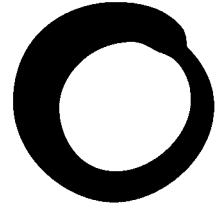


Briefing



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Cymru**

**Cyfeillion
y Ddaear
Cymru**

Proposed A40 St Clears- Haverfordwest Dualling

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Transport Policy

FOE Cymru believe that for reasons of public health and fitness, road safety, and social inclusion together with energy use, greenhouse gas emission reductions, and countryside/wildlife protection, that transport policies should focus on traffic reduction. It should be remembered that the private car and lorry have been the focus of most investment for several decades.

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To achieve such traffic reduction we believe that for the next 10 years most of the available National Assembly of Wales's (NafW) transport budget should be spent on public transport schemes and services, rail freight, traffic calming, road safety measures, minor road-building and road maintenance, as opposed to major road-building. If, by 2010, road traffic, greenhouse gas emissions and other transport related sustainability indicators are within sustainable limits, then larger road construction ideas could be reassessed for compatibility.

A40 Dualling

Over recent years, FOE Cymru has repeatedly called on the Assembly not to dual the 23 mile stretch of the A40(T) between St Clears and Haverfordwest. Pembrokeshire County Council are calling for the dualling. FOE Cymru believe that the £70 million (1) dualling call by the Council and some businesses reflects a hope and a prayer for more jobs rather than a thought through assessment of what a dualling may deliver or take away from west Wales. We point to a report called Transport and the Economy (DETR August 1999) written by the Government's own road experts (Standing Committee on Trunk Road Assessment, SACTRA). The report says that a faster road link to a peripheral region may not necessarily benefit that region economically and may actually not benefit the region (see also FOE Cymru Report 'Road Building - Help or Hindrance').

Faster roads are a double edged sword. Some peripheral businesses may benefit but other companies may centralise their operations eastwards and outside companies may out-compete the more local businesses. In that sense Pembrokeshire Council are gambling with the real possibility that the £70 million dualling may actually damage the region's economy, compared with no money being spent at all.

FOE Cymru believe that the call for faster roads is a typical response to the term 'peripherality' which to some almost automatically implies economic disadvantage. However, even in south-east England, a region not noted as being peripheral, poor, or lacking tarmac, road-building supporters are now proposing a £320m package of new roads, including the controversial Hastings Bypass, in a bid to resolve unemployment black spots.

The dualling call also highlights either a lack of environmental concern and initiative, or at least a lack of understanding of the jobs potential of environmental development. If £70 million were invested in localised road safety schemes, public transport and green tourism, and some on home/ business energy efficiency schemes, then a variety of the Assembly's Better Wales objectives could be addressed. Reductions in crash injuries, greenhouse gas emissions, traffic and social exclusion would be better

met, together with job creation at a local level throughout the region.

A40 Traffic and Transport considerations

The stretch of road in question is not congested and does not even show significant congestion on the NAFW Highway Directorate's 2015 Road Traffic Congestion Stress Map. Traffic levels on the A40 in 1997 were (at the Robeston Wathen counter) 9,886 vehicles per day (vpd) and at Canaston 11,491 vpd - Welsh Office figures. These figures are the average annual daily traffic flow (AADT) in a neutral month. The point at which single carriageway roads begin to experience serious congestion (called the Congestion Reference Flow or CRF is about 19,000 vpd for a road of this type). Dualling is generally considered for roads carrying more than 13,000 vpd.

The 2015 congestion stress map (based on highly unsustainable traffic growth forecasts in FOE Cymru's view), shows that the M4 from Cardiff eastwards would be congested. Hence in terms of long-distance travel times, rail freight investment particularly east of Swansea (2) together with public transport investment all along the corridor would help reduce any traffic congestion to some degree along the whole A40/M4 route from the west Wales ports to the Wales/England border.

FOE Cymru believe that temporary frustration caused by slow moving vehicles and the pulses of ferry traffic could better be addressed by public transport and possibly some rail freight investments (2), together with localised road upgrading. Such road upgrading would include localised safety improvements, a small single carriageway bypass of Robeston Wathen (3), right and left turn filters and possibly one or two climbing lanes. A 'farm access' study may also identify low cost ways to minimise agricultural traffic on the A40.

The £70 million dualling would result in a small journey time reduction - probably less than 10 minutes outside the ferry disembarkation times (drive-time reduction on a 23 mile dualling at an average speed of 70mph rather than 50mph, would be 7 minutes 55 seconds). In terms of peripherality, east-west drive time reductions would be marginal. It would, however, represent a more noticeable drive-time reduction for some of the region's car owners and would likely encourage longer-distance driving, be it for commuting, shopping or leisure purposes. This is precisely what should not be encouraged in FOE Cymru's view for compelling local, regional, national and global reasons.

Indeed, as public transport journeys would compare even more poorly, there could be a noticeable modal shift to cars, and consequently reductions in the commercial viability of some existing public transport services. The vicious circle of rural social exclusion for those who do not, chose not, or cannot drive would then continue. Car owning households would be making extra journeys to transport non-driving members of the household. For lower income households the resulting increase in motoring costs are often particularly disadvantageous. Indeed, reducing independent mobility for children, teenagers, the elderly and the infirm has a variety of negative impacts to the regions' overall public health, fitness and safety.

It is instructive to compare the A40 to the A55 across North Wales as both are east-west links to ferry ports, though the Holyhead/Dublin area ferry services handled about 200,000 HGV's compared to Fishguard/Pembroke Dock/Rosslare services which handled 92,000 HGV's last year. The A55 (at Rhuallt Hill, Denbighshire), carried about 9,000 vpd in 1982 (single-carriageway) similar to A40 flow at Robeston Wathen in 1997. In 1997, about 10 years after the A55 was dualled in the Denbighshire area, traffic flows were about 35,000 vpd. This is a four fold traffic increase in 15 years. Yet

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Denbighshire, Conwy and Gwynedd (and Anglesey) have all qualified for Objective One funding due to high unemployment despite east-west drive times being reduced by an hour or more.

For the above reasons, FOE Cymru does not believe that the £70 million A40 dualling is anything like a transport priority for the Assembly. Indeed, more A40 Irish freight may switch to the A55 central sea corridor through Holyhead now that the Anglesey dual carriageway has been opened. The Assembly transport committee should remain focussed on resolving much more pressing issues than the relatively minor driver frustration caused by slow moving vehicles on the A40 (those drivers should try the west Wales rail services to experience real frustration).

There is a belief that Objective One funds could be used to conveniently fund the dualling despite EC concerns about the value of road-building in net job creation. Yet, although there may be a Treasury matched £1.2 billion, giving £2.4 billion in total, the per capita fund for Pembrokeshire County works out at about £20 million per year for the 6 year period. Only 20% of the total funds are allocated to the 'Developing a Competitive Environment' category (infrastructure, etc) in the Single Programming Document submitted to Brussels. Hence, £4 million per annum might be available for all infrastructure projects in Pembrokeshire, or £24 million over the 6 year Objective One period.

FOE Cymru, and others, would like to see Assembly and Objective One funding invested in public transport and rail freight services (3), amongst other schemes in other sectors that would reliably result in more jobs. Energy efficiency, renewables and organic conversion schemes do offer such job creation. Enough funds for FOE Cymru's A40 upgrading proposals (say £10m) would be possible in this scenario. Minor safety upgrading along the A477 should also be considered.

We believe that it is reasonable to say that drive-time reductions would be marginal, consequently the net employment effect, positive or negative, is also likely to be marginal. The EC is aware of such regional effects and in a press briefing in Brussels in November 98, the then Transport Commissioner, Neil Kinnock, warned that before any money would be earmarked for road upgrading it must be clearly demonstrated that it would have a direct positive impact on jobs.

Comparative Assessment Call

SACTRA have been devising methodologies to assess road-building's effects on economies. In 1999 FOE Cymru called on the Assembly to conduct a A40 study using the SACTRA findings. Crucially, the study should compare the employment effects of dualling with the employment effects of alternative transport/economic investments of equal cost. The study should also compare the social, economic and environmental effects. No such comparative assessments, or SACTRA considerations, were used in the 1997 A40 Cardiff Business School report, rendering the document virtually useless in FOE Cymru's view. We called again on the Assembly to conduct such a comparative assessment.

Conclusion

To conclude, FOE Cymru believe that there is ample evidence to show that road-building is nothing like a guarantee of employment and it has been a never ending false dawn even for non-peripheral areas. Pembrokeshire will always be physically more peripheral than most parts of Wales, Britain and Europe, so it should play to its strengths and potential. Rather than compete with M4 areas further east, the region should use its funding opportunities to develop its public transport services, rail freight services, digital communications, local transport plans, green tourism and agriculture, and its on and off shore renewable energy resources. The resulting reductions in energy use and greenhouse gas emissions may well put the west Wales economy several years ahead of its competition by 2010,

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rather than a few minutes closer to them by road.

Notes

1) The St Clears-Haverfordwest dualling was estimated to cost 'between £60-£80 million' according to the NAFW Director of Highways during the summer of 1999. FOE Cymru used a figure of £100 million before contacting the Highways Director which is not an unreasonable estimate for 20 miles of dual carriageway. The relatively small number of villages along the route is one reason for the less than average cost estimate.

2) The Spring 2001 Council/West Wales Forum/Irish Exporters Association Interreg funded study concluded that intermodal rail freight services to Fishguard/Pembroke Dock were unlikely to be viable but that some rail freight potential within the region was identified such as bulk milk deliveries to creameries (Axis Milk). Rail freight developments east of Swansea did have much greater potential (which would result in less traffic congestion within the south Wales corridor generally)

3) In 1994, the then Welsh Office estimated that a 1.8 mile Robeston Wathen bypass would cost £3 million.