

M4 Relief Road Petitions

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 13 Mai 2024
Petitions Committee | 13 May 2024

Reference: SR24/8458

This briefing has been prepared to support the Committee's consideration of two petitions relating to the M4 relief road.

Petition 1

Petition Number: P-06-1415

Petition title: Brynglas Tunnels M4 South Wales relief road to be put into action.

Text of petition:

To see the relief road being built to help Wales grow and thrive once again
To reduce queues and wait times around the Brynglas area.

Millions was spent on surveys and compulsory purchases of land and then lay to the way side without a public vote. Why?

The public want to access and leave Wales without having to queue every day twice a day.



Tourists are reconsidering coming back to Wales due to the shambles that is Brynglas tunnels.

Wales relies on tourism for revenue yet everyone is stuck on an outdated stretch of road that is one of the biggest bottle necks into Wales.

Petition 2

Petition Number: P-06-1421

Petition title: Hold a public poll on whether to build the M4 Relief Road, then implement the result immediately.

Text of petition: The traffic congestion around the Newport tunnels is catastrophic to the economy and well-being of drivers and local residents.

1. Background

The Welsh Government is the highway authority for the Welsh trunk road and motorway network and is responsible for maintenance and improvement of the network, including the M4. Proposals to increase capacity on the M4 around Newport have been discussed since the early 1990s.

M4 corridor around Newport scheme

In 2014, the Welsh Government published M4 Corridor Around Newport – The Plan which set out plans to build a new section of motorway, known as the ‘Black Route’ or ‘preferred route’.

In March 2016 a substantial number of documents, marking a key stage in the planning and delivery process for the project, were published. Ten public exhibitions were also announced where members of the public were able to inspect draft orders, environmental information and other associated reports and materials. Senedd Research previously published an article which explored this in more detail.

Following the public exhibitions, in June 2016 the Welsh Government announced that a public inquiry would be held.

The inquiry began in February 2017, with an independent inspector appointed, and closed in April 2018. The inspector's report found:

...there is a compelling case for the scheme to be implemented in order to relieve an acute problem on the strategic motorway network...It is accordingly my view that the scheme is in the public interest.

However the inspector's report was not binding on the Welsh Government and in June 2019 the former First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS, announced his decision not to proceed with the scheme.

In his decision letter, the former First Minister cited two main reasons for his decision – the costs and environmental impacts of the scheme. Senedd Research published an article exploring this at the time the decision was made.

In 2020 the former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson suggested the UK Government could build the relief road, a claim strongly refuted by the Welsh Government with road infrastructure and land use planning being devolved matters.

The Burns Commission

Following the decision not to proceed with the scheme, the Welsh Government announced a Commission of transport experts would be established and tasked with making recommendations on alternative solutions to the problems on the M4 at Newport.

The South East Wales Transport Commission, chaired by Lord Burns, was subsequently established and published its final recommendations report in 2020. It recommended a “network of alternatives”, centred on public transport.

In 2021 the Burns Delivery Unit was established within Transport for Wales to take forward the recommendations.

The roads review

Should any future scheme to build the relief road be brought forward it would be subject to the Welsh Government's road building tests established as a result of its roads review.

In June 2021 the former Deputy Minister for Climate Change, Lee Waters MS, announced that a roads review panel would be established to review planned Welsh Government road investments. The former Deputy Minister announced a pause on all new road schemes while the existing pipeline of schemes was reviewed.

The panel published its final report in February 2023. In response the Welsh Government published a new roads policy statement which sets four road building tests. The former Deputy Minister made clear that the policy “will be a material consideration in the event of any planning dispute”.

2. Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government has provided the same response to both petitions.

In letters to the Chair dated 10 April and 11 April, the Cabinet Secretary for North Wales and Transport, Ken Skates MS says “the Welsh Ministers have been clear that the decision has been made on the M4 relief road”.

It goes on to highlight the ongoing work to implement the Burns Commission recommendations.

The Cabinet Secretary also recently said in a media interview that he “just can’t see” the road being built due to “astronomical costs”.

3. Welsh Parliament action

The issue has been debated on many occasions in the Senedd, particularly at the time of the decision being made.

The Petitions Committee has also considered various petitions on the road prior to the decision being made including one in support of the preferred route and one calling for the scheme to be scrapped to protect the Gwent Levels.

Most recently, when asked about the road during Plenary (in his previous post as Minister for Economy), the now First Minister, Vaughan Gething MS, said “when it comes to the M4 relief road, the reality is there is not the resource there”.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.