

## South East Wales Transport Commission recommends major improvements for transport in the region

November 26, 2020



The South East Wales Transport Commission has today published its final recommendations.

The commission was established to recommend ways to reduce congestion on the M4 motorway without building a new relief road around Newport.

Their main proposal is for a 'network of alternatives', providing a comprehensive and coordinated public transport alternative to the M4. The network is designed to give people and businesses new transport options that do not use the motorway - or indeed a car.

This centres on improving rail provision between Cardiff, Newport and Bristol by upgrading the existing four tracks of the South Wales Main Line, so that these tracks can be used by more trains with more flexibility. For the first time, this would allow for local, commuting services to run frequently without disrupting express rail services. They also suggest an ambitious rail station building programme, which would add six new rail stations between Cardiff and the River Severn.

To complement existing stations at Cardiff Central, Newport and Severn Tunnel Junction, the proposed new stations would be: Newport Road (Cardiff), Cardiff Parkway (St Mellons), Newport West, Newport East (Somerton), Llanwern and Magor.

The rail backbone would be supported by new rapid bus and cycle corridors across the region, especially within Newport. Taken together, over 90 percent of Cardiff and Newport's population would live within a mile of a rail station or rapid bus corridor if the proposals are taken forward. Many of these recommendations can be delivered through upgrades to the existing rail and road network.

Commission Chairman Lord Burns says: "The area around the M4 is a very important economic corridor for Wales. It is expanding and becoming an attractive place for people to work and live. Just like similar regions in the UK and other European countries, it needs a range of attractive, affordable and coordinated transport options to fulfil its potential.

"It is clear that people in South East Wales do not have good alternatives to the M4. Many people have little choice but to use the motorway, given the lack of public transport options. We believe that a competitively priced, efficient and reliable public transport network could become the first choice for many travellers.

"Even a moderate reduction in the number of cars travelling on the M4 could result in a significant improvement to the travel flow. The changes we are suggesting would generate considerable extra capacity in our region's transport system. This shift to public and active transport would have many wider benefits beyond relieving congestion, including cutting air pollution, improving public health, and providing better access to jobs and services for everyone."

Beyond infrastructure, the report recommends:

- new ways to organise transport services, speeding up interchange, coordinating timetables and integrating ticketing
- a new governance model so there is a 'single guiding mind' to organise the whole public transport network
- measures to reduce the need to travel, including superfast broadband-enabled remote working sites so people can work closer to home
- local authorities consider introducing a workplace parking levy to influence travel choices, once public transport improvements have been made
- a transport-focused approach to planning, ensuring developments are built around the public transport network rather than the motorway

The commission's final recommendations follow their earlier fast-track recommendations relating to M4 traffic management, which included replacing the current variable speed limit with a new average 50mph speed control and measures to improve lane discipline on the approach to the Brynglas tunnels.

Ken Skates, Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales said: "The Welsh Government welcomes the South East Wales Transport Commission's report and the direction of travel it sets out towards a major

upgrade of the south Wales mainline and better public transport along the M4 corridor. I'd like to thank Lord Burns and the Commission for a detailed and informed piece of work.

"As we outlined in our new Wales Transport Strategy, getting more people out of their cars and onto public transport is critical to our future and this report shows how that approach can relieve congestion around the Brynglas Tunnels and serve the economy and communities of the wider region. Newport Council has an important role to play in helping deliver the important shift this report sets out and we will work with them and UK Government to take forward the recommendations in this Report.

"As we have highlighted many times it will require the UK Government to play their part and to adequately fund rail infrastructure in Wales. Today's report, built on a major upgrade of the south Wales mainline, is an important step forward and we hope the UK Government will help us take advantage of the exciting opportunity it sets out."

*Photo credit: Welsh Government*

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