

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO CABINET

20 JULY 2021

### REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

#### PENCOED ROAD BRIDGE AND PENCOED LEVEL CROSSING

#### 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the current progress relating to a major capital transport investment to improve multi-modal accessibility within and through Pencoed.
- 1.2 This report brings Members up to date with the recent work undertaken together with some background information on the current situation and potential aspiration as well as seeking authorisation to go out to public consultation in due course.

#### 2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective/objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:-
  1. **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
  2. **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
  3. **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.
- 2.2 The transport proposals at Pencoed will facilitate active travel on Hendre Road by removing the requirement for pedestrians and cyclists to wait until a train has passed, through the provision of a dedicated active travel bridge. The proposals also seek to enhance active travel infrastructure at Penprysg Bridge through improved pedestrian and cyclist safety, convenience and usability.

- 2.3 The scheme will therefore contribute to the Council's Corporate Well-being Objective of 'Supporting a successful sustainable economy' under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 by reducing the carbon footprint through the method of encouraging modal shift to sustainable travel and by reducing the vehicular congestion resulting from these network constraints. There will also be further economic benefits by enabling future development in west Pencoed by creating transport conditions that allow for the current new development moratorium to be removed thereby unlocking the economic and social potential of that land for the benefit of Pencoed and its environs.
- 2.4 The creation of improved accessibility for all modes of travel contributes to 'Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient' by removing existing severance issues within the town and improving journey time reliability, cost savings and environmental benefits.
- 2.5 Additionally, the scheme contributes to a 'Smarter use of resources' by reducing the risk to rail travel efficiency and safety on the South Wales Main Line through Pencoed by the separation of road and rail surface intersections. The removal of the level crossing provides scope for further rail service frequency enhancements on the wider rail network in the county borough particularly along the Maesteg to Cardiff route, which has been identified as a key transport corridor.
- 2.6 The scheme will also provide an opportunity for future regeneration schemes around the area of the closed level crossing with positive enhancements to create a community focused public realm.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 Within Pencoed, the railway line creates severance between the community who reside to the west of the line and those on the east side. Significant traffic congestion is currently experienced within the town with particular emphasis on the road over rail crossings at Penprysg Road Bridge and Hendre Road level crossing.
- 3.2 These congestion issues are long-standing and are the core reason behind a moratorium on new developments on the west side of Pencoed which was identified in Policy PLA6 of the Bridgend Local Development Plan (2006 – 2021).
- 3.3 The impact of the congestion is therefore a constraint on Pencoed's future capability for growth and also generates negative impacts, both economic and environmental on the community presently. Queues of traffic generate emissions which effect air quality, as noise from idling traffic is experienced by those who live or work on the affected routes. Active Travel is currently under-provided due to the lack of appropriate connections between the west and east of the town. The scheme currently under investigation will rectify this shortcoming.
- 3.4 Key problems defined for the study area, as identified in the WeITAG process include:

- Congestion – The highway network within Pencoed is under strain at peak travel periods due to the capacity issues at the two main crossings for road over rail in the town. Significant delays are experienced at the level crossing location on Hendre Road when the barrier is down to allow rail services to pass through. This leads to queues forming on the highway approaches. Penprysg Road bridge, to the north of the level crossing, encounters similar effects of queuing due to the traffic signals which restrict flow to allow for one-way passage over the bridge in either direction. Both of these crossings are subject to significant demand at peak periods neither of which is capable of accommodating without the occurrence of traffic queues and delays.
- Severance – Due to the alignment of the South Wales Mainline that passes through the middle, Pencoed, could be considered as a town of two halves. This creates issues of severance for the community and makes crossings between west and east unpredictable at times when traffic is at a peak. The severance that results has a negative impact on community well-being and the general impression of the town by those who live within or visit it.
- Poor Active Travel Links – There is currently only limited opportunity for active travel within the affected area partly due to the limited availability of highway space for shared / segregated travel on the network. Crossings of the rail line by foot or by cycle are severely restrictive for those with a mobility impairment with footbridges that do not incorporate any ramped access.
- Restriction on New Development – Existing and future development in Pencoed is under a moratorium which rules that, without significant improvements to travel connectivity, the town will be unable to grow sustainably and benefit from the economic and societal boosts associated with the introduction of new homes.
- Public Transport Efficiency - The highway arrangements within Pencoed create issues for bus services as they are unable to achieve reliable journey times due to the congestion issues that occur at the rail crossings within the town. Access to the rail service is compromised by a lack of fully accessible and safe crossing opportunities for active travel modes.

3.5 A Stage One WelTAG was completed in June 2019 which identified, developed and appraised a long-list of options which were used to provide solutions to the issues that currently pose a challenge for connectivity between the west and east of Pencoed. The process identified which of those options from the long-list should be progressed and further investigated at WelTAG Stage Two.

3.6 The subsequent WelTAG Stage Two study was completed in August 2020. In accordance with the Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance (WelTAG 2017), the purpose of Stage Two is to examine in greater detail the short-list of options for tackling the problem under consideration, as agreed by the WelTAG Stage One report.

- 3.7 The recommendation of The WelTAG Stage Two study was for the option containing a combination of new bridge provision and closure of the level crossing to be taken forward to WelTAG Stage Three. The closure of the level crossing would be anticipated to include provision of a new active travel bridge.
- 3.8 Members will be aware that the closure of the level crossing and the replacement road bridge has been a long held ambition of the Council. A Steering Group has been set up comprising of representatives from the community, Council, the MP, the constituency MS, the town council, Wales Office, Welsh Government, Network Rail and Transport for Wales. The Group meets regularly and has been fully involved in the WelTAG process.
- 3.9 An addendum to WelTAG stage 2 is also nearing completion which is focussed on active travel bridge options at Hendre Road. Attached to this report, in Appendix 1, is the WelTAG Stage Two Report.

#### **4. Current situation/proposal**

- 4.1 The next stage is for public consultation on the proposals to formally commence which is critical to the WelTAG process. A public consultation exercise, approved by Cabinet, will enable some affected landowners to be contacted directly to discuss the concept of the scheme and initial engineering activities required to progress the WelTAG process. These initial works include requirements for third party land access to facilitate topographical surveys, ground investigations, ecology surveys and equipment access.
- 4.2 The public consultation phase is critical to the design of the scheme and any subsequent public realm enhancements. It is only by engaging with the community that the current issues and potential solutions are fully explored and assessed. Also, as this is a significant transport infrastructure project over two sites, which will have a positive impact on Pencoed in the medium to long term, there is likely to be some short term public disruption during the construction phase.
- 4.3 Network Rail have recently been engaged and negotiations commenced to facilitate the required access for the initial surveys identified above.
- 4.4 Following favourable public consultation, the project would be able to proceed to WelTAG Stage Three. As defined in the Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance (2017):

*'The purpose of Stage Three is to make a full and detailed assessment of the preferred option to inform a decision as to whether or not to proceed to implementation.*

*The detailed design and appraisal work should be used to refine the design and to inform any complementary measures that are needed in order to more fully realise the benefits of the proposal and seek to maximise contribution to the well-being goals whilst helping to mitigate any adverse impacts and resolving potential conflicts.*

*The completion of Stage Three will provide much of the information needed for applications to funding organisations and any mode-specific appraisal procedures.'*

## **5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules**

- 5.1 There is no effect on policy framework or procedure rules at this stage. If, however, a major transport intervention in Pencoed materialises, it is possible that it would create the necessary conditions to remove the current moratorium on development land west of the railway line, as stipulated in the existing LDP (2006-2021) and likely to be retained in the revised LDP (2018-2033).

## **6. Equality Act 2010 implications**

- 6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.
- 6.2 As identified in the WelTAG Stage two report, an Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken on the final preferred option (at WelTAG Stage Three).

## **7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications**

- 7.1 The WelTAG process incorporates the core aims of The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 however, an Assessment Template has been completed and a summary of the implications from the assessment relating to the five ways of working is below:

**Long-term:** The scheme will allow for greater opportunities of active travel with resulting environmental benefits associated with reductions in noise and air pollution; reduction in congestion and other associated economic benefits, promoting greater social inclusion, supporting the boroughs aims of a successful sustainable economy. The improvements would lead to a reduction in traffic congestion in Pencoed and would facilitate more reliable, safer and healthier connections between the western and eastern sides of Pencoed as well as through the town.

**Prevention:** The proposed active travel route helps reduce congestion by allowing free flowing traffic through the area and is expected to incorporate the additional traffic that would be generated due to the removal of the level crossing. In addition, Active Travel facilities are enhanced as part of the scheme, providing safer routes to schools and general cycling/walking activities within the area.

**Integration:** The scheme would encourage the use of active travel, which can provide health benefits associated with increased physical activity; environmental benefits associated with reductions in noise and air pollution; reduction in congestion and other associated economic benefits, promoting greater social inclusion. A reduction in traffic congestion in Pencoed would facilitate more reliable, safer and healthier connections between the western and eastern areas of Pencoed. If

congestion can be relieved at local hotspots then the negative impacts associated with queuing traffic can be mitigated helping to improve the surrounding environment for the benefit of residents, active travel activity and the community as a whole.

**Collaboration:** Officers of the Strategic Transportation Planning section work with various sections of the council including the local Town Council, Regeneration, Traffic Management, Engineering and Planning in considering wellbeing objectives. In addition, consultation with stakeholders has played a key role throughout the WelTAG process that has been undertaken to inform the scheme. The Cardiff City Region and Regional Transport Authority of South East Wales are also key partners in this scheme.

**Involvement:** Section 5 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 states: 'A public body must take account of... the importance of involving other persons with an interest in achieving the well-being goals and of ensuring those persons reflect the diversity of the population'. Subject to Cabinet approval, a consultation exercise will therefore be undertaken and managed effectively in the near future as part of the WelTAG process and in accordance with the statutory guidance associated with the Act.

## **8. Financial implications**

- 8.1 The current WelTAG assessments have been funded by the Welsh Government Local Transport Fund which is administered under the Cardiff City Region's Metro Programme.
- 8.2 Detailed construction costs will be provided at WelTAG Stage Three. However, the current conservative estimate is that the preferred option would cost in the region of £17 million, subject to changing variables and conditions.
- 8.3 Potential sources of funding for future technical work and construction include Section 106 planning contributions, Welsh Government grants, UK Government grants, Cardiff Capital Region City Deal and Network Rail.
- 8.4 The Council will need to fully explore future funding options in association with the Steering Group and these will be reported back in due course.

## **9. Recommendation(s)**

- 9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
  - 1. Note the information contained within this report.
  - 2. Delegate Authority to the Corporate Director of Communities to undertake a full public consultation on the scheme, liaise with affected landowners on the proposed design and continue to work closely with Network Rail to design, facilitate and deliver the scheme.
  - 3. Agree that a further report on the consultation outcomes, proposed designs and any potential funding streams comes before a future meeting of the Cabinet before proceeding further.

Janine Nightingale

**Corporate Director - Communities**

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**Contact officer:** Joseph Cassinelli  
Principal Planning Officer – Strategic Transportation

**Telephone:** (01656) 642528

**Email:** [joseph.cassinelli@bridgend.gov.uk](mailto:joseph.cassinelli@bridgend.gov.uk)

**Postal address:**  
Planning & Development Services  
Communities Directorate  
Civic Offices, Angel Street  
Bridgend  
CF31 4WB

**Background documents:**

- 1) EIA Screening Report
- 2) Pencoed – Improving Community Connectivity WeITAG Stage Two Report (August 2020)