



Mark Reckless AM
Chair
Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

02 March 2017

Dear Mark

Thank you for your letter of 31 January regarding the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee's meeting on air quality in Wales.

The attached annex sets out the actions taken within my portfolio to monitor and mitigate against the effects of air quality

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken', written in a cursive style.

Ken Skates AC/AM

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi a'r Seilwaith
Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure

Actions with the Economy and Infrastructure Portfolio in relation to air quality

Transport

Road

The Welsh Government is not responsible for vehicle emissions standards in Wales, which are set for the whole of the UK by the UK Government.

We do not carry out routine monitoring of air quality, although specific monitoring is carried out in relation to road tunnel safety and to inform decisions as described below.

The treatment of air quality issues in Welsh Government road infrastructure projects is driven by a number of established processes, where air quality is considered alongside other environmental and non-environmental considerations. These processes cover the following pollutants: dust, particulates (PM₁₀), NO_x and Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂).

These processes revolve around the Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance (WelTAG) and the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges Guidance. The latter Guidance meets the requirements for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) under Highways (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2007.

WelTAG enables decision makers to consider the implications of air quality from an early stage in a project's development, in terms of the justification for the intervention and an examination of potential options which could be taken forward. It is also used to develop objectives for the project involved which, if warranted, can include objectives for air quality.

The EIA process enables decision makers to consider the significance of air quality impacts, both during construction and operation of the project, alongside other environmental issues.

As part of the EIA process, results from a number of existing monitoring sources are used, such as local authorities' monitoring networks, alongside scheme specific monitoring designed to ensure an accurate and proportionate assessment is carried out.

During project construction, monitoring is carried out to deal with the implications of dust pollution and where relevant, other pollutants. Post construction, monitoring of pollutants is carried out when there is a need to do so.

Mitigation for air quality in individual schemes has to be tailored to the context of the scheme, the costs involved and the effectiveness of the measures.

In some cases, for example the A483/A489 Newtown Bypass and, if taken forward, the M4 Corridor around Newport, the provision of new infrastructure removes traffic from existing roads and can significantly reduce air pollution. Care is taken to ensure that the change of route does not cause unnecessary issues on the new route.

Similarly, during construction, process practices are carried out to ensure that the effects of the works on people and other features from dust are minimised.

Bus

There are incentives through the Welsh Government Bus Services Support Grant to encourage greener buses. Local authorities and bus operators in Wales are also eligible to apply for Department for Transport grants to green their fleets.

Rail

Through our procurement of Wales and Borders rail services and the South Wales Metro we are requiring bidders to put arrangements in place to improve environmental efficiency across the franchise. The new contract will deliver an increase in passenger capacity to cater for existing and forecasted growth in passenger numbers.

Metro Phase 2 will deliver two specific benefits:

1. Removal of diesel-only trains, therefore less diesel and associated emissions from the rolling stock; and
2. Modal shift from cars to public transport as a result of more frequent and faster services.

Both the ongoing Strategic Environmental Assessment for Metro and Environmental Impact Assessment for Core Valley Lines will investigate the impacts of potential changes on Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) as a result of the introduction of more attractive, cleaner and energy efficient rolling stock. Future phases of Metro are planned to operate on-street around Cardiff City centre offering greater penetration of public transport into some of the poorest and most densely populated AQMA.

Air

Air quality in aviation remains the responsibility of operators and users. In the support function of infrastructure, aerodromes exercise initiatives towards air quality which are compatible with their operation but remain exclusive to those activities. Working in cooperation with users of aerodromes (airlines) more efficient flight paths can be utilised to assist air quality.

Cardiff International Airport received an award for Environmental Initiative from the Airport Operators Association (2015) for a range of activities which had undertaken.

Learner Travel

The current learner travel legislation in Wales recognises the importance of achieving sustainable modes of travel. Section 11 of The Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 ('the Measure') places a statutory duty on Welsh Ministers to promote sustainable modes of travel, the definition of which may improve the physical well-being of those who use them and/or the environmental well-being of the local area.

Section 2 of the Measure places a statutory duty on local authorities to risk assess walked routes to school. This provision ensures the provision of available walked routes to school which, in turn, promotes walking and cycling amongst learners. This contributes towards relieving congestion and reducing the carbon footprint.

The Welsh Government's Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance 2014 advises local authorities to encourage learners to walk to school with adults, friends or groups (walking buses) and to provide kerb craft training for learners.

The Active Travel Act 2013 requires local authorities to continuously improve facilities and routes for pedestrians and cyclists by identifying routes for use and promoting access. Potentially, these routes could include routes to school.

Learners provided with free home to school transport generally travel by bus and this therefore removes multiple private vehicles from the school run thereby reducing congestion and pollution.

Low Carbon Vehicles

We are committed to exploring opportunities to reduce emissions from transport and maximise the low carbon vehicle sector's opportunities for growth and jobs in Wales. We are considering the recommendations of the Low Carbon Vehicle Expert Steering Group in the wider context of our decarbonisation duties under the Environment (Wales) Act.

Economy

Our economic sector teams have participated in Welsh Government workshops to look at how the sectors can play a part in reducing Wales' carbon emissions in line with The Environment (Wales) Act 2016. For example, the ICT Sector has a key role to play with the growth of the Digital Economy. Access to secure and reliable technology enables people to work more flexibly reducing the need to travel for work. This contributes to reducing carbon emissions and improving air quality.

Infrastructure Commission

We recently consulted on the setting up of a National Infrastructure Commission for Wales later this year following a full public appointments exercise. We are currently analysing the responses.

The consultation made clear that the commission would be remitted to work in line with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in advising the Welsh Ministers on strategic longer term infrastructure needs. From analysis of the responses so far, this aspect is strongly supported. My expectation is that this will provide the context for the commission taking into account air quality issues in providing advice.