

## P-05-782 Build a Chepstow Bypass to remove the bottle neck from the M48 onto the A48

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 07 Tachwedd 2017  
Petitions Committee | 07 November 2017

### Research Briefing:

Petition number: [P-05-782](#)

Petition title: Build a Chepstow Bypass to Remove the Bottle Neck from the M48 onto the A48

Text of petition:

We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to finally take in hand the problem of traffic congestion on the A48 through Chepstow.

The lowering of the Severn Bridge Toll represents a huge opportunity for growth in Monmouthshire, Forest of Dean and South East Wales. However the road infrastructure is inadequate. The A48 is already suffering from congestion and poor air quality through the town of Chepstow. With the addition of new housing estates in both Monmouthshire and Forest of Dean the current proposals fall unacceptably short in facilitating growth.

This scheme has been an aspiration since the 1960s and unless both the Welsh and UK governments finally co-operate and commit then the economic prosperity so within reach will be choked off, instead leaving the quality of the residents' lives to deteriorate and stifle sustainable economic development.

Additional information:

In a good example of how this issue has been neglected by all branches of government, a sister petition has been lodged with the UK Government as they rejected the original as being a Wales only issue.

We ask the National Assembly of Wales to ensure that this vital transport route not fall prey to cross border buck passing

### Background

The Welsh Government, as the highway authority for the motorway and trunk road network in Wales, is responsible for the A48 through Chepstow. It describes the A48 as “a strategic road

in South Wales linking the south west of Wales with England”. The South Wales Trunk Road Agent (SWTRA) is responsible for the management, maintenance and improvement of trunk roads in south Wales on behalf of the Welsh Government.

### Local development and local transport planning

Monmouthshire County Council’s (MCC’s) [adopted Local Development Plan](#) lists the line of a potential A48 Chepstow Outer By-pass scheme for protection from development likely to prejudice its implementation (Policy MV10). Its [Local Transport Plan](#) lists the construction of a new Hardwick Hill and Chepstow Bypass as a long term aspiration of local significance which forms part of a wider Chepstow traffic, environmental and road safety improvements scheme.

### Air quality

Hardwick Hill on the A48 in Chepstow has been designated an [Air Quality Management Area](#) (AQMA) due to the high emissions from traffic, particularly heavy goods vehicles travelling up the hill. Monmouthshire County Council’s 2011 [Air Quality Action Plan for Chepstow](#) says:

The possibility of a bypass for Chepstow has been investigated a number of times over the years. [...]

This option had by far the greatest support at the stakeholder workshops, but there was also a reasonable amount of opposition. **A bypass would significantly improve air quality within the AQMA and would also improve safety and living conditions for those living on Hardwick Hill.** However, there would be negative impacts for people living alongside the bypass route. As the exceedance area only affects a small number of properties on Hardwick Hill, **the costs of a bypass would almost certainly outweigh the benefits. In addition there could be a negative impact on the economy of the town if through traffic is reduced.**

Monmouthshire County Council’s 2016 local air quality management [Progress Report](#) (PDF 3.16MB) states:

[...] air quality within the Chepstow Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) continues to exceed the nitrogen dioxide annual mean objective level at certain locations [including Hardwick Hill].

The Toll at the Severn Bridge has been identified as a contributing factor to air quality exceedances on the A48, Hardwick Hill, as a number of HGV’s use the route to avoid paying the toll into Wales. **It was agreed at the meeting that petitioning to remove the Toll in 2017 was a priority.**

### Severn Crossings Tolls and the UK Government’s position

The UK Government [consulted](#) on proposals for reductions to the Severn Crossings Tolls in January 2017. In July 2017, it subsequently [announced](#) that tolls will be abolished for all vehicles by the end of 2018.

The UK Government rejected a [similar petition calling for a Chepstow bypass](#) submitted in February 2017 on the basis that:

It’s about something that the UK Government or Parliament is not responsible for.

Your petition is about something that the Welsh Government is responsible for. That means that the UK Government and Parliament can't look into it. Responsibility for roads is devolved in Wales.

## Welsh Government action

There are no Chepstow bypass schemes listed in either the Welsh Government's [National Transport Finance Plan](#) 2015 or its Infrastructure Investment Plan [project pipeline](#).

In 2013/14, SWTRA carried out a public consultation seeking views on how to improve air quality in Chepstow by making changes to the A48 on behalf of the Welsh Government. According to the [consultation summary report](#) (PDF 3.24MB), 13 of the 21 respondents suggested a new bypass as a solution.

In his letter to the Chair in respect of this petition, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure stated:

[...] we have conducted a consultation exercise and study into Air Quality Assessment in Chepstow. The outcome of the consultation was that **there were five potential options, one of which was a bypass**. However, the full impact of the tolls being lifted along with new housing developments in the area, are yet to be fully realised.

Whilst no formal plans for a Chepstow bypass have been developed to date, it is considered that such a scheme would likely straddle the Wales–England border to the south of Chepstow and Sedbury. This would require cross–border collaboration between the Welsh Government and the relevant highway authority in England. In his letter, the Cabinet Secretary stated that the Welsh Government is “working with Highways England to develop a coherent cross–border approach to planning for the removal of the tolls” which will include the “likely impact on the traffic model for Chepstow, including the A48”.

## National Assembly for Wales action

In response to a written question (WAQ27340) from Michael German on what consideration had been given to a Chepstow bypass in July 2003, the then Minister for Economic Development and Transport, Andrew Davies, [stated](#) (PDF 281KB):

The Assembly has no current plans for taking forward a Chepstow bypass as part of its trunk road programme. The Welsh Office did, however, indicate its support for a private venture project to construct an outer bypass of Chepstow, and offered to make a financial contribution. In recognition of this, the Welsh Office, with the former Gwent County Council, secured part of the route of the proposed bypass by virtue of agreements with a developer, who has constructed a road on the line of the proposed bypass at the south–west end. An inner bypass of Chepstow was also considered by the Welsh Office to address the safety issues at Hardwick Hill. However, following representations from the public and others, these proposals were withdrawn. De–trunking of the A48 through Chepstow is currently under consideration which, if taken forward, would allow the local authority to traffic–calm the existing A48.

In response to a question (WAQ51322) from Mike German on a Chepstow bypass and plans for de-trunking the A48 in February 2008, the then Deputy First Minister and Minister for Economy and Transport, Ieuan Wyn Jones, [stated](#) (PDF 26.2KB):

The Welsh Assembly Government has no plans for a Chepstow bypass especially since the Highways Agency recently detrunked the A48 across the border back to local authority control, removing it from their strategic highway network.

We have a similar view to the Highways Agency on the strategic importance of the A48/A466 at Chepstow. Our policy is to detrunk the routes thereby removing them from the strategic highway network in Wales and allowing Monmouthshire County Council to manage the routes as they think fit. If this is to proceed Monmouthshire County Council will have to agree the change of status and their becoming the responsible highway authority.

Following an [urgent question](#) in Plenary regarding the UK Government's consultation on continued tolling on the Severn Crossings in January 2017, Nick Ramsay stated:

[...] there are roads surrounding the area of the Severn Crossings, such as in Chepstow, in my constituency, for instance, which actually are carrying a lot of traffic—a lot more than they should—because people are currently avoiding the toll system. So, have you made any assessment, or are you planning to make any assessment, of the effect of reduction in the tolls—to this point now but, hopefully, in the future, even more—and the effect of lower traffic volumes on surrounding roads in areas like Chepstow [...].

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure responded:

I was pleased to see the leader of Monmouthshire council recognise the challenges, but also the opportunities, that removing tolls—or, in the very least, reducing tolls—on the Severn Crossings would have for the entire region, not just the area that he represents.

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.