



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Summary Report

Social Assessment of Section 3 of the A465 Heads of the Valleys Road: Brynmawr to Tredegar

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DRAFT REPORT

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1 Introduction

The aim of this summary report is to provide a brief overview of the key findings of a **social assessment** of the social and distributional impacts of the A465 Heads of the Valleys Dualling: Section 3 Brynmawr to Tredegar road improvement scheme. Other reports that accompany the assessment, and can be accessed at <http://www.its.leeds.ac.uk/research/featured-projects/A465/> are as follows:

1. Full Assessment Report
2. Technical Annexe
3. Methodological Annexe
4. Focus Group Report

2 Methodology

The study piloted a newly devised, “mixed methods” approach to the social assessment of transport projects, which was commissioned by the Welsh Government in specific recognition of the need for improved guidance in this area of project delivery. The methodology involves a combination of GIS-based and desk-based analysis of quantitative datasets with qualitative fieldwork studies, including local area ‘foot surveys’, interviews with key stakeholders and focus groups with local residents of five different local communities situated along this section of the A465.

2.1 The six social impact domains

The evidence from these local fieldwork exercises was used to supplement and enhance the desk-based GIS analyses, with a focus on six key areas of social impact:

1. User benefits (and local regeneration effects)
2. Accidents (safety and security)
3. Accessibility
4. Affordability
5. Pollution (noise and air quality)
6. Severance

The participants were also asked to comment upon their perceptions of:

1. The local user benefits of the A465 road once completed in its entirety
2. The local regeneration benefits of the A465 road once completed in its entirety

3. Their personal experience of the engagement process that accompanied the design and construction stage of the project.

In the case of each of these impact domains, the main findings were grouped according to the three main elements of the scheme:

- i) Section 3 - the new A465 Section 3 dual carriageway,
- ii) ii) the former A465 and
- iii) iii) the new cycle infrastructure.

The key stages of the social assessment approach are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

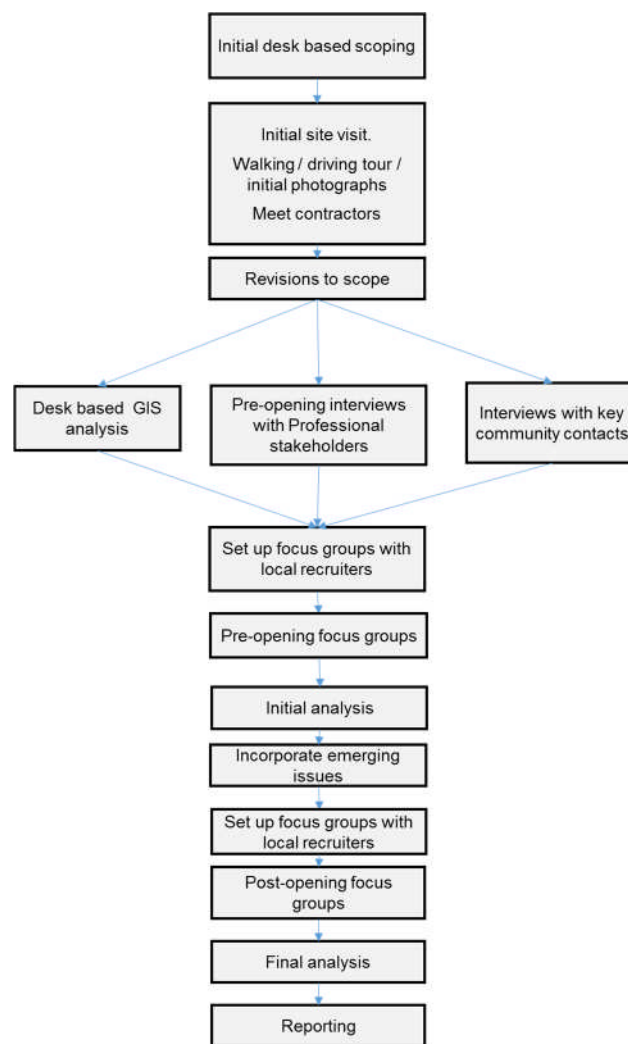


Figure 1 Key stages of the social assessment approach

This mixed methods approach to the social assessment proved to be a highly successful and relatively cost effective way of providing a detailed understanding of the wider social impacts of transport projects on local communities and businesses.

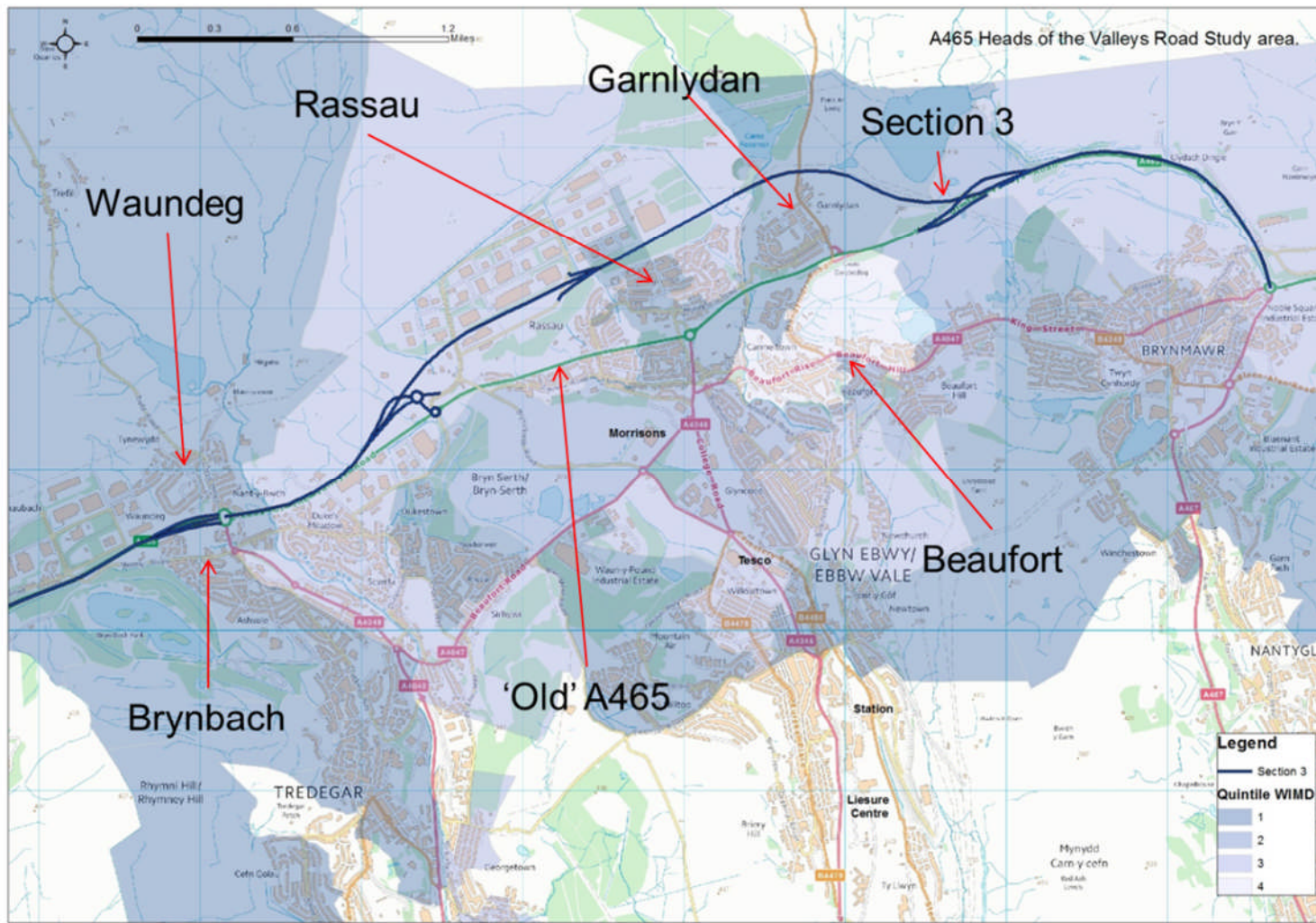
It is recommended that if such an approach is adopted during the ex ante appraisal of projects, it can be anticipated that the approach will allow policy makers to maximise the social benefits of such schemes, whilst being able to pinpoint and reduce any perceived negative associated social impacts on communities in the local vicinity.

2.2 The local communities

Five local communities were identified in the local study area (see Figure 2 map). These formed the catchment areas for the principal focus group exercises:

1. **Waundeg;** A solely residential area close to the A465 and the northern side Nant-y-Bwch roundabout site.
2. **Nant-y-Bwch** is a community on the opposite side of the far western edge of Section 3 of the A465 improvements. A focus group was organised with parents at the local primary school, which lies close to the A465.
3. **Rassau:** The Old and New Rassau residential areas are split by the old A465. The two halves of the area are different in terms of the type and tenure of housing and the socio-economic make-up of the area. The New A465 Section runs to the north of New Rassau.
4. **Garnlydan:** More female participants were recruited at the local primary school in Nant-y-Bwch because it was largely mothers who dropped their children off there. This imbalance was addressed by also holding an evening focus group at the football club in Garnlydan on a weekday evening in an attempt to encourage the participation of more working age males.
5. **Beaufort:** This community lies at the eastern edge of the study area. The A4047 runs parallel to the A465 through this community. The A4047 is a busy local route connecting Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale.

In addition, focus groups were held at the local secondary school at Brynmawr, located at the far eastern end of the study area, to include the opinions of young people living and studying in the local area.



Data sourced from www.edna.ac.uk Ordnance Survey boundary and backdrop mapping

Figure 2 Local communities along Section 3 of the A465.

3 Summary of findings

1. Local residents were generally in support of the new road, especially in terms of supporting the local economy and regeneration. There was general consensus amongst focus group participants and interviewees that the proposed Circuit of Wales motor track site could not have been negotiated without the new road.
2. Once completed, the new road will significantly improve car journey times to the two key Swansea and strategic centres to the east of Abergavenny and reduce road traffic collisions.
3. The new A465 will allow quicker access to more employment opportunities in Swansea and Merthyr Tydfil for people with access to a car. Faster car-based journeys to the local hospital and shops in Abergavenny were also seen as positive benefits of the new road.
4. Local residents generally feel that the noise mitigation measures have worked. There were also no local concerns about air quality impacts from the scheme
 - i. Approximately 80% of all households will benefit from the improvements in air quality;
 - ii. A maximum of 20% lower income household in Rassau are likely to suffer from slightly increased exposures to traffic related air pollution but these will not exceed World Health Organisation limits.
5. The study also identified some negative, but highly localised impacts of the scheme, which mostly affects the most deprived non-car owning residents in the study area.
 - i. For the households without a car, which accounts for 28% of all households in the study area, there will be no noticeable improvement in their accessibility to employment or other key activities.
 - ii. The severance effects caused by the roundabout design and pedestrian facilities at the Nant-Y-Bwch junction of Section 3 of the A465 was by far the most negative concerned for residents of the already highly deprived . Waundeg estate. Residents also have the highest reliance on walking in the study area due to low car ownership levels within households.
 - iii. Links between the A465 project and the Blaenau Gwent District Council's regeneration plans were not evident. There seems little thought within the local authority on how to maximise the potential of the new road or the

traffic-calmed old road and new cycle ways to deliver local community benefits.

- iv. Construction disruption has long term impacts on accessibility which are not currently assessed anywhere within scheme appraisal in the UK, but can have a serious detrimental effect on local people's quality of life and accessibility, as noted in the focus groups.

Our more specific finding in relation to each area of impact were as follows:

3.1 Local user benefits

The new A465 will allow quicker journey times along a strategic route and will provide access to more employment opportunities for local people with access to a car. In particular, the opening up of new employment opportunities in Swansea and Merthyr Tydfil was noted, as well as the potential to access the major shopping centres in these destinations. Faster car-based journeys to the local hospital and shops in Abergavenny were also seen as positive benefits of the new road, once Section 2 is completed.

For the households without a car, which accounts for 28% of all households in the study area, there will be no noticeable improvement in their accessibility to employment or other key activities. The population segments which are less likely to have car access (e.g. non car households, children, young people, and the elderly) are less likely to benefit from travel time savings compared to those in the segments of the population with access to a car.

The A465 corridor upgrade as a whole could potentially bring significant regeneration benefits to the local area, if properly coordinated with other local planning and policy measures. The links between the scheme and local authority regeneration activity were not always apparent. This represents an opportunity for the future. Despite regular interaction between the Welsh Government Highways Department and Blaenau Gwent District Council during the construction phase of the scheme there seems little thought within the local authority on how to maximise the potential of the new road or the traffic-calmed old road and new cycle ways to deliver local community benefits.

When the last section of the A465 corridor is completed an assessment of cumulative social impacts of the corridor should be undertaken. This is because many local area effects will not be fully established until this time.

3.2 Accidents (Safety and Security)

There was widespread agreement that the main positive social impacts locally will come from a reduction in road traffic accidents, but there is uncertainty about the distribution of these benefits. Restricting traffic speeds on the old-road from 50mph (40 mph between the Crown and Ebbw Vale roundabouts) to a local road speed of 30 mph could help with this outcome.

Local residents highlighted a number of the current popular local walk and cycle routes that do not benefit from the new infrastructures as being difficult to use or dangerous. It is noted that this is an issue that could be addressed by the local council in its on-going plans to improve active travel infrastructure in the area and is not a responsibility of the A465 scheme.

The former A465 will continue to be an important road for local access. The conservative decision by the local district authority to introduce a speed limit reduction from 60 to 50 mph may present considerable accident risk for local pedestrians and cyclists using the former A465. There was also some concern about the redesign of junctions on the old A465 road at Garnlydan, which are not subject to the new 30 mph road and so will remain at 50mph. A new signalised junction is being installed at this location, which local residents may not currently be aware of.

It is recommended that a longer-term evaluation of accidents should be undertaken at 12 months and 36 months post opening in compliance with statutory Road Safety and Accident procedures. This should include a distributional analysis of the accidents according to severity, home location of the perpetrator and victims and the socio-demographics of those involved. Pedestrian and cycle accidents should also be recorded alongside some indicator of the level of pedestrian activity alongside the old and new sections of the road.

3.3 Accessibility

The ex ante accessibility appraisal of the scheme was based on outcomes derived from accessibility and traffic models. These suggested that Section 3 and the A465

corridor as a whole would improve accessibility to a wider catchment area, improve access to employment opportunities and provide employers with a larger available labour force. As identified above, these outcomes are likely to be realized for car travellers to the strategic centres of Swansea and Merthyr Tydfil.

Accessibility models were not available for this study, but as there have been no changes to public transport provision as a result of the project, it was deemed sufficient to consider a rough analysis of local car-based accessibility to key destinations in the area using Google maps. This showed that for trips to local centres such as Tredegar and Ebbw Vale, the quickest route is to continue to use the old section of the A465. De-trunking measures may serve to slow the traffic down on this road, whilst decreased traffic flows may speed traffic up; the net effect of these changes will only become apparent over time.

3.4 Affordability

On the whole, reduced journey times by car to the two local centres may reduce the overall cost of transport for local households making the journeys on a regular basis. The socio-demographic profile suggests approximately 28% of local households did not have a car and so will not benefit from any travel cost savings from the scheme.

There are no anticipated changes to the cost of public transport as a result of the scheme.

New cycle infrastructure facilities have been constructed as part of the scheme. The individual links are of good quality and many connect to the National Cycle Network. Users of the new infrastructure are perceived as being mainly recreational cyclists and mostly coming from outside the local area. A small proportion of local travellers may benefit from a switch to cycle use as a result of the new cycle infrastructures that have been provided, but this is likely to be marginal.

It is recommended that the local district council should seek to build upon these investments to promote cycling and walking to local destinations as part of their Active Travel Plans.

3.5 Pollution (Noise and Air Quality)

Local residents generally feel that the noise mitigation measures have worked.

Noise levels should be monitored once the de-trunking works are completed and again when Section 2 work is complete and regional traffic is making use of the A465.

There were also no local concerns about any air quality impacts from the scheme. Approximately 80% of all households will benefit from the improvements in air quality, with only 20% maximum likely to suffer from increased exposures. It is unlikely that these levels will exceed World Health Organisation recommendations.

GIS analysis suggests that there will be some localised displacement of poorer air quality towards the new Section 3 route and in one case the displacement is from less deprived areas into more deprived areas at the north end of the Rassau estate. This displacement effect could only have been avoided at the design stage of the project if the route had been taken further north above the industrial estate. It is unlikely that such a proposition would have succeeded past the appraisal stage of the project due to the cost and environmental sensitivities of this alternative route.

3.6 Severance

By far the main negative local concern about Section 3 of the A465 came from local residents of the Waundeg estate and concerned the roundabout design and pedestrian facilities at the Nant-Y-Bwch junction. Waundeg is particularly deprived and also has the highest reliance on walking in the study area due to low car ownership levels within households. This has been an on-going issue of local public concern during project construction and a number of interim measures have been made by Carillion to mitigate the problem during the construction phase.

New Toucan crossings are now in place on the two slip roads at the roundabout but these are perceived by local residents and the headmaster of the local school to be inadequate for guaranteeing pedestrian safety. The local community has suggested several alternative measures, including the introduction of a pedestrian underpass or a pedestrian footbridge. Both would be difficult to construct given the alignment of the road.

Other non-technical solutions include the introduction of a school bus, a school traffic warden, or more integrated public transport services into Tredegar. These measures are outside of the jurisdiction Welsh Government to enact and remain the responsibility of the local authority, which says it is unable to intervene due to budgetary constraints.

It has been recommended to Welsh Government that further close monitoring of the severance and pedestrian safety impacts should be undertaken at the roundabout and remedial action taken in collaboration with the local district authority if necessary.

4 Recommendations for future policy and research

4.1 Policy recommendations

1. Social assessments should be incorporated into the WeITAG guidance refresh and adopted for all future large and medium scale transport projects.
2. An assessment of cumulative social impacts of the corridor should be undertaken when the last section of the A465 corridor is completed. This is because many local area effects will not be fully established until this time.
3. The Welsh Government should undertake further close monitoring of the severance and pedestrian safety impacts at the Nant-y-Bwch roundabout and take remedial action collaboration with the local district authority if necessary.
4. The local district council should seek to build upon these investments to promote cycling and walking to local destinations as part of their Active Travel Plans.
5. A longer-term evaluation of accidents should be undertaken at 12 months and 36 months post opening in compliance with RSA Procedures. This should include a distributional analysis of the accidents according to severity, home location of the perpetrator and victims and the socio-demographics of those involved.
6. Pedestrian and cycle accidents should also be recorded in the context of an indicator of the level of pedestrian activity alongside the old and new sections of the road.
7. Noise levels should be monitored once the de-trunking works are completed and again when Section 2 work is complete and regional traffic is making use of the A465.

4.2 Recommendations on the new approach to social assessment

1. A full social assessment (rather than a partial screening exercise) of transport schemes should be undertaken as an integral part of the early scheme appraisal. Local policymakers can then consider the social impacts of projects in equal balance with environmental and economic considerations.

2. A social assessment should be conducted during both the ex-ante appraisal and ex-post evaluation of schemes and feedback loops developed to improve the overall design of schemes.
3. Assessment and ex-post evaluation should be staged to consider the effects of each phase of a multi-part scheme (such as the A465 corridor). Assessment should also be carried out following full completion of any ancillary works, which may be sometime after the official opening of the new scheme. Social impacts often do not become apparent until after this settling in period.
4. A similar 5-year after care arrangement for environmental assessment should be put in place to consider the longer-term effects of negative social impacts, such as accidents, accessibility and severance.
5. The data requirements for undertaking desk-based analysis of social impacts are currently poorly served, with data either missing, partial and fragmented or not readily available in a useable form. Welsh Government should establish a data archive and protocol to address this shortfall.
6. Combining qualitative fieldwork exercises with GIS analysis allows quantified results to be verified and helps to identify micro-level community concerns. Training is needed to successful roll-out the method so that it can become common practice amongst transport professionals to undertake social assessments.
6. Qualitative studies can also assist with the engagement of 'hard to reach' and vulnerable population groups. Focus groups would assist in understanding the local context, akin to field studies, undertaken for environmental assessment.