



north wales economic ambition board
bwrdd uchelgais economaidd gogledd cymru

North Wales Economic Ambition Board Response to National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee Inquiry – Deeside Corridor Improvement

Introduction

The North Wales Economic Ambition Board is a cross sector partnership comprising representatives from the North Wales Local Authorities, Business, Higher and Further education and the Third Sector. Our collective aim is to support sustained economic growth in the region through better joint working.

The importance of transport connectivity in North Wales has long been recognised as a significant priority for the region. One of the key early projects delivered by the NWEAB was a Regional Infrastructure Plan, intended to support achieving a high-level economic growth strategy for the region. The importance of identifying solutions to the current levels of congestion and lack of resilience on the A494 / A55 corridor was high in the list of identified strategic priorities.

The North Wales Economic Ambition Board has recognised there is an urgent need for the existing A55 / A494 and the Deeside road network to be improved in order to sustain current and future levels of economic growth in North Wales.

The Strategic Infrastructure Plan highlights the following.

North Wales has a dispersed population, which apart from Wrexham and Deeside, make it harder for the region overall to develop hubs of economic activity with any scale. The region is also peripheral to the large economic centres on the English side of the border so excellent infrastructure and connectivity can contribute to economic growth by attracting inward investment and enabling residents to access higher quality jobs over a wider radius.

Transport improvements can promote economic performance by overcoming constraints caused by congestion, long travel times, and disproportionate commuting costs. Long travel times imply economic costs to a business as time could be used more productively elsewhere and it discourages commuting to higher value jobs. Transport is a unique type of infrastructure that enables enabling people to access jobs and bringing businesses closer together.

The existing road infrastructure on the A55 / A494 is one of the main arterial access points into North Wales and when congested acts as a throttle to the North Wales economy. In addition it is also the main means of access to the Deeside Industrial Zone, a major development area with over 9000 jobs and the potential for many more. The conflict between local access to employment and other services and also long distance traffic crossing from North Wales to North West England is a significant cause of congestion on this route. This is especially the case at peak times when high levels of tourist traffic are also entering or leaving North Wales. Without improvement, high levels of congestion on this route will impact on the potential for economic growth in the region.

The importance of the A494 / A55 as an arterial access route serving the whole of North Wales, is summarised in the description below.

The A55 is the main expressway through North Wales running from the end of the M53 in the east all the way to Holyhead Port on Anglesey. Its entire length running from Chester to Holyhead is a dual carriageway route and forms part of the TEN-T Road Network.

Junction 34/33b is point at which the A494 converges and then diverges with the A55. The A494 is a primary trunk route running from Dolgellau through part of the Snowdonia National Park to west Cheshire crossing Flintshire.

The A494/A55 between the River Dee and Northop Interchange is a dual 2-lane road. It frequently experiences severe congestion. The road carries significantly more traffic than it was designed for, and falls below modern standards. It is poorly aligned and there is nowhere for broken down vehicles to pull off the road. Some of the junctions have slip roads that are too short or too close to the road, some of which have poor visibility. It is at these junctions that the majority of accidents occur. Resilience along the route is a significant issue for the region.

Between the A55 at Ewloe Interchange and the M56 motorway, the current route through Queensferry is formed by the A494(T), A550(T) and A5117(T). These sections of the highway network suffer congestion and delay at peak weekday and tourism periods due to high traffic volumes, sub-standard junction geometry (e.g. Ewloe Interchange) and limited peak capacity.

Throughout Deeside there are significant pinch points in the road network leading to congestion, particularly through the Deeside Corridor. The proposed Red Route Road Improvement will address the chronic congestion the area suffers. Significant planned development in the Deeside area prior to the implementation of the road improvement is likely to have a detrimental effect on road capacity and resilience on this main gateway into Wales.

Importantly, the need for improvement along the current A494 corridor and the replacement of the current River Dee bridge will be required irrespective of the red route development.

The NWEAB response to the original consultation contained the following statements, all of which remain valid at the current time.

The lack of resilience in the current road network is a significant issue for the North Wales economy.

There are very high levels of cross-border connectivity between North Wales and North West England. There are very significant daily cross-border commuter flows and the cross-border economy functions in an integrated way. Fundamentally business does not recognise the border between England and Wales in this location. The current situation where direct access from the UK motorway network to Wales stops at a series of concrete blocks just after you enter Wales is unacceptable. Work undertaken by the NWEAB in partnership with the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership and the Liverpool City Region has highlighted the economic potential of the cross-border region and the prospect of significant employment growth that could accrue from better communication links. The delivery of an improvement scheme for the A55 / A494 better linking North Wales to the UK motorway network and the wider Northern Powerhouse is essential.

Response to Current Inquiry

The NWEAB remains strongly supportive of the proposal to deliver improvements to the A494 and A55 corridor, on the basis that improvements to the current congested network is essential.

The NWEAB supports the Red Route proposals because they: -

- Offer an increase in capacity to the current congested network.
- Offer opportunities for better resilience than other alternative proposals, will cause less disruption during the construction period and impact on fewer existing residents.
- Will significantly improve connectivity from deprived communities across north Wales to the employment opportunities at Deeside Industrial Park.
- Will enable existing businesses on the Deeside Industrial park to have improved access for staff, customers and to markets.
- Having traffic split over two routes will deliver significantly better resilience during periods of disruption than current arrangements and alternative proposals

The NWEAB has also strongly support the development of alternative transport proposals to road-based interventions. It was clear from the consultation proposals that road improvements alone would not resolve the current demand for transport in the area. In particular, one of the significant causes of congestion is when long distance traffic, including port related movements from Ireland, clash with peak holiday travel and local commuter traffic using only short lengths of the strategic road network. We have worked with Welsh Government and Flintshire County Council to support and prioritise local interventions that would provide a viable alternative to car- based commuting.

Multi-mode transport proposals include: -

Planned improvements to rail service frequencies and improved reliability on the Wrexham – Bidston route that links the Deeside area with Wrexham and Liverpool. The introduction of new rolling stock from December 2019 and a doubling of current service frequencies from 2021, supported by improved branding and marketing, will transform current services along this route.

Successfully campaigning for better and more frequent rail services along the north Wales main line, resulting in franchise commitments for better services, in the new Transport for Wales franchise.

Proposals for a new rail station, with associated park and ride and transport hub at Deeside Parkway.

Improvements to Shotton rail station including improved opportunities for interchange between the Bidston route and the North Wales main line.

Delivering improvements to the Deeside Shuttle bus services, including the emerging proposals for low carbon vehicles on the route.

Making significant improvements to active travel networks linking Deeside Industrial Park to communities in Shotton, Queenferry, Connah's Quay and surrounding areas.

Establishing Quality Bus Partnerships on the main bus routes along the coast and between Rhyl and Chester.

Detailed cross border work with partners in Cheshire and Warrington and the Liverpool City Region to better understand and manage cross border transport movements. These solutions will require investment in cross-border integrated ticketing and coordination of passenger transport timetables.

The NWEAB considers that the proposed delivery of the red route improvement scheme, delivered in conjunction with the area wide package of passenger transport and active travel interventions set out above, is the preferred solution.

Summary.

The heavy congestion currently being suffered on the existing A494 / A55 corridor is acting as a throttle on the North Wales economy. The lack of resilience when incidents occur has a significant impact on business throughout the region, but especially in the Deeside area.

The proposal to deliver improvements through the construction of the proposed red route will help resolve congestion in the immediate area. The proposed route will improve access to employment opportunities in Deeside for the whole of North Wales. The comprehensive package of wider transport improvements will provide opportunities to increase the use of alternatives to private car access in the local area.

The red route scheme will be a catalyst for improvements to passenger transport routes and services and active travel solutions will improve opportunities for local access to major employment sites.

The requirement for on-line improvements along the A404 / A55 will remain. The poor condition of much of the strategic infrastructure will be a significant issue in the future unless resolved. The nature of the work required will be highly problematic unless alternative road capacity is available.

Both proposed improvement packages are necessary to respond effectively to the current congestion in the Deeside corridor.

The NWEAB supports the package of improvements, including the proposals to construct the red route. It is however essential that wider improvements to passenger and active travel are also delivered as part of a comprehensive package of connectivity improvements.

September 2019