

PET(4)-13-12 : Tuesday 2 October 2012
P-03-144 : Guide Dogs for the Blind - Shared Space

Y Gweinidog Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau—sesiwn tystiolaeth lafar
The Minister for Local Government and Communities—oral evidence session

[181] **William Powell:** We move on now to the next agenda item, and we welcome the Minister and his team here this morning.

[182] Minister, I wish you and your team a happy new year—blwyddyn newydd dda. We will be considering a series of petitions under this agenda item: P-03-144, which is on guide dogs for the blind and the issue of shared space; P-03-162, which is on road safety in Llanspyddid; P-03-261, which is on local solutions to Newtown traffic; and P-04-319, which is the Newtown traffic petition. Minister, could you please introduce your team?

[183] **The Minister for Local Government and Communities (Carl Sargeant):** Good morning, Chair, and a happy new year to everyone. This is the first committee meeting of the year, and it is good to be with you this morning. I will let my team members introduce themselves, starting with Jeff Collins.

[184] **Jeff Collins:** I am Jeff Collins, and I am the director of transport in the Welsh Government.

[185] **Ian Davies:** I am Ian Davies, and I am the head of network operations in transport.

[186] **William Powell:** First, we will consider issues relating to guide dogs for the blind, petition P-03-144. Minister, could you please lead us off?

[187] **Carl Sargeant:** Chair, I was expecting questions from the committee.

[188] **William Powell:** If you would like to move on to questions immediately, that is okay. I thought that you might have had some initial remarks. Minister, could you please elaborate on the obstacles that prevent adoption in Wales of the UK Government guidance on shared space?

[189] **Carl Sargeant:** The committee will be aware that a report has been published by the Department of Transport in the UK Government. The Welsh Government is still yet to be convinced of a positive outcome in relation to shared space. We believe that there is still work to be done. We are not dismissing the issue, but we are saying that more evidence needs to be taken about the use of shared space in practice. As a Government, we have not endorsed the report. We are not opposed to it in principle, but we are looking at how to gather better evidence on the opportunities that may be presented for shared spaces in the future.

[190] **William Powell:** So, if equality and other issues can be addressed, do you still have an open mind on taking this forward?

[191] **Carl Sargeant:** We are taking forward the cycling Bill, and there are new opportunities to better understand the nature of how we use spaces for pedestrians and vehicles. There is little evidence, as I said, to argue either way about the dangers of a scheme of shared space. My personal view, and that of the Welsh Government, is that we must have better respect of users of infrastructure, both of road services and pedestrianised areas. There are examples of where these areas are in place, where there is a reduced speed limit in a shared space. However, it is still untested. We need to have better evidence on how these areas will develop. The Welsh Government will not be pursuing shared spaces in Wales in our schemes until there is better evidence that shows that they could prove a better solution for infrastructure in our communities.

[192] **Bethan Jenkins:** Rydych yn nodi na fydd Llywodraeth Cymru yn datblygu cynlluniau manau a rennir ar ffyrdd o fewn ei hawdurdodaeth nes iddi gael rhagor o dystiolaeth am effaith cynlluniau'r DU. Pa bryd y rhagwelwch y bydd digon o dystiolaeth ar gael?

Bethan Jenkins: You state that the Welsh Government will not develop shared-space schemes on roads within its jurisdiction until further evidence is forthcoming on the effect of UK schemes. When do you anticipate that sufficient evidence will be available?

[193] **Carl Sargeant:** I am sorry, Chair, I only got half of that through the translation, but I think that the last bit, which I heard, was the important bit, on when we intend to follow on with shared-space schemes.

[194] We are mindful of what is happening in the UK. My team will keep abreast of what is happening. I am keen to find a solution that everyone is happy with. As I said, it is about a cultural change in the way pedestrians and traffic use the infrastructure. The issue is about the respect element, because at the moment we have fixed solutions: kerbsides, barriers and so on, which separate pedestrians from traffic. Once you remove those, you would think that the risk would increase. We need to be able to evidence that. If we are to propose that we should have a shared space, we have to be assured of the cultural operation of such an area, so that pedestrians and road users have equal rights. We have to be convinced of that, and I am yet to be convinced. That is why we need to look at the evidence that is being pursued and what is happening in England.

[195] There are examples of other countries that do this as well, so we are looking beyond the UK boundary.

[196] **William Powell:** Good. Joyce, you have particular experience of this issue.

[197] **Joyce Watson:** Minister, we have had evidence from the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association indicating that local authorities are not consulting with disabled people's groups effectively. What steps will you take to ensure that local authorities follow best practice?

[198] I also raise a concern of my own. My dog is now blind and I walk him with him being completely without sight. That has given me an insight into how difficult it can be to negotiate a space and the obstacles within that space. There are boundaries that he knows, understands and follows. It has given me a completely different perspective from a position of trying to negotiate a space, albeit with a blind dog. However, it would be just the same if he was a person with absolutely no sight whatsoever. I walk him in the same place he has walked for 11 years and I have observed how he uses boundaries to good effect. Guide dogs are used to lead people who are blind and use the guidelines that they have trained to use. If we were to have shared spaces and take that legislation forward, all those dogs who have been trained to guide in the way they currently do would immediately have a problem. How would we deal with that? If the dogs have a problem, the people who rely on them have exactly the same, if not a bigger, problem.

[199] **Carl Sargeant:** It is a very complex and important question. I am sure that the committee understands the legislative nature of these proposals and my responsibility in that regard. Local authorities are highway authorities unto themselves and they have a duty to comply as a highway agency. I have my own authority with regard to Welsh Government road networks, but local authorities have authority on local roads. They have a duty with regard to the safe passage of all traffic, including all pedestrians and cyclists, so you may wish to consider approaching local authorities directly on that. They are expected to comply with those regulations. As I said earlier, I have no intention of introducing shared spaces as Welsh Government policy until I can evidence the proposal. I would expect local authorities to also consider our approach to this, but, as I said earlier, they are highway authorities in their own right. However, in order for them to pursue such a proposal, they would have to consider their statutory responsibilities with regard to safety. So, they are in the very same position as me. They need to be able to evidence right and wrong and the benefits of such an operation in the communities they represent.

[200] **William Powell:** Thanks very much. I think that concludes our consideration of shared spaces. We are now going to move to a pair of petitions coming from radically different

positions on the Newtown bypass proposals, which are petitions P-03-261 and P-04-319. Late last night, we received correspondence from one of the petitioners of petition P-03-261, Gary Saady from Newtown Traffic Solutions group. Given the late nature of this, I should read the text so that we have the context of his remarks.