

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

**County Council
6th March 2015**

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Wynne Jones, Portfolio Holder for Highways

SUBJECT: Question from County Councillor Dawn Bailey

The new National Transport Plan 2015 will set out in detail how the Welsh Government proposes to deliver in those areas of transport for which it is responsible in order to achieve the outcomes as set out in the Wales Transport Strategy from 2015 and beyond.

The consultation period on the draft National Transport Plan 2015 ends on 11th March 2015.

As Local Member for the border constituency of Trewern located on the borders of Shropshire and Montgomeryshire, it is extremely frustrating to see the Newtown bypass proposals progress whilst a scheme that was originally identified some forty years ago and more recently in 2004 for similar interventions on the A458 Buttington Cross to Wollaston Cross trunk road still remain identified in the Plan as being subject to further consideration.

It has been announced recently the Transport Minister, Edwina Hart AM has established a Cross Border Road Forum in order to help unlock the current impasse on road schemes that cross the English and Welsh borders. Specific mention has been made to the Forum re-opening discussions on the A483 Llanymynech to Pant bypass scheme located on the main trunk route between Wrexham and Swansea. Could the Portfolio Holder therefore confirm what representation this Council has on the Forum and whether the A458 Buttington Cross to Wollaston Cross trunk road scheme is also to form part of future discussions?

Furthermore, what assurance can the Portfolio Holder give me this Council remains committed to improving the east-west corridor transport links between England and Wales?

Firstly, I would wish to take the opportunity to thank Cllr. Bailey for her continued lobbying of the Minister over many years which has supported localised improvements to sections of the Trunk Road.

Secondly, to note that the Welsh Government's investment in Mid Wales' infrastructure is appreciated and to say that the County Council is fully supportive of the Minister's

announcements regarding the removal of critical restrictions on the East–West road network, as at Newtown and Pont ar Dyfi.

Reaching a consensus on investment priorities that cross administrative borders can be difficult but it does appear that steps are being taken to overcome this. At present the Council has not been informed that any “Forum” has been set up. What is clear is that, following consultation with the Secretary of State for Transport, Welsh Government officials and their counterparts from the Highways Agency will be meeting to discuss common highway links. This should include the A483 Llanymynech to Pant bypass and the A458 Buttington Cross to Wollaston Cross section which are not currently included in the Agency’s Major Projects Programme.

However, I do understand local concerns raised by current consultation on a Draft revision of the National Transport Plan. As it stands, there are a number of road schemes within Powys which remain in the “to do” category and those identified only for “further consideration” include the Builth and Rhayader bypasses and the A458 Buttington Cross to Wollaston Cross improvement.

A response to the consultation is being drawn up on a regional basis in order to set out the combined priorities and concerns of local authorities in mid-Wales (i.e. Powys, Ceredigion CC and Gwynedd Councils). It is proposed to include the following text as part of that response:

“With regard to mid Wales the NTP does not capture the need for improvements to the following stretches of highway which have been identified as being problematic in terms of safety, and which were identified as carrying significant heavy and light freight traffic in 2012 cordon counts:

- *A458 from Buttington Cross to the border at Middletown and on to Halfway House in Shropshire (HGVs and LGVs 26% of all traffic)”*

The scheme has also been referenced in the recently published Mid Wales Joint Local Transport Plan and in the region’s earlier Highways Strategy; Additionally, as the WLGA is in the process of updating its “Manifesto for Rural Wales” it has been put to them that this scheme, and Llanymynech-Pant, should be brought forward so as to be ‘ready to start’ when funding becomes available.

As we know, the border is invisible to both businesses and the region’s economy. What is needed now is a collaboration that supports public safety, improves accessibility and beneficial development and the Council will continue to press for investment in this part of the national road network.