29th March 2019

**Briefing**

The case against the Gwent Levels motorway.

In this briefing we lay out the reasons why building an M4 relief road is an outdated and backwards-looking solution, which goes against The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) and The Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

We urge all Assembly Members to oppose the building of this road, on the following grounds:

1. **It would lead to climate change**

We are facing a global climate emergency. Our young people are taking to the streets to fight for their future. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report makes it clear we have only 11 years to act and prevent catastrophic climate change[[1]](#endnote-1).

There is an urgent need to decarbonise. Building this road will result in more vehicles on the road (an extra 42,000 vehicles per day by 2037[[2]](#endnote-2)) which means more climate-changing emissions, making it very difficult for Wales to meet its emissions targets set out in The Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Locking-in car dependency is also a key barrier to more people using more sustainable modes of transport: active travel and public transport[[3]](#endnote-3).

According to the Future Generation Commissioner, transport is Wales’ third largest carbon emitting sector. The UK Committee on Climate Change has stated that transport emissions must reduce by 79% in the next 32 years.  To achieve this governments need to seriously rethink the way that transport infrastructure is planned and developed4.

1. **It’s too expensive**

The Welsh government has borrowing powers for all capital expenditure of up to £1 billion. This road will cost around £2 billion. Wales can’t afford to spend around £2 billion of public money on one stretch of road in a small area in south Wales that will use up all our borrowing powers. Wales need this money for investment across the whole country for infrastructure that reduces our carbon impact, and more sustainable transport options like active travel and public transport in north and mid Wales too.

1. **It would irreparably damage the Gwent Levels**

14 miles of motorway will plough several Special Sites of Special Scientific Interest[[4]](#endnote-4). The unique and protected landscape of the Gwent Levels is the only place in Wales you will find the endangered Shrill Carder Bee and numerous other species of insects and mammals. The Gwent Levels are also the only place in Wales where the Common Crane has nested in 400 years.

A 2016 report by the Wildlife Trust Wales showed that Wales is in the top quarter of biodiversity loss of the 218 nations assessed. We have lost 56% of species in the UK in the last 50 years[[5]](#endnote-5).

We can hardly afford to lose any more habitats and mitigation measures are ‘scientifically unproven and in some cases impossible’ according to Sir John Lawton FRS in his evidence to the M4 public inquiry[[6]](#endnote-6).

1. **It would not ease traffic**

The M4 relief road will not relieve congestion. In fact, it will make it worse. Research has shown that new roads like the M4 relief road will only lead to more cars on the roads[[7]](#endnote-7).

In a phenomenon called induced demand, more roads lead to more vehicles. Evidence from previous road schemes shows that projected reductions in congestion on the existing road network are often eliminated over time.

Even in the initial years of the project the Welsh Government’s traffic modelling shows journey time savings for through-traffic in the first year of **only** 2.5 minutes[[8]](#endnote-8).

1. **It would worsen air pollution**

Air pollution has been shown to cause lung cancer and worsen heart and lung disease[[9]](#endnote-9). Building the M4 relief road deprives Newport residents of their ‘green lungs’, resulting in worse air quality in the area, and more cars on the road will lead to increased air pollution elsewhere as well.

Make no mistake - air pollution kills and is a serious public health problem[[10]](#endnote-10).

**We don’t need or want this road. Our priorities need to be our children’s health, protecting endangered species and nature sites, and low carbon investment that benefits people right across Wales and helps tackle climate change.**

There are alternatives, as set out in the report by The Future Generations Commissioner – Transport Fit for Future Generations.  The transport of the future is smart and works for everyone including the up to 50% of people in some parts of Newport that don’t own a car. It includes better public transport options, car clubs and car pools, high occupancy vehicle lanes and smart motorway technology.  
  
Wales had led the way with ground-breaking legislation to protect future generations and build a positive sustainable system for people and the planet, and we are proud of that commitment.

This decision symbolises the future we want for Wales - and the M4 relief road would lock us into a high-carbon polluting catastrophe. We have a duty to future generations to reject the road and invest in a sustainable life for all.

We urge all Assembly Members to oppose the M4 relief road and urgently prioritise the climate emergency we are facing.

ENDNOTES

1. <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/summary-for-policy-makers/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/20180912-Transport-Fit-for-Future-Generations-C-1.pdf> (page 12) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.iwa.wales/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/IWA_Decarbonising_Transport-1.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.gwentwildlife.org/news/2017/09/26/gwent-wildlife-trust-m4-campaign> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.wtwales.org/wildlife/state-nature-2016> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <http://bailey.persona-pi.com/Public-Inquiries/M4-Newport/Third%20Parties/M4%20-%20Proofs/Gwent%20Wildlife%20Trust/M4%20Prof%20Sir%20John%20Lawton%20Gwent%20Levels%20proposed%20M4%20extension%20FINAL.pdf> (page4) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. <https://bettertransport.org.uk/roads-nowhere/induced-traffic> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. <https://futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/20180912-Transport-Fit-for-Future-Generations-C-1.pdf> (page 16) [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/332854/PHE_CRCE_010.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/332854/PHE_CRCE_010.pdf> (page1) [↑](#endnote-ref-10)