

Petition: Stop the Red Route (A55/ A494 corridor)

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 25 Mehefin 2019

Petitions Committee | 25 June 2019

Research Briefing:

Petition Number: P-05-886

Petition title: Stop the Red Route (A55/ A494 corridor)

Text of petition:

We call on the National Assembly of Wales to urge the Welsh Government to withdraw its support for the 'Red Route' (A55/ A494/A548 Deeside Corridor Improvement) on the grounds that:

- 1) The construction of the new road through ancient woodland, and across agricultural land, contradicts Planning Policy Wales and the Well-being of Future Generations Act.
- 2) The recently published plans for a new A494 Dee Bridge, widening of the A494 and other improvements will deliver the Deeside traffic improvements without the need for the 'Red Route'.
- 3) The costs used to justify the choice of the 'Red Route' failed to account for necessary upgrade of the Flintshire Bridge. It also does not include the addition of a crawler lane at a major congestion point on the A55, the hill out of Northop towards Holywell. Congestion at these points will be made worse by the construction of the Red Route. The underestimate of the costs used imply that the proposed road cannot be considered value for money. Furthermore, the costs do not include the proposed A494 improvements (outlined in 2).
- 4) The choice of the 'Red Route' was based on unrepresentative traffic surveys.
- 5) In considering the 'Red Route' the Welsh Government failed to adequately consult residents of the Flint and Northop areas despite the major potential impact on their

communities. Despite costing over a quarter of a billion pounds, the new road would be likely to lead to more traffic congestion in these communities.

6) The International Panel on Climate Change has called for urgent action to reduce CO₂ emissions, saying we have only 12 years left to save the world's climate. We need to be investing our limited resources in sustainable transport like rail.

Background

The Welsh Government is the highway authority for the Welsh trunk road and motorway network in Wales and is responsible for maintenance and improvement of the network, including the A55, A494 and A548.

The Welsh Government's [A55/A494/A548 Deeside corridor scheme](#) aims to "improve journey times between the River Dee and Northop Interchange".

A55/A494/A548 Deeside corridor scheme

In March 2017, the Welsh Government launched a [consultation on improvements to the A55/A494/A548 Deeside corridor](#). The consultation sought views on two different options for this section of the road network:

- A blue option to include widening the A55/A494 route and the removal, modification and improvement of junctions; and
- A red option to include increasing capacity on the existing A548 and a new road between the A55 and A548.

In addition to this public consultation the Welsh Government also assessed each option in accordance with the [Welsh Transport Planning Appraisal Guidance \(WelTAG\)](#).

In September 2017, the then Cabinet Secretary (now Minister) for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates, [announced in Plenary](#) that following the consultation and WelTAG appraisal the preferred route to be adopted would be [the red option](#).

The red option

As outlined, the red option includes building a new road. The scheme consists of:

- A new 13km two-lane dual carriageway, linking the A55–A5119 Northop Junction (Junction 33) with the A494 and A550 north of Deeside Parkway Junction; and
- Increasing the capacity along the existing A548, including modifications and improvements to junctions and providing a new section of road between the A548 and the A55.

As [reported in the media](#), the red route was the preferred option of Flintshire Council's Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, however local residents have raised concerns over the route.

River Dee bridge scheme

The petitioner refers to plans for the [A494 River Dee bridge](#). This is a separate highway scheme, with the Welsh Government considering options to replace the existing bridge.

A WelTAG appraisal of different options for this scheme has been undertaken and a preferred option identified. The Welsh Government consulted on this option between November 2018 and February 2019. Consultation responses are currently being considered.

The North East Wales Metro

In announcing his preferred red route option for the A55/A494/A548 Deeside corridor scheme, the then Cabinet Secretary referred to the scheme in the context of a range of additional transport initiatives for the area. This included funding for the creation of active travel routes which will contribute to the Welsh Government's vision for a North East Wales Metro.

In March 2017, the Welsh Government published [North East Wales Metro: Moving North Wales Forward](#). The brochure set out an outline vision for the project and listed existing projects in development including rail and integrated transport schemes. This included reference to a number of highway schemes, including both the A55/A494/A548 Deeside corridor scheme and the A494 River Dee bridge scheme.

Welsh Government action

In his letter to the Chair of the Petitions Committee, dated 6 June 2019, the Minister for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates, addresses a number of the points raised by the petitioner.

The Minister highlights that:

Whilst the red option crosses...Ancient Woodland, the crossing location has been selected at a point where the steep-sided valley can be spanned by a viaduct with minimum effect on the watercourse and vegetation...Mitigation would include substantial, targeted areas of new woodland planting to replace or improve screening in the long-term.

The Minister also highlights the traffic surveys and modelling that was used to determine the impact of both the red and blue options, in addition to the public consultation undertaken in regards the scheme. Other initiatives that the Minister suggests will contribute to the Welsh Government's vision for the North East Wales Metro, in addition to this particular highway scheme, are also outlined.

The petitioner raises concerns regarding climate change. In April 2019 the Welsh Government [declared a climate emergency](#). The First Minister, Mark Drakeford, also highlighted the adverse

impacts on the environment when [announcing his decision in June 2019](#) that he had decided not to proceed with the proposed [M4 corridor around Newport scheme](#).

National Assembly for Wales action

In [response to the then Cabinet Secretary's 2017 announcement](#) that the red option would be adopted as the preferred route, Mark Isherwood AM referred to the River Dee Bridge Scheme and asked:

In the consultation you describe that as a separate scheme, but can you confirm, as I know to be the case, that the red route is dependent on that, and confirm how the two will work concurrently to ensure that the whole can deliver as intended?

The then Cabinet Secretary responded that the:

...work will take place whilst, in parallel, it will not be dependent on us pursuing the red route. That work must take place regardless of the Deeside corridor project.

Also in response to the announcement, Michelle Brown AM stated that:

It seems to me that the blue route was the better option. I appreciate that it would have caused a lot of disturbance in the Deeside area while it was under construction, but what concerns me about the red route is that, effectively, you're just moving the bottleneck further west.

Hannah Blythyn AM asked the then Cabinet Secretary how the goals set out in the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* will be used to assess the environmental impact of the red route. The then Cabinet Secretary responded:

I am confident that, through our new Welsh transport appraisal guidance scheme, we'll be able to ensure that the Well-being of Future Generations Act is adhered to. I think, so far, the process that we've followed has indeed recognised the ways of working that are promoted by the Act.

In December 2018, Darren Millar AM [tabled a written question](#) asking what action the Welsh Government is taking to address congestion on the A494. In his response, the then Cabinet Secretary provided an update on the A55/A494/A548 Deeside corridor scheme stating that the Welsh Government is:

...currently in the process of procuring an employer's agent. This will be followed by the procurement of a contractor and designer who will develop the preferred route in more detail before progressing through the statutory procedures and onto construction.

On 12 June 2019 during Plenary, Russell George AM referred to the First Minister's decision not to proceed with the proposed M4 corridor around Newport scheme partly on environmental grounds. [He asked the Minister for Economy and Transport](#) whether the:

decision throw[s] into doubt other transport schemes in Wales, such as the Deeside corridor scheme...Does this decision by the First Minister represent a fundamental change to Welsh Government transport policy on environmental grounds?

The Minister responded:

The Member, I think, rightly identifies a number of schemes that many might fear will be lost as a consequence of this being seen as having set a precedent. That is not the case. All of those programmes will go ahead...work on the A494/A55, will be proceeding this summer with further modelling and Welsh transport appraisal guidance work and further consultations and meetings with local stakeholders.