



Marshfield Residents Opposition to the 'Black Route' of the Proposed M4 Relief Road

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On behalf of Marshfield Community Council

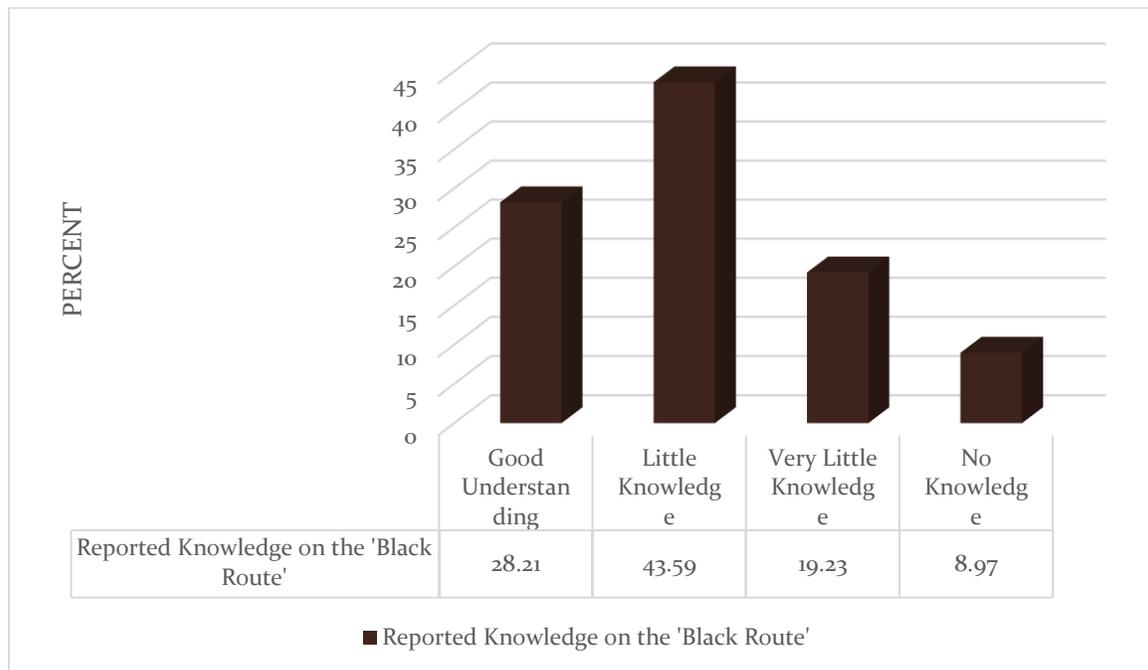
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Background

I have been instructed by fellow members of Marshfield Community Council (MCC) to prepare a report setting out the Council's official position to oppose the planned 'Black Route' of the M4 relief road. The proposed route for the relief road will see a new road system built alongside the existing M4 motorway running both directions from Magor (Junction 23) to Castleton (Junction 29). The estimated cost currently exceeds £1bn pounds but factor in VAT, inflation and maintenance could see this figure exceed £2bn. The development plan will be disruptive at best and destructive at worst. MCC acknowledge that a viable solution is required to address the unacceptable issue of the daily seven-mile queue of traffic that has an economic impact on Wales. While MCC accept that the current status quo is not fit for purpose, we do believe the 'Black Route' is not the viable solution. The Gwent Wildlife Trust have been campaigning against the 'Black Route' for they believe the construction will damage two nature reserves, five sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSIs), the Wales Coastal Path and increase the amount of pollution from construction and traffic seeping into the ancient reen systems. In addition to the environmental impact, the Wildlife Trust are concerned for the rare birds, water beetles, aquatic plants, otters and water vole that can be found along the Gwent Levels. The Gwent Wildlife Trust report that the Welsh Government has issued a compulsory purchase order for a section of the Magor Marsh nature reserve. Berryhill Farm, Coedkernew, has suffered a similar fate in preparation for the 'Black Route'. Losing a business and a way of life is a social impact that cuts directly at the heart of the morality of such decisions. The idea that the government can take your home, your land and your livelihood through legal channels opens the question on the legitimacy of Government and those in power. Those concerns are resonated through this council's work of engaging with residents regarding the 'Black Route'. A Survey Monkey questionnaire invited residents to offer their views and whether they would support or object to the 'Black Route'. In addition to the Survey Monkey poll, the Clerk to the council received several emails opposed to the 'Black Route' and councillors have been engaged with residents on several occasions regarding the proposals. The subsequent feedback led MCC to table a motion that would either see MCC remain a neutral party or officially oppose the 'Black Route'. The council decided that they were effectively mandated by the residents of Marshfield to oppose and the motion to object against the 'Black Route' was passed. This report seeks to put on record the concerns of residents with a strong recommendation that the 'Black Route' be reconsidered as inappropriate on environmental grounds, the detrimental risk to wildlife, the risk to the wellbeing of residents and the lack of benefit to our Marshfield residents.

Survey Monkey

To encourage Marshfield residents to engage with council on the proposed 'Black Route', Cllr Taylor employed the use of www.surveymonkey.co.uk. Survey Monkey is an online research tool that is free to access and free to use with some limitation. A lack of public engagement in council matters is not a new phenomenon but Survey Monkey has shown to increase public participation on previous council matters. The Survey Monkey questionnaire was advertised in the local Marshfield Mail inviting readers to respond. The Marshfield Mail is a local publication and is made available to Marshfield and Castleton residents. The population estimate for Marshfield and Castleton or 'Marshfield 3' (Newport City Council Ward Profile, 2015) currently stands at 1,885. Potentially, 1,885 residents were invited to respond yet the response rate was low (0.041%) with only 78 residents completing the survey (4.1 %). Several close-ended questions were employed for quantitative purposes whilst open-ended questions encouraged respondents to offer a more detailed explanation on their attitude towards the 'Black Route'. The results of the survey showed a third of residents (28.21%) had a good understanding of the planned M4 relief road. Alarming, a large proportion of respondents reported having little knowledge (43.59%), very little knowledge (19.23%) or no knowledge (8.97%) on the planned 'Black Route'. That said, a higher number reported an awareness of the other route options (62.34%) that were being considered by the Welsh Assembly Government. Most respondents felt MCC should oppose the 'Black Route' (52.56%) whilst a larger majority (68.83%) consider the preservation of the Gwent Levels to be a role of Marshfield Community Council.



IDENTIFIED CONCERNS

In addition to online feedback, public council meetings, emails to the Clerk, Marshfield Facebook Group, and face-to-face contact between councillors and residents have further lent support to the feedback obtained through Survey Monkey. Several issues were identified that can be categorised into three distinct impacts: Environmental, Ecological and Social.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Noise and Light Pollution

Many residents were concerned that the construction of the 'Black Route' would cause disruption with the continuous noise that construction trucks transferring materials and the machinery employed to carry out the work will emit. Indeed, post-construction residents have been anxious about the level of noise emitted by traffic that will use the motorway. Residents are worried that the increased level of noise will impact on their home life with some residents enjoying relatively quiet areas. Light pollution is another by-product of the 'Black Route' construction that several residents have raised to council. Too much lighting close to housing estates mean there are some concerned with their sleep patterns as too much light makes sleeping difficult. For those that are amateur sky watchers, too much light spoils their viewing capability and dampens the enjoyment gained from such activities.

Air Pollution

Residents have raised concerns that raised levels of carbon dioxide emitted from traffic will impact on their health. Newport City Council's (2015) Ward profile shows for limiting long term illness that 6% of residents suffer bad to very bad health and 11.9% experience fair health. Those reporting that their day-to-day activities are limited due to bad health is currently 6.5%. There were 1199.7 emergency hospital admissions due to respiratory disease for the years 2012-2014 reported and respiratory related illness is a common cause of ill-health and death. An increase in air pollution comes with an increased risk of developing respiratory disease, a concern to many of our residents.

ECOLOGICAL IMPACT

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Concerns have been raised regarding SSSIs and the impact the construction will have on the Gwent Levels. The Gwent Levels are areas of ancient grazing marshes and 'reen' drainage ditches virtually untouched for many generations. The Gwent Levels are home to the water beetle and dragonfly, a home to farmland birds that are already in decline and the habitat of several mammals like the brown hare, otter and water vole. Working farms are vital to the welfare of the species and with compulsory orders and a decline in land will impact on the survival of the species and the flooding risk if ditches are not maintained yearly. The flooding in Somerset has been associated with poorly maintained

ditches and there is a real concern and a real risk of flooding. Particularly, twice a year the Peterstone Wentlooge Marshes (SSSI) observes the migration of waders and offers a home for some species of birds for the winter months. Species such as the Oystercatcher, Curlew, Redshank, Grey Plover, Pintail, Wigeon, Short-eared Owl, Peregrine Falcon and Merlin's can also be found in the area with the risk of the 'Black Route' to their survival unknown. Residents feel that their concern to the real risk to the SSSI have not been addressed adequately nor have they received assurances that the SSSI will remain an ongoing priority of the Welsh Government.

SOCIAL IMPACT

Marshfield Community Council (MCC) have received many grievances regarding the impact on the value of their home, as the 'Black Route' poses a real risk that their homes will devalue over time. Safety was also identified with residents worried the A48 will see an increase in traffic and are concerned that increased traffic through the Ward will witness an increase of accidents and deaths. In addition to those grievances, residents feel that they will not benefit directly because no local entry or exit points are planned on the 'Black Route'. Residents put the case forward that their land, with the views and perceived benefits of living in a rural area will be destroyed. Poignantly, Residents feel that their concerns are being ignored at worst or have not been offered an adequate response at best. Residents that suggested the 'blue route' did not feel the explanation to reject the recommendations were sufficient. Many residents that contacted MCC strongly believe that the council has a duty to protect the area and its inhabitants and to do so free from external factors and influences. As a community council, there are no legislative powers that offers the council a legal right to prevent the 'Black Route' but we can offer protestations by both council and residents through the appropriate channels such as the inquiry, the basis of this report.

Community Impact Statements

The community have been liberal in providing statements to council and a few examples have been included in this report. Marshfield Community Council has taken direction by the people we represent. Marshfield Community Council strongly objects to the 'Black Route' for the damage that the construction of the relief road will cause to the local wildlife, the damage to the Gwent Levels and the health risks associated with increased pollution. Marshfield Community Council asks that the 'Black Route' proposal be reconsidered as destructive and inappropriate.

Respondent I: The Community Council has an absolute responsibility to protect the Gwent Levels from any development. We live in a beautiful part of Gwent and do not want this spoiled by a 6 Lane motorway. WELSH Government should be able to promote alternative routes or options to ease traffic congestion. This route will have no direct benefit for our community as there are no entrances or exits to the road close by. Our village will be greatly disrupted for many years during the long build of this monstrosity. Allowing this to go ahead would damage ancient woodland as well as new woodland only planted to replace the ones torn down for the existing M4. Building this would seriously damage the ecosystem for hundreds of birds and mammals living on the levels.

Respondent II: It's going to cost a fortune of tax payer's money and stop business going to Newport which is currently being regenerated. Congestion will occur in our community from traffic trying to get on to the new route. We can't assess it from Tredegar roundabout. We only want to bypass the tunnels not have to go as far as Magor to benefit. If there is an accident in the tunnels this road will not help I will still be stuck there with no alternative.

Respondent III: One of the main issues for the Community Council is the issue if water drain off from the elevated section. This water will drain in the reen running along Ty Mawr Lane and will be thousands of gallons if extra water being directed through the village. This poses a threat to 30-40 homes in the lower end of the village particularly when high tides and heavy rain coincide as this is when runoff water from the motorway will also be at its highest. The company responsible for this plan says it has used computer modelling to predict this but they have not visited the site on Ty Mawr Lane to look at the effect and consequences of the additional water. This is an important issue which the council should be involved in.

Respondent IV: The community council should act as a caretaker for the future in preserving the historic Gwent Levels as a site of special scientific interest. As a coastal community sandwiched between two major cities we should be supporting integrated and sustainable transport links that reduce the dependency upon the car (so often carrying only one person). Greenhouse gases are leading to climate change that may well be irreversible; the internal combustion engine is a major contributor to atmospheric pollution. The economics of the project are simply staggering, a debt burden for future generations to bear and now it seems that the evidence collected to justify support for the black route could be dodgy. As was with Brexit we need hard facts not fantasy!

Respondent V: ...the compromise to the environment and community is too great given the lack of local benefits

Respondent VI: Greater congestion on the old A48 through Castleton and at St. Mellon's roundabout. The Blue route is a better alternative. No access eastbound from our community to this new route. Affects Newport businesses Property prices in Coedkernew and Castleton Noise levels. Gwent levels destroyed.

Respondent VII: No eastbound access from Tredegar roundabout therefore access from our community would entail causing increased eastbound congestion to St. Mellon's roundabout and Pontprennau roundabout and maybe Cardiff Gate to Access the M4. Information was requested to clarify this at the public consultation but none able to be given then or since! 2. The new M4 entails downgrading of the current M4 to a trunk road, thereby making it not alternative due to difference in speed restrictions. 3. The Gwent Levels will be greatly affected see CALM. 4. The area of Coedkernew will be destroyed 5. The road has not been planned to enable current industry to continue, the fly over not being high enough for transport vehicles etc. 6. The new road will be in close proximity to brand new housing estates. 7. Greater noise pollution. 8. Any difficulties in the tunnels will not be prevented as motorists will have to decide on their alternative black route a long way in advance prior to knowing of any traffic congestion. 9. It seems a done deal. There is a lack of information of the alternative routes and no promotion to my knowledge. 10. Newport City Centre is still being revamped in order to attract business and this route will take business away.

Respondent VIII: Better & Cheaper options available.

Respondent IX: Environmental impact, cheaper and less damaging alternatives.

Respondent X: Because the area is one that should be preserved. The building of the road and once the road is built will have severe consequences on the area and surrounding area with regard to both wildlife and residents.

Respondent XI: The route through the wetlands and sites of special scientific interest should be avoided at all costs. In fact, the whole scheme should be scrapped and associated funding put into the Metro proposals to encourage more sustainable and reliable public transport links around south east Wales and encourage people out of their cars in the first place. There's no rail option at all between Newport and Cardiff and absolutely should be. Stop rerouting private traffic through important protected areas and think more about the best alternative options for the region as a whole.

Respondent XII: Despite the fact I commute to Bristol daily (and therefore would benefit daily from a better flow of traffic, I am still opposed to the new M4 route due to potential increased noise, possible adverse visual impact, potential negative impact on green land and habitats and potential increase of traffic flow close to Marshfield/Castleton

Respondent XIII: We live in a beautiful area which I believe our council should aim to protect. The noise and construction would cause disruption in the village. Traffic is already crazy; this would increase while the route was being built. There is no direct benefit to this community. Pollution and destruction of the Gwent levels, a beautiful area that we should protect.

Respondent XIV: The council's role is to protect the area and its heritage and not sit on the fence thus their silence gives consent without asking the people that it supposedly represents.

Respondent XV: The village has already been over developed why we can't leave some countryside left. There are other roads already in operation which could be utilised to relieve the congestion however the ridiculous speed restriction before the tunnel cause more congestion than anything.