

# **P-05-850 Protect the Gwent Levels and stop the proposed M4 motorway, Correspondence –Petitioner to Committee - CALM letter to First Minister, 14.05.19**



## **CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE LEVELS MOTORWAY** 29 March 2019

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The First Minister of Wales  
Mark Drakeford AM

Dear First Minister

### **M4 Around Newport**

We write to urge you not to support the M4 Black Route. As the umbrella body opposing the M4 Black Route, our members had been reassured by the objective and forward-looking approach you took towards this difficult issue before and during your election campaign, within the constraints of Cabinet responsibility. We hope that your vision for a Wales fit for future generations will continue to persuade you that the Black Route is not the way forward.

The financial costs of the proposal are eye watering, and look set to be well above £2 billion. Your predecessor was unintentionally accurate when he said in November 2015 that the cost would be “nowhere near” £1 billion. They will add to our indebtedness in return for what many experts have shown will be nugatory benefits for congestion relief and economic growth in Wales. Road building rarely solves congestion – it generates more traffic and shifts the problem to adjacent parts of the network. Authoritative 2017 research evaluating 80 recent new road schemes in the UK showed that they generate more traffic, leading to permanent and significant environmental and landscape damage, while showing little evidence of benefit to local economies. Bristol and SW England would also get proportionately more of what benefits there are from the Black Route than most parts of Wales: the area north of Bristol would get 2% growth in access to jobs whereas the Heads of the Valleys would get next to nothing. The consistent opposition to the Black Route by the Wales Federation of Small Businesses also reveals the weakness of the economic arguments. In 2014 they presciently called it a “billion pound mistake”.

The construction of the Black Route would generate huge additional carbon emissions over the next 2 decades which is completely incompatible with the crisis we now face both in Wales and the entire world in curbing climate change. Wales has wonderful pioneering legislation in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act which is rightly interpreted by Sophie Howe and many others to mean that the Black Route cannot be a 21st century option for improving our transport. Claims that the Black Route might be carbon neutral in 50 years time are an unacceptable response. The climate change crisis is immediate, as our younger citizens have rightly been pointing out in their “climate strikes” and demonstrations. A new generation of voters are aware of the legacy they face and are being mobilised to demand change - real change. We were very pleased to see that you recognised their call for immediate action last week. Stopping the new M4 and showing that the Future Generations Act has real teeth would be a groundbreaking decision that would set a new agenda for Wales, and hopefully inspire other countries to follow suit.

As well as flying in the face of all our responsibilities to reduce climate change, the Black Route would irreparably damage the Gwent Levels, one of the most precious and unique places in Wales.

14 miles of 6-lane motorway would plough through a Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest and four Sites of Special Scientific Interest, including the only site in Wales where the Common Crane has nested in the last 400 years. The motorway would have adverse impacts on many other species, including bats, otters, plants and the rare shrill carder bee. Natural Resources Wales has said that this conflicts with the Government's statutory duties. Farming would be adversely affected. Tourist income would be lost. New urban development would be certain to locate near the new motorway as we have seen everywhere else. The Levels would never survive as an oasis for farming, wildlife and public recreation, and a green lung for Newport.

CALM strongly believes in positive measures to improve transport in the corridor. Sound alternatives to the Black Route are available. In September 2018 the Future Generations Commissioner proposed a package of public and active transport measures costing £578m (a quarter of the likely cost of the Black Route). These are based on a full Metro public transport system and new infrastructure for cyclists and walkers which will be cheaper, greener, healthier and fairer to the whole population and our entire environment in South Wales. About a quarter of Welsh households do not own a car. A supporting study by the New Economics Foundation concluded that an M4 bypass would significantly increase inequality in Wales. Those with incomes in the top 20% would gain 3 times the benefits from an M4 bypass road than the poorest 20%. Sophie Howe's recommendations need to be swiftly developed by Transport for Wales. We need an environmentally-sound solution based on greatly improved public transport and active travel plus, maybe, some more limited road improvements. Options along these lines were not developed and examined in detail at the public inquiry.

In the spirit of seeking positive alternatives, CALM would like to co-sponsor a seminar, preferably to be held in the Greater Newport area, to address the specific challenges to transport policy in a region of Wales which has become overly dependent on cars with adverse impacts on levels of carbon emissions, air pollution, public health (including obesity and future life expectancy) and access to mobility for all sections of the population. We have contacted one of our local AMs, who was keen to help and we hope you might also be able to respond positively to this suggestion.

In conclusion, not one whit of the strong case against the Black Route has been weakened by any recent events (including the end of the Severn tolls). We have strong public support. In the first three months of 2019 our Petition to you and the Welsh Assembly against the M4 has been increasing by more than 1000 names a month. It has now reached 19,000 signatories, and is one of the best supported petitions ever submitted to the Assembly. [M4 Petition](#)

We have limited ourselves to mentioning the main elements in this letter but enclose a more detailed brief.

Kind Regards

Catherine Linstrum and Robert Hepworth,  
Joint Chairs CALM



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