

# P-06-1211 Remove the average speed cameras and 50mph speed limit on the M4 between Newport and Cardiff

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 15 Tachwedd 2021  
Petitions Committee | 15 November 2021

Reference: SR21/1044-11

Petition Number: P-06-1211

Petition title: Remove the average speed cameras and 50mph speed limit on the M4 between Newport and Cardiff

Text of petition: The government is pressing ahead with the installation of average speed cameras and a new 50mph speed limit on the M4 between Newport and Cardiff. They claim to reduce accidents, pollution and ease congestion. We the demand the immediate reversal of this policy. The investment should go into green initiatives that benefit not restrict the public. The best way to ease congestion is to increase supply (such as building additional lanes or bypass road), not reduce demand - damaging the economy.



# 1. Background

The Welsh Government is the highway authority and traffic authority responsible for the Welsh trunk road and motorway network. This includes setting speed limits on the M4 in Wales.

## Air pollution and speed limits

In 2018, the Welsh Government was taken to court for breaches of nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) limits. The High Court ruled that managing exceedances of NO<sub>2</sub> on the motorway and trunk road network was the direct responsibility of the Welsh Government.

To tackle NO<sub>2</sub> emissions, 50mph speed limits have been introduced at five sites on the trunk road and motorway network including between junctions 25 and 26 of the M4 at Newport.

In September 2021, the Welsh Government issued a press release suggesting that the introduction of 50mph limits at these sites had “already been successful in significantly lowering the levels of nitrogen dioxide in affected areas by up to 47%”.

## M4 relief road and Burns Commission

The petitioner calls for the 50mph limit at Newport to be removed, for investment in green initiatives and for additional lanes/ a bypass road to be build instead.

In June 2019 the First Minister announced that plans for an M4 relief road would not proceed. It was also announced that the South East Wales Transport Commission (chaired by Lord Burns and known as the Burns Commission) would be established to make recommendations on alternative solutions to congestion problems experienced on the M4 corridor around Newport.

In its December 2019 progress report the Commission made three initial recommendations, including that the Welsh Ministers:

Remove the variable speed limit from around junction 24 (Coldra) and up to junction 28 (Tredegar Park), and replace it with an average speed control of 50mph over the same extents.

In explaining the rationale for this recommendation, the report said:

We have considered and modelled a range of speed limits from 40mph to 50mph and 60mph. Our analysis demonstrates 50mph to be the optimal speed in terms of journey time reliability and journey speeds, also taking account other important factors such as air quality, emissions and noise.

In November 2020 the Commission published its final recommendations. It described its proposals as a “network of alternatives” with its recommendations centred on public transport.

The Welsh Government accepted all of the recommendations in principle and in January 2021 established a Burns Delivery Unit within Transport for Wales (TFW) to oversee implementation.

## Welsh Transport Strategy

In March 2021 the Welsh Government launched its Wales Transport Strategy. It includes a sustainable transport hierarchy which places travel by private motor car at the bottom of the list. It also sets a target to increase journeys made by public transport, walking or cycling from 32% to 45% by 2040.

## 2. Welsh Government action

In a letter to the Chair dated 25 October, the Deputy Minister for Climate Change states that the 50mph speed limit on this stretch of the M4 will be “enforced by Average Speed Enforcement at a future date”. The Deputy Minister also states that in Autumn 2021 the Welsh Government will consult on an Update Plan on the actions it is taking to address exceedances of nitrogen dioxide limits.

The letter also provides an update on the work being undertaken by the Delivery Unit to progress the Burns Commission recommendations.

## 3. Welsh Parliament action

The Welsh Government’s decision not to proceed with the M4 relief road has been raised and debated in the Senedd on numerous occasions, including in June 2019 following the First Minister’s announcement.

In June 2021, Natasha Asghar MS tabled a written question asking for a statement on the 50mph limit on the M4 at Newport. The Deputy Minister for Climate

Change responded that the limit is being closely monitored by [Go Safe](#) and that the change is intended to:

- help manage congestion issues along this stretch of the M4;
- improve journey times and provide smoother traffic flows;
- reduce the risk of accidents; and
- improve air quality by reducing emission levels.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.