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News

[Brexit](#)

[Natural Health Service](#)

[Our Land Our Future](#)

[Voice for nature](#)

[What's On](#)

[30 Days Wild](#)

[My Wild Life](#)

[Every Child Wild](#)

[Inspiring People](#)

[Back to news listings](#)

M4 relief road will increase carbon emissions say experts

Tuesday 24th March 2015



Wildlife Trusts Wales, Gwent Wildlife Trust and Friends of the Earth Cymru will this week hear the verdict of a judiciary review for the proposed M4 relief

road.

The environmental organisations have questioned the legality of The Welsh Government's decision to create a new 14 mile stretch of motorway, known as the 'black route', which will cut across the Gwent Levels landscape destroying much of its wildlife habitat.

Now, a new report by climate change experts [Professor Kevin Anderson](#) and [Dr Steven Glynn](#) concludes that this preferred route will "almost certainly lead to an increase in total carbon emissions".

The report, commissioned by Wildlife Trusts Wales and presented to the [Climate Change Commission Wales](#) (CCCW), also states that:

"it is evident that insufficiently rigorous analysis has been presented to appropriately address the implications of the M4 proposal for the total level of greenhouse gas emissions".

The Welsh Government has argued that a [new M4 will reduce congestion and greenhouse gas emissions](#) and make "Wales more resilient to the effects of climate change".

However, Professor Anderson and Dr Glynn highlight three significant sources of greenhouse gas emissions that the Welsh Government failed to take account of in their deliberations; namely that:

1. New roads will generate new traffic increasing both short term and long traffic numbers with limited relief to alternative routes. This increase in traffic will increase, rather than decrease, greenhouse emissions.
2. The embedded carbon from the manufacturing, and maintenance of, energy-intensive construction materials (e.g. concrete, tarmac and steel), as well as fuel consumed by construction equipment. This will create significant greenhouse gas emissions.
3. Disturbance of 9kms of the Gwent Levels carbon rich soils will likely cause these soils to emit potentially vast amounts of stored greenhouse gases.

The report concludes that "if the Welsh Government is to uphold its repeated climate change commitments and develop evidence-based policies informed by science it is difficult to envisage how the M4 relief road can be justified..."
The Welsh Government has already committed to reducing its climate change contribution by 3% per year and 40% by 2020.

Last week, it passed groundbreaking legislation on sustainable development, known as the Well-Being of Future Generations Bill, which will require all public bodies to embed climate change into their decision making. Further legislation will ensure that there is a clear pathway for climate change action that will guide investment and future delivery.

James Byrne, Living Landscapes Manager, at Wildlife Trust Wales said:

"The Welsh Government's commitment to pursue the M4 significantly contradicts the government's call for a more sustainable Wales.

"Wildlife Trusts Wales has commissioned this report in order to highlight the inconvenient truth that a new motorway will increase Wales's contribution to climate change not reduce it. We urge the Welsh Government to seek more sustainable transport solution that reduces our dependence on fossil fuels and protects our most precious places for people and wildlife."

Rachel Sharp, CEO of Wildlife Trusts Wales, said:

“Let’s not make the challenge of avoiding dangerous climate change even harder with projects that increase our climate change contribution and lock us into carbon intensive activities and infrastructure.

“If the Welsh Government is truly committed to promoting sustainable living for future generations, it must be bolder, have a higher level of ambition and look for better, more innovative, twenty-first century solutions to congestion.”

Download the ‘The potential impact of the proposed M4 relief road on greenhouse gas emissions’- Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at Manchester University / Sustainable Change Co-operative - below.

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tyndall_centre_-_the_potential_impact_of_the_proposed_m4_relief_road_on_greenhouse_gas_emissions.pdf	650.99 KB

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