

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



**Y Pwyllgor Craffu ar Waith y Prif Weinidog
Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister**

Carwyn Jones AM
First Minister
Welsh Government

20 August 2013

Dear First Minister

Major Infrastructure Projects in North Wales

We would like to thank you and your officials for appearing before the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister on 19 July and for making the journey to the Stiwt Theatre in Rhosllanerchrugog.

The focus of our scrutiny session was on economic infrastructure such as roads, rail, energy, waste and ICT. We are grateful to you for responding to our questions, particularly those questions that were submitted via Twitter and Facebook by members of the public. It was a most productive form of engagement for all of us.

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As a Committee we recognise the importance of strengthening the infrastructure of Wales as a cohesive unit to enhance its economic competitiveness. It is imperative that north Wales is a full participant in the country's economic growth, and we trust that our recommendations below will help in that process.

Strategic Overview

You agreed that in order to invest in major infrastructure Wales needs to do more to match the next round of Structural Funds with other funding sources such as the Green Investment Bank, and you accepted that Wales must start to move into a period of transition away from a reliance on Structural Funding. We believe that this should entail being more targeted in future in prioritising infrastructure development within an overall spatial framework. Yet we are concerned at the number of plans and strategies in existence or being developed that seek to achieve that targeted approach – including the Wales Infrastructure Investment Plan, the Wales Spatial Plan, Planning Policy Wales, and a new National Development Framework that you said will not be in place until after the Planning Reform Bill. You confirmed that the Wales Spatial Plan still provides the overall framework although it was last updated five years ago before the introduction of Sector Plans and Enterprise Zones. You also mentioned a “Delivery Pipeline” that seeks to co-ordinate investment across different levels of government.

Recommendation 1:

We would like you to explain how all these Welsh Government plans and strategies will work coherently and effectively across Wales and across Ministerial portfolios. Perhaps you could set this out diagrammatically so that we can see how they all fit together.

Community Benefits

One of the strongest themes that emerged from our discussions with you, and also from the public session that followed, was how to square national need with local impact. Many people made the point about ensuring that local communities are properly engaged in decision-making, and can receive direct benefits from major infrastructure developments located in their area, such as through direct financial payments or cheaper energy, support for conservation projects, or the ownership of community-based renewable energy schemes.

We are aware of the draft community benefits declaration agreed recently by the renewable energy industry. We believe there needs to be a more rigorous and strategic approach taken across all forms of major economic infrastructure. You referred to the variability in the approaches taken by different companies and in different situations, but you responded positively to the idea of local communities benefitting directly. You mentioned the need to develop “broader thinking” on this important issue and using the new Planning Reform Bill to secure new arrangements.

Recommendation 2:

We would like to know how you propose to develop the Welsh Government’s thinking and approach to ensuring that local communities receive direct benefits from all forms of major infrastructure developments, whether located in or affecting their areas.

Energy

You referred to the Welsh Government’s lack of powers compared with Scotland and Northern Ireland over major energy schemes, including over the National Grid and the subsidy regime. You stated that greater powers are

essential for Wales to develop an integrated and strategic approach to energy in the future.

We believe there is significant public confusion over where responsibility for major energy projects lies and we support your calls for powers to be devolved to Wales so that there can be proper scrutiny and decision-making.

We also discussed individual schemes such as the proposal for a seabed electricity connection between north Wales and Pembrokeshire.

Recommendation 3:

We were unclear whether you were expressing support for the proposed seabed cable connection between north and west Wales, and we should like you to clarify your position on the proposal.

In the public session at the end of the meeting concerns were raised about proposals for a new Gas Turbine Power Station in Wrexham.

Recommendation 4:

It would be helpful if you could clarify the Welsh Government's position on the development of new gas powered power stations in Wales.

Transport

The re-doubling of the Wrexham to Saltney Junction railway line featured in our conversation and in the public session that followed. You mentioned that the scheme will speed up rail services around Wrexham and will aid economic development across the region. Your official, James Price, explained that there has been a significant delay to the project but that the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport will be going "to sort it out". Mr Price referred to the lack of Welsh Government "levers" over Network Rail. He

also said that the Welsh Government was looking at the processes behind the approval of the scheme with a view to securing a better contractual agreement with Network Rail and greater value for money.

We support your efforts to secure devolution of further powers over railway infrastructure, together with commensurate funding from the UK Government. In the meantime, we seek clarity on the priority that the Welsh Government is giving to the Wrexham to Saltney Junction scheme, and we would like more detail on progress with the Government's negotiations with Network Rail and a clear timetable for when it will be implemented.

Recommendation 5:

We recognise the importance of the Wrexham to Saltney Junction scheme to people living in north Wales and would like to see the Welsh Government show leadership and clarity of purpose in bringing this scheme forward as soon as possible.

The importance of the A494/A55 corridor as a gateway to north Wales came across at the meeting, particularly the need to remove the current bottleneck at Aston Hill.

Recommendation 6:

It would be helpful to know when a scheme to remove the current bottleneck at the A494 Aston Hill will be implemented.

We would also like you to continue to press the case for modernisation of the north Wales rail network, particularly to offset the economic impact if passengers accessing High Speed rail (HS2) to and from north Wales have to change at Crewe. HS2 must not lead to reduced investment in the existing West Coast Mainline.

During the public session, an issue was raised regarding the lack of parking and rest facilities for the drivers of heavy goods vehicles along the strategic route of the A55.

Recommendation 7:

Could you indicate how parking and rest facilities for the safety of drivers of heavy goods vehicles and other road users travelling along the A55 will be improved.

Also during the public session, the point was well made that it is not just the principal strategic road and rail routes in north Wales that merit investment. Connections between Aberystwyth and north Wales and other routes across the region are also important for business and domestic use. **We would welcome a further note that sets out the Welsh Government's plans to improve other road and rail transport links in this area.**

Economic Development

We talked about the three Enterprise Zones in north Wales and the importance of ensuring no displacement of companies takes place from areas outside those zones.

We also talked about the roll-out of Next Generation Broadband. During the public session that followed our discussion with you, concerns were expressed about important areas such as the Wrexham industrial estate not having access to BT's Superfast Broadband scheme and people's frustration that BT is not releasing such hard-to-reach areas sufficiently fast from its commercial roll-out so that businesses and residents can receive rapid intervention from other sources.

Recommendation 8:

We should like you to provide a clear statement on what the Welsh Government is doing to ensure that hard-to-reach areas will have a quick resolution to the barriers preventing them from accessing Next Generation Broadband.

Also raised in the public session was the sudden withdrawal of capital investment programmes within regeneration schemes, such as Wrexham.

Recommendation 9:

Please could you explain and clarify the Welsh Government's position on realigning its regeneration funding and the implications for areas where funding has been withdrawn.

Environment

During our discussion on flooding in north Wales you alluded to the fact that TAN 15, which was introduced in 2004, may "not have gone far enough" in preventing flooding incidents.

Recommendation 10:

We would like to know if and when the Welsh Government intends to revise Technical Advice Note TAN 15: Development and Flood Risk.

Biofuels

Finally, during the public session, we were asked what the Welsh Government was doing to promote biofuel development in north Wales. **We would welcome a note from you on that issue.**

We look forward to receiving your response to the points we have raised.
Both our letter and your reply will be published on our website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Melding". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

David Melding AM
Chair, Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister