



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru **The National Assembly for Wales**

Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus **The Public Accounts Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 3 Mawrth 2015
Tuesday, 3 March 2015

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trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

The proceedings are recorded in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In
addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol

Committee members in attendance

Jocelyn Davies	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
William Graham	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Mike Hedges	Llafur Labour
Sandy Mewies	Llafur Labour
Darren Millar	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Conservatives (Committee Chair)
Julie Morgan	Llafur Labour
Jenny Rathbone	Llafur Labour
Aled Roberts	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats

**Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance**

Malcolm Bingham	Pennaeth Polisi Priffyrdd, Y Sefydliad Trafnidiaeth Cludo Nwyddau Head of Highways Policy, Freight Transport Association
Simon Higgins	Rheolwr Ardal, Road Haulage Association Ltd Area Manager, Road Haulage Association Ltd
Matthew Mortlock	Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru Wales Audit Office
Huw Vaughan Thomas	Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru Auditor General for Wales

**Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance**

Leanne Hatcher	Clerc Clerk
Andrew Minnis	Y Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service
Tanwen Summers	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Joanest Varney-Jackson	Uwch-gynghorydd Cyfreithiol Senior Legal Adviser

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:01.
The meeting began at 09:01.*

**Cyflwyniadau, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions**

[1] **Darren Millar:** Good morning, everybody. Welcome to today's meeting of the Public Accounts Committee. If I could just give the usual housekeeping notices: the National Assembly for Wales is a bilingual institution, and Members should feel free to contribute through either English or Welsh, as indeed should witnesses, as they see fit and, of course,

there are headsets available for amplification. If I could encourage everyone to switch off their mobile phones or put them on to 'flight mode' so that they don't interfere with the broadcasting equipment. I just remind everybody that, in the event of a fire alarm, we should follow the instructions of the ushers. We'll move on to item two. We have received no apologies for absence, by the way.

Papurau i'w Nodi Papers to Note

[2] **Darren Millar:** We've got a number of papers to note. We've got the minutes of our meeting held on 10 February. I'll take it that those are noted. We've had a letter from the Permanent Secretary regarding the responses to committee reports. Members will be aware that we've been having some responses from directors general and also responses from Ministers, and there appears to be an inconsistent approach from the Welsh Government in terms of the responses that we're getting. I'm meeting the Permanent Secretary tomorrow to discuss this on behalf of the committee.

[3] Then we have a letter also from Dr Andrew Goodall regarding the continuing healthcare funding. There are a number of points in the letter, but if I could draw Members' attention particularly to section 1 of the letter, where Dr Goodall refers to the pilots and the audits that were undertaken of the new decision support tool versus the older decision support tool. Whilst they indicate that they didn't find any problems with those older claims for those with dementia, there were some problems with those with learning difficulties, who were found to be eligible under the new tool versus the old tool—two out of the seven cases assessed. So, I'm sure Members will want to consider that as we look at our report. There'll be a draft report, which will be circulated to Members over the course of the next week or so.

[4] So, can I take it that those three papers are noted? Aled, you've got a question.

<p>[5] Aled Roberts: O ran papur y cyfarwyddwr, mae paragraff 3 yn esbonio bod gwelliant o ran y staff sy'n cael eu cyflogi gan Fwrdd Iechyd Lleol Prifysgol Betsi Cadwaladr o ddau i chwech, ond nid yw hynny'n esbonio os mai diffyg recriwtio oedd y broblem yn hytrach na phenderfyniad gan y bwrdd iechyd mai dim ond dau oedd yn cael eu cyflogi. Nid wyf yn siŵr iawn os ydy Betsi Cadwaladr yn dod i roi tystiolaeth.</p>	<p>Aled Roberts: With regard to the director's paper, paragraph 3 explains that there has been progress in terms of staff being employed by Betsi Cadwaladr University Local Health Board, from two to six, but that doesn't explain whether a lack of recruitment was the problem rather than a decision by the health board that only two would be employed. I'm not quite sure whether Betsi Cadwaladr is coming to give evidence.</p>
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[6] **Darren Millar:** I can't remember what they said. I think that they had some problems allocating sufficient resources, didn't they, rather than not being able to recruit?

[7] **Aled Roberts:** No, they made the point that they had—. If you remember, we were questioning at the end how Powys Teaching Local Health Board could be expected to recruit if the explanation that they gave was that Betsi Cadwaladr had had difficulties in recruiting. This letter suggests that Betsi Cadwaladr, in 2014, took a decision to increase their staff from two to six, which is different from saying that they were unable to fill four posts.

[8] **Darren Millar:** Huw.

[9] **Mr Thomas:** I think that section is perhaps a little confusing and I do think that it'd be useful if a direct question were put to Betsi Cadwaladr. If I recall, the PAC was concerned about how many staff were being engaged on retrospective work at Betsi Cadwaladr, whereas

here they are giving the total of staff engaged in the whole process. So, I just feel that some clarification is needed.

[10] **Darren Millar:** Bearing that in mind, we'll drop a note to Betsi, just asking them for the split, in terms of the recruitments that they had done, of those recruited to look at the retrospective claims versus the current ongoing claims, which are coming in on a regular basis. I know they've passed all of their retrospective work, haven't they, to Powys? But we'll get some clarity on it for you, Aled.

[11] **Aled Roberts:** And, also, whether or not their previous—

[12] **Darren Millar:** Comments about difficulties in recruiting.

[13] **Aled Roberts:** Yes. Because if, in fact, they only had two people working on it previously, that's different from saying that they had four vacancies.

[14] **Darren Millar:** Yes, okay. We'll clarify. Are there any other questions on that letter? No. Okay. I'll take it the rest of the contents are noted. We'll try and get some clarity on that in order to support our report.

09:06

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r
Cyfarfod
Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the
Meeting**

Cynnig:

y pwyllgor yn penderfynu gwahardd y cyhoedd o weddill y cyfarfod yn unol â Rheol Sefydlog 17.42(vi).

Motion:

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 17.42(vi).

*Cynigiwyd y cynnig.
Motion moved.*

[15] **Darren Millar:** I'll move the motion under Standing Order 17.42 to resolve to exclude the public from items 4, 6 and 7 on today's agenda. Does any Member object? I can see there are no objections, so we'll move into private session.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 09:06.
The public part of the meeting ended at 09:06.*

*Ailymgynullodd y pwyllgor yn gyhoeddus am 09:47.
The committee reconvened in public at 09:47.*

**Ymchwiliad i Werth am Arian Buddsoddi mewn Traffyrdd a Chefnffyrdd:
Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 1
Inquiry into Value for Money of Motorway and Trunk Road Investment:
Evidence Session 1**

[16] **Darren Millar:** Welcome back to the Public Accounts Committee. We are now back in public session. We are on item 5 on our agenda, commencing our inquiry into value for money of motorway and trunk road investment. This is our first evidence session in this inquiry. I am very pleased to be able to welcome the Road Haulage Association and the Freight Transport Association to the table. We have got Simon Higgins with us; he is the area manager for the Road Haulage Association. Welcome to you, Simon.

[17] **Mr Higgins:** Thank you.

[18] **Darren Millar:** And Malcolm Bingham, head of highways policy at the Freight Transport Association, welcome to you as well. Can I thank you for the papers that you submitted to us in advance of the evidence session today, which Members have had the opportunity to look at? I'll give you an opportunity to make a few opening remarks, if you like, and then we'll open the floor up to questions. We'll start with you, Malcolm.

[19] **Mr Bingham:** I'm Malcolm Bingham, I head up road network management issues for FTA. I would say 'internationally', because it's all the national countries, including Northern Ireland. I work very closely with the Highways Agency and Transport Scotland, and indeed Traffic Wales and those officers, to try to make sure that our members can use the road network efficiently. That's our main issue in many ways. It is the costs to road transport that create a big problem for our industry, particularly when the network is not working well.

[20] **Darren Millar:** Anything to add to that, Simon?

[21] **Mr Higgins:** Firstly, thank you for inviting me and giving me the opportunity to talk to you. As an area manager, I'm not actually directly involved with policy per se. I can't comment on any formal analysis of cost and benefit. However, I can give you a perception of a highway user with the perspective of a lorry. So, hopefully, that will help.

[22] **Darren Millar:** Thank you very much indeed for that. I'm going to come to Sandy Mewies for the first question.

[23] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you, Chair, and good morning to you. This is a question that arises out of the Freight Transport Association's paper. Your members have been very critical of the failure to communicate planned roadworks and the problems that this can cause for you as an industry. I'm sure it's extremely frustrating, the delays. Also, of course, it is really frustrating for members of the public. In north Wales, this is the case on the A55/A483, which I haven't used for weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks. When I do forget, and I do forget now and again, as a member of the public I find it very frustrating. You talk about the Traffic Wales website, which does highlight what's going on presently, but not what is going to happen in the future. It doesn't always update all that quickly when snags arise. What do you think could be done to improve that situation? If you have any suggestions for members of the public as well, that would be quite useful. Is it a problem that you find everywhere? Is this UK wide? Is there any particular area where information is communicated very clearly and well in advance or is it a general problem?

[24] **Mr Bingham:** We try to communicate real-time traffic information to our members on an hour-by-hour basis. We actually send e-mails out every two hours to our members on that issue. We have a contract with a company called INRIX, which has done a lot of work on trying to identify real-time problems on the network, and not just on the strategic road network. Very often, our members don't actually discriminate between strategic roads and those roads that are operated by local highway authorities. So, we've got that service that we provide as a baseline.

[25] When we've got a problem is when we are trying to identify what's likely to happen

on the network, not what is happening on the network. Up until about 18 months ago, we used to send out an e-mail to our members for English roadworks on the strategic road network once a week to give them an idea of what was going to happen over the next week, but we found out, because of our members' criticism, that the information within that set of data was not correct very often and then we started to research the issue, and it wasn't just England, it's all over the country. It's the way that the agents for the highway authorities notify of those roadworks going forward. Very often it's in a block-type notification. They may notify for four weeks, but they only have about four days' work to do. If you're putting that sort of information out day by day or even week by week, it very often is very inaccurate.

[26] Yesterday morning, on my way down here, I got an e-mail from one of our members talking about the M6 in England where, overnight, they'd closed a section of the road and the headline on the e-mail said, 'You couldn't make this up'. So, they were diverted off the motorway network onto a diversionary route, which had roadworks on it. It's that sort of problem that creates a lot of cost to the industry. We calculate from our vehicle operating costs that a large goods vehicle, just standing still, not doing anything, is costing that company £1 a minute. That's the sort of cost.

[27] **Darren Millar:** What's your experience, Mr Higgins?

[28] **Mr Higgins:** We don't go into such detail with day-by-day roadworks. I must admit that the Welsh side is lacking compared to England. We tend to get advised of roadworks, road closures and weight restrictions, which we do put on the internet and send out to members via e-mail. The Welsh side tends not to be as coherent as that. We don't tend to get as much information, which would be more useful. I echo what Malcolm says. The other problem we have had is diversions that have taken lorries down routes with weight restrictions, width limits and bridges that can't take lorries, and that is annoying, and that does cost money and time for lorries as well, obviously.

[29] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you.

[30] **Darren Millar:** And congestion on some of those roads, as well.

[31] **Mr Higgins:** Congestion is horrendous, yes.

[32] **Darren Millar:** I've got a few Members who want to come in, but I know Mike Hedges had a question on co-ordination.

[33] **Mike Hedges:** Mine follows on from what Malcolm Bingham just said. How effective is the Welsh approach to the planning and delivery of highway maintenance, minor improvements, major road improvements, and making sure that you don't need to use an alternative route that is already being dug up, because that just creates an additional problem? I live very close to the A48, which is used when the M4 is isn't available. Now, if the A48 has roadworks on it, it just brings the whole world—or my part of the world—to a grinding halt. So, are the Welsh Government working well at co-ordinating, to making sure that, if they've got a major road closed, the minor roads around there are usable? Sometimes, you need to change the traffic lights: for example, the traffic lights are set up for normal, but when you've got the A48 becoming the main Swansea to London road, then there is a need to make sure that the lights are realigned, to give more time to the traffic coming along the A48 because, all of a sudden now, it's taking far more traffic than it did. Is that actually working?

[34] **Mr Bingham:** I think it comes back to my previous comment. It could work, as long as the information that is provided into the system is accurate and correct. We believe there is an opportunity to work on that issue. The road agents, many of which, by the way, would be FTA members, are the people who are actually doing the work, so we have a role to play in

that as well. The relationship between the highway authority and their agents needs to get smarter, we believe, on extracting the data that show exactly when those roadworks are going to happen, particularly on local highway networks, when, as you said, the strategic network has a problem. And that's part of the issue. We know that there's a site that you can use that a lot of local highway authorities, and, indeed, national authorities, put their data into—it's run by a company called Elgin; it's roadworks.org, if you go on the net—and you can plan your journey using that system. But, it may not be correct. That's the problem, and that's what we need to work on. In fact, we've challenged the Highways Agency—Highways England, as it's about to be—to come up with something on the English road network that would be more accurate, in that sense. I know that they're working with their agents at the moment to look at the contractual arrangements that they have with the highway authority. I think that's the key to getting information that's correct.

[35] **Darren Millar:** So, the local road network and the trunk road network, you're saying that, very often, if there is information shared, it's not sufficiently specific about start dates and end dates to be of great use to your members.

[36] **Mr Bingham:** That's it.

[37] **Darren Millar:** That's effectively what you're saying.

[38] **Mr Bingham:** Yes.

[39] **Darren Millar:** And, the co-ordination between local road networks and strategic road networks isn't always there in terms of the timings of work that is being undertaken.

[40] **Mr Bingham:** Yes. And the data that are there at the moment is vast. There's a huge amount of it, and the difficulty is wading through it, to find out something that's sensible for your journey, or your set of journeys.

[41] **Darren Millar:** Okay. I've got a number of other Members who want to come in on the back of this issue, I think. So, Jocelyn.

[42] **Jocelyn Davies:** Well, I was just going to ask, I mean, I assume your members are not confined just to the UK—they probably travel further. Does it work well anywhere else, in other parts of Europe, and so on, where you can say to us, 'Well, there's a good system, and this is how it works'?

[43] **Mr Bingham:** I believe it's a Europe-wide problem

[44] **Jocelyn Davies:** Oh, right.

[45] **Mr Bingham:** But the difficulty is that the UK road network is stressed most of the time, compared to some of the networks across Europe, which don't have the same stresses. Certainly, around the strategic road network, I think that's true to say, and particularly at peak. At one time, we used say peak was 8 o'clock till 9 o'clock in the morning; nowadays, it's more likely to be 6 o'clock through till 10 o'clock in the morning, and again in the evening. So, for most of the day, the network is stressed.

[46] **Jocelyn Davies:** It's stressed.

[47] **Darren Millar:** Okay. Aled.

[48] **Aled Roberts:** Rwyf eisiau gofyn yn **Aled Roberts:** I'll be asking my question in
Gymraeg. Welsh.

[49] **Darren Millar:** We've got headsets available if you need them.

[50] **Aled Roberts:** Roedd Simon Higgins yn gwneud y pwynt bod y sefyllfa yma yng Nghymru ddim yn cymharu'n ffafriol â Lloegr. A gaf i ofyn i Malcolm Bingham ai dyna'i brofiad o hefyd? Hoffwn hefyd ofyn, os yw'r sefyllfa'n well yn Lloegr, pwy sy'n gyfrifol am ddarparu'r wybodaeth yn fwy effeithiol yn Lloegr nag yma yng Nghymru.

Aled Roberts: Simon Higgins made the point that the situation here in Wales doesn't compare favourably with England. Could I ask Malcolm Bingham whether that is his experience as well? I would also like to ask, if the situation is better in England, who is responsible for providing the information more effectively in England than here in Wales.

10:00

[51] **Mr Bingham:** England has similar problems to Wales; there's no doubt about that in my mind. The responsibility lies, we believe, with the highway authorities, and there are many of them. That's one of the problems. It is that liaison between national highway authorities and local highway authorities that sometimes breaks down.

[52] As far as information is concerned, that needs to work better. I think, for the industry and information to the industry, we perhaps have a developing situation in England that we believe could be copied in Wales, with the Highways Agency looking at the moment—. They've taken a three-month period to look at a trial, which actually finishes this month in England, to see how they can better manipulate those data together. If you give the whole thing to the industry, we've got to start wading through those vast amounts of data; that is one of the problems. So, we need some form of spearhead, if you like, and we've asked the national highway authority in England to help us with that. We would hope that Wales could do the same and, indeed, we have talked to Transport Scotland in a similar way.

[53] **Darren Millar:** Mr Higgins, do you have anything to add?

[54] **Mr Higgins:** Yes. There is an issue as well that comes to mind: unforeseen circumstances on a strategic highway network. If there's an incident, such as an accident, we do get complaints. Obviously, if it's a fatal accident, the road has to be closed and there has to be the necessary time taken. But, there are often complaints with relatively minor collisions where the road is blocked by two or three cars, and they seem to be parked for a long time while all the necessary arrangements are made to take the measurements and all the rest of it. Surely, there must be a way that we can get this time shortened.

[55] **Aled Roberts:** Is it worse in Wales than in England?

[56] **Mr Higgins:** No, both are the same.

[57] **Jocelyn Davies:** It's a big issue.

[58] **Mr Higgins:** It is. It's getting worse; that's the trouble.

[59] **Darren Millar:** I'm going to bring William Graham in here, because I know he's got an interesting question on that.

[60] **William Graham:** I talked to you about this before you came in. I understand that it is a Home Office directive in terms of the amount of closure that chief constables carry out, because it is not what it used to be years ago, when they would try to manage that. As you said, for a relatively minor accident, perhaps they would close one carriageway, et cetera, and

allow traffic movements. That seems to have stopped. The other point that I might ask you to touch on in your reply is something that happens a great deal, where there has been a minor accident, or even a major accident, on the other carriageway, and suddenly all the traffic reduces while they watch and see what happened.

[61] **Darren Millar:** Rubber-necking it's called, isn't it?

[62] **William Graham:** Yes, rubber-necking. A lot of countries in continental Europe use screens—and the United States—so that you can't see what's going on and so you might as well keep going. I presume this is your experience.

[63] **Mr Higgins:** Interestingly enough, the Highways Agency years ago did try screens, and they were put on seven-and-a-half-tonne trucks that would park up there. Unfortunately, they had a problem with wind. The wind would come along and blow them over. [*Laughter.*] Practically, it didn't work. So, they did look at it and rejected it. However, there's no reason I can see why they can't revisit it or improve it.

[64] You are right; I believe it's getting worse. It's not just that; you could be looking at health and safety for this particular one, but there are issues where, for example, a car or lorry is having tyres changed on the hard shoulder, and they will block off the whole of lane 1 for that. I have to look at Malcolm—is this legislation through the Government?

[65] **Mr Bingham:** Police-controlled incidents, I think, are really the issue here. If you think about the highway authority themselves, it's not in their interests to keep that road closed. They'd like to get it open as quickly as possible, but if it's—

[66] **William Graham:** I'm pleased to hear it. Please go on.

[67] **Mr Bingham:** What we find is that, if the police have to take charge of the incident, if there is criminality or if there's death or injury, then we see that as the right thing to do, but then they have to go through a very thick manual from A to B, because, effectively, they've got to convince further inquiries about what happened in that incident, and they've got one chance to understand that.

[68] What we believe is wrong with the system is, very often, the various agencies—and it isn't just the police; it could be the fire brigade or the ambulance service—and the highway authority don't always communicate with each other effectively during those incidents, because they all have their priorities. In some ways, they are understandable priorities. They have an emergency situation that they have to deal with. What they Highways Authority have done—and I know Wales is looking at the issue—is set up a system that they've called CLEAR, and, forgive me, I've forgotten what CLEAR stands for. What it's trying to do is set up a system where all of those agencies can work more effectively together to speed up the incident. Westminster has also provided some equipment for police forces et cetera in the form of radar scanners. It's believed that you can put about a 40-minute saving on those incidents. Unfortunately, some of them are several hours long though. That is the issue. And it is not just fire brigade, ambulance, et cetera; there is a fourth emergency service, and that is the recovery services, which are not, of course, controlled by local authorities. They play a very important role in clearing up those incidents. If they haven't got the right equipment, particularly when HGVs are involved, it can extend those incidents.

[69] **William Graham:** From what you are saying to us, people are aware of this and are trying to reduce the time, which clearly must be of vital importance to your members.

[70] **Mr Bingham:** From my observation, from the very top of those organisations, there is a desire to do exactly that. The issue is, it has to get into operational practice.

[71] **William Graham:** Can I just follow on, you talked earlier on about signage. Certainly, on parts of the M4, there have never been more signs, particularly the part around Newport for various reasons, for the NATO conference—I mean, the signs are huge—and for the golf tournament as well. But, they don't display information very often. Also, there is a question of confidence in the information. We have all driven for miles on a sunlit motorway where everything says 'fog' all the time. So, again, this is not new, so why isn't there action being taken?

[72] **Mr Bingham:** In fact, when I drove down yesterday, I noticed that the signs were telling me what the speed limit was, but, otherwise, it wasn't giving me very much information. What some of our members have started talking about is better use of those variable message signs to give journey time and that sort of thing, to show that the network is being managed, almost. I believe most motorists would prefer to have a managed network, rather than a free for all. So, if you can improve on that system of signage, it will help some motorists, I'm sure, to either expect what time to get to their destination or maybe tell them, if there is a reason to divert, why.

[73] **William Graham:** Finally, on the confidence issue of what the signs are telling you, I remember—sorry to be anecdotal—driving on the M5 and on the M6 from Scotland and there were very large signs every now and again saying, 'From junction so-and-so, there'll be a major delay'. But, nobody turned off. So, we were all there in this very long queue at the end. There is a question of confidence in the signs, because the previous one telling you that was long since gone.

[74] **Mr Bingham:** We had a similar problem some years ago—the day has become known as 'windy Thursday', when 52 vehicles actually closed the Highways Agency network by being blown over in high winds. We worked very closely with the agency at that time to see what we could do about that, and we came out with a system of warnings—amber and red warnings, depending on the severity. It has taken us probably four or five years to gain confidence in those messages. You can't do that sort of thing overnight. Once the messages go out, they've got to be reliable. It only takes one of two to destroy that confidence.

[75] **Mr Higgins:** I think it is an issue with our members. They like gantry signs that warn you of problems ahead and reducing speed. That works, and the M42 proved it. Bringing everyone down to a set speed limit does help with congestion. I think confidence is eroded when you have an incident and the sign says there's been an accident or you are bound to 30 mph or 40 mph and there's nothing there. As you drive past you think, 'What was all that about?' That is eroding confidence. I was told—I don't know but I think it may be true—that there are sensors in the road on a motorway and it will tell you how many axels are going over it at what speed and it will give you an idea of the traffic and the congestion. There was a case on the M42 where a low-loader, which is a very long, low lorry, with lots of axels on, went across the system on the road—the sensors—and it assumed this was three or four cars, all doing 40 mph. So, it immediately sensed there was congestion, so all the speed limit signs dropped down, and there was nothing there—it was just a lorry going across that. I don't know how you get away with that, I must admit, but I think you have to be careful of confidence. I think, generally speaking, we get a positive feedback for gantry signs—I think they're very good, and I think most of our members think they are too, provided they're accurate.

[76] **William Graham:** Yes, okay. Thank you, Chair.

[77] **Darren Millar:** Thank you. Julie Morgan.

[78] **Julie Morgan:** I was actually going to ask about gantry signs and the inaccuracy.

Having come from London to Cardiff the week before last, near London there was a sign saying that there were severe delays just before you got to Bristol, and then, of course, we got to Bristol, and there were no delays at all, but I think that a lot of the traffic did go off the motorway. So, what could be done to get more up-to-date information so that they are managed better? I accept that you say that your members, on the whole, think they're good guides, but I have experienced quite a lot of this false information.

[79] **Mr Higgins:** I would think it would be down to Highways England, really, to manage it. They are aware of it, as far as I'm aware. Are you of the same view?

[80] **Mr Bingham:** Well, perhaps I could help a little bit there. The system that's used on the motorway network, and the strategic road network, of sensors, has to clear. So, if you had an incident, and it's logged that in the central system, traffic has to start moving again across that road for it to clear the signage.

[81] **Julie Morgan:** Right.

[82] **Mr Bingham:** In England, they'll very often send—on the motorway network—a traffic officer to check, because they need to verify it as well, not just see that it's cleared, but verify that it's cleared. And I believe it goes back to all of the agencies again, because it's—. Look, even in England, there aren't that many traffic officers on the motorway network; we rely on police officers, and others, to be able to verify those messages. I know that, in the background to all of this, there's a massive amount of work being done with data—the big data scene—not just on the information that the highway authorities hold, but data that comes out of vehicles on the move, using mobile phone technologies and the like.

[83] But, the problem is that it's a vast amount of data, and it's going to take some while and, I believe, some money, to take hold of that, to determine what data is going to be useful to the motorist and what data isn't. I know there are several—in fact, I know of at least two universities that are looking into the issue at the moment, and I attended a workshop in Cambridge University at the applied mathematics college. I was kind of worried about that—I thought that it would be up about there or be totally boring, but it was very, very good, because they could see the potential of using that data properly and of taking information out of vehicles as well as getting information into vehicles. I believe that's the way ahead, but, once again, it's not an overnight solution we've got to work on any more.

[84] **Julie Morgan:** And is any work being done on this in Wales?

[85] **Mr Bingham:** It will be applied in Wales.

[86] **Julie Morgan:** It will be applied.

[87] **Mr Bingham:** Yes, because the data is already there. You can see it on Google Maps, when it shows that there's a hold up on the strategic network, or even local roads. So, that data is already being fed into a system; it's how we manage that, and use it.

[88] **Darren Millar:** One of the problems we've got, though, is that most parts of the trunk road network in Wales do not have these signs, do they—these variable signs? So, what do you think needs to be done to better communicate, either on a live basis or in a more planned way, where planned work is taking place, on those other parts of the trunk road network?

[89] **Mr Bingham:** Well, mobile phone technology is moving along, and I saw some figures recently that astonished me, about the amount of people who own a mobile phone or, indeed own more than one mobile phone, and it's the fastest-growing communication that

we've got. So, that's one way. But, actually, for the industry, I think it's a little bit more fundamental than that, because big fleets nowadays want to control the way their fleets are operated. The days where the driver was given the key and told to go and deliver a load have gone for the big fleets; That journey is calculated and planned, so they need to have, within their operating systems, the sort of data I was talking about earlier on, which are accurate and tell them exactly where the hold-ups are going to be so that they can avoid joining the queue.

10:15

[90] **Darren Millar:** And in terms of resilience, again, you've talked about the potential blocking off of sections of road, and there's been some work on the trunk roads in north Wales—the A55, which is a key artery in terms of the economic routes up there. Large parts of the A55, though, don't have hard shoulders, for example. Do you seem to have more problems in certain parts of Wales than in others in terms of congestion or poor planned maintenance? What is your experience?

[91] **Mr Bingham:** Our members tell us that the big problem areas—yes, the A55 is part of it, but actually the major areas are in south Wales and around the M4. And we know that we've got issues around the tunnel as well. It's that sort of delay that creates the cost, because you're not expecting it. It's when an incident happens that it piles on the cost to the industry.

[92] **Darren Millar:** Mr Higgins, do you have anything to say on—

[93] **Mr Higgins:** I think the most problematic—. Generally speaking, on the M4, it's getting better and traffic does tend to flow quite well. The problem that we have with the congestion is the pinch points—it's that last mile or two miles into cities and towns. That's where most of the congestion is. Obviously, the FTA and the RHA are consistently talking about things like consolidation centres and freight priority lanes—things that will basically segregate the truck from the rest of the traffic, because a truck is designed and built to get in, deliver and get out. It doesn't want to be caught in traffic, where there's more pollution—it's not running very efficiently. It needs to get in and get out as soon as possible for everyone's benefit. That makes it more efficient.

[94] **Darren Millar:** I know that Jenny Rathbone's got some questions on this, so I'm going to come to you, Jenny.

[95] **Jenny Rathbone:** Yes. Moving away from communications and on to how well Wales strategically plans the use of its transport network, and, in the context of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill, which is, hopefully, going through its final stages this month, the RHA's got some interesting ideas for how we can improve the use of delivery of goods. One is on the freight consolidation front, so that the last mile of the delivery takes place in smaller commercial vehicles, and another is the pilots that have been done by the Noise Abatement Society around using trucks in off-peak hours. I wonder if you could just talk about how you think Wales could use its transport network more effectively to obviously deliver the goods that we all want to see.

[96] **Mr Higgins:** The delivering out of hours: there's a quiet delivery scheme—actually, the FTA were involved in it as well—with delivering at night-time, in essence. There are issues. There's good-practice guidance from the Department for Transport with key principles and processes for freight operators, and some are available on the internet. There are lot of key benefits that I won't go through, unless you want me to. But, basically, it's good news for the majority of people. The people who it does affect are people in hospitals and residents, where you may have reversing beepers that may have to be switched off, but the benefits are good. Did you want to talk about that, Malcolm?

[97] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, you can switch off reversing beepers.

[98] **Mr Higgins:** Yes, you can.

[99] **Mr Bingham:** Yes, a lot of work was done with the Noise Abatement Society, particularly, which you mentioned earlier, on night-time deliveries, which are sensitive. There are a lot of curfew areas, where vehicles are literally barred from making those night-time deliveries anyway—for very good reasons; residents want to sleep at night. So, what we did with the quiet delivery scheme was look to see how the vehicle and its equipment could be designed to be quiet in effecting that delivery. So, if you've got a supermarket in a residential area, the vehicle would be fitted with—. It's not just about switching off the reversing alarms, but actually turning them off and into a different type of alarm, rather than the very high bleep that tends to wake people up, that is loud enough in the very local area of the vehicle to make sure people know the vehicle is around and moving. But also it's about even roll cages coming off the vehicles, that they're fitted with the sort of equipment that keeps them quiet, rather than rattling down the ramp of the vehicle. So, all of that work was done. Actually, a lot of it was done just prior to the Olympics, because we knew that there was going to be a problem delivering during the day during the Olympics, and therefore we needed to deliver at night, in that sense.

[100] One of the biggest problems, though, with night-time deliveries, is that the industry works to supply its customers, and the customer, very often, needs to be there to receive the goods, and they're going to find it very difficult to have people there in the middle of the night sometimes to do that. So, it's useful in areas like supermarkets, which maybe now have 24-hour opening, that sort of thing, and that sort of approach. Then it does help.

[101] **Jenny Rathbone:** Obviously, real night-time working isn't very good for the health of the driver either. But after nine o'clock—I mean, electrical vehicles, for the last mile, they're much quieter.

[102] **Mr Higgins:** Yes, that was suggested with consolidation centres.

[103] **Jenny Rathbone:** Exactly.

[104] **Mr Higgins:** So, taking it to the consolidation centre, then an electric vehicle then takes it into the shops.

[105] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. So, what emphasis is being given to the relevant discussions in the Welsh context?

[106] **Mr Bingham:** I think what we need to look at is how you can effectively use those vehicles, and where you can use them. It isn't just Wales—it's all over the country that there's the issue about electric vehicles, in towns particularly. We know that some operations have looked at trying to take electric vehicles out of consolidation centres, delivering to large shopping areas, which is fine as long as the vehicles can reliably get in and out. One of the biggest problems with electric vehicle technology still is the life of the battery, and companies get very nervous about having vehicles running out of power in the middle of towns and cities and not being able to get back. So, one of the arguments at the moment—and we've heard it recently from the courier-type services, which would like to move to that sort of technology, but don't have the infrastructure support to be able to. If they do run out of power in towns and cities, is there somewhere where they can recharge reliably?

[107] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. But there are all sorts of ways of combatting that, like dual fuel.

[108] **Mr Bingham:** Yes. But there are similar issues with dual fuel as well; the infrastructure is not there.

[109] **Darren Millar:** But, for the purposes of our inquiry, Jenny, it's more important that we talk about the management of the network of consolidation centres, Perhaps you can return to that.

[110] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay, but I think the point is, are we, in any way, looking at consolidation centres as a way of being more strategic in the way we use our road network? Also, meeting some of the other problems that you raise around places where drivers can use the toilet and all that sort of thing.

[111] **Mr Bingham:** The consolidation concept is not something that we disagree with at all. As Simon has said, in the main, what we'd like to do is get the main vehicles into some sort of point so that they can put the goods in place, and then deliver on. That would still take a sea change overall in the industry, because, actually, the industry does consolidate. It very rarely sends out an empty truck, and, all right, it might have some empty trucks coming back, but all of those regional distribution centres are there to do exactly that—consolidate loads, and a load into a very large supermarket could be a full HGV. So, they would be looking at the dual-fuel-type approach, rather than electric. What they said to us a couple of years ago, when the technology strategy board issued a challenge out to the industry, to say, 'Can you design a vehicle that would be more suitable for these operations?', the argument that came back was, 'Actually, we are using those vehicles already, but we'd use more if there was more infrastructure around to be able to supply compressed actual gas, or liquefied gas, to those vehicles, or, indeed, for the smaller vans—the very small vans—the electric charging points'.

[112] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, are you having these conversations with Transport Wales?

[113] **Mr Bingham:** We are, in the sense of that's what our industry is asking for, yes.

[114] **Jenny Rathbone:** But you're unable to tell us anything concrete about those proposals.

[115] **Darren Millar:** Just in terms of consolidation centres for one moment, if I may, how many consolidation centres are there in Wales? Are there more planned? Is the Welsh Government having discussions with you about the need for more of those, if you're calling for them as organisations?

[116] **Mr Bingham:** I don't think there are any in Wales.

[117] **Mr Higgins:** I don't know of any.

[118] **Darren Millar:** There are none at all in Wales?

[119] **Mr Higgins:** Not that I know.

[120] **Darren Millar:** Where would you like to see them?

[121] **Mr Bingham:** In towns and cities, like Cardiff, that would have a central point—well, maybe more than one central point—that those consolidation centres could service.

[122] **Darren Millar:** So, on the edge of every big urban development.

[123] **Mr Higgins:** There is another issue. A consolidation centre has to be paid for. Someone has to be paid to run it and the building has to be put up, built, and managed. The

problem that you have is people that have their own shops—for example, Marks & Spencer and John Lewis—they will have their own trucks anyway. So, they will argue, ‘Why can’t my truck just go and deliver to my shop and come back out again? Why have I got to park it up a mile away and pay for this consolidation centre on top of the cost of bringing the vehicle there?’ Commercially, you have to look at that as well. I don’t know if you’re aware, but we do do pallet consolidation networks. We have a lot of pallet—well, there are about five or six pallet—companies, and it works very well in England. I can’t think of any in Wales.

[124] **Darren Millar:** So, these are commercial operations really, then.

[125] **Mr Higgins:** Yes. What they basically do is they pick pallets up from all around the country, they go to a centre at midnight/one o’clock in the morning, they drop those pallets off, they pick up the pallets, they go back to where they came from—so, basically, there’s never an empty run, and they are taking pallets up and back, and it works very well—and that does work well. But I have to say, can you think of any current networks?

[126] **Darren Millar:** Is there a European nation, perhaps, that makes extensive use of consolidation?

[127] **Mr Bingham:** Sorry, I missed the first bit of what you said.

[128] **Darren Millar:** Is there an EU example that you can give us? A European Union example.

[129] **Mr Bingham:** There are some in Europe. Can I use a couple of examples in England, which I can actually speak with some authority on?

[130] **Darren Millar:** Of course.

[131] **Mr Bingham:** There is a consolidation centre at Meadowhall, in Sheffield, that supplies into a very controlled shopping centre, and it seems to work quite well on the basis that Marks & Spencer—it isn’t Marks & Spencer’s, by the way, they don’t own a single vehicle; they put their mark on it, but it’s the industry that supplies into Marks & Spencer—will put a whole load into that shopping centre. But there are a number of outlets that will be taking part loads, and what the consolidation centre does is it prepares those goods ready for the shop floor, ready for sale, and the retailer is quite prepared to pay for that, because they don’t have to have paid staff and it actually saves them some floor space as well, so they can have more floor space to display goods. So, that works quite well, and it pays for itself in that sense. I ought to also use one that’s not quite as controlled as that, because, in some ways, they are almost held to that, really, in contract arrangements within the centre. Bristol, some years ago, set up a consolidation centre for one of their shopping centres, but that was done on a similar basis and the suppliers into that shopping centre in Bristol do prepare the goods for shop, ready for sale. So, it’s that sort of approach: what added value can you add to it that will make it attractive and worth paying for?

[132] **Darren Millar:** Okay. William Graham, you wanted to follow up.

[133] **William Graham:** Just on that point, although I can see the attraction of some consolidation centres, would this mean, therefore, some pressure from your members to have larger HGVs to take goods there? Because that has implications for road use and repair.

[134] **Mr Bingham:** I’m not so sure about why we would be talking necessarily about larger goods vehicles in this sense. The reason I say that is that none of our members will gross out on size first before weight, and most of the goods vehicles are determined by the maximum weight that they can carry. What we have got at the moment is a trial on the longer

semi-trailer, which is being run by the Westminster Government, to look at the feasibility of adding on a little bit more length to the vehicles and giving them another row of pallets, effectively, on the back of the vehicle. It seems to be working very well on the trunk road distribution network. So, in the main, what's happening with those vehicles is they're taking goods from the manufacturer and moving them into distribution centres and then using smaller vehicles—not-as-long vehicles—to distribute into towns and cities.

10:30

[135] They are required to comply with existing turning-circle requirements, so they've additional equipment, steering axles on the back of the trailers, to be able to accommodate the turns that they need to do. Most of the drivers find that they are easier to drive than the standard semi-trailer, from what we've heard so far, but there is this caution about only using them for certain networks. So, the strategic road network—yes, but not moving them off that.

[136] **Darren Millar:** Can I just ask, you mentioned freight lanes on some of the bigger parts of the trunk road network? Are they used extensively elsewhere? How successful are they at alleviating congestion?

[137] **Mr Higgins:** Well, there's an example in Bristol, the A4174, and that seems to work very well. Up north, in your neck of the woods, there's one as well, isn't there?

[138] **Mr Bingham:** We have one in Leeds which takes vehicles off the motorway into a very large industrial area. That is for vehicles over 7.5 tonnes. It's a bus lane, but they're allowed into the bus lane as well. Newcastle—in fact, Tyne and Wear, so Newcastle and Sunderland, have a number of no-car lanes. There was some talk about a year ago, too, by the local authority that they wanted to take those no-car lanes and convert them back into bus lanes. My belief is the pressure they were getting was from their bus operating companies, and Nexus who are part of that. That hasn't happened. Indeed, one of the biggest objectors was the large department store in the centre of Newcastle, Fenwick's, who used that no-car lane to get the vehicles right into the back of the shop. So, what I am seeing is some interest in other parts of the country to introduce other types of, I think the title is now 'no-car lanes', but 'priority lanes' I think is a better way of putting it, so that you can say that traffic that needs to can move in and out, at congested times particularly. I've seen some plans in west Yorkshire, for example, to connect the M62 to Halifax and Huddersfield, either side of the motorway, in the future, with a priority lane that will be public transport as well as HGV. Now, that's in the very early stages of planning and it's got to go through due process, but it is an idea that's been floated.

[139] **Darren Millar:** To what extent do you think that those sorts of priority lanes might assist in the management of the network, particularly in terms of capital investment or planned maintenance? Presumably, you get much more wear and tear on those priority lanes, because of the weight of the vehicles travelling on them.

[140] **Mr Bingham:** I think what is likely to happen—and as I said, it is at the very early stages in this case, certainly in the west Yorkshire instance—is that the idea is to actually talk to the distribution centres and the industrial estates about the use of those lanes and about the cost of those lanes, looking for contributions, if you like, at least in capital investment going forward.

[141] **Darren Millar:** So, there's an opportunity for some private investment coming into the network in order to pay for the capital investment required on those priority lanes, but in return you hopefully get less congestion, better delivery times et cetera for your members.

[142] **Mr Bingham:** The congestion issue is a matter of how you can control the car usage,

but what it will provide is a free-flowing lane for priority traffic. Very often, that priority traffic will be large vehicles, even bus vehicles are large vehicles, and that will cut down on some of the problem areas that we're starting to face on emissions from vehicles et cetera in congestion.

[143] **Mr Higgins:** Another issue, just to add to that, which you didn't mention, is tachographs. A lorry driver is constrained in the amount of time he can drive and work by tachographs. If you have a fairly accurate ETA with delivery, you'll know then you'll be in time to take your tachograph break, but to be stuck in a traffic jam messes the whole thing up. So, that would help.

[144] **Darren Millar:** I think you mentioned stop areas as well, or break areas for drivers, being a bit of an issue in Wales.

[145] **Mr Higgins:** Big issue. We've got very few particularly secure resting places with washing facilities. At the end of the day, a washing facility is a basic human right. There are lots of places that don't have those. It's a struggle. The problem we have with lorries parking in places they shouldn't be parking is purely because of the law, because they have to stop after so much time working or after however many hours they've driven for. They have to stop and they have to take a night-time rest. The problem is that, if there aren't the facilities there to be able to stop in time, then they're going to stop somewhere they shouldn't stop because they don't want to break the law.

[146] Now, the secure issue is another problem. A lot of places just aren't secure for the driver and for the load. We have a lot of problems in Wales and in England regarding potential problems with driver security and load security.

[147] **Darren Millar:** Jenny.

[148] **Jenny Rathbone:** On this point then, what conversations have you had with, say, large supermarkets or other places where there are large places suitable for a lorry to park outside normal hours? I mean, why is it not—

[149] **Mr Higgins:** We tend to talk to planners. What we're trying to get planners to do is, where there is an industrial site, provide somewhere that they should be able to park, at least for a short period of time while they're waiting to unload, because a lot of industrial sites haven't even got that. It's planning that really needs to be tackled. Local councils need to be looked at as well. The problem with it is that, with parking, there's not a lot of money in it—there's no commercial gain.

[150] **Jenny Rathbone:** But you are commercial operators. Why are you not providing safe sites for the industry so that they don't get robbed, but also places where your drivers can have a washing facility?

[151] **Mr Higgins:** That's what we're putting over. There should be secure and safe parking facilities, with washing facilities for drivers.

[152] **Jenny Rathbone:** But are you telling us that local authorities actually ban you from doing that? Or are you not actively doing it yourselves?

[153] **Mr Higgins:** Well, we wouldn't do it ourselves; we're an association. We—

[154] **Jenny Rathbone:** Well, as an industry, though.

[155] **Mr Higgins:** As an industry, we are pushing it—and the FTA as well. I know you've

been involved in it as well, Malcolm.

[156] **Mr Bingham:** The industry does actually look after a lot of the parking issues. Actually, when we talk to FTA members, they tell us that they haven't got a lorry parking issue—it's somebody else. Very often, the parking issue is created by drivers who've come from very long distances sometimes into an area where there's a lack of facilities. That's why, in many ways, we're trying to talk, within the planning system, to ask, 'Where is the right place to put these facilities?' I've actually seen examples of lorry parks being provided on one side of a town, but it's taken a journey through the town from the motorway to get there.

[157] **Jenny Rathbone:** That's ridiculous.

[158] **Mr Bingham:** That's the sort of issue we want to look at on the planning side. Within the industry itself, many companies actually do have that, particularly large companies. They will park their vehicles up on their own sites and, sometimes, but not always, have arrangements with other companies. There are commercial issues around parking sometimes on other people's premises. There could actually be issues about the segregation of goods as well, if it's foodstuff. That industry is very careful about where it parks. But there are security issues as well. We have a summit just a bit later on this month, actually on the skills issue. We've identified within the skills issue that one of the problem areas of getting people into the industry either as drivers or indeed within the industry itself is the image of the industry, and a lack of really good-quality, secure parking areas. What we need to do as an industry is identify how we can generate that, but we need the planners' help to be able to identify where to put them.

[159] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay.

[160] **Darren Millar:** Just to ask you, in terms of Welsh Government's planning of the infrastructure network, as it were—the transport network—what discussions are they having with you about the appropriate places in terms of locations for those rest stops that you need?

[161] **Mr Bingham:** One of the problems at the moment is layby parking. We know that highway authorities generally want to try and reduce that. Our cry at the moment is, 'We agree with you, but don't do it until we've got the other facilities in place'.

[162] **Darren Millar:** But are they having that discussion with you actively?

[163] **Mr Bingham:** Indeed. I was talking to officers of the Welsh Government just about three months ago on exactly that, and particularly the A55 area, where there is a problem.

[164] **Darren Millar:** And you're happy with the engagement that you've got?

[165] **Mr Bingham:** I'm happy that we have contact and we've got engagement. What I'm not happy about is how fast we're moving to a solution.

[166] **Darren Millar:** The pace of delivery as such. Okay. Sandy.

[167] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you. I think Mr Higgins made a very valid point about costings in all this. Everybody's talking about 'Somebody ought to be supplying these things', and I'm really quite interested to know who and why and what. I know Holyhead is the entry through to my constituency and certainly, as you'll be aware, there've been issues there about provision for drivers, particularly because it's an area of outstanding natural beauty. Part of that has been resolved now. So, there are planning issues, as you say, and I'm not quite sure about planning authorities, as it must be quite difficult for an association to liaise anyway with every planning authority. We've got 22 local planning authorities at the moment, never

mind the Government. I don't know how easily you would see that being resolved.

[168] I was also interested in Jenny's point on the consolidation centres. Is there a point below which they're not viable? I can't imagine that, in some parts, certainly my constituency, there would be any benefit whatsoever in having a large consolidation area. I don't think it would be a viable prospect for hauliers, nor would it give any great benefit. Wales is a fairly big country, but we've got a small population: 3.2 million or whatever it is. I'm just wondering. I mean, I'm sure there isn't a magic figure, but is there a size, an economically viable size for these things?

[169] **Mr Bingham:** As I was talking about earlier on, about Meadowhall, I think it's a really good example. It's a very, very large shopping centre, one of the biggest in the country, and it's got a range of outlets that are prepared to pay for the service, and therefore the cost to them is that much lower.

[170] **Sandy Mewies:** Would the Bristol one be something like Cribbs Causeway or something similar?

[171] **Mr Bingham:** That's right, yes.

[172] **Sandy Mewies:** I'm a keen shopper.

[173] **Mr Bingham:** I think you can tell I'm not. But it's that supply in. Are there sufficient outlets within that supply area to afford the cost?

[174] **Sandy Mewies:** Right, okay.

[175] **Jocelyn Davies:** I wanted to ask about trunk road agents and maintenance programmes and so on. We're in March now and I hate driving around in March because it's the end of the financial year. and there are going to be temporary traffic lights everywhere. Have you got any views on that, how we could do that better so that we don't have these pinch points at the end of the financial year when it takes so much longer to travel from one end of the country to the other?

[176] **Mr Bingham:** I believe that we're about to see a bit of a sea change in England over those issues—on the strategic road network, that's for sure. With the change in funding arrangements for Highways England on a five-year cycle, that has a lot of implications, but I believe it has a massive—

[177] **Jocelyn Davies:** So, instead of an annual cycle, they're going to have a five-year cycle.

[178] **Mr Bingham:** It'll be a five-year cycle, but, within that five-year cycle, they will move things through, but not rush at the end of the financial year to make sure they've spent the money for that year. So, they've got more surety, and they'll be able to plan those works out. Our biggest cry is, 'And what are you going to do about telling us where they're going to be?'

[179] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes. Simon?

[180] **Mr Higgins:** I agree with Malcolm. It'll be very interesting to see how this develops. There will be issues. I agree with you, as well: I think the situation at the moment isn't perfect, by any means, and I think the Welsh could look at England to see how it develops. It could be a good lesson.

[181] **Jocelyn Davies:** Okay, thanks.

[182] **Darren Millar:** In terms of the quality of the network at the moment in Wales, you're happy and your members aren't complaining about lots of potholes on the road, or anything like that? You're content with the quality of the network, are you?

[183] **Mr Bingham:** We did a survey, last year and the year before, on the pothole issue, whatever that's defined as, to try and get a bit of an idea about what costs our members were picking up in repair, if you like, to vehicles. About 40% of them said that they could identify costs that they'd had to pay for that could be directly attributable to road surface damage. Now, that was right across the organisation and we thought 40% was about right. That was a year ago. This year, 49% of people said they could identify that. Now, that could be—there are lots of dynamics in this—simply that people are more aware, and are looking for those things. I think, with HGVs particularly, that defects may not have been picked up and actually just repaired at a six-weekly repair cycle, or that sort of thing, without being attributed to the road damage that created the cost.

10:45

[184] We have, in FTA, very large fleets and some of those fleets run even larger van fleets. We've got an organisation within FTA called Van Excellence and we did a similar exercise with the van fleets as well. It wasn't quite as well conducted as I would like. So, the data are not quite so assured. But, the data that we've got back were that over 90% of van operators could identify damage attributable to road surface. Now, I can't separate that out for England and Wales and Scotland, because we did it right across the organisation, but those are the sorts of figures that we've got to take notice of, and I think we are, because we're starting to see more money allocated to maintenance. That was an issue, wasn't it, over the last few years with spending cuts et cetera, that it was maintenance budgets that got hit rather than, sometimes, some of the capital costs? So, the cry from our members is: do not hit the maintenance budgets; keep the network that we've got in good condition, please.

[185] **Darren Millar:** Just one final comment: can I ask you just to let us know what impression you have of the Welsh Government's management of the trunk road network in Wales, in terms of the delivery against the forecasted timescales of major capital improvements? So, say there's going to be one, from that point until its delivery, and then from the start of the project, from the construction company that's appointed, to the delivery, are you content with that? Is the right sort of time frame in the pipeline, for example, from start to finish?

[186] **Mr Bingham:** I think, within the industry itself—and it's difficult for us as a trade association representing operators—some of the observations we made in the last year or so, in the consultation on moving towards Highways England, started to identify some of the issues that go wrong in that process, particularly with start-stop funding. The amount of money that's being wasted, and time wasted, on projects simply because they've got so far down the line and then stopped. I've, perhaps quite innocently in the past, said, 'Well, we can always use that next time when it's resurrected', but, very often, when you come to take those data back off the shelf, it's been so long between the project being abandoned and then restarted, you've effectively got to start all over again, certainly on the cost issues. So, that is a massive, massive problem within all highway projects. That's one of the reasons we've been very supportive of the Highways England concept, because we feel that they'll have a better opportunity to control that and actually fund the supply chain that they've got that feeds in, whether it be at the very early stages of a consultation, or on how you would recruit people, the right people, to design that, and how you recruit the amount of right people to actually build it. That goes into universities and all the rest of it at the skills level.

[187] That's been the problem with stop-start funding on roads. When we look at equivalent funding systems in rail, Network Rail, for the last 20 years plus, have had that five-year cycle and more surety and been able to recruit better and design better the rail system than they did before.

[188] **Darren Millar:** Do you have anything to add, Mr Higgins?

[189] **Mr Higgins:** I think that covers that quite nicely. At the end of the day, on infrastructure, the RHA is constantly asking for money. We'd prefer it to be spent on maintaining the current roads, as opposed to building new ones. We'll see how it goes.

[190] **Darren Millar:** On that note, if I can thank you—. Did you have another question there?

[191] **Jocelyn Davies:** No, no.

[192] **Darren Millar:** If I can thank you, Mr Bingham and Mr Higgins, for your evidence today. You'll get a copy of the transcript of today's proceedings so you can correct it for any factual inaccuracies. Thank you very much indeed; it's been very, very helpful.

[193] **Mr Higgins:** Thank you.

[194] **Darren Millar:** Thank you.

[195] We've already agreed to go back into private session for items 6 and 7 on our agenda, so we'll move back into private session.

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10:49.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10:49.*