



Ein cyf/Our ref KS/05619/20

Ian Campbell

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2 October 2020

Dear Ian

I am writing in response to your letter of 14 September, regarding Stop the Red Route A55-A548 destroying Leadbrook Woods and meadows, Flintshire. I am responding to you as the campaign organiser, rather than to each individual letter.

Improving transport infrastructure and services in North Wales and across the border is fundamental to delivering economic growth across North Wales, connecting people to jobs and services and businesses to markets as well as achieving sustainability and climate change objectives.

I published 'Moving North Wales Forward' in 2017 which set out my vision for the North Wales Metro. The Metro initiatives include integrated active travel and bus networks, linked to the rail network to enable a mode shift away from the car. Connecting the rural areas to major employment sites and improving access to local jobs and services are also an important element of the Metro approach. Targeted highway improvements that will improve air quality, reduce congestion, enhance conditions for freight transport and provide more opportunities for walking, cycling and bus travel also form an integral part of the Metro aims.

As you recognise in your letter, there are regular congestion problems in the area due to the road network not being designed to accommodate the current volume of traffic. Of course it is possible for some sectors to adopt new ways of working such as increasing the percentage of employees working from home. However, the Deeside Industrial Park for example, which is predominantly made up of large and very important manufacturing companies, require employees to travel to work on a daily basis and they do also generate significant freight movement.

During Covid-19, traffic volumes dropped during the initial lockdown period, however, they have been increasing steadily over the summer months and significant increases were recorded in August on the A55/A494 in Flintshire where traffic volumes approached pre-Covid levels. Further detailed traffic modelling and scenario testing will however be undertaken as part of the next stage of scheme development.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Highway improvements are therefore an essential element to unlocking the benefits of the Metro. Reducing congestion on the A55 and A494 will in turn decrease the volume of traffic that would normally reroute via local roads. Decongested and safer local roads with improved air quality will allow more active travel and public transport opportunities to be developed in line with the Metro's sustainable travel principles. If nothing is done, the growth in traffic along the corridor is predicted to increase air pollution, congestion and reduce journey time reliability and network resilience.

We are continuing with the next stage of development on the Flintshire corridor improvement and are currently procuring a designer to develop the design of proposals in more detail. As you may appreciate, we are at the early stages of the scheme development and a significant amount of work needs to be completed in consultation with stakeholders before the Welsh Government will be in a position to make any decisions to progress onto construction works. This will include a statutory process which is likely to include a public local inquiry.

We were planning to hold public information exhibitions this spring to provide an update on the scheme and to advise on the programme for the next stages of scheme development including how stakeholders can comment and input on the proposals. As you can appreciate, these plans are currently being impacted by the COVID-19 virus and therefore the public information events have been postponed at the present time.

Preparations are underway to undertake detailed environmental surveys along the route including Leadbrook Wood. During the route selection stage, the crossing point at Leadbrook Wood was selected at a point where a steep-sided valley could be spanned by a 200m bridge thereby minimising the affected area of the ancient woodland (anticipated that less than 5% of Leadbrook Wood will be affected). A structure at this crossing point also minimises the effect on the watercourse and vegetation below and maintains continuity between the severed woodland and allows continued movement of wildlife beneath the bridge.

During the next stage, further refinement of the route alignment will be undertaken to minimise the impacts on Leadbrook Wood and a comprehensive compensation strategy will be developed along with opportunities for environmental enhancements. This will include substantial targeted areas of new native woodland or wood pasture planting, restoring or managing other ancient woodland, including plantations on ancient woodland sites and where soils may be lost or disturbed. These could be used within a suitably detailed translocation strategy into areas adjacent to Leadbrook Wood.

These compensation strategies will be developed in more detail in consultation with stakeholders and I'd welcome your input into these strategies during the next stage.

The cost for the Red Route was identified as £255.4m in the consultation brochure in 2017 and this was base dated to Q4 2015 and excluded VAT and inflation. The £300m includes VAT and inflationary increases from 2015 to 2019. Also identified in the brochure was the benefits to cost ratio which was calculated as 2.77 for the Red Route meaning the scheme would deliver high value for money for the public purse.

I see the investment in the North Wales Metro including the Flintshire Corridor Improvement as an essential part of the wider work to improve the transport infrastructure across North Wales to provide better links to the UK motorway network and the wider Northern Powerhouse. This would lead to greater economic potential of the cross-border region and the prospect of significant employment growth that would be realised from better sustainable transport links.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken', is positioned above the printed name.

Ken Skates AS/MS

Gweinidog yr Economi, Trafnidiaeth a Gogledd Cymru
Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales