

Transport Case Study A483/A489 Newtown

Transport Wales commissioned Jacobs to carry out an independent study to examine the transport problems associated with the A483 and A489 passing through Newtown. These trunk roads provide important links between North, South and Mid Wales, and Newtown was identified as a pinch point on the network. Improving the traffic situation within the town was considered to be of strategic importance, and industrial developments in Newtown were believed to be hampered by transport issues.

The purpose of the Jacobs commission was to identify the transport problems within the area and develop a set of Draft Planning Objectives, against which broad-based solutions could be assessed and a pre-appraisal carried out to sift these generated options. The resulting report concluded that it was unlikely that further traffic management measures, improvement in public transport or a combination of such measures would have a significant impact on the problems.

Congestion along certain roads was a frequent occurrence, and problems also arose from low headroom and reduced road width under railway bridges. Subsequently, HGVs and high-sided vehicles would sometimes divert through residential areas. This in turn compromised the safety of local residents, particularly school children and other vulnerable road users. A road improvement or bypass option, which would remove low headroom restrictions and reduce congestion within the town, was considered to likely be the only acceptable solution.



Work on investigating a potential bypass of Newtown dates back to 1969, and resulted in a preferred route being announced in 1973. The protection of the route was relaxed in 1989 and some developments have since encroached into the protected route corridor to the south-west of Newtown.

Study Progress

Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB) was formally appointed by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) to undertake the A483/A489 Newtown study on 21 November 2007. The study's purpose was to investigate ways of relieving the congestion on these roads through Newtown, building on previous work by Jacobs.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) was implemented as a two-stage appraisal in conjunction with the Welsh Transport Planning and Appraisal Guidance (WelTAG) published in June 2008.

What is WelTAG?

WelTAG is the core document to be used in the planning appraisal of transport proposals in Wales. It has been developed as "overarching guidance whose principles and practices are to be applied to all modes, to all types of transport investment proposals, at a strategic or scheme level." It further states that "all transport proposals requiring public funding and/or approval of the Welsh Assembly Government need to be planned and appraised to ensure that the resultant schemes are 'fit for purpose' and achieve the expected and required outcomes."

One requirement of WelTAG is an assessment of health and equality impacts as part of the appraisal process. HIA therefore forms an integral part of the WelTAG appraisal process and follows the same principles that the process should be objective-led and subject to participation. It was anticipated that the information gathered as part of the HIA would further the understanding of the society impact sections of the WelTAG appraisal.

What is Health Impact Assessment?

HIA is “a combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, programme or project may be judged as to its potential effects within the population, and the distribution of those effects within the population. In other words, it is a process that considers the wider effects of local and national policies or initiatives and how they, in turn, may affect people’s health.”

The Stage 1 HIA screening workshop was undertaken on 11 December 2008 at Ladywell House in Newtown to assess the health impacts of the previously defined transportation options, which were then sifted and summarised. Six options performed well against social impact criteria and fully met the Transport Planning Objectives. These six options were further developed and then taken forward for detailed consideration at Stage 2. Workshop attendees were comprised of representatives from WAG, Mid Wales Trunk Road Agency, Nation Public Health Service Wales (NPHS Wales), Parsons Brinckerhoff and transport consultant partners TACP. The Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (WHIASU) facilitated as part of a ‘learning by doing’ approach to HIA..

The Stage 2 HIA was held on the 2nd June 2009 at Ladywell House in Newtown, and consisted of a participatory workshop, during which the six transportation options taken forward from the Stage 1 process were reviewed. This second workshop took the form of a presentation to inform and update participants about the study to date, and was followed by informal discussion in which the group worked through a HIA appraisal summary table for each option, and agreed on the likely impacts in relation to individuals’ lifestyles/capacities affecting health, social and community influences affecting health, living and working conditions, access to and quality of services, socio-economic, cultural, environmental and sustainability factors, macro-economic factors, and any miscellaneous factors. After considering each option’s beneficial or negative impacts in each of these areas, the six options were given an overall rating. Stakeholders from WAG, Powys County Council, NPHS Wales, Powys Local Health Board, Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations, Mid Wales Trunk Road Agency, the Town Clerk, Mid Wales Economic Forum and WHIASU (facilitating once more) attended.

Conclusions

In terms of health and wellbeing, three options were found to have a moderate beneficial impact, and each option was considered to benefit Newtown in terms of improving access and journey reliability within and to Newtown, especially for work and employment and for access to services. All of the options were considered to be beneficial in terms of macro-economic issues through improving air quality, sustainability and creating opportunities for economic development. Each option also allowed for the movement of wind turbines, an important factor for economic development in the wider area around Newtown.

Overall, one option was seen to have performed best throughout the assessment. This was because it provided access and environmental benefits to the people living in Newtown and did not have the community severance and more localised environmental disbenefits of a route through the built up area.

Some adverse impacts were identified in other options, especially in terms of the loss of amenity land and the proximity of the road to residential dwelling reducing air quality and increasing noise disturbance in the local area. It should be noted that whilst the loss of amenity land was noted for two of the options, it was possible that this land could be made available for economic or residential development if the other options were taken forward. It was stressed that strict planning controls would potentially be required to ensure that this amenity land was not lost completely.



The full reports for both the Stage 1 and Stage 2 HIAs, as well as other related reports, can be found at the following link: <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/page.cfm?orgid=522&pid=10108>.