

17 September 20

Senedd Cymru
Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a Sgiliau

Effeithiau COVID-19: Galwad Agored
am dystiolaeth a phrofiadau
EIS(5) COV – 26
Ymateb gan: Ymateb unigol

Welsh Parliament
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills
Committee

Impacts of COVID-19: Open Call for
evidence and experiences

Evidence from: Individual Response

Dear Committee,

Response to your consultation on the impact of COVID-19.

There are many issues facing Wales and the world at the moment, including at least two global crises. COVID-19 is of course one of these global crises and it is rightly high on the Senedd's agenda. However, I am concerned that the Senedd may be focusing on COVID-19 to the exclusion of all else and missing opportunities to act on other important issues.

Climate Change, like COVID-19, is a global crisis. Neither appears to be sufficiently well understood to determine which is the more serious, but both clearly require massive changes. COVID-19 appears to be receiving the attention it needs, with radical measures introduced to limit the spread of the virus. Unfortunately the measures introduced to date regarding the climate crisis have mostly been comparatively minor and do not go far enough. The massive reduction in travel caused by the pandemic will have temporarily reduced humanity's carbon footprint but despite this we have already past 'Earth Overshoot Day' which this year fell on August 22nd. Private car and air travel are now recovering towards pre-pandemic levels while public transport remains, by necessity, suppressed.

Will the attention on COVID-19 mean that opportunities to address climate change will be missed? For example, a new transport strategy is due from the Welsh Government in 2020. Transport is now the UK's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. Will the lack of attention on climate change mean that the old unsustainable transport strategy, with its focus on road-building, will simply be rolled over? Similarly, Network Rail has recently published its recommendations for decarbonisation of rail services. For most Welsh routes, the preferred option is electrification. Unfortunately, Transport for Wales has already ordered a large fleet of new diesel trains which are incompatible with electrification. This new fleet, with a potential lifespan of 30 years, is likely to lead to rail decarbonisation in Wales being deferred beyond 2050. There is very little time remaining, the Senedd must act within the next few months if the problem of a large new diesel-only fleet is to be averted. Will COVID-19 mean that the Senedd is unable to address this issue?