



Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-886  
Ein cyf/Our ref KS/08081/19

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Dear Janet,

Thank you for your letter of 14 October on behalf of the petitions committee regarding petition P-05-886 – Stop the Red Route. I will answer each of questions individually below.

**1. An outline of the remaining stages of the process for developing this scheme and likely timings.**

We have appointed CordCorderoy supported by Capita, as technical advisors to assist the Welsh Government in managing the delivery of the scheme which will form an integral element of the North Wales Metro. My recent written statement on the North Wales Metro can be found at <https://gov.wales/written-statement-north-wales-metro-update>. They are currently developing a procurement strategy to deliver the next phase of the scheme. This will be the procurement of a designer/contractor to prepare a preliminary design developed in consultation with stakeholders, considering the environmental and engineering issues in more detail. The procurement of suppliers commenced in autumn 2019. Development of the preliminary design, preparation of the environmental statement and publication of draft orders for the scheme is scheduled for completion in late 2020/early 2021.

Publication of the draft Orders forms part of a statutory consenting process, which is likely to include a public local inquiry before any land acquisition and construction can take place. This process is programmed to be completed in late 2022/early 2023, with detailed design and construction commencing in 2023. The construction period is likely to take 3 years.

**2. Specifically, details of when environmental assessments will be undertaken and published**

A full environmental impact assessment will be undertaken in consultation with Natural Resources Wales, Environment Agency and other environmental stakeholders. The assessment will consider both the benefits and adverse environmental impacts. The findings, including any mitigation measures, will be reported in an Environment Statement. The assessment will commence once a designer is appointed, and is likely to take 18 months to complete. The Environment Statement will be published for all stakeholders to comment and will be scrutinised at the Public Local Inquiry.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

**3. Your response to the suggestion made by the traffic modelling is flawed and has underestimated traffic flows, and that the current scheme will, for example, exacerbate congestion on the A55 at Halkyn Hill**

The scheme assessment followed the WelTAG (Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance - 2008), which refers to WebTAG (UK Government's Department for Transport - Transport Appraisal Guidance) for transport modelling and economic appraisal, and ensures a consistent approach to scheme appraisals nationally. WebTAG defines when traffic surveys should be undertaken - TAG Unit M1.2 Section 3.3 states surveys should be carried out during a 'neutral', or representative, month avoiding main and local holiday periods, local school holidays and half terms, and other abnormal traffic periods. Therefore the options have been appraised using a neutral month transport model which has been developed and validated in line with guidance and allows for periods where traffic flows are both below and above the average. The model performance was carefully reviewed with independent scrutiny and assessed to be suitable to appraise the relative merits between the red and blue options required for WelTAG Stage 2. If a decision is made to progress the scheme further, the transport modelling and economic appraisal for the preferred option will be updated to take account of current guidance and traffic growth forecasts (which will include latest assumptions on the economic impact of Brexit).

The transport modelling and economic appraisal does incorporate the effects of increased traffic flows in the A55 at Halkyn Hill, in the neutral period assessed.

- 4. How the two highway options consulted on were arrived at, including:**
- a. Whether a wider range of road and non-road schemes was considered at the development stage?**
  - b. What consideration was given to non-highway interventions as an alternative to the two road schemes?**

The scheme assessment followed WelTAG, which included a Planning Stage and Stage 1 Appraisal, prior to the Stage 2 Appraisal. During the Planning Stage a wide range of options including highway, walking & cycling, bus, rail, freight and demand management were considered. These were grouped into the following categories, as defined in Section 7 of the A55 A494 WelTAG Study: WelTAG Planning Stage Report (2010):

- Managing Demand
- Making Best Use
- Capacity Enhancements

The A55 A494 WelTAG Study – Stage 1 Appraisal Report (2012) assessed the identified packages of options against the assessment criteria (defined by WelTAG) to produce the options that were assessed at Stage 2. Section 4 of the Stage 1 Report defines all the options assessed. These were categorised as:

- Managing Demand
- Making Best Use: Non-highway and highway measures
- Capacity Enhancements: A55-A494 Corridor; A548 Corridor and local highway scheme

- 5. Your response to the points raised that the scheme does not currently include works at Ewloe interchange and Halkyn Hill, and the suggestion that these are essential but will make the scheme unaffordable (both panels the Committee heard from agreed that these works are desirable)**

The proposals do not currently include plans on the A494 along Aston Hill to realign and rationalise the existing junctions or to remodel the Ewloe interchange. Traffic along the A494

will reduce as a result of constructing the Red Route which will improve road safety along the A494 as well as deliver the aforementioned environmental and health benefits.

The request for a crawler lane as the Red Route rises up Halkyn Hill was received following the Public Consultation and I gave a commitment to consider this during the development of the preliminary design. From the traffic modelling undertaken as part of the route selection study, traffic is forecast to increase on the A55 to the west of Northop as a consequence of the Red Route. Further detailed assessments will be undertaken to determine if additional capacity is required. This will include an economic assessment to confirm if any additional lanes do provide value for money and offer demonstrable benefits to health and the environment.

**6. The evidence received that a wider range of non-highway interventions are needed in the area of this scheme (for example in relation to rail, bus and active travel), what consideration has been given to delivering these, and how are any being taken forward?**

The Metro Vision was published in March 2017, which partly focuses on creating integrated transport hubs at key employment sites across North Wales and the wider Mersey Dee area. These hubs are centred in Bangor/Menai, Colwyn Bay/Llandudno/Conwy, Abergale/Rhyl/St Asaph, Wrexham, and Deeside areas. It is about better connectivity within, to and from, and between these hubs. The initial scope of the work has focused on developing the integrated hub concept in Deeside, encompassing rail, bus, active travel, and road enhancements. The integration of the North Wales Metro and the Red Route will therefore deliver connectivity improvements by bus, rail, active travel and road across the region and across border, working with partners in North West England which will lead to delivering economic growth across North Wales.

In the last three financial years, funding of over £12.3m has been awarded to Flintshire CC for schemes the support the delivery of the NE Wales Metro. The funding supports schemes to improve Active Travel and bus infrastructure in Deeside Industrial Park, bus priority and other bus infrastructure on A548/B5129 corridor between the Denbighshire border and Queensferry and also active travel infrastructure in Holywell and the Greenfield Valley. These schemes will improve access to and within Deeside Industrial Park and the wider Enterprise Zone, linking communities with job and services.

Officials are working with Flintshire CC and Transport for Wales (TfW) to support the introduction of a Quality Bus Partnership on core bus routes connecting Flintshire to Denbighshire and Chester. The aim is to secure a high quality, more stable bus network with multi-operator ticketing availability. TfW have been commissioned to develop schemes for an integrated Shotton station and a new Deeside Parkway station working in partnership with Network Rail and Flintshire CC. Work to identify a preferred option for Deeside Parkway is planned to be completed by Christmas and for Shotton Station by spring 2020. Consultation with the local stakeholders is planned as part of this work and further details will be available in due course.

Crucially, developing the Flintshire corridor as the principal artery of the Metro offers an opportunity to align significant investment with the vision that has popular support and to accelerate the delivery of the outcomes of the Metro.

**7. How the scheme complies with Planning Policy Wales 10, particularly in relation to ancient woodland.**

**Background:** The primary document setting out the findings of the WelTAG Stage 2 study that relate to environment and biodiversity is the Environmental Appraisal Report, specifically Chapter 8 Biodiversity. This was completed and issued in February 2017, before the publication of PPW 10 in December 2018. The study report identifies one area of ancient woodland, at Lead Brook Wood which is also a Local Wildlife Site (LWS), a number of other woodlands and a wide range of sites of biodiversity interest across the study area for both options.

The report states ‘The Red Option crosses Leadbrook Wood LWS approximately through the centre of the LWS. The road would cross the LWS on a viaduct approximately at the level of the adjacent fields, thereby minimising the loss of ground-level habitat in the steep-sided ravine. At this preliminary stage the assessment assumes the potential impacts would be a gap of approximately 30 m wide in the woodland canopy, the permanent loss of habitat where any bridge supports are to be placed, as well as temporary loss of habitat to facilitate works. The LWS is also likely to support bats, and so the gap in the canopy may result in severance of commuting routes both during construction and when the road is in use. Increases in noise, light and air pollution may also have a significant impact on the woodland and the species it supports, including potentially bats, during the operational phase of the Red Option. ‘..if this option is taken forward then detailed surveys of this area of woodland should be undertaken to understand the potential impacts of the proposed scheme fully. Specifically, surveys should look at the plant species present within areas of proposed works, and detailed species surveys should be undertaken to establish how the woodland is used by mobile species... Impacts on the Lead Brook watercourse and associated species should also be considered and avoided or mitigated.’

In December 2017 the report on a programme of survey for dormice in this woodland was issued. No evidence of dormice in Lead Brook Wood was found.

**PPW10 and Ancient Woodland.** PPW is the principal and authoritative source of national planning policy, under which local planning authorities prepare their Local Development Plans. PPW 10 (December 2018) is the latest edition of Planning Policy Wales, and takes account of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It outlines policies on all the key land use topics, and is supplemented by Technical Advice Notes, Circulars and Policy Clarification Letters. PPW edition 10 is produced to guide development by setting out the national planning policy framework to be followed by the development planning system. PPW10 makes no attempt to guide the provision or design of new or improved trunk roads directly; it guides the local development plans for land use which the road network serves, and confirms that the WelTAG process is to be used to assess transport projects.

*12. The primary objective of PPW is to ensure that the planning system contributes towards the delivery of sustainable development and improves the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, as required by the Planning (Wales) Act 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and other key legislation. A well-functioning planning system is fundamental for sustainable development and achieving sustainable places. (Extract from PPW10)*

PPW 10 paragraph 6.4.26 states that ancient woodland and semi-natural woodlands ‘should be afforded protection from development which would result in their loss or deterioration unless there are significant and clearly-defined public benefits;’ and so in considering this project there is a need to weigh up the balance between loss or deterioration of ancient and semi-natural woodland and the public benefits of the project. There is also a need to weigh up the balance between the environmental impacts of the Red Route and the Blue Route, in reaching a Preferred Option.

**8. The suggestion that the location of the consultation events favoured residents of Deeside, who are less directly affected by the potential negative impacts of the Red Route.**

The Public Consultation ran for 12 weeks. During this time, all information available at the public exhibitions could be viewed on the Consultation Pages of the Welsh Government's website; this information was available to anybody. Paper copies of the display material were also available at local council offices, and libraries. A study telephone number and email address were provided for people to engage with the study team and 100 people made use of these facilities. Five Public Consultation exhibitions were held during the consultation period and these events were publicised by letter drops, posters and press releases in the study area. The local press also ran articles for the duration of the consultation period and BBC North East Wales provided television or online coverage at the outset. 1,842 people attended the events and 2,536 responses were received from the public and statutory consultees; the highest consultation response received by the Welsh Government.

Initially, four days of public exhibitions were held at two venues in March 2017; two days each at Ewloe Social Club and Coleg Cambria, Connah's Quay, Kelsterton. Each day the events were open from 10am until 8pm. The Connah's Quay venue was also used during the Public Information Exhibition (PIE) and was close to residential areas towards the middle of the Red Route. The Social Club was a new venue selected as the Leisure Centre that has been used in the PIE was unavailable and previously, negative comments were received about how far the exhibition room was from the venue entrance. The Social Club had good parking facilities and was close to residential areas close to the middle of the Blue Route. Following a request from the Welsh Government, a fifth exhibition was held in Northop on 10 May 2017 (Northop Campus, Wrexham Glyndwr University) again being open from 10am until 8pm. This venue was close to the end of the Red Route. A letter outlining the options inviting recipients to attend the March exhibitions was sent to 4,980 properties in the study area. The properties identified were approximately 500m from the centre line of either the Red or Blue Route. A further 793 properties were sent letters advising them of the Northop exhibition. Both letters provided a link to the study website. Three of the five public exhibitions held were close to the Red Route.

The questionnaire available during the consultation asked respondents to provide their postcode and showed responses were received from across the region. In the Consultation Report, respondent postcodes were plotted against Route preference and mapped and views on each Route were set out clearly.

I hope this addresses each of the points the committee has raised.

Yours sincerely,



**Ken Skates AC/AM**

Gweinidog yr Economi a Thrafnidiaeth  
Minister for Economy and Transport