officials from other organisations to plan and coordinate works. Attendance at forums is assessed for relevance and value for money.