



WLGA • CLILC

Reprioritisation of the National Transport Plan and Scrutiny of the Minister for Local Government and Communities

Thank you for your letter of 19th December inviting views on the prioritised National Transport Plan (NTP).

The prioritising of items in the NTP was a sensible step in light of the constrained financial situation we now face. The process of consulting Regional Transport Consortia and the constituent authorities on the priorities was welcome. Informal discussions that took place with authorities were also helpful in influencing expectations arising from the exercise.

Comments on the specific questions you raise in your letter are provided below.

1. The question asks about key issues 'currently affecting transport in Wales'. Current issues relate to:

- the economic situation and how transport can support employers and contribute to efforts to create accessible job opportunities;
- the increasing impact of the long term trend of rising oil prices and the effect this will have on commuting patterns, choice of residence/workplace etc (especially for rural areas)
- the need to encourage behaviour change to encourage alternatives to road transport where possible
- maintenance of the highway asset, especially in light of the previous two severe winters
- the decline in funding available for transport schemes, including cuts in grants to local authorities
- volumes of traffic and congestion at 'bottlenecks' in the highway system and the associated costs and risks of accidents.

In addition, it is also important *now* to be thinking ahead to what transport might look like in 20-30 years time and considering what we need to invest in *today* so we can respond to anticipated changes and, where possible, give a steer in a more sustainable direction.

Some of these issues arguably should have featured in the *Wales Transport Strategy* (WTS) rather than the *National Transport Plan*. In response to consultation on the NTP, WLGA noted the absence of a document setting out views on such strategic choices. Subsequently, a useful session was held involving local authority Transport Cabinet Members and the former Deputy First Minister to start to look at 'Transport Futures'.

Steve Thomas CBE
Chief Executive
Prif Weithredwr

Welsh Local Government
Association
Local Government House
Drake Walk
CARDIFF CF10 4LG
Tel: 029 2046 8600
Fax: 029 2046 8601

Cymdeithas Llywodraeth
Leol Cymru
Tŷ Llywodraeth Leol
Rhodfa Drake
CAERDYDD CF10 4LG
Ffôn: 029 2046 8600
Ffacs: 029 2046 8601

www.wlga.gov.uk

Undoubtedly, more work is needed on this long term planning but it would be unrealistic to expect this in a prioritisation exercise on the existing NTP. Viewed on its own terms, the Prioritised NTP gave some sensible 'nudges' in the right direction, for example:

- more funding to support sustainable forms of travel
- signalling of a shift of resources from spend on highways towards alternative modes
- a welcome emphasis on road safety issues
- targeted measures to address 'bottlenecks'
- targeted measures to improve access to employment sites.

It is important to acknowledge too the very welcome agreement between Welsh Government and the WLGA on a borrowing initiative to help local authorities address the condition of the highway network.

2. Insofar as is possible in such a relatively limited exercise, the WTS strategic priorities do appear to have influenced the projects highlighted. Walking and cycling, aspects of public transport, access to key sites and safety all receive support. However, it is important for there to be a consistent approach on all fronts. The recent decisions on the Local Transport Services Grant (cut from £11m to £8m or 27.3%) and the Bus Service Operators' Grant (cut from £22.6m to £17m or 25%) will almost inevitably result in cutbacks in bus services, working against efforts to encourage people out of their cars.

3. In 2011 Sustrans Cymru, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales and the Campaign for National Parks produced a report on *Making Sustainable Transport easier for rural communities*. It highlighted the concept of 'transport poverty', noting that low income households can spend a considerable proportion of their income on meeting their transport needs. Provision of viable alternatives to car-based travel such as those proposed in the Prioritised NTP can therefore help households that would struggle to meet the costs of running a car. However, poverty and well being are relative concepts. So long as car ownership is associated with wealth, status and 'getting on' and dominant lifestyles depend on car ownership (e.g. 'the weekly shop' with a boot full of purchases) those without a car will tend to feel (or be viewed as) disadvantaged or less well off in some way. Clearly, tackling poverty and improving well-being requires a joined-up approach and major changes in society. The priorities in the NTP can make a contribution but only if they form part of a wider, integrated approach.

Similar considerations apply in relation to economic development. Whilst good transport links are likely to be necessary to most forms of economic development there are many other factors involved (e.g. overall levels and changing patterns of demand, technology issues, workforce skills, energy and other materials costs etc). There are also different paths along which economies can develop – some sustainable and others unsustainable. An assessment of the contribution of the NTP would need to be clear as to the forms of economic development we want to encourage as the transport requirements will often be very different.

4. The 'correct objectives for Welsh transport policy' should flow from an analysis of where we are now and where we need to be by some point in the future. This should be informed by evidence of long term trends such as climate change, rising oil prices and alternative forms of energy, technological change etc. They could also respect a 'transport hierarchy' which starts with the elimination of unnecessary travel (e.g. through teleworking) and then

proceeds through travel minimisation and use of public transport and low carbon means of transport before resorting to more conventional means where no other alternatives exist. (The work by the former Sustainable Development Commission on low carbon regions is relevant here: [Low Carbon Wales: Regional Priorities For Action · Sustainable Development Commission](#)). Priorities could then be identified for taking forward these objectives.

The NTP prioritisation exercise takes as 'given' the previous work on the WTS and NTP and draws its priorities from within the existing pool. On its own terms it has successfully identified priorities, with input from stakeholders, and will enable some key schemes that will result in positive outcomes. However, there are perhaps questions to be asked as to whether the original WTS adequately addressed some of the longer term planning issues.

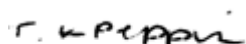
5. Answers to the previous questions are relevant to this question. Much depends on the vision of future Wales. The Welsh Government's Sustainable Development Scheme - *One Wales, One Planet* - sets out a vision where:

- walking and cycling are more commonplace
- there is enhanced provision for cyclists and pedestrians
- major settlements are connected by fast, reliable public transport
- the 'school run' has been replaced by organised school transport or group walking/cycling
- there is widespread take up of hybrid vehicles
- lift sharing is common
- the rate of growth of air travel has slowed
- Wales is a fairer and more equal place.

Certainly a range of measures included in the priorities would contribute towards a number of these ends. However, consistency of approach, integration with other policy areas and appropriate, long term investment will be required if truly sustainable outcomes and greater equality are to be realised.

I hope these thoughts and comments are of use to you.

Yours sincerely



Tim Peppin
Director – Regeneration & Sustainable Development