

Adran yr Economi a'r Seilwaith
Department for Economy and Infrastructure



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Objection Ref OBJ6920

File Ref WG/REB/OBJ6920 – Phil James

Response to Objector's Evidence: Phil James

1. GROUNDS FOR OBJECTION

1.1. Details

1.1.1. Phil James has submitted a Statement of Evidence dated June 2017 in relation to the draft statutory Orders associated with the Welsh Government's proposals for the M4 Corridor around Newport, which has been received via the Programme Officer.

1.1.2. The Welsh Government understands the evidence submitted within the Statement to be based on the following:

1. States that on the existing M4, the majority of queues amass when the traffic management system is switched on, i.e. when the speed restriction signs are lit up.
2. Challenges the safety benefits of the variable speed limit system.
3. States that the variable speed limit system is not consistent and actually causes problems. Notes a recent example of witnessing the first sign showing 40mph, then the next one 50mph, another 60mph, then back to 40mph.
4. Notes a recent example of witnessing westbound speed restrictions through the tunnels despite no congestion.
5. States that it is strange that there are no queues before J24 or after J28.
6. States that the variable speed limit system should be used when there is a problem (e.g. after an accident) not as a matter of course on a daily basis.
7. Suggests that in order to address traffic congestion on the existing M4 the variable speed limit system should be turned off for a trial period, allowing it to operate with a 70mph speed limit.

2. REBUTTAL

2.1. Points Raised

2.1.1. The above points are dealt with by topic by the relevant witnesses in the following sections. Readers should also make reference to the Proofs of Evidence in their entirety for a full understanding of the Welsh Government's case. For ease of reference the places where the above points are addressed in this Rebuttal are listed in the table below:

Objector's point reference	Rebuttal paragraph reference	Objector's point reference	Rebuttal paragraph reference
1	2.2.1	5	2.2.5
2	2.2.2	6	2.2.1
3	2.2.3	7	2.2.6
4	2.2.4		

2.2. Matthew Jones (Chief Witness)

2.2.1 Response to **Points 1 and 6** (States that on the existing M4, the majority of queues amass when the traffic management system is switched on, i.e. when the speed restriction signs are lit up) and (States that surely the variable speed limit system should be used when there is a problem (e.g. after an accident) not as a matter of course on a daily basis):

1. A variable speed limit system (VSL) uses sensors in the road to detect the start of traffic build up that could cause congestion. If this happens, a reduced mandatory speed limit is automatically activated and adjusted to keep the traffic flowing. Therefore, the VSL system is activated *because* of congestion, and is not the *cause* of the congestion.
2. The system is showing to be effective in aiding flow during the onset and recovery from congestion. However, it does not prevent the congestion owing to the sheer number of vehicles using this section on a daily basis. The section in question, J24 to J28, has had a VSL installed owing to the congestion that was present for many years in advance of its installation due to traffic flows frequently approaching and sometimes exceeding this section's capacity.

2.2.2 Response to **Point 2** (Challenges the safety benefits of the variable speed limit system):

1. Historic accident data for the M4 around Newport indicates that since the introduction of the VSL in 2011 the accident rate has reduced. However, despite this improvement, the existing M4 around Newport still has an accident rate that is higher than for a typical motorway since the existing M4 does not meet modern standards. It has many lane drops and lane gains, an intermittent hard shoulder and frequent junctions.

2.2.3 Response to **Point 3** (States that the variable speed limit system is not consistent and actually causes problems. Notes a recent example of witnessing the first sign showing 40mph, then the next one 50mph, another 60mph, then back to 40mph):

1. It is sometimes necessary to adjust the speed limit a number of times over a section of the motorway where drivers are approaching sections where heavy congestion is present, an accident has occurred or where they are being diverted away from the M4 as part of a closure of the motorway.

2.2.4 Response to **Point 4** (Notes a recent example of witnessing westbound speed restrictions through the tunnels despite no congestion):

1. It should be noted that there is a temporary 50mph speed limit in place on the westbound approach to the Brynglas tunnels. Following the tunnel fire in July 2011 a temporary lighting system was installed to allow the tunnel to reopen as quickly as possible. Usually, the lighting within the tunnel should adjust automatically depending on the amount of natural light outside. This is the case in the eastbound tunnel. However, the temporary system in the westbound tunnel is not variable. As a result, 50mph is the safest speed limit to have in place for the time being. There are no speed restrictions in place in the eastbound tunnel other than when the VSL system is in operation

2. The Welsh Government began works to refurbish the Brynglas tunnels on 20 June 2016 with completion expected by February 2018. The mechanical and electrical systems, including lighting, will be replaced as part of these works. The westbound tunnel bore will be refurbished before the eastbound bore and removal of the temporary 50mph speed limit on the westbound bore is anticipated later this year.

2.2.5 Response to **Point 5** (States that it is strange that there are no queues before J24 or after J28):

1. The section of existing M4 around Newport between J24 and J28 was originally designed as the 'Newport Bypass' in the 1960s. Some sections have alignments (gradients and bends) that are below current motorway standards and in places there is no hard shoulder. In addition to this, it has many lane drops, lane gains and frequent junctions, resulting in many weaving movements with vehicles accelerating, decelerating and changing lanes over relatively short distances. The section is also subject to relatively high traffic flows that frequently approach or exceed its capacity, and is therefore the section where congestion is most likely to occur.

2.2.6 Response to **Point 7** (Suggests that in order to address traffic congestion on the existing M4 the variable speed limit system should be turned off for a trial period, allowing it to operate with a 70mph speed limit):

1. The VSL on the M4 around Newport was introduced in 2011 to reduce congestion in busy periods by reducing the speed limit in order to smooth the traffic flow and prevent stop-start traffic conditions. By slowing the traffic VSLs increase the capacity of the road, because slower vehicles travel more closely together, making better use of the available road space and make journeys more reliable. By reducing the stop-start traffic conditions and the need for lane changing over short distances which create weaving movements, VSLs also contribute to reducing accidents. When the M4 is operating in uncongested conditions, the VSL is set to the national speed limit, except at the tunnels.
2. Prior to the introduction of the VSL scheme, and its associated roadworks (2009-2011), the M4 around Newport operated at a 70mph speed limit. The VSL has been successful in improving safety and in smoothing the

traffic flow at peak times, but at certain times due to the high travel demand some congestion effects remain. Without measures to reduce the traffic flow on the existing M4 around Newport, the existing route will continue to experience operating difficulties at particular times, and this is expected to worsen in the future. For this reason, removing the VSL and setting the speed limit to the national speed limit would not address the problems identified on the existing M4 around Newport and is not a viable alternative to the proposed new section of motorway

2.2.7 I confirm that the statement of truth and professional obligations to the inquiry from my main proof still applies.

Annex – Correspondence List

Date	In/Out	Author	Email/Letter/Meeting
02/06/2017	In	Phil James	Email
22/06/2017	Out	Welsh Government	Email & Letter

-----Original Message-----

From: pmjwales1960@yahoo.co.uk [mailto:pmjwales1960@yahoo.co.uk]

Sent: 02 June 2017 06:22

To: Carwyn Jones (Ministerial); Correspondence mail - KS; Correspondence mail - VG; Correspondence mail - MD; Correspondence mail - LG; Correspondence mail - CS; Correspondence mail - JH; Correspondence mail - RE

Subject: Save £1 billion

Dear Mr Jones

As leader of our country, I believe you there is an alternative to wasting £1 billion, which I am sure you would want to investigate. I do hope that you will give my proposal some serious consideration.

As you are aware consultation is ongoing regarding the above, with various proposals of new motorways etc with various financial estimates and environmental impacts. However all the proposals that have been mentioned involve a new motorway, and yet, I believe there is an alternative.

CURRENT ISSUE

I, like you I am sure, have travelled on the M4 during the busy and quiet times. I have noticed though that the queues in the majority of cases amass when the traffic management system ((TMS) is switched on, ie when the speed restriction signs are lit up.

As soon as this happens, the area around the tunnels immediately becomes brake light city, and then this in turn, especially during the peak times, becomes a concertina effect. Yet the traffic was flowing nicely before the signs were switched on, and has often disappeared shortly after the tunnels.

No doubt, if you were to enquire of this, you would be told that it's because of Health and Safety.

However, I would respectfully ask you to challenge this, and then with my proposal below, the relief road may NOT be needed!

I say to challenge the validity of the speed restrictions, because I have been on the M4 numerous times when there is NO traffic, yet the signs are still on. My wife has taken photos to evidence this whilst I was driving which I can supply if needs be. Furthermore, the signs are not consistent, and I believe actually causes problems. Only recently I saw the first sign saying 40mph, then the next one showed 50mph, another 60mph, then back to 40mph. Rather than being for safety, this must surely count as DANGEROUS!!

Just recently was the most ridiculous that I have yet seen. Travelling east to Newport when I approached the tunnels, there were no signs on, no queues, no brake light city and the traffic flowed beautifully. However, when I went through the tunnels, I looked in my rear view mirror only to see that the signs WERE ON even though there was hardly any traffic.

If the argument of the TMS is for safety, then how is it safe to travel one way with no restrictions, but not safe the other way?

Isn't it strange that there are no queues before J24 or after J28?

Surely the TMS should be used when there is a problem, eg after an accident, not as a matter of course, on a daily basis.

SOLUTION

For a trial period, let's say 1 whole week, turn off the TMS altogether, and let the traffic flow. Obviously this can be monitored and assessed, with the results being shared with all parties, eg Parliament, Police, Newport City Council etc.

OUTCOME

Being the party of the people, what an outcome it would be if this trial were to be successful. To have saved an estimated £1 billion, to have had a positive affect on the environment, to be able to utilise the money elsewhere, surely this can only be a win- win situation, with no cost outlay except a trial period.

I look forward to your thoughts.

Phil James

Sent from my iPad

Sent from my iPad

Trafnidiaeth • Yr Is-adran Rheoli'r Rhwydwaith
Transport • Network Management Division



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref TO/KS/01962/17

Phil James

pmjwales1960@yahoo.co.uk

22 June 2017

Dear Mr James

Thank you for your email of 2 June to the First Minister regarding the M4 Newport variable speed limit. I have been asked to respond.

A variable speed limit system uses sensors in the road to detect the start of traffic build up that could cause congestion. If this happens, the mandatory speed limit is automatically adjusted to keep the traffic flowing. When no speed limit is indicated, the section reverts to the national speed limit. The system is showing to be effective in reducing the severity of collisions as well as the onset and recovery from congestion. However, it does not prevent the congestion owing to the sheer number of vehicles using this section on a daily basis. The section in question, junction 24 to junction 28, has had a variable speed limit installed owing to the congestion that was present for many years in advance of it's installation due to traffic flows frequently approaching and sometimes exceeding this sections capacity.

It is sometimes necessary to adjust the speed limit a number of times over a section of the motorway where drivers are approaching sections where heavy congestion is present, an accident has occurred or where they are being diverted away from the M4 as part of a closure of the motorway.

We are continuing to keep the situation under close review and your comments have been passed to those monitoring the effectiveness of the system.

It should be noted that there is a temporary 50mph speed limit in place on the westbound approach to the Brynglas tunnels. Following the tunnel fire in July 2011 a temporary lighting system was installed to allow the tunnel to reopen as quickly as possible. Usually, the lighting within the tunnel should adjust automatically depending on the amount of natural light outside. This is the case in the eastbound tunnel. However, the temporary system in the westbound tunnel is not variable. As a result, 50mph is the safest speed limit to have in place for the time being. There are no speed restrictions in place in the eastbound tunnel other than when the variable speed limit system is in operation.

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

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We began works to refurbish the Brynglas tunnels on 20 June 2016 with completion expected by February 2018. The mechanical and electrical systems, including lighting, will be replaced as part of these works.

The westbound tunnel bore will be refurbished before the eastbound bore and removal of the temporary 50mph speed limit on the westbound bore is anticipated later this year.

Further information on the refurbishment work is available on our website:

<http://gov.wales/topics/transport/roads/schemes/m4/brynglas-tunnels/?lang=en>

The public local inquiry is currently underway for the M4 Corridor around Newport. Your comments will be passed to the Inquiry Programme Officer to be considered by the appointed Independent Inspectors.

Further information regarding the project is available at www.gov.wales/m4newport.

Yours sincerely

Colin Jones

Head of Delivery

Network Management Division