

Ken Skates MS

Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales

21 October 2024

Dear Ken,

Thank you for attending the Committee's meeting on 26 June 2024 to discuss transport policy. The Committee agreed that I should write to you to request further clarification and information on several matters raised during the meeting.

### 20 mph Speed Limit

The Committee questioned whether the guidance for local authorities to support the implementation of the policy had been sufficiently clear and whether this had resulted in an inconsistent approach across Wales. In response, you said that further work was being undertaken to address public concerns. This would consist of a three-phase approach: engaging with the public and local authorities, refining the existing guidance, and the implementation of changes to specific roads where necessary. The implementation phase would start in September.

You will be aware that media reports have suggested that the scale of changes will be significant, with certain reports describing the review as a policy u-turn<sup>1</sup>. There are concerns that this will only serve to further erode confidence in the communication around the policy. The Committee is eager to hear what steps you are taking to manage the public's expectations in relation to the policy.

- *Given that decisions on changes to specific roads will be a matter for local authorities (within the framework of the Welsh Government's guidance), how will you address public concerns about potential inconsistencies across Wales?*

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<sup>1</sup> [The end of hated 20mph speed limit in Wales: Roads revert to 30mph as transport minister reveals even his own family have signed 500,000-strong petition against the scheme | Daily Mail Online](#)



- *What steps are you taking to manage public expectations regarding the scale of changes likely to arise from the review?*

The Committee highlighted concerns about the misreporting of the policy and the misuse of statistics.

For example, in July, the media reported that fines resulting from the policy had totalled £1.28m by June. This would appear to be derived by multiplying the total “offences” reported on the GoSafe website by the £100 fixed penalty. However, we understand that only about one quarter of offences actually resulted in fines, with the remainder either addressed by other means, such as speed awareness courses, or involving exempt vehicles like emergency vehicles on call.

Similarly, media coverage has reported increases in accident rates in 20mph areas, along with suggestions from campaigners that this may indicate 20mph roads are less safe, without highlighting that the total distance of 20mph limit roads has increased from 870km to 13,000km. We note that for this reason, the Welsh Government has reported accident rates in 20mph and 30mph areas together.

More generally, concerns have been raised about the Welsh Government’s apparent reluctance to explain and defend the policy in the face of criticism. This is difficult to understand, particularly given the emphasis you placed on securing public buy-in for the policy.

- *Could you explain the steps being taken to promote the benefits of the policy to the Welsh public, and how will you assess whether this has been a success?*
- *How do you respond to concerns about the Welsh Government’s apparent reluctance to defend the policy in the face of misinformation in the media?*
- *What steps have you taken to clarify reporting on the policy in general, and specifically in the case of the two examples outlined above?*

## Roads Policy Statement and review

During the meeting, you emphasised the importance of making transport decisions at the most appropriate level and stressed your commitment to empowering local authorities and Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) in making these decisions. You highlighted the need for flexibility in terms of funding to enable local authorities to have greater control over investment in transport.

You referred to the need to consider whether the Roads Policy Statement remains effective and fit for purpose, in response to the climate and nature emergencies. You argued that new road building can be consistent with climate targets if it facilitates more effective public transport and reduces road congestion on local roads. You said that strategic road planning could reduce overall vehicle use.

We note that the current Roads Policy Statement does not prohibit road investment but would allow it in circumstances, including where it would “support modal shift and reduce carbon emissions”. We recognise that you are still considering the policy, but we would be grateful for further explanation of

whether you believe this specific aspect of the statement would already enable road building to take place in the circumstances you outlined.

You also indicated that you believe road building is consistent with the Net Zero Wales Carbon Budget 2 target of a 10% reduction in car miles per person. We would appreciate details of the evidence supporting this view, including examples of road-building schemes that have led to a net reduction in car miles overall, rather than reductions on specific feeder routes or the wider local road network.

- *Can you explain the steps you are taking to ensure that transport funding is sufficiently flexible to provide local authorities and CJs with more control over investment?*
- *With regard to your comments that road building may be desirable where it promotes public transport, can you clarify whether you are satisfied that the current provision in the Roads Policy Statement, that road investment and building is permissible where it would "support modal shift and reduce carbon emissions" would permit construction in the circumstances you outlined? If not, which aspect would prevent it?*
- *Can you provide data and case studies that demonstrate how recent road-building projects have successfully reduced private car use by the Welsh Government's target of 10%?*
- *How are you seeking to ensure that any proposal for a third Menai crossing aligns with the Welsh Government's climate goals, and what environmental impact assessments are being conducted as part of the planning process?*

## Highway Maintenance

During the meeting, you strongly supported the Lugg review on strategic road network maintenance. You recognised its importance in guiding maintenance practices to maximise benefits for modal shift, biodiversity, climate change resilience, and emissions reduction.

You went on to acknowledge the significant backlog in road maintenance, which has been estimated to require over £1 billion to address it.

- *How are findings of the Lugg review being incorporated into current and future road maintenance projects?*
- *What specific measures are being taken to address the backlog in local road maintenance, and given the estimated overall costs, how are priorities being set?*

## Active Travel

In terms of active travel, you emphasised that the focus should be on the quality of active travel programmes rather than their overall quantity and highlighted the importance of identifying high-impact projects to meet the 2030 target set out in Net Zero Wales. Again, you acknowledged the

importance of providing flexibility in funding for local authorities to allocate funding based on their specific needs, including highway maintenance and active travel projects.

The Committee notes the recent publication of the Wales Audit Office's report on active travel, which set out that the Welsh Government remains a long way from achieving the step change in active travel intended through the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013.

- *What mechanisms are in place to ensure that funding used by local authorities will meet both maintenance and active travel objectives?*
- *Can you outline your timetable for responding to the Wales Audit Office's report on Active Travel, including the publication of your response?*

## Bus Reform

During the meeting, you confirmed that you are satisfied with the progress being made on bus reform and that the delay in introducing the Bus Reform Bill would not impact the overall timeline.

You acknowledged the risks associated with transitioning to a new model of provision, including ensuring short-term stability, managing costs, and maintaining a sustainable bus network. During discussions, you highlighted innovative funding models from other countries, such as council tax-funded free local bus networks in parts of France and suggested that such models could be considered in Wales.

- *What steps are being taken to explore innovative funding models for bus service provision from other countries, such as those in France?*
- *Can you set out the approach being taken to managing risks associated with the transition to bus franchising?*

## Rail Services

During the meeting, you referred to improvements in Transport for Wales' (TfW) performance, particularly in relation to punctuality and reduced numbers of cancellations. However, you explained that delays often arose due to issues under the control of Network Rail.

You discussed preparations for the upcoming Under-19s Euros in North Wales in 2026, mentioning recent meetings with Wrexham local authority leaders and Wrexham AFC co-owner Rob McElhenney to plan for increased foot traffic due to the football club's success. Steven McGregor added that meetings were scheduled to discuss the challenges and opportunities around the tournament in North Wales.

- *In your statement in the Senedd Chamber on 24 September, you referred to the establishment of GBR Cymru, an "empowered Wales and Borders Business Unit within Great British Railways". Can you provide the Committee with further details on this and the statutory role for the Welsh*

*Ministers which you referred to, including details of any firm commitments you have received from the UK Government?*

- *What discussions are you having with your counterparts in the UK Government about the need to urgently improve rail infrastructure and the role of Network Rail in Wales?*
- *What are the key challenges identified in planning for the Under-19s Euros in North Wales, and what support is Welsh Government providing to Tŷŵ to help address them?*

## Decarbonisation of Public Transport

You acknowledged the difficulty of meeting the 2028 target for 50% of the bus fleet to achieve zero-tailpipe-emissions. You said that the transition to zero emissions could be facilitated through the new bus franchising arrangements, although reaching the target would remain a significant challenge due to costs and the pressures on public finances.

- *Do you intend to revise the 2028 target in light of the challenges you outlined?*
- *How will the rollout of bus franchising be structured to ensure that it supports the transition to zero-tailpipe emission buses?*

Thank you again for your constructive contribution to the Committee's ongoing work on transport policy.

I should be grateful for a response as soon as possible, and by 14 November at the latest.

Yours sincerely,



Llyr Gruffydd MS,  
Chair, Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg | We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.