

AGENDA ITEM 4

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

8TH SEPTEMBER 2016

M4 RELIEF ROAD: SUBMISSION OF RESPONSE TO PUBLIC INQUIRY

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, HIGHWAYS AND STREETCARE IN DISCUSSION WITH THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, COUNCILLOR A. MORGAN AND IN LIAISON WITH THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLANNING

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the Council's submission of a response to the Public Inquiry that will be held shortly, in connection with the proposed construction of a relief road for the M4 motorway.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:
- Notes the proposals drawn-up by the Welsh Government to construct a relief road for the M4 motorway and the outcome of its appraisal of the various route options.
 - For the reasons set out in this report, supports the selection of the 'black route' as the preferred route option for the relief road.
 - Agrees to the Council formally submitting a response to the Public Inquiry in support of the 'black route' option.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 A Public Inquiry into the proposed route for the M4 relief road will commence in September. Consideration of this matter will enable the Council to submit a formal response in advance of the Public Inquiry that takes account of the importance of the M4 to the economy of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Cardiff Capital Region is an area where people want to live and work. With two cities (Cardiff and Newport) at its core, the region has seen significant regeneration and investment over recent decades.
- 4.2 The area is home to a range of competitive business clusters with significant international and indigenous businesses. A thriving higher education sector, which includes Cardiff University, Cardiff Metropolitan University and the University of South Wales, exists.
- 4.3 However, the region still punches below its economic weight. Gross Value Added is lower than all but one of the English Core City Regions. There are significant connectivity issues across the region which make it more difficult for people in Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Valley communities generally to access economic opportunities.
- 4.4 Business needs to be connected within the region, but also beyond to the rest of the UK and globally.
- 4.5 Transport has a key role in delivering economic growth and improving outcomes for people by connecting communities, business, jobs, facilities and services. However, across the Capital Region, there are significant congestion and transport capacity issues that need to be addressed.
- 4.6 The M4 corridor is of strategic importance to the Welsh economy, not only to the towns and cities along the coastal belt of South Wales but also to the West Wales region and South Wales valleys. It forms part of the Trans European Transport Network and acts as a 'gateway' to Wales for tourists, businesses and for the transport of goods and services for local residents and businesses.
- 4.7 However, the M4 motorway between J24 and J29 in the Newport area is the most heavily trafficked section of road in Wales with traffic levels often exceeding the available capacity. This has resulted in congestion and delays to road users, a deterioration in local air quality and an impact on safety. This situation is exacerbated by other factors specific to the section of motorway between J24 and J29. Namely that this section of the M4 is also used as a distributor route by local traffic travelling from one part of Newport to another part and the motorway narrows to 2 lanes along each carriageway through the Brynglas Tunnels.
- 4.8 As a result of population growth and increasing economic activity, forecasts have shown that these problems will worsen in the future. Against this background, and to tackle the problems highlighted above, the Welsh Government has drawn-up a proposed scheme to construct a relief road for the M4 motorway in the Newport area.

5. DETAILS OF PROPOSED M4 RELIEF ROAD

5.1 The current proposals (designated the 'black route') involve the construction of 23km of new six-lane motorway between Magor and Castleton that would pass to the south of Newport, crossing the Gwent Levels, River Usk, Newport Docks and the Llanwern Steelworks site. Crossing the River Usk, the new motorway would be raised on approach viaducts and a cable stayed bridge. The cost of construction is estimated to be £1.1bn.

5.2 A number of other options and alternative routes were considered by the Welsh Government, but were discounted following a detailed appraisal. These were as follows:

- 'Red Route' - a non-motorway, dual carriageway option. Did not offer value for money in terms of the cost of construction and ability to attract traffic off the existing M4 and meet the objectives set out in the statutory documents.
- 'Purple Route' - a new section of motorway following a very similar alignment to the 'red route'. A number of constraints were identified and objections received from an earlier consultation exercise.
- 'Blue Route' - route would run further north compared to the other options and use the existing A48 and A4810 roads upgraded to dual carriageway standards. Although less expensive than the other options considered, an appraisal found that this option did not sufficiently address the existing problems associated with the M4 around Newport.

5.3 The Welsh Government also carried out an appraisal of other measures including public transport improvements, improvements to existing roads and construction of a tunnel under the River Usk. In all cases, they reached similar conclusions to the appraisal carried out for the 'blue route'.

5.4 The 'black route' was identified as the preferred option by the Welsh Government because:

- it minimises land requirements, including property demolition and land take from the Gwent Levels which are protected areas. Mitigation measures proposed by the Welsh Government include the creation of new habitat for flora and fauna found on the Levels.
- it minimises the impact on utility apparatus and Newport Docks.

- it has the support of a significant number of local residents and businesses including the Welsh branch of the CBI and Institute of Directors.
 - a large number of residents will benefit from reduced noise and improved air quality in the vicinity of the existing M4 between J24 and J29.
 - it will enable safer, easier and more reliable travel between east-west in South Wales.
 - it will provide improved transport connections between South Wales and the rest of the UK and Europe.
 - it will enable the existing M4 (J24 - J29) to be incorporated into the existing local road network enabling local residents to have easier access to local services and commercial centres around Newport.
- 5.5 Provision of the motorway south of Newport will free up capacity on the existing M4 around Newport. This will improve the functioning of the city-region and hence improve employment opportunities within South East Wales. Improved operating conditions on the existing M4 around Newport, in conjunction with the Cardiff Capital Region Metro, will generally increase local accessibility.
- 5.6 The wider impacts of the motorway are likely to have the direct benefits of reduced user costs and, by improving accessibility and through the provision of new junctions, the motorway would also be expected to result in new investment and employment bringing additional benefits to the South Wales economy. In addition, the journey time improvements will increase the accessibility between areas of economic activity and improve access to jobs.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) screening form has been prepared for the purpose of this report. It has been found that a full report is not required at this time. The screening form can be accessed by contacting the author of the report.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 At this stage no consultation has taken place, but the report has been drafted in liaison with the Director of Regeneration and Planning.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no projected financial implications for the Council associated with the proposed M4 relief road. However, completion of this scheme will act as a catalyst for the public and private sectors to provide further investment in new developments linked to the City Deal programme.
- 8.2 The Welsh Government has not promoted the M4 relief road in isolation of other transport and planning schemes such as the creation of the Metro network across South East Wales. It recognises that the combined cost of both the M4 relief road and the Metro network is substantial but it has stated on record that "it was elected on a mandate to deliver both of these ambitious projects and that is what we will do".

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 9.1 The planning and construction of the M4 relief road is being progressed by the Welsh Government in accordance with its statutory powers. The proposed route will not come into the Rhondda Cynon Taf area so the Council will not be required to discharge its duties as the local highway and planning authority.

10. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES / SIP / FUTURE GENERATIONS - SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- 10.1 The projected economic impact of the construction and opening of the M4 relief road, in addition to the wider economic benefits to the region and therefore Rhondda Cynon Taf, would be linked to the objectives and goals covering prosperity set out in the Council's Single Integrated Plan and Corporate Plan.
- 10.2 In terms of supporting the provisions set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the linkages are more complex. This is because proposals for addressing the problems of traffic congestion, road safety and poor air quality along the existing M4 around Newport have been under consideration for many years, prior to the Act coming into force in April of this year. The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has recently raised this issue with the Welsh Government which is currently considering its response.

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1 Through the appraisal process, the Welsh Government has demonstrated how the M4 relief road will support the objectives set out in a number of statutory documents such as the Wales Infrastructure Investment Plan for Growth, The Wales Transport Strategy 2008, The National Transport Plan and The Wales Spatial Plan.

- 11.2 Furthermore, the Welsh Government has taken a robust approach to the demand forecasts which have underpinned the need for a relief road along the M4 motorway. Concerns raised by environmentalists and other parties about the overall cost of the scheme and its impact on the local landscape will be examined with due diligence at the forthcoming Public Inquiry.

- 11.3 Although the construction of the M4 relief road along the 'black route' will have significant local benefits in the Newport area, it should be noted that it will also have a much wider and positive impact for the residents and businesses based in Rhondda Cynon Taf. In particular, the economic benefits of increased capacity to accommodate future growth in journeys, improved reliability and improved connectivity between the South East Wales Valleys and the markets of the rest of the UK and mainland Europe.