

Third Menai Crossing electricity connection to be examined

National Grid is currently developing plans for a new 400,000 volt connection between the existing substation at Wylfa on Anglesey and the existing electricity transmission network on the mainland in North Wales. The project is known as the North Wales Connection Project and will also facilitate the export of power from the proposed Wylfa Newydd power station.

The joint study between the Welsh Government and National Grid will look at any potential opportunities between the North Wales Connection Project and the Welsh Government's proposed third crossing utilising the bridge to house National Grid infrastructure in order to cross the Menai Strait.

Should there be a feasible solution, the study will look at timelines for delivery and also assess if it provides the best value. National Grid has an agreement with Horizon to provide the connection to Wylfa Newydd by the mid 2020s.

The feasibility study agreement will be funded through the £3m design and development stage of the third crossing which is part of the two-year budget agreed by the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru.

The consultation looking at four possible options for a third Menai crossing closed on 9 March and all responses are currently being evaluated.

Economy and Transport Secretary, Ken Skates said:

"The Welsh Government has made known its ambition for a shared third Menai Crossing and this feasibility study will now examine in detail the potential opportunities, challenges and obstacles to making that vision a reality.

"Any solution must of course be fit for purpose, not only to deliver a safe electricity connection but to protect the environment around it and provide the best value for money for the taxpayer.

"We have held constructive discussions with National Grid to explore if a third Menai crossing could be utilised to carry power onto the national grid, including from the proposed Wylfa Newydd, and today's announcement is a step forward establishing if this is possible.

"The third Menai Crossing is a huge investment project which has the potential to make a big difference in supporting the needs of communities and visitors, tackling congestion issues and providing a boost to the economy.

“The Welsh Government has an ambitious programme for transport improvements over the coming years and a third crossing over the Menai Strait is a key part of our plans.”

Gareth Williams, Senior Project Manager, National Grid said:

“We are pleased to be working with Welsh Government to look at the possibility of placing cables to connect Wylfa Newydd over the proposed third crossing of the Menai Strait. The project could present challenges in terms of construction programme, cost and technical delivery and we will examine these to see if they can be overcome.

“In tandem, we’ll continue to move ahead with our current plans for a tunnel as our customer, Horizon requires a connection by the mid 2020s. It will be vital that we deliver a reliable connection on time to unlock the billions of pounds of investment Wylfa Newydd will bring for North Wales.”

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Finance Secretary announces £260m for infrastructure investment

The funding announcement comes as the Finance Secretary will publish a mid-point review of the Welsh Infrastructure and Investment Plan, which highlights how the Welsh Government has invested £9bn in new hospitals, schools, houses and transport links since 2012, in the face of ongoing austerity.

The new capital will fund a range of infrastructure investments, including active travel, next generation broadband, the NHS all-Wales capital programme, school community hubs throughout Wales and the Tech Valleys programme, which is part of the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys and the Economic Action Plan.

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“I am pleased to announce this additional capital funding, which will help us to continue to deliver ambitious infrastructure projects throughout Wales.

“Our aim is to ensure our infrastructure investment contributes to the growing Welsh economy and helps to deliver prosperity for all.”

Speaking about the mid-point review of the Welsh Infrastructure and Investment Plan (WIIP), which will be published Tuesday May 1, he added:

“The mid-point review is an opportunity to look back at what we’ve achieved since the WIIP was published in 2012. But it also provides a timely opportunity to consider the future direction of our infrastructure investment.”

Since the publication of the WIIP in 2012, the Welsh Government has invested £9bn of capital funding in infrastructure in Wales and developed new innovative finance initiatives, including the new Mutual Investment Model, to complement conventional capital funding.

The £266m of new capital will build on this work and help to meet the needs of present and future generations. The investment is aligned to the commitments in the programme for government Taking Wales Forward and Prosperity for All.

Kirsty Williams steps in with £200,000 to support armed forces children

Up until March this year schools in Wales were able to bid for funding from the MoD's Education Support Fund (ESF) which was open to schools across the UK and provided targeted support for Service children.

As the fund has now come to an end, a new interim £200,000 Supporting Service Children in Wales Fund will be established. This will be administered by the Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Project and hosted by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).

Schools are being invited to bid this term for funding ready for the new term in September.

Kirsty Williams said:

"Our national mission is to raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and deliver an education system that is a source of national pride and confidence. For this to happen, every learner in Wales must be able to achieve their full potential.

"Service children often have to move schools at very short notice, and can also face the anxiety of having a parent away on active service. That's why we need to ensure schools are there to support them."

Alun Davies, Cabinet Secretary for Local Government & Public Services, said:

"We have made tremendous progress in Wales in delivering services and support for our Armed Forces community and stepping up to help the children of active personnel through what can clearly be a stressful time in their life is further evidence of our commitment.

"The WLGA is particularly well suited to manage the fund with the SSCE as they already have the links with schools and the Armed Forces in Wales.

"They will be making sure that schools are fully aware of the new fund and will be inviting them to submit their bids so that the funding is in place ready for September."

Councillor Debbie Wilcox, WLGA Spokesperson for Education, said:

"The unique stresses and anxieties that Service children face can often be overwhelming especially in a learning environment. That is

why the SSCE Project continues to work positively with relevant stakeholders, raising awareness of the issues of service children in education and supporting schools working with these children and young people across Wales.”

“This interim Welsh Government fund for 2018-19, administered by SSCE and hosted by WLGA, will ensure that the children of our armed forces are given the additional support that they need to fulfil their potential at school. WLGA and Welsh Government are committed to reduce the attainment gap and to provide an education system which prepares all learners in Wales for bright futures. As we look ahead, it is imperative that long-term government funding is secured for future years to ensure that children of all backgrounds are given the best possible opportunities to thrive.”

Ant Metcalfe, Wales Area Manager for The Royal British Legion said:

“Having a parent in the Armed Forces can have a tremendous impact on the wellbeing of some service children. We welcome any additional support that benefits the children of Armed Forces personnel in Wales and helps them gain access to the help they need due to their unique circumstances.

“In October 2017 the Legion launched a guide for Service children and families in Wales to improve awareness of the support available to them and we hope the establishment of this fund will further increase the help available for service children across Wales’.

£1.4m EU boost to increase skills in the advanced manufacturing sector

The Materials and Manufacturing Education Training and Learning (METaL) scheme, led by Swansea University’s College of Engineering, is helping to raise skills, boost performance and productivity to drive this growing industrial sector.

The additional funding of £1.4m will enable the scheme to help more than 400 people gain technical skills in new and emerging sectors, such as energy and power, smart manufacturing, materials engineering, circular economy as well as corrosion and coatings technology. It will also support an extra 60 companies in North, West Wales and the South Wales Valleys.

Professor Drakeford said,

“The Welsh Government is committed to ensuring the Welsh workforce is equipped with the skills needed to drive growth and productivity. This is another example of the importance of replacement funding for Wales following Brexit so that future investments can continue to support our ambitions for a sustainable and prosperous Welsh economy.”

Dr Khalil Khan of Swansea University, METaL Project manager, said:

“Securing this EU funding ensures the continuation of a fantastic vehicle for Swansea University to share its knowledge and experience to support Welsh businesses.

“The funding complements the investment of Welsh Government in supporting Welsh businesses, and will benefit industry by ensuring that its workforce have the correct technical knowledge to enable Welsh businesses to compete in a global marketplace.”

One of the companies that has benefited from the METaL scheme is TATA Steel in Port Talbot. Andrew Townsend, a Fire and Environment Manager at the site talks about his experience of the scheme.

“The METaL courses have helped colleagues gain a better understanding of technical aspects associated with their operations. In particular, the environmental issues course has helped people understand environmental legislation and global, local, and market-sector based environmental issues.”

“The benefit for our employees is that they now have a better understanding of the environmental aspects of our business. For the company it is an advantage to have a workforce which is more environmentally aware which helps improve Tata Steel’s environmental performance.”

The scheme aims to support more than 800 people by the time it is completed in 2022.