



Trunk Road Communities Fight for Safety

The stress and the dangers of living in communities split in half by trunk roads was brought home to local politicians and Welsh Government officials on a recent visit to villages on the A470 and the A40. Residents and businesses from Llanhamlach, Nant Ddu, Llanspyddid and Libanus described what it is like to live with heavy lorries, motorcycle convoys and an increasing number of cars, travelling at speed past their front doors.

The Welsh Government is currently undertaking a review of speed limits on roads which divide these communities and wanted to listen to residents and community councillors explain just how they are affected. Sheena Hague, Deputy Director of Network Management Division, Welsh Government was joined by Roger Williams MP, Kirsty Williams AM and Powys Councillor Liam Fitzpatrick. They heard that many accidents are not even reported to the police. Cars crashing into walls and hedges are helped out by local people and unless there is serious damage or injury they do not count in the official statistics.

All the communities affected have grown over the last few years, with tourist, pub and hotel businesses attracting a considerable amount of local traffic. This, combined with the increase in through traffic going at speed, creates a constant potential for accidents. Kirsty Williams stressed that local people must be heard; their observations and concerns hold the greatest importance as they live and work alongside these trunk roads and experience the issues on a daily basis. Their views, therefore, need to influence the final decision.

In the villages of Llanhamlach, Llanspyddid and Nant Ddu, there is currently no reduction in the national speed limit of 60mph. The risks involved in crossing the traffic lane to turn into or off the road were common to everyone who spoke. Each community had its own specific issues but they were united in wanting the speed limit to be reduced locally to at least 50mph and preferably 40mph. Community Councillor Paul Cravos of Libanus, where there is already a 50mph limit said even that was too fast.

Llanhamlach residents are also asking for a footpath. As a vivid illustration of how frightening the experience can be for an ordinary pedestrian, Mrs Anna Reed, Manager of Peterstone Court Hotel pushed her baby along the A40 from the Peterstone Court turning to The Old Ford Pub in Llanhamlach - the only route for her but one with no footpath. She said, "This was an extremely dangerous undertaking and only rendered possible by the all-terrain nature of the pram allowing me to push it up the bank every time a car passed. This was not in any way intended to prove a point, I didn't have a car that day (or a babysitter) and this was my only means of getting there."

In Nant Ddu, holidaymakers at the Coed Owen Bunkhouse, owned by Netty and Baden Reese found crossing the A470 to the Nant Ddu Lodge equally stressful. Adrian Wilson, Manager of the Nant Ddu Lodge which is set to expand with 30 more rooms said, "My concern is that even with our existing trade, customers continue to 'run the gauntlet' of pulling out onto a very busy road where traffic often passes by at speeds in excess of 100 miles an hour. Motorbikes, particularly at the weekend, are the worst offenders where the A470 is quite simply a speed track...however heavy lorries also pose a huge problem as they pick up speed down the hill. A speed reduction programme, whether it be signage or in my opinion cameras, is essential to reduce damage to properties locally and also human lives. I would urge this happens sooner rather than later..."

Dr Mervyn Bramley, Community Councillor in Llanhamlach, said to Sheena Hague, "Local communities expect the Welsh Government to be consistent in interpreting its own guidance on setting local speed limits. This guidance was introduced in 2009 with the specific purpose of developing safer and sustainable environments for rural communities."

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The Minister for Transport, Edwina Hart AM, has since written to Kirsty Williams confirming that the information gathered by Sheena Hague on her visit will be used to inform the Welsh Government's current review of speed limits on trunk roads in Wales. Residents wait with hope that the outcome of the review will be favourable for the four villages when the Welsh Government announces this in late 2014.

Notes from Residents' meetings with Sheena Hague, July 2014:

Llanhamlach

1. Safety issues on the A40 through Llanhamlach have been a concern to people living and working in the area for a number of years. (Gordon Jones produced correspondence with the Welsh Assembly Government dating back to 2003)
2. A problem with Police statistics is that small incidents may not be recorded. Police statistics may not therefore form an entire record. This is a small self-reliant community where locals tend to sort many shunts out themselves.
3. Drivers coming off the dual carriageway into Llanhamlach are not always aware that the speed limit has decreased.
4. Many drivers who know of the bends in the A40 2-3 miles towards Bwlch use the Llanhamlach stretch to overtake.
5. Locals are aware of speed restrictions in other villages of similar size and feel they have as strong a case to be treated equitably.
6. Residents, workers and visitors turning onto the A40 or from A40 are in danger of collision with vehicles going too fast and/or being on the wrong side of the road because they're overtaking. The Police have previously even advised residents to overshoot and turn around to avoid the danger of collision.
7. The section of road between The Old Ford Inn and Peterstone Court has no footpath leaving pedestrians with no choice but to walk on the A40. This is a popular route for visitors staying in Llanhamlach.
8. Roger Williams pointed out that many of the turnings off the A40 in the village would not be permitted under current planning regulations. The special needs relating to these should be recognised by the review. The two turnings to Peterstone Court Hotel and the Old Ford Inn can each have over 100 cars a day turning off, and then onto, the A40 on busy weekends.

Nant Ddu

1. Over the last few years the community of Nant Ddu has grown and developed with two major businesses, Nant Ddu Lodge Hotel and the Coed Owen Bunkhouse. This combination of much-increased visitor and local traffic combined with the heavy flow of through traffic presents serious road safety issues.
2. Nant Ddu Lodge, which already runs at 75% occupancy, with more than 20,000 visitors a year, has been granted planning for 30 more rooms. Coed Owen is, within less than two years of opening, regularly accommodating more than 20 people and their cars, a night.
3. Visitors also come on a daily basis, to walk, and to use the restaurant and spa facilities at the hotel.
4. All of this extra business means that Nant Ddu is a flourishing and sustainable community which sees its future growth compromised by these very present traffic hazards.
5. At one time the switchback road leading to Nant Ddu from Brecon had a natural traffic calming effect. But road improvements have reduced what was once called, "the seven hills" to a flat fast road leading down

hill into the village. So these road improvements have had a negative knock on effect with traffic arriving at speed into Nant Ddu.

6. There are two blind spots, one on each side of the A470, in the village created by bends in the road. Because of these blind spots, traffic accessing/entering premises on both sides of the road is particularly vulnerable when crossing the carriageway.

7. Pedestrians crossing the road, from bunkhouse and homes on that side of the road, to the Lodge find the experience very stressful, especially with children.

8. At the current speed limit of 60mph, the number of cars veering out of control, knocking down walls, running into hedges and other more dangerous accidents has increased dramatically. Many of these are not reported with local farmers and residents helping out at the scene and as a consequence the official statistics about accidents here are probably inaccurate.

9. The Royal Mail post box was moved from the “residential” side of the road to the Nant Ddu Lodge side after it was repeatedly knocked over by cars. But the danger to pedestrians having to cross the road to post a letter was considered too great and it has now been moved back over the road in front of the house called Glan Nant.

10. Residents of Glan Nant, Mr and Mrs Prosser, say the wall in front of their home has been rebuilt at least five times following accidents. (see photos on Llanfrynach Community Council website)

12. Nant Ddu is the last community on the school bus run from Brecon and the school bus has to use a farm track in order to do a U turn on the A470, to make the return journey. The danger to schoolchildren is a real concern.

13. The amount of heavy freight on the road has increased.

14. As the centre for medical care for residents of Brecon is expected to move from Neville Hall, Abergavenny to Prince Charles at Merthyr, and the shopping facilities in Merthyr (new M&S etc) increase, the traffic on the road is expected to increase even further.

15. Accidents mean the road has to be regularly closed and traffic, including emergency traffic, diverted.

16. Motorcyclists, often in gangs, are a real danger. Motor cycling magazines advertise this stretch of road as having potential to do 100mph. Magistrates should be encouraged to better understand the issues relating to the danger of this motor biker’s culture.

Common source information for Llanhamlach and Nant Ddu

If Nant Ddu and Llanhamlach are to continue to thrive as major visitor attractions and as sustainable communities into the future, a reduction of the speed limit and its enforcement are vital.

Background information on the Welsh Government’s Review of Local Speed Limits on Trunk Roads is available on the Llanfrynach Community Council website - see below. This includes photos of Nant Ddu accidents, Kirsty Williams’ questions in the Senedd, and two Notes with maps on the traffic safety issues in Llanhamlach and Nant Ddu.

Web page: http://www.llanfrynach-community.org.uk/public_html/community-council/other-information/

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Updated 26 August 2014 - last para re Minister’s reply