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Ein Cyf/Our Ref:		Eich Cyf/Your Ref:	DT/cssw/20150303	Dyddiad/Date:	3 March 2015

Kirsty Cilia,
Team Support
Chamber and Committee Service
National Assembly for Wales

Dear Sirs,

Welsh Government Inquiry into Value for Money of Motorway and Trunk Road Investment.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide views to the above Inquiry. I apologise for the late submission of comments.

I am writing on behalf of The County Surveyors' Society (Wales). CSS Wales is the professional association of all the Directors/Heads of Service of technical services in Wales. Membership includes all 22 of the Welsh unitary authorities.

In providing these views, it is to be stressed that they are provided in a constructive aspect, and are intended to help develop the existing excellent working relationships with the other local authority stakeholders, service providers, local communities, WG and the trunk road agencies.

Local authorities view the strategic road network as of vital importance to improving the economy of individual counties, and the whole of Wales. The perception, the availability and efficiency of the strategic network as viewed by industry and the travelling public, is a crucial factor to any future investment and business development.

A number of local authorities (LA's) are involved in regional maintenance arrangements for operational services to Welsh Government (WG), via their Trunk Road Agents. The provision of motorway and trunk road maintenance services includes routine highway maintenance, emergency response, and winter maintenance.

1) Whether the WG's approach to delivery of major trunk road projects provides value for money:

A. The effectiveness of WG planning and costing of schemes.

The planning of schemes and combining links with other forms of public transport are crucial to develop sustainable growth.

It is considered that there are in some cases the opportunity to improve the information flow from WG to local communities, for example announcements relating to the programmes of proposed schemes, particularly where these cannot be delivered on time, possibly for good reason. One example quoted by a member is the £45M, M4 Brynglas Tunnel improvement scheme, that was due to be completed this financial year. To date no works have been undertaken, consequently, the strategic network and surrounding LA networks are potentially more at risk.

An illustration of the current WG good practice dialogue with local communities was provided in relation to the series of A465 Heads of the Valleys improvements, which was noted as being positive. Even though challenging schemes such as these will inevitably cause disruption, the local community in the main, understand and welcome the potential safety improvement and economy benefits of the schemes.

B. The approach to project delivery and evaluation of projects.

Some concern has been expressed regarding the delivery of certain schemes. Some are relatively small schemes, but create regular and significant problems to local communities when the strategic network is not available, and trunk road traffic has to be diverted onto unsuitable LA roads. Residents are put at risk and the LA diversion route extensively damaged. The public perception of local authorities and WG has the potential to be harmed by these events.

2) The extent to which the current approach to routine maintenance and improvement of the network via Trunk Road Agents has delivered value for money

The comments in this section are in the context of a number of Councils being in a supply partnership, to provide trunk road maintenance services to WG, via their trunk road agents

In relation to South Wales, in 2009, the eight individual local authorities that were providing routine highway maintenance, emergency response and winter maintenance services on the trunk road network in South Wales, reorganised themselves into a body of three lead authorities and five partner authorities. The primary goals were to reduce overheads, reduce the number of interfaces between the LA service providers and the WG managing agents, SWTRA, and to provide a consistent level of service delivery, throughout South Wales. The level of service is based on a significantly detailed and priced service level agreement document, with the designated WG agent authority, Neath Port Talbot.

The current SWTRA SLA document was redrafted in 2012 and is based on a 3 year, 1 year+1 year performance based contract. The LA's produced an average 6% saving on the major components of the SLA, and offered an annual Retail Price Indicator minus 2% reduction, for each year of the SLA. The performance criteria have been met and the SLA arrangement extended to April 2016.

Feedback from Society Members is that it is considered the current public service model, which has been continually refined since 2006, has reduced costs year on year, and produced a quality assured service, that has been performance based and measured. The view expressed is that the WG can be assured that the prices indicated within the SLA for cyclical activities, will be the actual outcome costs. The intention is to enable WG to accurately forecast its maintenance costs, for a period of years ahead.

The LA's are all committed to provide a premier service, and have local knowledge, local resources and local SME's available to meet any demand required. The aspects of emergency response and winter maintenance are crucial aspects of the service, and must be available 24/7.

The LA's working closely in conjunction with trunk road agencies, the Police, the Fire Service, the Ambulance Service and the excellent trunk road Traffic Officers, has produced a cadre of service orientated public service employees, who often work in difficult and hazardous circumstances, and who take a pride and ownership of the network.

3) How the maintenance and improvements functions delivered by Trunk Road Agents can be improved, in the context of the on going Welsh Government review of these agents.

The ongoing collaborative approach is positive and essential. Particular feedback from the SWTRA region was highlighted, in terms of efficiency, consistency and ongoing reducing LA costs to the WG.

A potential next step could be the closer integration of the LA's and the managing agent, to ensure that staff overheads are as effective as possible, and to use the LA's in house public sector consultancy resources, when cost effective to do so.

It is considered that works on the strategic network could be undertaken more efficiently, if network access was improved, and priority given to the LA service providers. However, it is acknowledged that this is not easy, as other contractors must be accommodated and could only move forward on the basis that delays to the travelling public are reduced to the minimum.

Some consideration could be given to trunk road agents developing communications with the local community, to that end they could interact with community groups that are directly affected by the strategic network. Many trunk roads influence the daily environment of residents, who are sometimes confused by the different management approaches to the trunk road network and the adjacent LA highway network, such as the approach to street lighting switch offs.

I hope this feedback is of assistance to your Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "D. Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Darren Thomas
Chair County Surveyors' Society (Wales)

cc: Rob Evans, Secretary CSS Wales Engineering Subgroup