

Newtown bypass to be officially opened ahead of schedule

Construction of the bypass began in February 2016 and traffic will be allowed to travel on the road for the first time following the official opening.

The development to the south of Newtown is approximately 6.3km long and has two lanes in one direction and one lane in the opposite direction to provide safe overtaking sections of the road.

The Newtown bypass will ease traffic congestion through the town centre by between 40 and 50 per cent resulting in reduced journey times in the area and better access to jobs and services. It will also improve safety by removing the need for large high sided heavy goods and agricultural vehicles from travelling through nearby residential areas.

A strong emphasis has been placed on investing in Welsh businesses during the construction phase with £46.8 million being spent on goods, services, or overheads from companies in Wales.

In addition, £10.7 million has been spent on employing people, including apprentices, living in Wales as a result of the scheme.

Alun Griffiths contractors who built the bypass have provided local employment and training opportunities in partnership with Coleg Powys through the Skills Academy Programme. This has resulted in 18 apprentices and graduate trainees gaining valuable skills and experience by working on the bypass.

Active travel provisions have also been included as part of the bypass including a link from Newtown to the Mochdre Industrial Estate.

Ahead of the official opening, Economy and Transport Minister Ken Skates said:

“I am delighted to officially open what is a significant development in Mid Wales.

The Newtown Bypass has been delivered ahead of schedule and completed to the very highest standard. The scheme improves north-south and east-west links and will provide a real step change in how people travel in the area, as well as to and beyond Newtown.

The amount of traffic passing through the town will reduce as a result of the development leading to shorter journey times and improved air quality in the area.

The new bypass will strengthen the local economy by making it easier and better for people to access jobs and services and

businesses will benefit too as the new route makes it simpler to import and export goods. It also provides improved links to tourist destinations which will be a boost for the industry.

I have been impressed with the role apprentices and graduate trainees have had working on the construction of the bypass. I'd like to congratulate them, Alun Griffiths and everyone who has worked on delivering this excellent feat of engineering.

I'm also very pleased with the level of community engagement and projects that have been delivered as a result of the project. From fundraising for charities to educational link programmes such as visits to schools, this scheme has had a real community element to it.

The Newtown Bypass is an absolutely fantastic example of how Welsh Government investment and commitment is delivering for the benefit of residents in Mid Wales."

[Young care leavers to be exempt from paying council tax](#)

The plan to take forward regulations to exempt care leavers under 25 from paying council tax is set out as responses to a consultation with local authorities, voluntary organisations, taxpayers and care leavers themselves are published.

The feedback to the consultation has been very positive, with 91% of respondents supporting the proposal to provide this additional help to care leavers and 80% agreeing the exemption should be extended to the age of 25.

The principle of exempting care leavers from paying council tax has been widely accepted for some time, but the level of support available to care leavers across Wales has been inconsistent.

The new legislation is the latest in a series of measures designed to make council tax fairer in Wales – a key Welsh Government commitment.

Finance Minister Rebecca Evans said:

"I am keen the Welsh Government and local authorities do everything possible to support care leavers and support their successful transition into adulthood and independent living.

"Today's announcement is another positive step in our pledge to

make council tax fairer and I want to thank everyone who took part in the consultation.”

As council tax bills start to arrive through the letterboxes of homes across Wales, the Finance Minister is urging people to check if they are entitled to help paying their bill.

The minister added:

“There are many discounts, reductions and exemptions available and I would encourage everyone to check the Welsh Government website to see if they could be paying less council tax.”

[More information about the support on GOV.WALES](#)

The regulations to exempt care leavers from paying council tax will be laid before the National Assembly in early March.

[New support for previous recipients of the Welsh Independent Living Grant](#)

An independent social work assessment will be offered to all former Independent Living Fund (ILF) recipients who are unhappy with their new care and support package and would like a second opinion.

The Welsh Government will provide additional funding to local authorities for the cost of the workers to carry out these independent assessments and additional care hours that may result from the assessments.

The independent assessments will be consistent with people’s agreed wellbeing outcome and acknowledge the historical entitlement of former ILF recipients.

Mrs Morgan said:

“It is paramount that people’s ability to live independently is not compromised by changes the care and support provided for people previously in receipt of the Welsh Independent Living Grant. These changes will ensure that is the case and deliver a consistent level of care and support across Wales.

“While the majority of former ILF recipients are receiving the same or more care as they were previously, a significant number have experienced a reduction in hours of support. There is also

considerable variation in the reductions in support.

“I have therefore written to local government leaders to request a pause of the transition with immediate effect in order to bring in the revised arrangements.

“This is a significant change of approach that ensures that the needs of former WILG recipients will be fully met, and that resources are no barrier to a full package of care and support.

I would like to thank Nathan Davies and his colleagues in the Save the WILG Campaign for the representations they have made to Welsh Government on this matter. I have met with Nathan twice in the last three weeks to hear his concerns and to seek to develop a new approach. I understand that Nathan is supportive in principle of the new approach Welsh Government intend to take. We share a common interest in seeing it implemented properly.”

New Treatment Fund is improving and prolonging lives across Wales

Introduced in January 2017, the New Treatment Fund speeds up access to medicines recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the All Wales Medicines Strategy Group (AWMSG).

The Fund has shortened the timeframe in which new medicines must be made available from 90 days to 60. Due to its success, the average time taken to make medicines available has fallen to an average of 17 days.

The Welsh Government is providing £16 million annually to health boards and Velindre NHS Trust over the five years of this Government – £80m in total – for the New Treatment Fund.

This substantial investment in NHS Wales demonstrates the Welsh Government’s commitment to ensuring that patients receive the latest recommended treatments quickly, no matter where they live in Wales.

One of the new drugs that has been made available thanks to the New Treatment Fund is the breast cancer drug Palbociclib, which was recommended by NICE for routine use in November 2017. The drug blocks the growth and spread of the cancer.

According to the latest figures available, 73 women in Wales are now receiving Palbociclib and the numbers are expected to grow.

Vaughan Gething said:

“Our New Treatment Fund is improving and prolonging lives across Wales.

“Due to the success of the Fund, the average time taken to make medicines available has fallen considerably. We have reached and far exceeded our 60-day target, which is a great achievement and is making a very real difference to people’s lives.

“We are seeing our patients get faster access to the full range of new medicines coming through the appraisal pipeline from NICE and AMWSG. This includes new medicines to treat arthritis, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, asthma and breast cancer to name just a few.

“The prompt availability of Palbociclib, widely considered to be a game-changer in the treatment and management of metastatic breast cancer, is a prime example of the New Treatment Fund delivering what the Welsh Government intended.

“I am enormously proud of what we have achieved in the last two years and I want to see the Fund continue to go from strength to strength. The people of Wales deserve only the best.”

[Companies from across Wales to benefit from cutting edge technologies thanks to EU funding](#)

An EU-backed project which has helped businesses in parts of Wales develop cutting-edge technologies and boost productivity is expanding to cover the whole of the country.

The Centre of Excellence in Mobile and Emerging Technologies (CEMET) was launched in 2016 and has already helped develop iPad software to detect sight problems in young children, a virtual system that improves safety for both children and workers on railways, and a product that communicates with children through a remotely-operated animal character that appears on a TV screen, amongst others high-tech innovations.

Led by the University of South Wales (USW) and backed with £4.3m of EU funds through the Welsh Government, CEMET has been working with companies in the Valleys, West Wales, and North Wales over the last two years. A further £1.2m of EU funds, announced today by the Minister for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates, will allow companies across the whole of Wales to benefit from the expertise. The pan-Wales CEMET is now a £8.9m project, with £5.5m of EU funding, and will run until March 2023.

Minister for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates said:

“This expansion will see CEMET build on the support it has already given to a number of SMEs to design and test new mobile and emerging technologies to create products and services for commercial success.

In an ever changing businesses landscape, mobile and emerging technologies play an ever important role for companies and it’s fantastic to see Government, Universities and businesses working together to look for solutions and innovations that are of real benefit to companies, consumers and the wider public.

This comprehensive package of support has already seen a number of businesses develop innovative, and in some cases truly life changing products and services. With this latest, welcome, EU funding allowing that invaluable work to reach all part of Wales, I look forward to seeing the project contribute to further business successes in the coming months and years.”

Mark Griffiths, Co-Director of CEMET said:

“Since its launch, the project has gone from strength to strength and has given support to SMEs which are now rapidly expanding.

For example Motion Rail uses pioneering Virtual Reality technology to help children understand the dangers of the railway, while Evoke Education’s virtual avatar Moe has successfully encouraged a non-verbal child to speak and has gained interest from both the legal sector and child psychology experts.

We have also worked with a company which has put Augmented Reality in the hands of local high street retailers in South Wales and is gearing up to launch across the country.

With the support of this funding these entrepreneurs have been able to advance their ideas, develop cutting-edge products, and expand their businesses.

Now we are operating across the whole of Wales, CEMET will be able to provide support to more SMEs so they can develop their ideas and turn them into a market-ready product.”

In the last decade, EU-funded projects have created 45,000 new jobs and 13,000 new businesses across Wales, while also helping more than 85,000 people into employment.