

Personal Submission to the Planning Enquiry on M4 extension from Andrew McDermid

1 I note that the Welsh Government M4 Corridor around Newport Sustainable Development Report, March 2016 states “assessment of carbon emissions indicates that the Scheme would result in a marginal reduction of user carbon emissions when compared to without the Scheme, even though the number of vehicle trips would increase”.

This is not a believable assertion given that the very purpose & justification of the scheme is to facilitate the increase in traffic volumes forecast, by increasing traffic carrying capacity. The published Plan for the M4 Corridor around Newport dated July 2014 citing lack of capacity as a justification, para 2.1 states inter alia, that weekday peaks of traffic due to forecast traffic volume increases, will increase to 105% of capacity on some stretches & increase to 71% on the least problematic stretches by year 2022 compared to the 2012 measured levels of 91% & 61% respectively.

This above assertion that net emissions will be reduced, is apparently based, according to the section 5.2 of the Plan, on “Mitigation measures including “integrating energy efficient technologies into traffic systems.... innovative traffic management ‘Intelligent Transport Systems’” & through “scheme design to adopt micro renewables to power such technologies, whilst encouraging a wider shift to renewable energy to supply network services..... development of potential traffic plans; e.g. supporting the introduction of electric vehicle infrastructure plans, speed management strategies, event management plans and weather management plans”.

This gives the impression of “pie in the sky” thinking, that emissions will be reduced by yet - to - be realised technologies which will save the day & that budgets are likely to be provided to achieve such at some unspecified point in the future, after the Scheme is put in place.

The only way to control CO2 emissions is to work on schemes that will reduce motor traffic volumes. Long term rational thinking on the other hand, would suggest that enhancement of road capacity will inevitably stimulate increased traffic and hence sooner or later give rise to congestion at the new higher level of road capacity causing higher CO2 emissions all the while. Would the answer to that by any chance, be to concrete over what then remains of the Gwent levels?

2 Another related aspect the plan has conspicuously not dealt with despite its anxiety to appear future-proof, is the real likelihood of today’s car ownership model being superseded before 2030, by renting mobility as – and – when needed. This, together with driverless cars (AVs), which it is currently thought, by eliminating human driver error would enable a higher density of passengers per road mile as autonomous vehicles can travel safely much closer together with less braking and accelerating. On motorways more vehicles will then be able to fit into the same road and with fewer accidents, effectively increasing capacity. Hence the Scheme as planned contains the seeds of its own obsolescence.

3 The Sustainability report goes on to talk of increased prosperity for Wales by increasing the potential for economic growth by adopting the Scheme, as if rising CO2 levels incurred thereby would not in themselves be inimical to economic growth. It would also incidentally increase the likelihood and extent of flooding due to destabilisation of the weather. It may be true that current

perverse measurements of GDP would not count flooding and its opportunity costs as detrimental to GDP but that is not presumably what the wellbeing of future generations in Wales Act 2015 had in mind when it was setting its wellbeing goals.

The link between infrastructure development and economic growth is undisputed, although subject to the caveat that this is only to the extent that they generate a sustainable flow of services valued by users (see World Bank Discussion paper, 1993 ISBN 978-0-8213-2628-2978). The question in this case is who are the beneficiaries of the services provided by the scheme?

One section of that community would be the growing numbers of people choosing to buy property around Newport and commute daily to their existing jobs in Bristol. A personal economic decision that is well worth their while, given that property prices in Newport compare very favourably with the very high property prices in Bristol, especially relative to South Wales. I note the very recent government announcement of plans to reduce the Severn Bridge tolls which only serves to strengthen this argument. Here we have a very good example of the law of unintended consequences in that the highly prized and sought – after, putative economic growth arising from the Scheme is thereby being exported straight out of Wales and into Bristol and perhaps other English cities. Disbenefits arising from this would of course include those felt by native Newporters becoming less able to afford houses in their own neighbourhood.

4 Speaking personally as a member of the public who derives great pleasure from the amenity value of the Newport Wetlands, an entity incidentally, that was provided, presumably “in perpetuity” as compensation for loss of habitat due to the Cardiff Bay development, I enjoy birdwatching there. I am not however only pleading on behalf of my own eccentric hobby but also on behalf of the amenity value derived by all sections of the local community, especially families who are always there in great numbers whenever I visit. This is a true community amenity.

It is an integral part of unique larger ecosystem, the Gwent Levels, which will be subject to devastating loss, directly by loss of territory such as the compulsory purchase order for part of Magor Marsh reserve, which is the arbitrary sequestration of an acre of that Marsh, but indirectly by degradation of the drainage system and fragmentation of the land by the new roads.

This affects the whole entity and cannot be mitigated. Wildlife cannot move freely as it needs to in order to flourish, from fragment to fragment of protected area, across concreted and developed areas. Species removal and relocation as mentioned in p35 para 5.2 of the plan, as if living organisms are transportable in the way of inanimate artefacts, is not a satisfactory alternative. As new land cannot be manufactured or created like a new product, species transferred to another less suitable and now more restricted area, already in use for another purpose will not thrive when suddenly expected to compete with the preexisting species already in occupancy there. Destruction of the existing system of ancient reens, which are vessels for unique micro flora and fauna and as such the basis and enabler of the existing biodiversity, and which by the way has also served as a flood protection system, cannot be recreated in the form of new “reens” or culverts, as if it was “new habitat” as also mentioned in para 5.2. Provision of “walking infrastructure” – the phrase is almost beyond parody – as per para 5.2 is in reality not going to make any difference to population health and wellbeing. The only prerequisite for walking has ever been, is the non existence of a motorway.

5 The above is my personal submission to the Planning Process for the M4 Relief Road Development.

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