

First Minister: Take no deal off the table

The First Minister will today say that the Prime Minister must show flexibility to break the deadlock in Parliament instead of presenting a “tweaked” version of a deal which has already been completely rejected by MPs.

Mark Drakeford will warn that while the UK government refuses to take ‘no deal’ off the table, the UK faces an uncomfortably high-risk of a no deal Brexit by default.

In response to these unprecedented circumstances, today’s government business in the National Assembly has been amended to make way for a series of emergency statements on the impact of a no deal outcome on Wales and the work that is underway to prepare for this.

Ministers will outline the real risks of a no deal Brexit on health, the economy, transport and farming which include:

- concerns about the future supply of radioisotope, which is essential for diagnostic and therapeutic use by our NHS
- the risk of severe disruption to freight transport, with knock-on effects for businesses and consumers
- tariffs and non-tariff barriers on exports to the EU which would damage our manufacturing and agriculture sectors, with sales of processed foods attracting tariffs of around 15% and other products exceeding 50%, with red meat attracting particularly high tariffs, if we move to WTO rules.

Speaking ahead of this afternoon’s statement in the Senedd, the First Minister said:

“Last week the Prime Minister’s Brexit deal was defeated, and the scale of that defeat provided the clearest proof yet that her deal is dead. Yet the Prime Minister continues stubbornly to push ahead with only a tweaked version of her failed deal.

“No UK government should be capable of consciously allowing a catastrophic no deal outcome, and the Prime Minister must take this option off the table and extend Article 50. This would allow time for the UK government to change direction and commit to re-entering negotiations with the EU to secure a Brexit that protects jobs and the economy.”

Further work on case for investment in North Wales rail infrastructure

The supplementary work which has been commissioned by the Welsh Government follows the publication of The Case for Investment by Professor Mark Barry which identified a vision and objectives for improvements to the North Wales Main Line and the Wrexham-Merseyside line following extensive engagement with stakeholders.

The interventions would widen access to employment across North Wales, Cheshire and Liverpool by improving rail services and enhancing rail connectivity from North Wales to international gateways at Manchester and Liverpool airports.

The next step is further development, refinement and assessment of the packages identified in the Case for Investment such as the modernisation of the North Wales Main Line from Holyhead to Crewe including line speed improvements, integration with HS2 at Crewe, increased frequencies, and park & ride and bus integration at several stations along the Wrexham-Merseyside borderlands line.

This will complement the work being done by the UK Government, who are responsible for funding and delivering rail enhancements in Wales, to develop enhancements across Wales following the cancellation of electrification to Swansea.

Ken Skates said:

“Development and delivery of an ambitious and equitable programme of rail infrastructure improvements in North Wales needs to happen at pace and this is a matter I have previously made very clear to the Secretary of State.

“Today’s announcement is another important step in the right direction and a good example of the action the Welsh Government is taking. The further development of cases for rail enhancements in North Wales will include identifying requirements, timescales, scope and costs for future outline business case developments and I am pleased that Transport for Wales will be carrying out this stage of work.

“North Wales’ connectivity with economic hubs across the border is becoming more and more important and this will only increase following Brexit.

“Reducing journey times, ensuring better access to airports and improving rail network resilience in North Wales to accommodate future demand are just some of the issues which will be considered as part of the next stage of work.

“We are determined to see a real step change in our rail infrastructure which is deliverable for the benefit of passengers. I urge the UK Government to get on board with our aspirations.”

Iconic bridge officially named after Welsh war hero

The official ceremony, held on Monday 21 January, Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport Lee Waters unveiled the Jack Williams Gateway Bridge plaque in front of 12 members of Jack’s family, including his granddaughter Ann Page.

Representing the Royal Welsh Regiment was Major (Retd) Derek Adams, who was joined by a serving officer and four soldiers.

Transport Minister Ken Skates and principal contractor Costain, who is delivering the A465 ‘Section 2’ dualling scheme stretching 8km from Brynmawr in the west to Gilwern in the east, called on the community for nominations at the end of last year.

Three names were clear favourites:

1. Jack Williams Gateway Bridge
2. Clydach Gorge Gateway Bridge
3. The Bevin Boys Gateway Bridge

Voting on the shortlist, the local community decided to honour Victoria Cross recipient John Henry Williams, who lived in the community in which Costain has worked for the last three years.

Decorated four times for his bravery during the conflict that was to become known as The Great War, local man, John – who was better known as Jack – was born in Nantyglo in September 1886.

A Welsh colliery blacksmith, he enlisted in the 10th Battalion, South Wales Borderers (part of the 38th (Welsh) Division) in November 1914 and was promoted to company sergeant major on 2 October 1917.

In October 1918, he single-handedly saved his company and an entire village from almost certain destruction. For this selfless act of bravery, he was awarded the Victoria Cross. Previously he had been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, French Médaille Militaire and the Military Medal and Bar.

The Victoria Cross is the highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces. That, along

with the other honours he received, makes Jack Williams the most decorated Welsh non-commissioned officer of all time.

Dominating the most westerly part of Clydach Gorge, the largest of the structures on the A465 'Section 2' project is a 118-metre span, thrust arch bridge, crossing from north to south, with the A465 split-level carriageway below. The new bridge also crosses the Gorge, which is considered one of south Wales' most important environmental and ecologically sensitive areas.

Senior Project Director, Costain, Bruce Richards said:

"We are extremely proud to have delivered this impressive structure for the residents and road users in the area. We are particularly pleased that Welsh Government and the public have chosen to name the bridge after local hero Jack Williams allowing his memory to live on in the communities for years to come."

Jack's granddaughter, Ann Page said:

"The family is immensely proud of Jack Williams VC and very grateful that the people of Blaenau Gwent share our pride and help to keep his memory alive by supporting memorial events. Naming this spectacular bridge after him will hopefully generate an interest for future generations to explore the reasons why and to understand why his courageous actions during WW1 should always be remembered along with the sacrifices made by so many young men and their families. Jack and all Victoria Cross winners have a special place in our history – as the bravest of the brave."

Economy and Transport Deputy Minister, Lee Waters said:

"Jack Williams was a true hero and naming such an iconic bridge built in the area he lived after him is a fitting tribute to a man whose name should never be forgotten.

"This connection with Jack will create a lasting legacy for generations to enjoy. That we can do it in the same year Jack received his Victoria Cross from the King in Buckingham Palace – and marking almost exactly 100 years since Jack acted so bravely – is moving."

'This is Not Love. This is Control' – new campaign launched to help people in controlling relationships

The Welsh Government campaign, "This is Not Love. This is Control" aims to help people identify coercive control behaviours.

Coercive control is a form of abuse – it can be subtle, making it difficult to identify and to recognise as wrong and abusive. Those experiencing it are often left feeling belittled and isolated.

Limiting a person's access to money, dictating what they can wear and making them cut contact with their friends and family are examples of coercive control.

An estimated 2 million adults in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse last year – 65% women and 35% men.

Coercive control has been a criminal offence since 2015. Last year, 9,053 offences of coercive control were recorded by Police across England and Wales and those being prosecuted faced on average 17 months imprisonment.

'This is Not Love. This is Control' is part of the Welsh Government's long-standing commitment to ending domestic violence in Wales. The Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act was launched in 2015 and an information and advice service, Live Fear Free, offers support 24/7 via a helpline and live chat.

At yesterday's launch event (Thursday 17th) at the Riverfront in Newport, the audience heard moving speeches and audio clips from survivors of coercive control.

One of those speaking today was Luke Hart. Luke's mother Claire and younger sister Charlotte were murdered in broad daylight by their father using a sawn-off shotgun. He then committed suicide.

Following the deaths, Luke and his brother Ryan started a project called CoCo Awareness. The pair now spend their time raising awareness of coercive control and speaking out against male violence towards women and children.

Speaking ahead of the event, Luke said:

"'This is Not Love. This is Control' is a vitally important campaign. We grew up under a coercively controlling father and neither we nor anyone else saw the signs for 26 years until he murdered our mother Claire and 19-year-old sister Charlotte in 2016.

"The perpetrator's desire for control lies behind all abuse, we

must stop seeing abuse as 'an emotional loss of control' but rather as driven by masculine belief systems, in particular an obsessive demand for power, control and dominance: the perpetrator in fact demonstrates an excess of control, not a lack of it.

"Currently, most people are surprised and shocked by domestic abuse when it surfaces, but this is precisely because we are looking for the wrong things. This campaign will help educate us all on what we need to be looking for."

Jane Hutt, the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, said:

"The 'This is Not Love. This is Control' campaign is the next step in our on-going pledge to tackle violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wales.

"Coercive control had been fairly under the radar until recently. With the remarkable support of survivors and partner organisations, we hope this campaign will raise awareness of this toxic behaviour and empower more people to come forward."

Gwendolyn Sterk, Policy and Public Affairs Manager for Welsh Women's Aid, said:

"Welsh Women's Aid welcomes the Welsh Government focusing on and highlighting coercive control as a form of violence against women and girls. We feel that it is very important to raise awareness of coercive control and to make it known that it is a criminal offence.

"Often, all it takes for a woman in a controlling or abusive relationship to seek help, is to have a conversation with someone who believes them, understands what they are experiencing, and knows where to direct them for specialist help and support."

Yasmin Khan, Welsh Government National Adviser on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, said:

"Survivors tell us they feel humiliated by the control they've experienced and this is compounded by the fact it can be hard for them to prove what's happening. They describe a 'drip, drip' effect of coercive control; a cumulative build up and escalation, often towards physical abuse, over time."

"Whether someone is experiencing coercive control themselves or witnessing it, we would urge them to get in touch with our free helpline, Live Fear Free, or contact the Police."

If you've experienced coercive control or any kind of domestic abuse, call the free and confidential Live Fear Free helpline on 0808 8010 800 or visit livefearfree.gov.wales to message an adviser 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

[Deal to bring faster broadband to additional premises announced](#)

The final lot under the successor project to Superfast Cymru for east Wales will provide faster broadband for around 10,000 extra premises. It will be underpinned by over £9.2m of public funding and will be completed by March 2021.

In total, along with the two other lots announced in the Autumn, Openreach will provide 26,000 premises with access to fast reliable broadband by March 2021 at a cost of nearly £22.5m which will be met by the Welsh Government and EU funding.

This is in addition to the 733,000 premises already with access as a result of the Superfast Cymru programme.

None of these premises would have access to faster broadband without the Welsh Government's intervention as the market had no plans to reach them under their own deployment plans.

Lee Waters said:

"These premises would have no access to faster broadband without government intervention.

"While our Superfast Cymru programme has transformed the digital landscape in Wales, with over nine out of 10 premises now able to access faster broadband, there remain premises with no access.

"There is no one size fits all solution to reach all of these premises and a variety of measures will need to be used, including today's contract which will reach 10,000 of those without. The other elements are individual support through our ABC and ultrafast connectivity voucher schemes, and support for communities through our vouchers schemes and community led interventions.

"It is a challenging and complex process but we are working hard on ensuring the final premises will have access."

Kim Mears, Openreach managing director for strategic infrastructure delivery, said:

“We’re delighted to be working once again with the Welsh Government in widening access to superfast fibre broadband across Wales.

“Our engineers have already delivered an enormous engineering project that has brought access to fast reliable connectivity to nearly 95 per cent of Welsh homes and businesses which is helping to enable a digital revolution in the country.

“But we also appreciate that there are those that didn’t benefit from Superfast Cymru and this latest intervention working alongside the Welsh Government will be one part of a suite of measures to bring faster broadband to those that missed out.”