

Petition: Roads surrounding Trago Mills/ Cyfartha Retail Park

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 25 Medi 2018
Petitions Committee | 25 September 2018

Research Briefing:

Petition Number: P-05-827

Petition title: Roads surrounding Trago Mills/Cyfartha Retail Park

Text of petition:

We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to look at the issue of the build up of traffic on the A470 around the vicinity of Trago Mills and Cyfartha Retail Park and put in place a new traffic system to alleviate the amount of traffic seen at peak times, which can then resolve the constant ongoing issues residents are facing.

Trago Mills opened its doors around two weeks ago to the public, Ever since Trago Mills has opened, there have been constant issues of traffic build up within the local vicinity of Trago Mills and Cyfartha Retail Park, not only is this happening on the weekends but it's also happening mid week.

When this issue was originally brought to the attention of the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport some time ago before Trago Mills opened, he stated personally in a letter that the A470 would be able to take the pressures of the traffic in and out of the area but sadly this isn't the case, The build up of traffic on the main roundabout of the A470 isn't able to withhold the traffic load going directly into Cyfartha Retail Park and Trago Mills, not only is this an inconvenience to the residents that already live close to the area it is also affecting local businesses within the area and its having a knock on effect to the economy due to visitors avoiding the area.

Please could you look at the matter in question again as direct action is needed to resolve this problem.

Background

Welsh trunk road and motorway network

The Welsh Government is the highway authority for the Welsh trunk road and motorway network. It is responsible for the maintenance and improvement of the network, including the A470 which the [Welsh Government describes](#) as ‘our main trunk road linking north and south Wales.’ A map of the Welsh trunk road network is [available online](#).

While statutory responsibility for the trunk road network rests with the Welsh Ministers, two Welsh Trunk Road Agents are responsible for the day to day operation, maintenance and minor improvement of the network:

- the [North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agent](#); and
- the [South Wales Trunk Road Agent](#).

Cyfartha Retail Park and Trago Mills Location

[Cyfartha Retail Park](#) and the [Trago Mills store](#) are located in Merthyr Tydfil with the entrances to both sites accessed from the Swansea Road roundabout on the A470.

Cyfartha Retail Park first opened to the public in 2005 whilst Trago Mills opened in 2018.

Cyfartha Retail Park

Planning permission for Cyfartha Retail Park was granted in 2003 for the development of the site which opened in 2005.

In 2012 an application to expand the retail park was submitted to Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. A [report was considered by the full Council in 2013](#) (PDF, 3.91KB) and planning permission was granted.

A Transport Assessment submitted alongside the application to extend the site considered the potential impact of increased traffic and stated:

the proposed development would be open in 2015 and the junction capacity analysis considers the highway impacts up to 2030, to ensure there is sufficient capacity to accommodate any growth in the existing traffic flows. It is acknowledged that in this assessment regard has been given to other committed development, namely Trago Mills.

The initial application to extend the site included highway works to the A470 Swansea Road roundabout which the Welsh Government, as the highway authority for the trunk road network, refused. However, [as reported in the media](#), a revised application was submitted and approved. As stated in the Council report, following the submission of plans for the revised highways works:

any highway safety concerns or impact to the junctions on the A470(T) roundabout [have] been considered in detail by the Welsh Government. It is acknowledged in [the] Welsh Government

Highway Division's response to the application, that they are satisfied with the proposed scheme and have raised no objections, subject to appropriate conditions.

The highway improvements to the roundabout were subsequently implemented in 2014 and included additional approach lanes plus additional signs and lines to improve the flow of traffic.

Trago Mills

The land upon which the Trago Mills site is situated was acquired by the developer in the 1990s. Outline planning permission was granted in 1995 by the local planning authority (at that time Mid Glamorgan planning authority) and ground works [initially began on the site in 2005](#). In 2010, the local planning authority (Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council) [considered and granted an application to extend the building](#) (PDF, 1.42MB) to include an:

additional storage and retail area, garden centre, loading building and plant house together with minor alterations to roof detail and accessibility improvements.

The Welsh Government's Transport Division were consulted on the the plans to extend the proposed site and initially raised concerns regarding the Transport Assessment which accompanied the plans. The Welsh Government subsequently undertook testing of traffic volumes on the roundabout used to access the site itself and concluded that:

the safe and free flow of Trunk Road traffic would not be compromised. As a result [there is] no objection to the proposed extension to Trago Mills.

Work on the structure of the building began in 2016 and in April 2018 the store opened to the public.

As [reported in the media](#), the opening weekend of the Trago Mills site resulted in congestion as people visited the new store.

Welsh Government and National Assembly Action

As outlined, the Welsh Government's Transport Division was consulted on the transport impacts of expanding both sites as part of the relevant planning applications.

The Welsh Government's [National Transport Finance Plan 2015](#) (the NTFP) sets out how the Welsh Government proposes to deliver the outcomes identified in the [Wales Transport Strategy](#) between April 2015 to March 2020 (short term) and beyond (medium term). The Plan provides timescales for the financing and delivery of schemes to be undertaken by the Welsh Government, identifies potential funding sources and lists projects which will seek funding under the European Regional Development Fund. The [NTFP 2017 update](#) (PDF, 1.05MB) outlines a 'pinchpoint programme' which includes considering options and solutions for 'A470 Corridor Taff's Well to Merthyr Improvements'.

Following the opening of the Trago Mills site, the issue of traffic congestion in the area was [raised in Plenary on 1 May 2018](#). The Leader of the House and Chief Whip, Julie James AM, advised that studies in relation to traffic on this section of the A470 were being undertaken by the Welsh Government. It was stated that the:

section around Trago Mills is currently being investigated and appraised to the requirements of the Welsh transport appraisal guidance, known as WelTAG. Studies are on hold at the present time whilst the unsettled traffic patterns and demand return back to average conditions following the opening of the Trago Mills store, which we know increased demand considerably.

The bedding-in period is expected to last about six months, by which time the study will recommence by testing projected trends with those known post-opening of Trago Mills. The sensitivity testing will better inform the appropriateness of the longer term solutions that are proposed. Once the stage 2 studies along the corridor have been completed and appraised, transport interventions to address congestion will be addressed. That's expected to be completed by early 2019, and in the meantime there are medium-term measures to be progressed.

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates' letter to the Chair of the Petitions Committee also outlines the points made by the Leader of the House that the Welsh Government is undertaking a study to investigate levels of congestion in the area. The letter states that

Appraised Transport interventions to address congestion on the A470 will be known once the Stage 2 studies along the corridor have been completed. Stage 2 is expected to be completed by early 2019.

In relation to planning permission for the Trago Mills site, the Leader of the House and Chief Whip also [acknowledged in Plenary](#) that:

the decision for planning consent was made in 1994 by the Mid Glamorgan planning authority and included highway improvements appropriate to the scale of development at that time, but...that situation has changed very much. The studies [being undertaken by the Welsh Government] will inform improvements in the road once the traffic has settled again.