

Petition P-05-886

Stop the Red Route (A55/A494 corridor)

March 2021

This report summarises the Petitions Committee's consideration of a petition against the further development of proposals for a new road in north east Wales. It includes several recommendations made by the Committee.

The petition

1. Petition P-05-886 Stop the Red Route (A55/A494 corridor) was submitted in the name of Linda Scott in June 2019 having received a total of 1,409 signatures, consisting of 1,275 collected online and 134 on paper.

Petition Text:

We call on the National Assembly of Wales to urge the Welsh Government to withdraw its support for the "Red Route" (A55/A494/A548 Deeside Corridor Improvement) on the grounds that:

- 1) The construction of the new road through ancient woodland, and across agricultural land, contradicts Planning Policy Wales and the Well-being of Future Generations Act.
- 2) The recently published plans for a new A494 Dee Bridge, widening of the A494 and other improvements will deliver the Deeside traffic improvements without the need for the 'Red Route'.
- 3) The costs used to justify the choice of the "Red Route" failed to account for necessary upgrade of the Flintshire Bridge. It also does not include the addition



of crawler lane at a major congestion point on the A55, the hill out of Northop towards Holywell. Congestion at these points will be made worse by the construction of the Red Route. The underestimate of the costs used imply that the proposed road cannot be considered value for money. Furthermore, the costs do not include the proposed A494 improvements (outlined in 2).

4) The choice of the Red Route was based on unrepresentative traffic surveys.

5) In considering the Red Route the Welsh Government failed to adequately consult residents of the Flint and Northop areas despite the major potential impact on their communities. Despite costing over a quarter of a billion pounds, the new road would be likely to lead to more traffic congestion in these communities.

6) The International Panel on Climate Change has called for urgent action to reduce CO2 emissions, saying we have only 12 years left to save the world's climate. We need to be investing our limited resources in sustainable transport like rail.¹

1. Background

The A55/A494/A548 Deeside corridor scheme

2. The Welsh Government's A55/A494/A548 Deeside corridor scheme aims to "improve journey times between the River Dee and Northop Interchange".²

3. In March 2017, the Welsh Government launched a consultation on improvements to the A55/A494/A548 Deeside corridor.³ The consultation sought views on two different options for this section of the road network – a Red Route option and a Blue Route option.

4. In September 2017, the then Cabinet Secretary (now Minister) for Economy, Transport and North Wales, Ken Skates MS, announced that following the consultation and Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance (WelTAG) assessment, the red option had been adopted as the preferred route.⁴

¹ [P-05-886 Stop the Red Route \(A55/A494 corridor\)](#)

² Welsh Government, [A55 A494 A548: Flintshire Corridor \(overview\)](#), accessed 16 February 2021

³ Welsh Government, [A55/A494/A548 Deeside Corridor improvement study \(consultation\)](#)

⁴ [Oral Statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure](#), 26 September 2017

- 5.** The red option includes building a new road, with the scheme consisting of:
- A new 13km two-lane dual carriageway, linking the A55-A5119 Northop Junction (Junction 33) with the A494 and A550 north of Deeside Parkway Junction; and
 - Increasing the capacity along the existing A548, including modifications and improvements to junctions and providing a new section of road between the A548 and the A55.
- 6.** In correspondence with the Petitions Committee the Minister has stated that the scheme is part of a wider programme of transport improvements in north east Wales:

“The scheme is a key element of the Metro multi-modal integrated transport system [...] Improving traffic flows and capacity on the trunk road network will alleviate the existing rat-running and congestion on local roads. This will not only improve safety, especially in urban areas, but also free up capacity that will be key in generating greater opportunities for walking, cycling and bus travel on local roads within Flintshire.”⁵

Timescales

- 7.** In the early stages of the Committee’s consideration of the petition, the Minister indicated that publication of draft orders for the scheme was scheduled for completion in late 2020/early 2021 with detailed design and construction commencing in 2023.
- 8.** A briefing prepared by the Welsh Government on the scheme in Autumn 2020 highlighted that the programme of work has been “rearranged” due to the Covid-19 pandemic.⁶ The latest available timetable for the project shows that the development of the preliminary design, preparation of the environmental statement and publication of the draft orders is now due to take place from 2021 to 2022. Detailed design and construction is now scheduled to begin in 2024.⁷

⁵ [Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales to the Committee](#), 14 April 2020

⁶ Welsh Government, [A55/A494/A548 Flintshire Corridor - Stakeholder briefing note and project update, Autumn 2020](#)

⁷ Welsh Government, [A55 A494 A548: Flintshire Corridor \(overview\)](#), accessed 16 February 2021

9. Publication of draft Orders forms part of the statutory consenting process for highway infrastructure schemes such as this. The Minister has highlighted that the process “is likely to include a public local inquiry before any land acquisition and construction can take place”.⁸

2. Consideration by the Petitions Committee

10. During the Committee’s consideration of this petition, two Committee Members have declared interests in the scheme: Jack Sargeant MS (Alyn and Deeside, Welsh Labour) who has declared his support for it; and Michelle Brown MS (North Wales, Independent) who has declared her opposition.

11. The Petitions Committee considered evidence on the petition on six separate occasions between June 2019 and December 2020. This evidence has included a range of written evidence and oral evidence sessions held on the following dates:

1 October 2019 (Panel 1)

- Prof Tom Rippeth, on behalf of the petitioners.
- Mike Webb, representing the North Wales Wildlife Trust.

1 October 2019 (Panel 2)

- Iwan Prys Jones, Programme Manager, North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB).⁹
- Cllr Carolyn Thomas, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Countryside, Flintshire County Council.
- Stephen Jones, Chief Officer for Streetscene and Transportation, Flintshire County Council.

13 October 2020

- Ken Skates MS, Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales, Welsh Government.

⁸ Minister for Economy and Transport to the Committee, 6 November 2019

⁹ A cross sector partnership comprising representatives from the North Wales Local Authorities, Business, Higher and Further education and the Third Sector.

- Andy Falley, Deputy Director of Infrastructure Delivery, Welsh Government.

12. The Committee has also considered detailed correspondence from the Welsh Government, the petitioners and NWEAB on several occasions. It has also received written evidence from a number of others, including Natural Resources Wales, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, the Woodland Trust and North Wales Mersey Dee Business Council.

13. In December 2020 the Committee agreed to produce a summary report of its consideration of the petition, including recommendations, with a view to publishing this before the end of the Senedd term.

3. Opposition to the scheme

14. The petitioners have raised a number of concerns about and arguments against the proposed 'Red Route'. These can be summarised as follows:

- Detrimental impacts on the environment;
- Interaction between the scheme and national transport and environmental policies;
- The traffic modelling used to justify the scheme; and
- The cost of the scheme, including in relation to costs not accounted for.

Environmental impact

15. The petition expresses concern about the proposed route of the new road on the basis that it will pass through ancient woodland and across agricultural land. The petitioners have also argued that the Welsh Government has declared a climate emergency and that "building a new 4 lane highway which they concede will result in more greenhouse gas emissions will only make the problem worse."¹⁰

16. Responding to a request to submit written evidence, the Woodland Trust highlighted that it had previously objected to both the Red Route and Blue Route, as both options would be likely to result in damage and loss to ancient woodland. The Woodland Trust emphasised that "direct loss isn't the only issue" and suggested that the route would create separate fragments of woodland and

¹⁰ [Correspondence from the petitioners to the Committee](#), 20 November 2020

new woodland edges which would cause “significant changes in environmental conditions”. Also of concern to the Trust are the impacts of construction activity near areas of ancient woodland.

17. Referring to the cumulative impact of woodland loss, they commented that:

“... since 2001 our records suggest that a total of 34 ancient woods in Wales have come under threat from road schemes, of which 7 have been lost or damaged, 13 are on-going and 14 have been saved.”¹¹

18. The Minister told the Committee he currently anticipated “less than 5 per cent of Leadbrook wood would be affected” due to the planned use of an elevated section of road above the wooded area.¹² However, the petitioners have noted that the amount of woodland which would be affected will not be known until after detailed design work is completed and have stated that the amount of woodland impacted would exceed the amount directly lost due to:

“... [damage] during construction, edge effects, shading effects, indirect adverse impacts and damage to connectivity of the wood through severing it in two, which would damage a far greater proportion of the wood, and effectively undermine its ecological resilience.”¹³

19. An open letter to the Minister has been published by The Wildlife Trusts urging the Welsh Government not to proceed with the scheme because it “would rip through ancient woodland and old flower-rich meadows, damage this historic landscape, and destroy viable farm holdings.” The letter also highlights concerns over carbon emissions and the cost of the scheme. Signatories include representatives from the Wildlife Trusts, Woodland Trust, NFU Cymru, Sustrans and a number of county and community councillors.¹⁴

20. The Minister has stated that a full environmental impact assessment will be undertaken and has highlighted some of the findings of the Environmental Appraisal Report undertaken as part of the WeITAG Stage 2 study for the scheme. This report stated that:

¹¹ [Coed Cadw Woodland Trust to the Committee](#), 5 November 2017

¹² [Record of Proceedings](#), 13 October 2020, paragraph 41

¹³ [Correspondence from the petitioners to the Committee](#), 20 November 2020

¹⁴ The Wildlife Trusts, [Stop the Red Route Road Scheme in Flintshire open letter](#) (accessed 16 February 2021)

“... if [the Red Route] option is taken forward then detailed surveys of this area of woodland should be undertaken to understand the potential impacts of the proposed scheme fully.”¹⁵

21. The Minister also told the Committee that further detailed design work will be carried out on the preferred route, during which:

“The project team will consult with stakeholders such as Natural Resources Wales and Woodland Trust on measures to mitigate and minimise impacts on the environment including areas of ancient woodland.”¹⁶

22. He also sought to reassure the Committee that a ‘comprehensive environmental strategy’ would be developed to mitigate and compensate for what is lost which “will see not just an increase in volume of woodland in that area, but we will also see the quality of the woodland improved as well.”¹⁷

23. In a letter to the Committee following an invitation to comment on the petition and the proposed Red Route, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) also highlighted that the scheme would be expected to be subject to a detailed Environmental Impact Assessment and a Habitats Regulation Assessment. NRW also stated that until more detail is available and a formal application for consent is made it is unable to provide the Committee with “with a reasoned view of the scheme at this time”.¹⁸

24. The Woodland Trust has stated that “the Trust’s preference would likely be an option such as tunnelling under the ancient woodland”, as they “do not expect that a viaduct [...] would completely avoid impacts on the woodland along the ‘Red Route’”.¹⁹

Transport guidance and policy

25. The petitioners have drawn to the Committee’s attention that the scheme was assessed in accordance with a previous iteration of the Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance (WelTAG), WelTAG 2008, and suggest that it should now be reassessed against the latest version produced in 2017. They argue that the 2008

¹⁵ [Minister for Economy and Transport to the Committee](#), 6 November 2019

¹⁶ [Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales to the Committee](#), 14 April 2020

¹⁷ [Record of Proceedings](#), 13 October 2020, paragraph 42

¹⁸ [Natural Resources Wales to the Committee](#), 28 October 2019

¹⁹ [Coed Cadw Woodland Trust to the Committee](#), 5 November 2017

guidance does not reflect subsequent developments such as the Well-being of Future Generations Act or provisions within Planning Policy Wales 10. In relation to the latter they state that:

“... there's no way to compensate for the loss of ancient woodland, and that's reflected in the very, very strong protection that's provided to ancient woodland by 'Planning Policy Wales' 10. Whilst the planning system very rarely, if ever, puts a complete ban on something, as a planner I can tell you that the language used in 'Planning Policy Wales' sets the very, very highest bar that can be set. So, it talks about wholly exceptional circumstances. Now, obviously, this is not a wholly exceptional circumstance because there are other ways of looking at the issue.”²⁰

26. The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales' response to the Committee's call for evidence stated that her office had previously worked with the Welsh Government to amend WelTAG and align it with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. However, the Commissioner outlined that:

“... since the launch of the new guidance, we have received a number of letters about different road proposals where people feel that WelTAG and the Act were not fully considered or the consideration they were given was only a formality and retro-fitted to a pre-determined solution.”²¹

27. The Commissioner provided the Committee with a copy of correspondence between her office and the Minister in which the Commissioner advises that the:

“...Welsh Government does not release funding for schemes that have not correctly implemented WelTAG in Stage One...[the Commissioner] strongly believe[s] the Welsh Government must require comprehensive and demonstrable application of WelTAG before releasing any funds and [is] currently concerned that this is not the case.”²²

28. The Commissioner highlighted that she has chosen a few examples to consider how the amended WelTAG guidance has been implemented. While this

²⁰ Record of Proceedings, 1 October 2019, paragraph 97

²¹ Future Generations Commissioner for Wales to the Committee, 12 November 2019

²² Future Generations Commissioner for Wales to the Committee, 12 November 2019

scheme was not one of the examples used, she suggests that the conclusions “should be equally relevant to the Red Route (A55/A494 corridor) proposal”.

29. The Minister told the Committee that WelTAG 2017 is an “evolution” of the previous guidance and that:

“... within the supplementary guidance of WelTAG 2017 it clearly states that on transitional arrangements, schemes that are being taken forward through WelTAG 2008 should move across to WelTAG 2017 at an appropriate point in their development; they shouldn't have to go right back to the beginning.”²³

30. Therefore he stated that:

“... WelTAG 2017 is going to be used to make a full and detailed assessment of the Flintshire corridor at stage 3 and that aligns perfectly with the WelTAG 2017 supplementary guidance.”²⁴

31. The Transport (Wales) Act 2006 places a duty on the Welsh Ministers to prepare and publish a Wales Transport Strategy (WTS). The current strategy was published in 2008²⁵, however the Welsh Government has recently consulted on a draft version of a new Wales Transport Strategy, ‘Llwybr Newydd’. The Government states that this “sets out our ambitions for the next 20 years and our priorities for the next 5 years.”²⁶

32. The petitioners have argued that work on the Red Route should be paused “until the scheme is assessed as part of the broader transport strategy for Wales”.²⁷

Traffic modelling

33. The petitioners have raised concerns that the traffic surveys used to evidence the scheme were not undertaken at times when traffic congestion is most likely to occur:

²³ [Record of Proceedings](#), 13 October 2020, paragraph 32

²⁴ [Record of Proceedings](#), 13 October 2020, paragraph 32

²⁵ Welsh Government, [The Wales transport strategy](#), 2008

²⁶ Welsh Government, [Llwybr Newydd: a new Wales transport strategy consultation](#), November 2020

²⁷ [Correspondence from the petitioners to the Committee](#), 29 June 2020

“If we look at the detail of the traffic modelling, the questioning was done on Tuesdays to Thursdays between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.... So, you're missing out on a key period of the day, which is the rush hour”.²⁸

34. They also argue that because these took place during late September and early October 2015 they “do not account for the major congestion issues associated with holiday traffic” in July and August, as well as weekends and bank holidays. They believe these will add to problems already associated with Halkyn Hill close to the point at which the Red Route joins the A55.²⁹ This issue is covered further in section 4.

35. However, the NWEAB did not share these concerns and were confident the methods used were accurate, arguing that they “are sufficiently robust to pick up expected peaks and troughs” and that it can take “confidence in the accuracy of those models”.³⁰

36. The Minister states that the scheme was assessed in line with WeITAG, which in turn refers to:

“...WebTAG ([the] UK Government’s Department for Transport - Transport Appraisal Guidance) for transport modelling and economic appraisal, and ensures a consistent approach to scheme appraisals nationally.”

37. He outlines that WebTAG defines when traffic surveys should be undertaken including that:

“...surveys should be carried out during a ‘neutral’, or representative, month avoiding main and local holiday periods, local school holidays and half terms, and other abnormal traffic periods.”³¹

The cost of the scheme

38. The text of the petition refers to claims that the estimated cost of the scheme does not reflect all the costs that are likely to be incurred, pointing to the ‘Red Route Plus’ option proposed by Flintshire County Council (see section 4) and the potential for an upgrade to the Flintshire Bridge being required as a result of it

²⁸ [Record of Proceedings](#), 1 October 2019, paragraph 136

²⁹ [Correspondence from the petitioners to the Committee](#), 20 November 2020

³⁰ [Record of Proceedings](#), 1 October 2019, paragraph 207

³¹ [Minister for Economy and Transport to the Committee](#), 6 November 2019

needing to accommodate additional traffic associated with the Red Route. In their most recent submission the petitioners state that:

“Since the petition, estimated costs have already risen from the original 2017 costing of £210 million to £300 million (as of November 2019). These costs still do not include the additional costs associated with work promised to Flintshire County Council... or relating to the upgrade of the Flintshire Bridge.”³²

39. The petitioners argue that if costs associated with implementing a ‘crawler lane’ on the A55 at Halkyn Hill, as proposed by Flintshire County Council and now being reviewed by the Welsh Government, and a potential upgrade to the Flintshire Bridge were included the scheme would become unaffordable.

40. The Minister has stated that the Welsh Government is “not anticipating needing to upgrade the Flintshire Bridge”³³ and, during oral evidence, told the Committee that the bridge is currently being “underused”. He stated that:

“The maximum capacity would still allow a very significant increase in the number of vehicles using it and that's why we are confident that the Flintshire bridge, even though it was designed more than two decades ago, is still capable of taking significant additional traffic.”³⁴

41. During the same session the Welsh Government did acknowledge that additional wind proofing measures may be required on the bridge to reduce the need for closures during high winds, which the petitioners suggest many present “additional engineering challenges associated with retro fitting wind shielding”.³⁵

4. Support for the scheme

42. The Petitions Committee has also received evidence in support of the proposed scheme. This support has largely focused on a need for road improvements in the area in order to alleviate congestion and provide improved connectivity for businesses, including those on the Deeside Industrial Park, and for

³² [Correspondence from the petitioners to the Committee](#), 20 November 2020

³³ [Minister for Economy and Transport to the Committee](#), 6 June 2019

³⁴ [Record of Proceedings](#), 13 October 2020, paragraph 65

³⁵ [Correspondence from the petitioners to the Committee](#), 20 November 2020

this to be delivered as part of a wider range of transport improvements including the North Wales Metro.

The rationale for the scheme and the North Wales Metro

43. As referred to earlier, the Welsh Government states that the aim of the scheme is to “improve journey times between the River Dee and Northop Interchange”.³⁶

44. The Minister has stressed on a number of occasions that the scheme should not be assessed in isolation because it forms an essential part of the wider ‘Metro’ scheme³⁷ to improve transport in north east Wales:

“... the proposal is not, as some people believe, a road-based solution to congestion for the benefit of... private vehicle users. This scheme was developed alongside what we called the north-east Wales area based transport study. That essentially became known as metro, and the Red Route is an integral part of metro; it's designed to liberate road space for public transport.”³⁸

45. The Welsh Government has argued that further increases in the number of vehicles using the existing route would be forecast if the Red Route is not progressed, with the Minister predicting a “vast increase in the number of cars and HGVs using that existing route—it's estimated that it could rise by as much as 20 per cent to 30 per cent between now and 2037.” He considers the Red Route to be “an essential programme of work to deliver the north Wales metro vision.”³⁹

46. In answering a question from the Committee the Minister went further, contending that “the Metro cannot go forward unless this scheme is delivered” because, without the extra road space that will be created, it would not be possible to create sufficient opportunities for public transport infrastructure (such as bus corridors) or active travel opportunities.⁴⁰

47. The NWEAB has also noted a need for improvements to public transport in the area and that it “sees the road scheme as being able to facilitate further

³⁶ Welsh Government, [A55 A494 A548: Flintshire Corridor \(overview\)](#), accessed 16 February 2021

³⁷ Transport for Wales, [North Wales Metro](#), accessed 16 February 2021

³⁸ [Record of Proceedings](#), 13 October 2020, paragraph 27

³⁹ [Record of Proceedings](#), 13 October 2020, paragraph 28

⁴⁰ [Record of Proceedings](#), 13 October 2020, paragraph 56

significant planned improvements in public transport infrastructure.”⁴¹ It has noted some of these potential improvements in written evidence.⁴² Flintshire County Council also described the links between the scheme and improved public transport and active travel including bus and cycle lanes, park-and-ride schemes and a new parkway rail station at Deeside Industrial Park.⁴³

48. The Minister referred to a forecasted reduction in the level of traffic using other routes in built-up areas as a result of the scheme, including an anticipated:

“... reduction between 25 per cent and 35 per cent in traffic through Sealand, Queensferry, Higher Shotton, Aston Hill and Ewloe. With that, we'll be able to develop those dedicated bus corridors that will deliver bus rapid transport and become an attractive alternative to private car use, and we will also drive down levels of nitrogen dioxide in some of the most challenged communities in north Wales.”⁴⁴

49. The petitioners have acknowledged the traffic and congestion problems in the area and supported the need for them to be addressed. However they propose alternative solutions including improvements in rail services, action to reduce rail fares and increased use of smart technologies on existing roads.

Support from the business sector

50. The NWEAB stated that congestion experienced along the route “acts as a throttle to the north Wales economy” and that there is an urgent need for the road network in the area to be improved. They point to the fact that the route is a major arterial access points for north Wales and “the main means of access to the Deeside Industrial Zone, a major development area with over 9000 jobs and the potential for many more”. They consider that:

“Without improvement, high levels of congestion on this route will impact on the potential for economic growth in the region.”⁴⁵

51. Iceland, which is located at the Deeside Industrial Park, emphasised its support for the scheme and its importance for businesses. It states there is a:

⁴¹ [Record of Proceedings](#), 1 October 2019, paragraph 153

⁴² [North Wales Economic Ambition Board to the Committee](#), 9 September 2019

⁴³ [Record of Proceedings](#), 1 October 2019, paragraph 155

⁴⁴ [Record of Proceedings](#), 13 October 2020, paragraph 46

⁴⁵ [North Wales Economic Ambition Board to the Committee](#), 9 September 2019

“...fundamental requirement to improve access to Deeside Industrial Park and widen the catchment area for the workforce required to support the businesses.”⁴⁶

52. Also in relation to Deeside Industrial Park, the NWEAB told the Committee of reports that workers on the Park can experience significant delays when attempting to leave by car during rush hour and that:

“...there's a statistic that is quoted quite frequently that 1 in 5 people who are offered jobs on Deeside industrial park turn it down because they can't get there, either because of the lack of public transport or because the congestion is a significant deterrent for them.”⁴⁷

53. During his evidence session with the Committee the Minister also referred to difficulties previously experienced in attracting major projects to the region, citing an example of a rail manufacturing site which he said that the Welsh Government was “close to securing” but which was lost “in part because of a lack of resilience on roads.”⁴⁸

54. The NWEAB outlined some of the problems experienced on the existing road infrastructure, including that:

“It frequently experiences severe congestion. The road carries significantly more traffic than it was designed for, and falls below modern standards. It is poorly aligned and there is nowhere for broken down vehicles to pull off the road. Some of the junctions have slip roads that are too short or too close to the road, some of which have poor visibility. It is at these junctions that the majority of accidents occur. Resilience along the route is a significant issue for the region.”⁴⁹

55. They consider that development of the new route would mean that traffic would be split over two routes, therefore delivering “significantly better resilience during periods of disruption than current arrangements and alternative proposals”.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ [Iceland to the Committee](#), 11 November 2019

⁴⁷ [Record of Proceedings](#), 1 October 2019, paragraph 208

⁴⁸ [Record of Proceedings](#), 13 October 2020, paragraph 56

⁴⁹ [North Wales Economic Ambition Board to the Committee](#), 9 September 2019

⁵⁰ [North Wales Economic Ambition Board to the Committee](#), 9 September 2019

56. The North Wales Mersey Dee Business Council also stated that it is “broadly supportive” of the Red Route and that a resilient road network is “pivotal [for] cross-border connectivity between north Wales and north west England”. However, it stated that before it can be “100% supportive” it would need a more detailed understanding of how “this investment coupled with other planned investments e.g. in public transport, [will] work together to provide the capacity and increased resilience [needed].”⁵¹

‘Red Route Plus’ option

57. During an evidence session with the Committee in October 2019, Flintshire County Council stated that it had put forward a “Red Route Plus” option which includes delivering works at Ewloe interchange and a crawler lane at Halkyn Hill.⁵² These works were previously identified to be part of the Blue Route option, though the Council argues that there would be merit in including these as part of a wider ‘transport corridor’ project.

58. The petitioners also suggested that these works are important, citing Halkyn Hill as “the major congestion point”, but suggest that their inclusion would make the scheme unaffordable. They also argue that the proposals for the ‘Red Route Plus’ are an acknowledgement that the Red Route alone will not solve congestion problems in the area.⁵³

59. The Minister stated that, whilst the proposals do not currently include plans regarding Ewloe interchange, he has given a commitment to consider whether a crawler lane at Halkyn Hill is required, and whether this would “provide value for money and offer demonstrable benefits”.⁵⁴ A briefing published by the Welsh Government in August 2020 stated that:

“...the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales has agreed to review the introduction of an additional climbing lane on the A55, westbound from Junction 33 at Northop to Halkyn Services. This is being undertaken by a separate commission by North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agent (NMWTRA).”⁵⁵

⁵¹ [North Wales Mersey Dee Business Council to the Committee](#), 4 December 2019

⁵² [Record of Proceedings](#), 1 October 2019, paragraph 165-6

⁵³ [Record of Proceedings](#), 1 October 2019, paragraph 125-7

⁵⁴ [Minister for Economy and Transport to the Committee](#), 6 November 2019

⁵⁵ Welsh Government, [A55/A494/A548 Flintshire Corridor - Stakeholder briefing note and project update, Autumn 2020](#)

60. The Minister has stated that this is being taken forward separately so that it can potentially be implemented ahead of the Red Route scheme, as well as helping to inform any public inquiry into the Red Route.

5. Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

61. The Committee notes that the Covid-19 pandemic also raises relevant issues for the scheme, both in terms of its affordability and due to the potential for there to be long-term changes to travel patterns and behaviour. Whilst this is a highways scheme, the Minister has emphasised⁵⁶ that it is a key element of the wider North Wales Metro project.

62. However, demand for public transport has significantly dropped during the pandemic.⁵⁷ Whilst this could result in further reliance on the private motor car and therefore the potential for increased traffic congestion in the area, the Welsh Government has also been clear that it supports working from home as a long term policy shift. For example, the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport has stated that the Welsh Government will explore the creation of a network of community-based remote working hubs within walking or cycling distance of many people's homes and that it aims "to see around 30% of the workforce working remotely on a regular basis".⁵⁸

63. With regards to monitoring the effect of the pandemic on travel behaviour and demand, in October 2020 the Committee heard that Transport for Wales was finalising the development of a traffic model for north east Wales. The Minister told the Committee that, in August, traffic levels on the A55 were "back to what they were, pretty much, in 2019" and linked this to the high proportion of manufacturing businesses in the area, with a lower proportion of staff being able to work from home.⁵⁹

64. The Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee has been told that:

"The Welsh Government and Transport for Wales are currently working with colleagues in the Department for Transport to identify the range of possible scenarios for future travel demand. These range from a gradual return towards previous travel patterns, albeit with a higher

⁵⁶ [Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales to the Committee](#), 14 April 2020

⁵⁷ Senedd Research, [Coronavirus: public transport](#), updated 8 December 2020

⁵⁸ [Written Statement by the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport](#), 14 September 2020

⁵⁹ [Record of Proceedings](#), 13 October 2020, paragraph 85

proportion of people working from home, to more extreme scenarios of greatly increased private car use or a collapse in demand for travel. There is no consensus just yet as to what the long-term impact will be.”⁶⁰

65. The petitioners have argued that this means that work on the Red Route should be paused until that work has been completed.

6. Next steps and recommendations

66. Having considered the evidence set out in this report and noting the current uncertainties as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Committee has set out several recommendations below. We do so in the acknowledgment that the forthcoming Senedd election means that further decisions will be taken by a future Welsh Government and any further scrutiny that may be required will be undertaken by the next Senedd.

67. We also note the likelihood that a public inquiry will be held on a project of this type and that further work is required to determine the precise route of the proposed new road and on associated detailed design work.

68. In light of these considerations we make the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1. That detailed design work and further impact assessments in relation to the proposed scheme do not take place until the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on traffic patterns has been fully assessed. This evidence should be available for consideration as part of any public inquiry the proposed scheme is subject to.

Recommendation 2. That the proposed scheme is assessed in accordance with the latest Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance (2017) at the next stage of its development.

Recommendation 3. That a detailed re-assessment of the costs associated with the scheme is undertaken and published. This should include accounting for any additional costs associated with related works such as those associated with

⁶⁰ Minister for Economy and Transport to the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 24 August 2020

the 'Red Route Plus' option and upgrades required to the Flintshire Bridge, including wind proofing.

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should ensure that any road scheme which is implemented is part of a wider package of public transport improvements in the area and that schemes such as the North Wales Metro are delivered effectively.

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government must ensure that adequate consultation is undertaken with organisations including the Woodland Trust and Natural Resources Wales during the detailed design stage of the scheme to mitigate and minimise any impacts on areas of ancient woodland.

Recommendation 6. Any public inquiry held following the publication of the draft Orders should be highly publicised and accessible to all residents in areas which may be affected by the route or construction of any new road.
