

Have your say on new A494 River Dee Bridge preferred option

A 12-week consultation begins today until 4 February 2019 on the preferred option to upgrade the River Dee Bridge which was identified in the Welsh Government's 'Moving North Wales Forward' to address existing traffic issues in the area and ensure it is fit for the future.

The current crossing was built in 1960 and presently carries more than 61,000 vehicles per day which is far higher than it was designed for.

Due to the age of the bridge, there is evidence of deterioration to key structural features which would require substantial repair. Addressing the deterioration would result in closing the bridge for long periods causing significant and unacceptable delays and disruption to the trunk and local road network in the area.

The proposal would see a new crossing for westbound traffic with a replacement of the current structure for eastbound traffic. Both bridges would have three lanes and a hard shoulder. A shared path for pedestrians and cyclists would also be included, connecting the new River Dee Bridge to Station Road.

The proposal would bring this part of the route up to modern day standards, ensure smooth flow of traffic and strengthen the road's resilience.

During the construction of the proposed scheme, two lanes in each direction would remain open on the current bridge to minimise disruption on the A494 and the local road network. It is possible there would be occasions when reductions to one lane would be required but kept to an absolute minimum and only for a short period of time.

Public Consultations events will take place where people can learn more about the preferred option and provide comments on it. These will take place at St Andrews Church Hall in Garden City on Tuesday, 20 November between 2pm and 8pm and Deeside Leisure Centre on Saturday 24 November between 10am-4pm. Both are free to attend and everyone is welcome.

Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

"The A494 is a key economic artery connecting North Wales with North West England and beyond.

"Replacing the ageing A494 River Dee Bridge with two crossings will not only improve safety, but also provide greater resilience and enhance journey time reliability. It will also address air quality issues in the area which will improve the health and wellbeing of local residents.

“The Welsh Government is investing significantly in North East Wales transport infrastructure over the coming years and ensuring this section of the A494 is fit for the future is absolutely essential. This is a key part of our plans for the region and I am pleased we are moving to the next stage of development.

“The Public Consultation events offer a great opportunity for people to see the preferred option, ask questions and leave comments. I encourage everyone with an interest to let us know their thoughts on the proposed scheme before Monday 4 February when the consultation closes. All responses will be carefully considered and will be invaluable in shaping the final design of the proposal.”

[Wales secures €100m of competitive EU research and innovation funding](#)

Horizon 2020 is the EU’s largest ever research and innovation programme, supporting cutting-edge science and technology and international collaboration to deliver solutions to key challenges facing society.

Since the launch of the highly-competitive programme, Welsh businesses and universities have been involved in more than 2,800 international collaborations. These have delivered significant economic benefits for Wales and have helped to put Welsh universities at the forefront of research.

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“Today we are celebrating Welsh success in Horizon 2020. The programme provides a real opportunity for Welsh businesses and universities to be at the forefront of world-class research and innovation while also helping to grow our economy.

“This success highlights just how important it is that we continue to have full access to Horizon 2020 and its successor programme in the future after the UK leaves the EU.

“We will continue to press the UK Government to ensure this is part of any new relationship between UK and the EU after Brexit.”

Swansea University is one of the many successful organisations in Wales to win Horizon 2020 funding. With support of nearly €1.5m, its QNets project is researching how the computational power of quantum physics can be harnessed for information processing in areas such as smartphones, machine learning and

big data analysis.

Dr Markus Muller, from Swansea University said:

“The Horizon 2020 funding will help us to take a leading role in establishing a new paradigm for quantum information processing.

“It has the potential to significantly strengthen the university’s contribution to the fast-growing European research in the field of quantum technologies, providing a new cornerstone of our emerging modern information-based society.”

Denbighshire-based anchor company Qioptiq Ltd and Cardiff University secured €635,000 of Horizon 2020 funding to work alongside a consortium of 20 international partners on the MANUELA project.

The project will develop additive manufacturing production processes in a wide range of areas, including automotive, aerospace, energy and medical.

Lee Eccles, principal engineer from Qioptiq Ltd, said:

“Qioptiq is excited to be a part of the Horizon 2020-funded MANUELA project. Our active involvement in the development of such leading-edge technology will help to ensure that Qioptiq maintains its position as a market-leading innovator, generating growth for the company, the local economy and Wales.”

Dr Samuel Bigot from Cardiff University School of Engineering said:

“Participation in the MANUELA project offers Cardiff University an exciting opportunity to work with leading industrial and academic partners across the EU and be at the forefront of research developments in two major emerging technologies – artificial intelligence and metal additive manufacturing or 3D printing.”

My Travel Pass to double eligibility

Previously open to 16 to 18 year-olds, Transport Secretary Ken Skates made the announcement today that the scheme is not only secured until March 2020, but will be available to many more people.

The one-third discounted offer began in 2015 when Welsh Government launched a

pilot discounted bus travel scheme to provide all 16, 17 and 18 year-olds with discounted bus fares for any journey within Wales. The extension should take effect from early December 2018.

Existing MyTravelPass holders who have a 16 to 18 years pass, and who wish to take-up this exciting offer, need not do anything now, but should reapply shortly before their existing pass expiries.

Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

“I’m pleased to announce that following the consultation exercise I undertook last year and talks with the bus industry we have been able to increase the upper age for discounted bus travel from 18 to 21 years.

“I would like to thank the bus industry for agreeing to this improvement. We appreciate their co-operation, as although the Welsh Government pays, their participation is voluntary.

“We will continue negotiations with our bus industry partners during 2019 to identify any further enhancements, potentially involving some of the key issues raised during the consultation we might jointly achieve.

“Today’s enhancement of the MyTravelPass scheme will not only help young people in training or apprenticeships, and during the transition into work, but will hopefully also encourage more to use the bus for more of their journeys. This way, they will be helping to tackle congestion and air quality in our towns and cities.

The MyTravelPass scheme was originally established as part of a budget deal between the Welsh Government and the Welsh Liberal Democrats during the last assembly term.

To keep in touch with the date from which applications may be made, visit www.mytravelpass.gov.wales or call 0300 200 22 33.

Kirsty Williams announces single biggest investment in support for teachers

The National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL), announced today by the Education Secretary, will see £9 million in this financial year, increasing to £15 million next financial year. It is the single biggest investment in

support for teachers in Wales since devolution.

The funding will give schools the time and resources they need to plan ahead for the new curriculum and ensure that changes are made in a way that will prioritise the wellbeing of teachers and minimise disruption to pupils' learning. The funding will also help ensure that there is cover for staff to be released for professional learning.

Under the NAPL, Professional Learning will be an entitlement for all practitioners in schools, not just teachers.

Schools will also be encouraged to create, share and exploit learning opportunities with other schools and organisations as they work together in clusters.

One of the most striking features of the NAPL will be an entirely new approach to how teachers learn. A much more accessible blend of learning will be available through Wales' regions and universities. This will encompass learning outside the classroom, online learning, classroom learning and coaching.

This will ensure that teachers have much greater flexibility about how and when they learn.

Education Secretary Kirsty Williams said:

"This major investment shows how highly we value teachers' professional learning. It is an investment in excellence and we are aiming for nothing less than a wholesale reform of how teachers learn; a process that starts from the moment they begin initial teacher education and goes right the way through their career.

"This is a time of great change in our education system and it will be impossible to deliver our new curriculum without a high-quality education workforce. That is why we are making it easier for teachers to learn and explore the curriculum, giving them the time they need and not compromising their day to day work or pupils' learning.

"We are also providing schools with the option of working together to help them make the changes ahead of the new curriculum. This means that staff can be released to be involved in collaborative professional learning and planning, drawing from the very best evidence-based research."

First Minister takes steps to transform refuge provision and sexual violence services in Wales

The review, led by the Wales Centre for Public Policy, will examine some of the best international examples of services and support, and engage with people who have experience of refuge and sexual abuse services, to develop a made-in-Wales model that provides a world-leading standard of support to victims of sexual violence.

Earlier this year, the First Minister made a commitment to make Wales a world-leader in women's rights and gender equality, and make Wales the safest country in Europe for women.

Today, the First Minister and the Welsh Government's national advisor for violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, Yasmin Khan, will visit New Pathways in Cardiff, where they will meet staff and survivors.

New Pathways, which receives support from the Welsh Government, is the largest provider of sexual violence services in Wales.

Speaking ahead of the visit, the First Minister said:

"It is unfathomable that, in the UK today we call ourselves civilised, yet 1 woman in 5 has experienced sexual violence, and 1 in 4 experienced domestic abuse. This cannot continue.

"Change must happen if Wales is going to become a world leader in women's rights and gender equality and improve the lives of women and girls. Today, I'm setting out my intentions to conduct an expert-led review to make improvements to the services we provide to women affected by sexual violence, and a second review into refuge provision.

"As a society we have shied away from talking about domestic abuse, rape and sexual violence, but this only contributes to myths and misinformation which can make survivors worried about speaking up. It's time to change. The more we talk about what is happening, the more we spread messages of support and awareness, and the more we fight against this."

The First Minister also reiterated his calls to the Prime Minister to urgently proceed with measures that will ratify the Istanbul Convention and make Wales, and the UK as a whole, the safest place for women in Europe.

By agreeing to ratify the Istanbul Convention, the UK government would be required to protect funding for domestic violence shelters, rape crisis

centres, helplines and offer counselling for domestic abuse survivors. It would also ensure education on healthy relationships is consistently provided in schools.

The First Minister added:

“In Wales, we have already met all the obligations of the Istanbul Convention within our powers. I have written to the Prime Minister urging her to set a timetable for implementing legislation that will allow ratification of the Istanbul Convention to happen. The UK has signed up, now it is time for the Prime Minister to step up to this gesture and place in law commitments to better protect women and girls.

“Until then, I am determined to do all I can to make sure every person in Wales who experiences any form of domestic abuse or sexual violence can receive the services they need at the time they need it.

“I am so grateful to the survivors who have agreed to meet me today and to those who will contribute to our reviews. I know it’s not easy to speak about their experiences, but their voices will be heard and are crucial in changing things for the better.”