

NORTH WALES REPORT

A REPORT FOR THE NORTH WALES TRANSPORT COMMISSION

International Best Practice and Innovation in Transport of Direct Relevance to Policy Development in North Wales

By John Whitelegg

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INTRODUCTION

The Welsh Government has adopted a new transport strategy¹ that puts social justice, climate change, public health, local economy and future generations at the heart of transport policy. This is fully in line with European best practice on integrated and co-ordinated transport policies to deliver the widest possible range of benefits.

The Wales Transport Strategy, sets out a vision for an accessible, sustainable and efficient transport system that:

- contributes to a more equal Wales and to a healthier Wales, that everyone has the confidence to use.
- delivers a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, maintains biodiversity and enhances ecosystem resilience, and reduces waste.
- contributes to our wider economic ambitions, and helps local communities, supports a more sustainable supply chain, uses the latest innovations and addresses transport affordability.
- supports the Welsh language, enables more people to use sustainable transport to get to arts, sport and cultural activities, and protects and enhances the historic environment.

The Welsh Government has moved strongly to implement this new direction in its support for major public transport improvements, cancelling road building projects², adopting a national 20mph speed limit on residential roads and improving bus-rail connections.

Photo credit: Catrin Ellis, Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, Station Road, Trevor, Llangollen, Wales, 2021. <https://unsplash.com/photos/mLFI8yYhNyg>

Only 15 of the schemes examined by the roads review panel – an independent expert group tasked with assessing more than 50 road-building projects – were given the go-ahead, with the remainder scaled back, postponed or scrapped altogether³.

The North Wales Transport Commission was appointed by Welsh Ministers to consider modal shift opportunities in the region. The Commission wished to learn from best practice in mainland Europe and commissioned John Whitelegg to summarise that best practice and apply it to the distinctive geography of North Wales and its 600,000 residents.

¹ Llwybr Newydd: the Wales transport strategy 2021 | [GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales)

² Welsh Government response to the Roads Review [HTML] | [GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales)

³ Welsh road-building schemes scrapped following climate review | ConstrucNon News

⁴ Rural / urban definiNon (England and Wales) - Office for NaNonal StaNsNcs (ons.gov.uk)

REPORT SUMMARY

The report brings together best practice in Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and Denmark and uses that information to inform policy choices at different geographical scales following the definitions used by the Office for National Statistics⁴.

- Urban (population over 10,000)
- Town and Fringe
- Village
- Hamlet and isolated dwellings

The report scrutinises and evaluates best practice in European transport policy and distils that large body of evidence into specific measures and interventions that are directly relevant to the distinctive geography of North Wales. The report discusses important issues around knowledge transfer and learning from best practice e.g., what would it cost and is there an evidence base confirming that the measures and interventions deliver on important policy objectives e.g., reducing carbon emissions, supporting local economies, improving health and social justice and delivering value for money.

The evidence base on best practice in Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark and Austria is clear. A transformation to a desirable future based on the widest possible application of best practice is possible and essential to deliver on climate change, public health and local economic viability objectives.

The report notes that the measures and interventions discussed are directly relevant to the policies and objectives in the Wales Transport Strategy. The report concludes that ten specific transformational changes could be made across all aspects of transport provision, budgets, modal choice and behaviour.

The North Wales Transport Commission will use this report and the highlighted measures in making its recommendations for the Welsh Government.

THE 10 “TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGES”

1. A clear organisational system based on the German Verkehrsverbund which is very similar to the Swedish and Swiss regional transport systems, and it replaces the disorganised, fragmented, under-funded and privatised approach that is enthusiastically followed in England.
2. Significant improvements in public transport provision along the lines of those in place in Switzerland with defined services levels of bus frequency by settlement population size plus pulse timetabling (Switzerland), with all bus and local rail services co-ordinated and integrated.
3. Significant and attractive public transport offers e.g., the German 49 Euros per month that covers all bus, local rail and tram options and the end of buying separate tickets for separate legs of journeys.
4. The full-scale adoption of Mobility as a Service (MaaS) to inform and precipitate large scale voluntary behaviour change in transport choices from privately owned cars to walk, cycle, car-share and public transport.
5. The Konus card giving free public transport to tourists/visitors and paid for (partly) by a tourist tax. This, if adopted, would be applied in the Snowdonia National Park.
6. Fiscal reform to generate income to pay for significant upgrades to public transport e.g., road pricing and work place parking levies (Nottingham)
7. Best practice monitored travel plans covering all schools, colleges, hospitals and new housing areas.
8. Car-free housing on the German, Swedish and USA model.
9. Significant upgrades to all pedestrian facilities including car-free streets and conformity with the principles of the International Charter for walking⁵
10. Significant upgrades to cycling facilities and infrastructure in conformity with the Dutch Cycling Embassy guidelines⁶:
 - a. Hardware: physical elements of the built environment – infrastructure
 - b. Software: mental and virtual elements – ideas, plans, policies, programs, laws
 - c. Orgware: organizational and institutional elements – administrations, governments

⁵walking-charter-document-2020.pdf (walk21.com)

⁶Dutch Cycling Embassy - Think



NEXT STEPS

The report aims to inform the North Wales Transport Commission of the rich, evidence-based opportunities for transforming transport and to apply that list to the special geography of North Wales. It recognises that Wales (unlike England) has already moved significantly in that direction and has a sound policy base in the 2021 transport strategy (Llwybr Newydd) to deliver its detailed policy interventions. It is understood that a final selection of detailed measures and interventions is for the Welsh Government, balancing budgets and priorities along with the demands of its distinctive regions and geography. The international experience described in this report can inform that process but cannot second guess the shape of the outcome.

The Welsh Government has demonstrated that it has the capabilities and policy judgment to get this right and the story so far is very encouraging indeed.

Author Details:

Professor John Whitelegg is a visiting Professor in the School of the Built Environment at Liverpool John Moores University and a transport consultant. His PhD was in industrial location theory and change over time in the opening, closing, decline and growth of the firm. He has worked on transport projects for over 40 years, written 10 books on transport and was the former editor of the journal “World Transport Policy and Practice”.

His projects include ex-post evaluation of job creation and inward investment following new highway and motorway investments, the impact of new highways on air quality and greenhouse gases and the performance of non-highway building measures on reducing congestion and pollution and stimulating local economic performance.

Photo credit: Catrin Ellis, View from Llangollen Bridge in North Wales Llangollen, Wales, 2023. <https://unsplash.com/photos/9T8uTmgxOE>