



Ein cyf/Our ref – KS/PO/333/2024

Llyr Gruffydd MS,

Chair, Climate Change, Environment and
Infrastructure Committee

14 November 2024

Dear Llyr

Thank you for your letter of 21 October seeking further clarification and information on several matters raised during the previous committee meeting. Please see below responses to the questions.

20MPH SPEED LIMIT

- *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?*

There is a growing consensus on safe speeds in communities that we can build from. We still believe that 20mph is right, but we want to make sure we are getting the right speeds on the right roads.

Between April and August 2024, I met and listened to citizens, bus drivers, emergency services, the police, young people, vulnerable people, businesses, county, town and community councillors, local authorities and many others – to understand their views on road safety in residential areas.

In July 2024, we gave highway authorities revised guidance to make it clearer where roads can be 30mph. In 2024, the public has had a chance to suggest where they feel changes should be made. Highway authorities are now using [our revised guidance](#) to assess these suggestions.

Any change in speed limits will need to be made through a traffic regulation order. This process will take several months to complete.

Officials continue to hold regional meetings with all local authorities to support them while making these changes ensuring they can share best practice and a consistent approach is taken. However, it is important to note that each Local Authority acts as the local highway authority and ultimately, how they decided to interpret guidance and implement the change is down to them.

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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.

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

Over the summer, people were encouraged to feed back to their highway authority to ensure we have the right speeds on the right roads across Wales. Highway authorities are now in the process of reviewing feedback. We have provided an additional £5 million in funding to help highway authorities implement changes.

Highway authorities will advertise any proposed changes through the statutory Traffic Regulation Order process, which includes a 21-day public consultation period allowing the public to comment on the proposed changes. Welsh Government is supporting highway authorities to communicate a consistent message to the public about changes and has provided a communications toolkit. This includes managing expectations around the number of roads which will change and the need to be clear that the default speed limit remains 20mph. This is not a change in policy, but a review to change the speed limit to 30mph where it is considered safe to do so.

- *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?*

Welsh Government is undertaking a five-year evaluation of the policy. This will provide a process evaluation report by 2025, a mid-term evaluation report by April 2027 and a final impact evaluation report by 2029. A meaningful assessment of the policy will be made over this longer-term period, including collision rates, changes in public attitudes to the 20mph limit and estimated changes in carbon dioxide emissions.

Transport for Wales (TfW) have published the [monitoring framework](#) which sets out what is being monitored and how the monitoring will take place. The initial phase one monitoring has been completed, which measured (but was not limited to) performance indicators such as vehicle speeds, collisions, injuries, journey times and air quality. This shows that:

- Vehicle speeds on 20mph main through roads have fallen by an average of 4.3mph, with reductions evident soon after the new limit was introduced. 58% of vehicles are now being driven at or below 24mph, compared to 20% before. These reductions are expected to lower the collision risk and the severity of resulting injuries.
- Average journey times have increased on most routes assessed but generally not by more than 2 minutes. Simultaneously, journey time variability has reduced on most routes, indicating improved journey time reliability and meaning greater certainty on how long it will take to drive a particular route.
- Air quality monitoring in the phase 1 areas until April 2024 did not reveal any material difference in nitrogen dioxide concentrations between areas inside and outside the 20mph limit.

There is also secondary data being collected from police recorded road collision statistics. From April – June 2024 they showed that both collisions (24%) and casualties (24%) on 20mph and 30mph roads (combined) have fallen by almost a quarter compared to the same period of 2023 - the lowest recorded outside of the pandemic.

We also know that in the first nine months since the introduction of 20mph in September 2023, the number of collisions (26%) and casualties (28%) on 20mph and 30mph roads (combined) were down by more than a quarter. The three quarterly reductions within this period are the three largest quarterly reductions outside the pandemic period.

- *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?*

We have consistently said that the default 20mph policy will reduce collisions and save lives. Since the introduction of the new speed limit, we have continued to promote statistics on police recorded collisions, which show that, since September 2023, we have seen promising signs that collisions and casualties are reducing.

Over the summer we engaged in a listening programme and have supported Local Authorities with new guidance to help empower local decisions. We have highlighted this work in the media and continued to set out our belief that 20mph is the right speed where people live, work and play.

- *What steps have you taken to clarify reporting on the policy in general, and specifically in the case of the two examples outlined above?*

When setting out the next steps for this policy we have been clear in our communications that 20mph is the right speed where people live, work and play. We want to give people a voice and 20mph and get the right speeds on the right roads.

We work closely with GoSafe, who lead on communications around enforcement. We have also encouraged them to ask for any corrections necessary on the statistics they publish.

When publishing statistics on police recorded road collisions, we have carried out technical briefings for the media to help them understand the contents of releases and report on them accurately. Any misreporting of statistics is raised with specific news outlets and we have published a blog post to correct misinformation on 20mph: [20mph Speed Limits | For The Record](#)

ROADS POLICY STATEMENT AND REVIEW

- *Can you explain the steps you are taking to ensure that transport funding is sufficiently flexible to provide local authorities and CJsCs with more control over investment?*

The four Corporate Joint Committees (CJsCs) in Wales are currently preparing Regional Transport Plans which set out their priorities for transport in their region over the next five years. The Welsh Government currently has several different capital grants for Local Authorities, which each have different criteria for how they can be spent, such as the Active Travel Fund, Local Transport Fund and Resilient Roads Fund. We are looking at how we can combine our grants into a single source of funding aimed at delivering Regional Transport Plans, while also giving the four CJsCs a role in making decisions about how this funding is spent.

- *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?*

The purposes set out in the policy statement should not be treated as simplistic ‘black and white’ tests, as this would not take into account the many different decisions which go into building a road, including the design of the road and the method of construction. However, in many circumstances, building a road to promote public transport would be consistent with the aim of supporting modal shift and reducing carbon emissions. We are assessing how the roads policy statement and been understood and applied by those using it, to ensure we have a framework that works as intended.

- *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%?*

Two recently completed road building projects (past 18 months) include the A55 Aber to Tai'r Meibion Improvements and A487 New Dyfi Bridge Improvements. The key objectives for both schemes were to improve safety and resilience against flooding. In addition, significant improvements to active travel connections were implemented. On the A55 Aber to Tai'r Meibion Improvements, a tenfold increase in usage has been recorded on the improved active travel route (National Cycle Route 5) from January to May 2023 to the same period in 2024. This demonstrates people are using sustainable modes of transport rather than private cars where high quality and safe active travel facilities are provided as part of road schemes.

- *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?*

No progress is currently being made on developing any proposals for a third Menai Crossing therefore no environmental impact assessments are being undertaken.

However, following the Roads Review, the North Wales Transport Commission made 16 recommendations on 'Improving the Resilience of Connections Across the Menai Strait.' [North Wales Transport Commission Improving the Resilience of Connections Across the Menai Strait](#) Consultants have now been appointed to take forward the highest priority recommendations including; reviewing the speed limit and consideration of the A55 mainline carriageway, slip roads and junction layout changes; options to install wind deflectors and an active travel route on Britannia Bridge.

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

- *How are findings of the Lugg review being incorporated into current and future road maintenance projects?*

We have adopted the New Approach to Road Maintenance following the agreement with the recommendations of the Lugg Review. The focus is on:

- Improving Asset Management and maintenance strategies
- Alignment of maintenance priorities with Policy
- Enhancing our inspection data collection and analysis to inform evidence-based decisions for maintenance
- Ensuring our resources are prioritised and are sufficient to deliver our priorities

We are also progressing with a Major Asset Renewal (MAR) programme – these are mainly large scale and complex structural repair schemes on the network which need addressing to maintain safety and to avoid road closures.

A prioritisation methodology has been developed based on factors including safety, network criticality, urgency, decarbonisation and opportunities for sustainable travel. We engaged with UK wide industry and supply chain partners on 10th October 2024 to launch the MAR programme and to obtain feedback on delivering innovation, decarbonisation through the delivery cycle and procurement options and opportunities.

Good progress is being made to progress this programme with the high priority schemes, including the A494 River Dee Bridge replacement, already underway and the overall delivery of the programme and timescales will be subject to funding availability.

- *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?*

In addition to the Revenue Support Grant, we provide grants to Highway Authorities across Wales for local road improvements through funds such as our Local Transport Fund, Resilient Roads Fund and Active Travel Fund. Through their Regional Transport Plans, the Corporate Joint Committees can prioritise the most important work needed on their highway network, and we will work with them to give them even further control over budgets to deliver on those priorities.

ACTIVE TRAVEL

- *What mechanisms are in place to ensure that funding used by local authorities will meet both maintenance and active travel objectives?*

Currently, local authorities apply for funding for active travel through our Active Travel Fund and Safe Routes in Community grant. The Active Travel Fund includes a core element, guaranteeing a minimum amount of funding for each local authority. The core funding can be used for minor works such as dropped kerbs, pedestrian seating, barrier removal and cycle storage.

Welsh Government is working towards the devolution of local authority transport grant funding. From 2026-27, local authority transport grants (including the Active Travel Fund and Safe Routes in Communities) will be used to fund the Corporate Joint Committees' Regional Transport Plans and Delivery Plans. These plans, whilst reflecting local priorities, will be aligned with Welsh Government policy. Highways maintenance is funded from a separate budget.

- *Can you outline your timetable for responding to the Wales Audit Office's report on Active Travel, including the publication of your response?*

Welsh Government has responded to Audit Wales' report and has accepted its recommendations. I have attached a copy of Welsh Government's response.

BUS REFORM

- *What steps are being taken to explore innovative funding models for bus service provision from other countries, such as those in France?*

We are always keen to engage with and learn from the experiences of other administrations, both in the UK and beyond. We are aware of different funding models, including in France, and officials will seek to learn more about these to inform our approach in Wales.

- *Can you set out the approach being taken to managing risks associated with the transition to bus franchising?*

We recognise that – subject to the successful passage of the Bus Bill – the implementation of bus franchising represents a significant change for the industry, which does therefore come with risks. To mitigate these risks, we are working very closely with a wide range of stakeholders including TfW, local authorities, trade unions and bus operators. TfW have begun a series of engagement sessions with bus operators and meet regularly with local authorities and trade unions as we plan for a bus network that works more effectively for current and potential users of the network.

We have a governance structure in place with TfW to ensure risks, decisions and our complex programme of work to operationalise bus franchising is properly managed.

RAIL SERVICES

- *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?*

I have had productive discussions with the UK Rail Minister, Lord Hendy, and the Secretary of State for Transport, Louise Haigh, concerning our key priorities for Rail Reform. These talks have encompassed the establishment of GBR Cymru, the creation of a Wales enhancements programme, and granting Welsh Ministers a greater role in specifying cross-border services. The UK Government has committed to partnering with us on these priorities and our shared ambitions to boost opportunities and lead to better outcomes for passengers.

The establishment of GBR Cymru, an empowered Wales and Borders Business Unit within Great British Railways (GBR), is a key ask within the wider reform we are seeking. A locally driven, empowered business unit that is accountable to Welsh Ministers and the Senedd is a step change against the current system today. Alongside a fair funding settlement, this will contribute to better outcomes for passengers by ensuring the railways in Wales are managed and developed to meet their specific needs and expectations against Welsh priorities and policy. Our ongoing collaboration with industry partners and the UK Government to continue developing the detail behind the proposition is focused on ensuring this necessary accountability and delivering better outcomes for passengers across Wales and Borders.

- *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?*

The need to improve the railways in Wales is a key focus of my regular discussions with the UK Government. We are working closely with the UK Government to develop a pipeline of rail infrastructure enhancements via the Wales Rail Board, which also includes representation from TfW and Network Rail.

The role of Network Rail in Wales will be considered as part of the UK Government’s proposals for Rail Reform. We have outlined our priorities for Rail Reform, including the need for accountability to Wales for the management and enhancement of railway infrastructure, and I have regular engagement with the UK Government on this matter.

- *What are the key challenges identified in planning for the Under-19s Euros in North Wales, and what support is Welsh Government providing to TfW to help address them?*

I am delighted to welcome the UEFA Under-19s Football Championships to North Wales in 2026. TfW develop bespoke operational plans for major events and are experienced in working with partners to ensure that passengers can safely travel to and from their destination. This was in evidence over the summer as TfW successfully moved hundreds of thousands of passengers for major events across Wales. I am confident that they will work positively with UEFA and the FAW to agree a robust plan to accommodate the likely number of people who will travel to the event.

I was also delighted to recently announce plans to significantly increase rail capacity on the North Wales Main Line by 2026. TfW will deliver a 50% increase in timetabled services on the line which will provide a major boost in capacity for the whole region.

DECARBONISATION OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT

- *Do you intend to revise the 2028 target in light of the challenges you outlined?*

Yes, it will be necessary to change the targets for decarbonising the bus fleet. Carbon emissions from bus amount to around 3% of all transport emissions in Wales and so cannot be ignored, we also have some of the oldest buses operating in the UK. That said, reducing the carbon emissions from buses is expensive. As we progress towards franchising it is important that we have a bus fleet that is fit for purpose and attractive to bus users. There is a requirement for a fleet of around 1600 buses in Wales along with the need to provide infrastructure for charging and fuelling. My officials are nearing the completion of plans to have a rolling programme of bus fleet replacement over the next 15 years, which I will share with the committee as soon as it is complete.

- *How will the rollout of bus franchising be structured to ensure that it supports the transition to zero-tailpipe emission buses?*

Current thinking is that franchising will be rolled out across regions in Wales, starting with the southwest. As far as possible or affordable the intention is to provide zero emission buses to replace the older vehicles in each region as franchising is introduced. It will also be necessary to replace some of the older and more polluting vehicles in regions before the introduction of franchising, which may include the cascading of vehicles from areas where we are introducing franchising first. The principle of replacing the oldest and most polluting vehicles first is key to our planning. For the next 3 years it will be necessary to provide a proportion of new diesel buses, which are far less polluting than the older buses currently in use. The main reason for this being the need to provide new fuelling and charging infrastructure ahead of introducing new zero emission fleet in an area. As already mentioned, I will share the details of the plans to roll out new fleet as soon as they are complete.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Ken Skates AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Drafnidiaeth a Gogledd Cymru
Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales