



## **Welsh Government - Llwybr Newydd Consultation ASLEF Response January 2021**

### **Introduction**

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train drivers' union representing over 20,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems. We represent just over 650 members in Wales.
2. As a trade union representing transport workers, we have a particular interest in the development of transport in Wales and are encouraged to see that a comprehensive strategy of this type is being put in place.
3. The union is very encouraged by some of the headline aims of the strategy - particularly seeing transport as a social issue; aiming for modal shift to active and sustainable modes of travel, and a specific focus on the movement of goods which is an element of the system too often overlooked.

### **Ambitions**

4. ASLEF agrees with the 20-year ambitions set out in the plan. It is encouraging to see an acknowledgement that transport cannot be considered and planned in a silo. It is clear that transport has a role to play in decreasing emissions across sectors from housing to planning to business.
5. The role of the supply chain is particularly important here, as giving businesses a range of affordable, efficient and sustainable options for the movement of goods is an important incentive to move goods away from less sustainable modes of transport.
6. For passenger travel, the union is pleased to see the Welsh Government note that placemaking and spatial planning has as much of an impact as the planning of transport in order to reduce emissions and make active and sustainable travel more appealing. It is vital that transport links (both existing and to be developed) are considered at every stage of spatial planning.

### **5-year Priorities**

7. The union agrees with the broad priorities identified in this section of the plan.
8. In order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by improving connectivity, ASLEF is encouraged to see that this includes neighbourhood planning and remote working, as well as the need to build new public sector developments near to transport links.
9. In terms of the Welsh supply chain, the union is very pleased to see that the Welsh Government intends to prioritise setting aside land for transport hubs and logistics hubs. One of the barriers to moving more freight onto rail (which produces on average 76% fewer emissions than the equivalent road journey) is spatial planning. Local authorities are often disinclined to grant planning permission

for freight interchange, particularly in densely populated areas. This is a strategic error, however, because rail freight has a unique ability to reach the centre of towns and cities without adding to congestion, and creating efficient interchange between rail and road (which remains essential for last-mile deliveries) would reduce HGV movements in town and city centres.

- 10.** While ASLEF agrees that it is very likely we will see a shift to more people working remotely and perhaps commuting for just part of the week, the union believes it is important to account for these behaviour changes in the transport system. There is an opportunity for the Welsh Government to take steps soon to introduce, for example, part-time season tickets for public transport. There is also a clear opportunity to promote leisure travel as, with fewer people commuting during the week, there may be an increased interest in weekend and holiday journeys by public transport. The transport system must be able to cope with this both in terms of services running and the balance of revenue income required to operate services.
- 11.** It is essential that the Welsh Government enacts the proposals in this plan as soon as possible so that remote working and the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic doesn't lead to a renewed reliance on private cars. Public transport must be ready, efficient, affordable and safe as soon as possible to ensure that it remains an attractive option for travelling around Wales.
- 12.** In terms of making public transport attractive to people (priority 2), the union agrees with the aims laid out. We are particularly encouraged to see the commitment to socially necessary bus and rail services, and that the Welsh Government has identified the essential requirement to improve journey planning and interchange between different modes of transport.
- 13.** The union also agrees with much of Priority 3, to ensure well managed infrastructure. The union believes it should be detailed that while the road network must of course be maintained, building new roads should not be seen as a solution to congestion while public transport options have not been fully exhausted. New railways and bus corridors, or improvements to existing ones, should be explored first.
- 14.** Wales has for some time lagged behind in terms of public transport infrastructure - though the union acknowledges that due to the systems of funding and devolution settlement this is due to UK Government decisions - so the commitment to future-proofing is very welcome.
- 15.** As the union representing train drivers, we know that our members are currently driving a number of rolling stock types which are below the standard one would hope for in 2021. We will be pleased to see modernisation and improvements made, taking into account driving cabs and the safety and comfort of drivers. A comfortable driver is a safe driver, and in a safety-critical environment like the railway this should be considered of the utmost importance.
- 16.** While the union does agree with the need to encourage the use of electric vehicles rather than traditionally fuelled road vehicles, we believe there is a place for strategic thinking about the locations and accessibility of vehicle charging points. For example, locating charging points at modal interchange hubs such as rail or bus stations would make it more attractive for people to use an electric vehicle to connect with public transport for their onward journey.
- 17.** Priority 4 is a welcome addition to the plan as behaviour change is key to achieving modal shift. While the plan does discuss the various ways in which behaviour change among individuals can be encouraged, the union would like to see more detail about the Welsh Government's plans to encourage behaviour change among business, public and other organisations. Businesses also need incentives to switch from car to public transport travel, and to move to more environmentally friendly vehicles for journeys that must be by road.
- 18.** The union is also encouraged to see a commitment to rebalancing the impact of car use, particularly in terms of addressing the issues of disadvantaged communities feeling the negative impacts of congested roads running through their neighbourhoods and leading to pollution and health

problems. While this issue requires a transport-based solution, it is also a health crisis that cannot be left to build up for the future.

- 19.** Within Priority 4 is also a commitment to improving the reliability and punctuality of rail and bus services. This is an important priority for achieving modal shift and to keep the system running smoothly and efficiently. It is important that transport workers are considered within these plans. It is not acceptable, for example, to lengthen shifts or put pressure on operational staff to compromise any safety in order to prioritise punctuality over other considerations. There are lots of ways within the system, from timetabling to timely maintenance, that these improvements can be made while still maintaining world-leading safe working practises.
- 20.** ASLEF agrees with the aim to provide better information for users, and collect data which can inform the design and usability of services. There are a number of organisations and individuals already working in this space, creating apps and other resources to help travellers plan their journeys. The union believes it is better to co-produce and collaborate with those who have already begun the work, and those who already hold data, rather than trying to 're-invent the wheel' at government level where this is not necessary. Local authorities could also be encouraged to work closely with independent providers of these systems to ensure that travel by public transport within localities is as barrier-free as longer distance travel.
- 21.** The union further agrees with Priority 5 to support innovation across the transport sector. It is important to note, however, that innovations from previous centuries such as the bicycle and electrified rail are still a key element of providing good quality, sustainable transport options for Wales. ASLEF would like to see a rolling programme of rail electrification in Wales, working as one project so that skills, knowledge and supply chains can be retained and rolled over between projects. The union does understand that this relies on negotiating funding from the UK Government and we continue to lobby the UK Department for Transport for the same.

### **Measuring Success**

- 22.** ASLEF is pleased to see a detailed strategy for measuring the success of the new plans. We would also be keen to see a specific commitment to collecting data on freight transport, including the shift from road to rail and other sustainable modes. Alongside this, data should be collected on the impacts on the road and rail system of these shifts, including examples like the number of collisions on Welsh roads involving goods vehicles.
- 23.** It is important that the proposed National Travel Survey reaches all demographics and communities, especially those who currently do not use any public transport or travel at all. It is as important to understand the barriers faced by these groups as the experiences of those who do use more of the transport system. It may also be possible to collect data on journeys that people would like to make but cannot currently achieve.
- 24.** This is also applicable to measuring how people travel to access sport, culture and heritage events. As well as analysing attendees by travel mode, it is important to discover whether people are electing not to attend at all due to a lack of available transport links, or limited operational hours of public transport both in Welsh cities but also in towns and rural areas across the country.
- 25.** It is also well-documented that women travel differently to men, and have different perceptions of their safety while travelling, and that those from other protected groups have a variety of needs from accessibility to affordable fares. ASLEF would like to see specific targets and measurements set to ensure that the transport plan is working effectively for every community and type of person in Wales and that nobody is left behind or disadvantaged.
- 26.** Additionally, public transport must be fully accessible to disabled people, and other people facing barriers to travel. Specifically this should include targets to make every station step free from street to

train as soon as possible, and for any interchanges - such as between rail and bus - to allow for a step free mode change.

27. The union is also pleased to see commitments to measuring the impact of transport on the environment, including the impacts on households susceptible to pollutant exposure.

## **Delivery**

28. ASLEF is in agreement with the proposal to embed sustainable investment into the transport plan. While of course priority should be given to active travel and public transport, the union does believe that it is important to include sustainable freight in this list of priorities as there must continue to be provision made for freight paths on the railway and for smooth interchange with other modes such as maritime.

29. As part of delivery and action planning, ASLEF is encouraged to see a proposal for a Decarbonisation Pathway for transport. The union believes it is essential that this includes rail electrification. While we acknowledge that the funding for some of this work will need to be negotiated from the UK Government, we still believe that it is essential that rail electrification is highlighted in the terms detailed for the proposed plan.

30. We also agree with proposals to collaborate with communities and passengers - and work in partnership across industry and the third sector - in order to design transport systems. It is important that the Welsh Government also states its intentions to work with transport workers through their trade unions in order that their valuable frontline insight can contribute to design the best possible transport system.

31. In addition to working in partnership with local authorities, there is a place for Welsh Government to encourage or even incentivise local authorities across Wales to consider active travel and public transport across their entire spectrum of decision making. This is particularly important for spatial planning as local authorities must be prepared to grant planning permission for transport and logistics interchanges.

32. In terms of governance, the union also agrees with proposals to create a transport advisory group and performance board. We believe it is essential that this group includes representatives (through their unions) of transport workers, and is as diverse as possible, encompassing the full diversity of Wales and those with protected characteristics.

## **Ways of Working**

33. The union is in agreement with the objectives set out under 'ways of working'. In particular we are encouraged to see a commitment to overcoming barriers to travel and use of public transport or active travel. We are also very pleased to see a focus on integration, and in agreement with the view that transport must be thought of as a single, integrated system that is about moving people and goods, regardless of individual mode.

34. While we are primarily a rail union, ASLEF's position is for a fully integrated, multi-model transport system that allows easy interchange between modes so that places, people and goods can be connected to each other with as few barriers as possible. In order to achieve this, we are in support of increasing public sector control over buses and for public transport to ultimately be publicly owned and operated with social - rather than profit-led - objectives.

### **Mini Plan: Active Travel**

- 35.** The union is supportive of the proposals laid out in this mini plan. For active travel to be effective and safe as part of an integrated, multi-modal system, interchange is vital. Safe cycle storage, segregated routes and safe access from walking routes to stations and other transport interchanges must be prioritised.
- 36.** The union also agrees that involving people and communities in decision making in this area is very important. It is also important to include in these discussions people who don't currently incorporate active travel into their journeys as well as improving things for those who already do to whatever extent.

### **Mini Plan: Bus**

- 37.** Wales has an opportunity to overhaul bus services, which are a vital lifeline to many communities where it is not possible to have rail access and active travel is challenging either due to population demographics or topography.
- 38.** The union is in favour of proposals to decarbonise the bus fleet and move to less polluting fuels.
- 39.** As with active travel, bus routes are only as good as where they take you so it is vital that bus stops and timetables are considered as part of an overall transport system, allowing for easy interchange between bus and train, bus and active travel or any other mode.
- 40.** Bus reliability is a key barrier for travellers so the union is also encouraged to see proposals to take a strategic view of this and ensure that bus routes can be run efficiently.

### **Mini Plan: Rail**

- 41.** ASLEF is broadly in agreement with the proposals in this mini plan. We are in favour of the aims to contribute to a more equal and healthier Wales, particularly the plan to provide training to ensure that everyone feels safe and welcome on the railway, and integrating with bus and active travel to ensure seamless multi-modal journeys.
- 42.** While we appreciate the need to look at renewable diesel and alternative power sources, electrification is still the most effective way to reduce the carbon emissions on the railway. As a union we are not opposed to new technologies such as battery and hydrogen, though we will not accept old rolling stock that has modified for new technologies with no modification or modernisation of driving cab conditions.
- 43.** We are in strong agreement with the proposal to move more goods onto rail as part of an integrated system, recognising that mixed mode is the most practicable solution for the freight system. In order to achieve this aim, it will be necessary to continue to make space for freight paths in rail timetables and to look at additional rail capacity for the future.
- 44.** In order for rail to be used for people to access major sporting and cultural events, due consideration must be given to capacity and operating hours. Rail needs to run to and from the right places at the right times in order to be an effective method of transport for people attending events. It also needs to be and remain more affordable and convenient than driving.
- 45.** In terms of delivering the priorities identified in the plan for rail, ASLEF would like to see a firm commitment to working with trade unions as the representatives of transport workers. It is important to have collaboration across partners and the public sector but transport workers are on the front lines, understand the system and have a vital contribution to make.

## **Mini Plan: Freight and Logistics**

- 46.** The union is in agreement with the majority of proposals in this mini plan. We are encouraged to see that freight and logistics is given the status of a mini plan as this element of transport is vitally important and becoming more so - as we have seen throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. The need for an efficient freight system gained profile due to the pandemic, and so it is an important opportunity for transport planning to build on that profile and ensure that the movement of goods is a consideration at every level.
- 47.** With reference to the aim to adopt innovations to create low carbon logistics networks, ASLEF would again highlight the importance of rail electrification to achieve this priority. While it is an innovation from some time ago, it remains the most comprehensive and effective way to decarbonise the movement of goods and people over both short and long distances.
- 48.** Additionally when considering the integration of freight and logistics into wider land-use planning policy, the union is very supportive of this aim. It is vital that local authorities understand the importance of logistics hubs for enabling the efficient movement of goods, as well as getting freight close to its final destination for last-mile van or bike deliveries.
- 49.** In order to further decarbonise road journeys and last-mile deliveries, the Welsh Government should seek to support hauliers to make their fleets more sustainable by procuring electric lorries and vans. Due consideration should also be giving to charging points at key interchanges and on the outskirts of cities and towns.
- 50.** Again, ASLEF is pleased to see collaboration being prioritised in the plan but it is important that proposed stakeholders include transport workers through their trade unions. We look forward to collaborating on the proposed Freight Plan for Wales in the coming months and years.

## **Conclusion**

- 51.** ASLEF is very supportive of the measures and plans identified in Llwybr Newydd. We are encouraged to see a commitment to priorities including seeing transport as a social issue, and bringing together communities and other stakeholders to ensure the efficient movement of both people and goods across multi-modal, sustainable journeys.
- 52.** We look forward to collaborating further in order to achieve and action the proposals and move towards our shared vision of a fully integrated, publicly owned and operated, sustainable transport system for Wales.

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