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The Welsh Government has today (15 March 2016) published the draft orders for the highly controversial M4 black route. The decision to proceed with this highly controversial £1.1 billion motorway, which would run through the heart of the Gwent Levels, instead of considering cheaper and more sustainable options, would have serious implications for Welsh taxpayers and the environment. It is likely that the real cost of the black route could be as much as £2 billion as the Welsh Government has not included VAT in its estimations.

This announcement comes in spite of:

- a cheaper and less damaging alternative known as the blue route (£380m) produced by Transport Professor Stuart Cole from The University of South Wales
- a highly critical report on the M4 proposals from the National Assembly's Environment and Sustainability Committee who published a critical report that took evidence from many stakeholders including Wildlife Trusts Wales and Natural Resources Wales
- a report to the Climate Change Commission Wales from the UK's leading climate change scientist that highlighted that building the black route would significantly increase Welsh climate change emissions
- an open letter to the First Minister from ten of Wales' leading conservation charities that highlighted that the M4 black route would have a significant impact on the environment and is at odds with the Welsh Government's commitments to halt the loss of wildlife, reduce its climate change impact and create a more sustainable Wales.

The Welsh Government's preferred option, known as the black route, would cut through the Gwent Levels, irreparably damaging 9kms of nationally important sites for wildlife. It is likely that the Black Route will not be completed until the mid-2020s while Professor Cole's route could have been in operation by 2019.

Ian Rappel, Chief Executive of

Gwent

Wildlife Trust, said:

“It is an incomprehensible decision to spend vast amounts of public money destroying a unique landscape when cheaper more sustainable alternatives haven’t been fully considered. We have been working to protect the amazing wildlife of the levels for over fifty years, and we will continue to defend them in any way we can.”

Edwina Hart, Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, declined to appear before the Environment Committee and also refused to meet representatives from environmental organisations

at any time. The planning application, with its thousands of pages of technical information, is only open for 55 days making proper scrutiny of the application challenging.

The Welsh Government has not produced any economic analysis for the scheme. At a time when local authority budgets and other public services around Wales are being cut, the Welsh Government has not stated how it intends to fund the scheme (as the borrowing powers will likely only cover

£500m

) or what will not be funded if this revenue is spent on one infrastructure project in south east Wales.

James Byrne, Living Landscapes Manager for Wildlife Trusts Wales, said:

“To justify building a motorway to bypass a motorway, the Welsh Government is prepared to rip up its own as well as international commitments to protecting the loss of biodiversity, reducing climate change emissions, promoting sustainable forms of transport and embedding sustainable development into every aspect of government policy.”

“The decision to approve a scheme that is economically and environmentally damaging means the Government has failed its own duty of sustainable development. The fact that there is such a short response period (consultations normally run for 90 days) is also worrying and as the closing date is the immediately before the Welsh elections, it will be left to the next Welsh Government to decide if the black route goes ahead.”

CALM urges those concerned about the environmental and economic implications of the black route to response to this consultation.

All responses should be sent to arrive at the Welsh Government no later than 4 May 2016

Responses should be posted to:

Orders Branch

Transport

Department for Economy, Science and Transport

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

Alternatively, you can email responses to

info@m4-can.co.uk

. For more information visit

gov.wales/m4newport

There are also a set of public exhibition dates this week and next. If you can go along and underline your thoughts on how damaging this proposal will be for the natural environment and the Gwent Levels then please do, they are;

Magor - Ebenezer Baptist Church

The Square, Magor, NP26 3HY

Thursday 17 March

11am - 7:30pm

Friday 18th March
11am - 7:30pm

Nash □ - Nash Community Centre
St Mary's Road, Nash, NP18 2DD
Monday 21 March
11am - 7:30pm

Tuesday 22 March
11am - 7:30pm

Castleton □ - Castleton Village Hall
Marshfield Road, Castleton, Cardiff, CF3 2UW
Wednesday 23 March
11am - 7:30pm

Thursday 24 March
11am - 7:30pm

Caerleon □ - Caerleon Town Hall
Church Street, Caerleon, Newport, NP18 1AW
Wednesday 30 March
11am - 7:30pm

Thursday 31 March
11am
- 7:
30pm