



Focus group 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

1.1 Aims

This report forms a part of the supplementary documentation that reports on a social assessment of the Section 3 of the A456 road project in the Blaenau Gwent District of South Wales. A team of researchers in the Institute for Transport Studies at the University of Leeds study conducted the study on behalf of the Welsh Government.

This report presents a detailed narrative of the outcomes of the focus group exercises that were conducted with local residents as part of a mixed methods approach for the assessment of social and distributional impacts of the scheme.

1.2 Accompanying documents

This report has the following accompanying sister documents

- Executive summary – a short overview of this report focusing on its main findings.
- Social Assessment report – this is the full report of main finding from the social assessment.
- Technical Annex – further technical data, maps and detailed assessment tables relating to the quantitative analyses which inform this assessment report.
- Methodology Annex- describes the development of a methodology for conducting mixed methods assessments of the social and distributional impacts of transport schemes.

2 A mixed methods approach

The social assessment used a mixed methods approach, involving both desk-based quantitative analysis and qualitative methodologies. Focus groups exercises with local residents in the five study areas along the route of the Section 3 of the A465 formed the main element of the qualitative data collection for the study. These were conducted in June 2015, and again with the same people in October 2015. Section 3 was officially opened in September 2015.

The focus groups were designed to facilitate discussion about the perceived benefits and possible negative impacts of the road from the perspective of local residents. They also involved discursive mapping exercises to reveal participants' daily mobility patterns, as well as the landscape and reach of their regular activities. These outputs were later coded into GIS for the purposes of further localised mapping and impact analysis.

Further details on the recruitment approach and methodology for these focus group exercises can be found in the accompanying Methodological Annex. For the purposes of this report, it is important to note that some of the quotes that have been included under each of the topic headings in section 3 also include material from the in-depth interviews that we conducted with the key stakeholders who help us to recruit the groups in their local areas and who are also local residents of the area. As explained in the methodological annex, the key community contacts were interviewed prior to the focus groups in order to get background information on the types of issues the area faces, and more general information about the area in order to prepare topics and references for use in the focus groups.

2.1 The local communities

Five local communities were identified in the local study area. These formed the catchment areas for the principal focus group exercises. These are communities 1-5 below. In addition a community bordering the study area and the catchment of the next phase of the Heads of the Valleys project was identified, Brynmawr – number 6 below.

1. **Waundeg;** A residential area close to the A465. This area is very close to a major new intersection created by the new road.
2. **Nant-y-Bwch;** A focus group was organised at the local primary school, Brynbach 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:** The school based focus group at Brynbach primary school was likely to be skewed towards female participants as it is largely mothers who drop their children at school. This imbalance was addressed by also holding a focus group at the football club on a weekday evening to encourage participation of working males.
5. **Beaufort:** This community lies in the east of the study area. The A6047 runs parallel to the A465 through this community. The road is a busy local route connecting Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale. The traffic flow forecasts for the road in 2015 are, without the scheme, 12400 vehicles per day falling slightly to 11200 with the scheme.
6. **Brynmawr:** is at the far eastern end of the study area. Part of Brynmawr is beyond the eastern end of Section 3 but is included in this study because of the possible impact of the scheme on local connections between Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale, Rassau and Tredegar. The school grounds are also partly being used by the A465 Section 2 contractor (Costain) for the works on section 2.

2.2 Focus group participation

In the case study five areas were identified as the closest communities to the new road: Waundeg, Nant-y-Bwch, Rassau, Garnlydan, Beaufort. Prior to the focus groups an interview was held with the Public Liaison Officer from Carillion (the contractor), who had regular contact with community members, helped identify key community stakeholders. These contacts not only participated in the focus groups, but were used to recruit the community focus group participants. These key community stakeholders also helped to arrange the focus group venues. Two focus groups were conducted within each of these communities, before and after the opening. Also one focus group was carried out at the Brynmawr secondary before

the opening. In total, 32 adults took part in the five community focus groups and 18 at the school (Year 10 students aged 14-15).

Prior to each focus group key community contacts were interviewed, 6 community contact interviews were carried out. The interviewees were asked to describe their community and were also asked questions relating to each of the potential social impacts and distributional domains within the study area that we had identified prior to the fieldwork.

To provide further context semi-structured interviews (guiding questions are provided in the technical annex) were carried out with professional stakeholders from the area and with key community contacts during the before-opening phase of the study. Together with them, a group interview took place at the Welsh Government. The interviews were not transcribed as their purpose was for information gathering rather than in depth analysis, but notes were taken.

The interviews with professional stakeholders focused on gathering contextual information about the district, the road scheme, transport in the area and the domains included in the distributional impacts screening proforma (shown in the methodology annex adapted from WebTAG A4.2). In total, 6 professional stakeholders were interviewed individually as well as group interviews with Blaenau Gwent council and The Welsh Government.

The purpose of the Welsh government group interview (which included policy officers from across different policy areas, such as health and education) was to gain information on the types of methods currently used in decision-making and project appraisal and the processes of assessing social and distributional impacts. Moreover, the interview aimed to gather more information about the provision and sharing of information and data between national and local level professionals in order to get a better sense of the context within which this study was being carried out, and how it could be most beneficial within that context.

The field work was carried out between May and October 2015 as shown in Table 1 and formed part of the overall work plan as shown in Figure 1

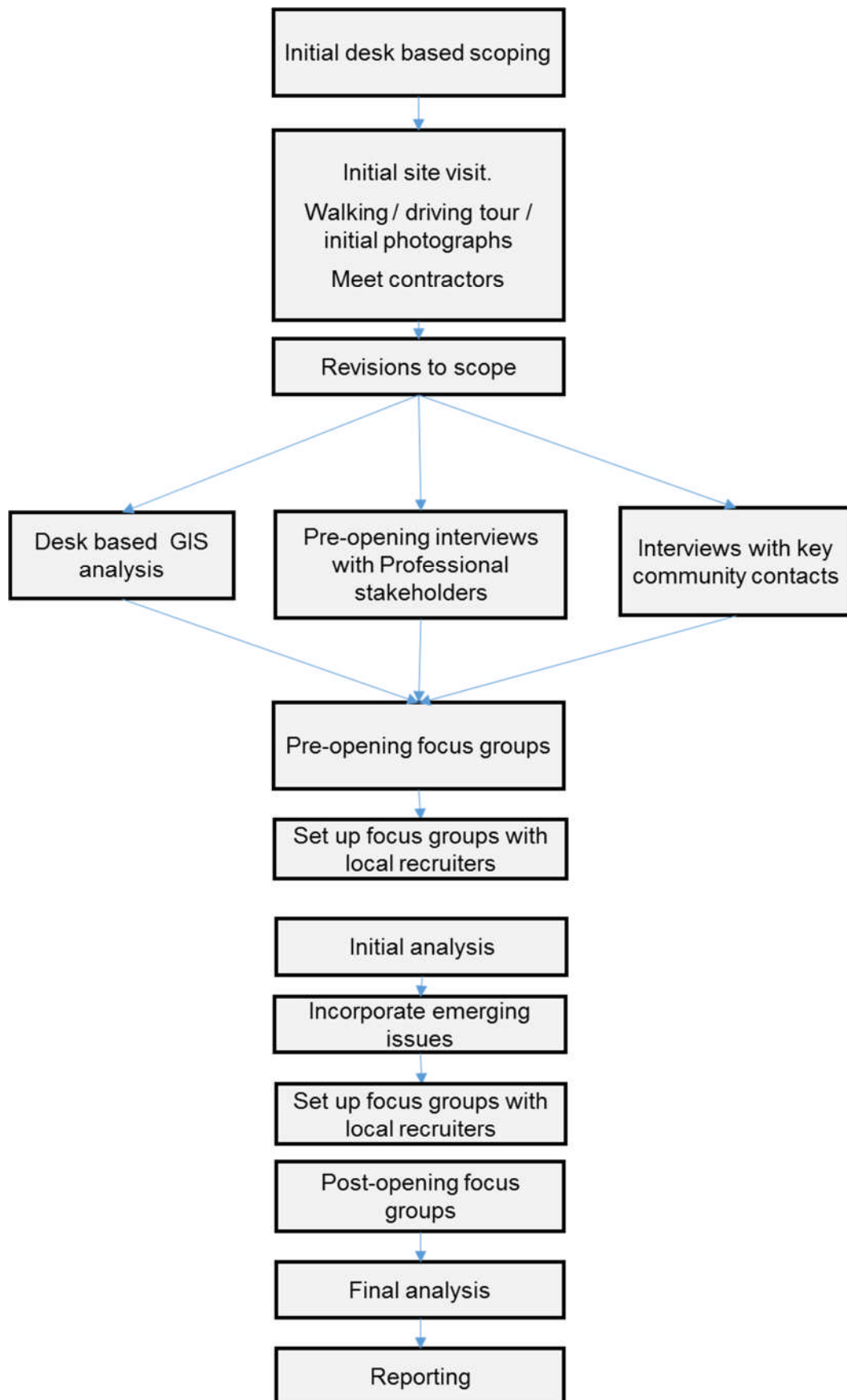


Figure 1 Field work within the overall workplan

Table 1 *Fieldwork schedule for A465 case study*

Initial site visit	27-28 May 2015
Interviews with key stakeholders and professionals	WC 22 June 2015
Pre-opening focus groups	WC 29 June 2015
Post opening focus groups	WC19 October 2015

2.3 The seven social impact domains

The evidence from these focus group exercises were used to supplement and enhance the desk-based GIS analyses that were undertaken to assess seven key areas of social impact:

1. User benefits (and local regeneration)
2. Noise
3. Air Quality
4. Accidents (safety and security),
5. Severance
6. Accessibility
7. Affordability.

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 consultancy engagement process that has 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) the former A465 and iii) the new cycle infrastructure. We have attempted to draw out the participants concerns about each of these

elements of the new infrastructure design but their comments are often overlapping and so not always tangibly related to these specific sections.

The remainder of this document reports the key findings from these focus group exercises according to the issues above for **local people** living within the case study communities along its route. It illustrates these findings with the use of quotes taken directly from the transcripts of the focus group exercises. All the participants' names have been anonymized within the document for the purposes of confidentiality.

3 Focus group and interview guides

3.1 Professional stakeholder interviews

- Can you briefly describe your what you job role involves?
- Can you briefly describe the geographical area that you are responsible for (e.g. population profile, employment, land uses, housing, etc.)? (Past, present and future)
- What are your key priorities as an organisation at the moment?
- Are there key documents available which give further details about these plans?
- How do you think the A465 Upgrade project will affect the local area?
- What do you think the main motivations are for the road upgrade (e.g. journey time savings, regeneration, accessibility, etc.)?
- Will the upgrade directly affect your organisation / clients / service-users, and if so how?
- What key plans (if any) does your organisation have arising from the A465 Upgrade?
- What has been your professional role or the role of your organisation in the decision making process relating to Section 3 of the A465 upgrade?
- What did you think of this process of involvement?

3.2 Community interviewees

- How long have you lived in the area?
- What is it like living here? What is the local community like? Has it changed at all over the years? (Try to pick up on quality of place e.g. sense of community / natural and built environment / social issues/ economic conditions)
- What are your views on the A465 Upgrade
- How do you think it will affect you personally?
- How do you think it will affect other people living in this local area? (E.g. the district and also the local community / neighbourhood - will it provide more opportunities and if so what?)
- Did local people ask for the road? - If not, did/do they want anything else instead?

- Were you directly involved in the decision making process relating to Section 3 of the A465 upgrade?
- If yes, how were you involved? What did you do? What effect do you think it had?
- What do you think should happen to the former A465?
- What other changes would you like to see around here in the coming years? (aspirations and visions for the area generally and how the road fits in with this)

3.3 Welsh Government group interview

The Welsh Government group interview was aimed at finding out about the existing and future practices relating to methods and processes of assessing social and distributional impacts and how these can be improved. It was also concerned with the provision of information between national and local level government and transport research professionals (e.g. local policy makers, consultants, operators and frontline agencies).

- The relevance of social assessment and appraisal for policy
- What are the key strategic priorities for transport for the Welsh Government in the short and long term?
- How does social assessment of projects fit in with these? What are you hoping to achieve from it?
- How are national priorities for transport fed down to the local planning level? (E.g. Is the A465 project a local or national priority?)
- What freedom does the local level have to determine and enact its own transport priorities?
- SDI appraisal in practice
- How do you see the SDI appraisal process working in practice – e.g. primarily conducted and funded by WG or devolved to LAs or contracted out?
- What mechanisms are already in place to share data across levels of government?
- What organisation has the main responsibility for data collection? Is data shared routinely? What mechanisms are in place to share data?
- What do you see as the key gaps in the data you currently have available?
- How much opportunity is there to fund new datasets?
- What types of data do you place prime importance on in making your funding decisions and why?
- Are there any constraints (organisation, financial, political) on you in terms of the data you have and can use?

3.4 Focus group facilitator's guidelines

3.4.1 Before- opening focus group facilitator's guidelines

1. Introduction

- presentation of team and of project aims
- who is the research for
- explain the aims of the focus group
- clarify about data management (recording) and ethics
- convenience announcements and structure of the focus group (45 min + break + 30 min)
- Rules of engagement (it is a group conversation/discussion, feel free to say what to think but try not to talk over each other, etc.)

2. Ice Breaker

Ask each participant to say their name, where they come from, how they got to the focus group venue, how long they have lived in the area. *As they speak layout a map of the new road and surrounding area, with names of places and other basic information on it so the participants are able to identify these easily.*

3. Discussion on the new A465

Kick off the discussion asking: what's like to live around here? (Neighbourhood level, locally, wider area) Which are the goods and bads?

Then continue with the questions: What about the road? Is this affecting you in any way? If yes, where and why? If not, why? Do you think you will use it? Do you think other people will be affected? If so, how? Could anything be done about it?

While asking these questions try to get construction issues voiced to ensure the social assessment issues become the focus and there is enough time to discuss them fully.

4. Mapping exercise

Open the map on the table and give participants coloured pens. Explain the rationale of the exercise and give instructions. (The rationale for the mapping exercise was to collect data allowing us to examine the revealed activity spaces of individuals and compare this to the GIS based accessibility and travel data).

Participants need to mark on the map with different colours:

- where they live (green)
- where they work (yellow)
- schools their children go to (red)
- shopping locations (blue)
- leisure locations (pink)

They also need to draw routes to destinations with coloured pens: green for walking routes, blue for PT routes, red for car routes

Take pictures of the map

5. Break

6. Accessibility issues

Recap the map exercise. Ask participants about accessibility problems or issues they find in daily mobility: barriers to destinations, barriers specifically related to A465, other types of barriers or barriers that affect other groups.

7. Former A465

Think about the former A465: what do you think should happen to it? Will it still be used? For what? Could it be used for something else?

We heard about possible cycle lanes. Is it a good idea? What about pedestrian crossings?

8. Decision making

Was anyone involved in the decision-making process relating to the new road construction? Which was your experience?

9. Conclusion

- Say that we will be coming back in autumn
- Make a summary of the main points emerged during the discussion and ask: is there anything else? Any last thoughts?

- Final thanks
- Give incentives and collect filled in questionnaires

3.4.2 Post- opening focus group facilitator's guidelines

Part 1: Guiding questions

- How have things been in the area since our first fieldwork visit?
- Has anything changed since the road opened? For the better or worse?
- Have you changed the way you travel since the road opened? Either your route, your mode, or your destination for different activities?
- Do you still use the former A465? Has this use changed?
- Hotspots: are there any places presenting particular issues for you; have these changed?

Part 2: Mapping exercise

Mark on the map the following:

- Where you would say the noisiest/quietest part of the road is?
- Where (if anywhere) you would be worried about walking and cycling?
- Where is easier / harder to get to?
- Where (if anywhere), do you think are dangerous parts of the road?

Part 3: Follow up on issues raised by participants in the before opening focus group

- Questions on issues raised quotes from the before opening focus group (printed out)
- Questions on engagement: Have you had any contact from the road builder, the council or your councillor since the road has opened? Or since our last visit? If so, why? Did you have to approach them?
- Follow up on issues raised by participants

- Has there been any change in school attendance? (more Waundeg relevant)

4 Focus group findings

The remaining sections of this report describe the main issues that were raised by the local residents that participated in the focus group exercises, as far as possible trying to communicate what the social impacts of the new A465 infrastructures mean for their daily lives. We have, as far as possible, ordered the sections in the way in which these conversations emerged during the various discussions and in order to present a fluid narrative. This does not always indicate their order of priority for each of the five communities that were involved. Where possible we have tried to indicate these priorities within each section and also in the main Social assessment report that accompanies this document.

4.1 User Benefits

During the first wave of focus groups in June 2015, we discussed with the participants possible general benefits they envisioned for the area from the construction of the new road. One of the key benefits perceived was the possibility for the new road to reduce travel times and make journeys simpler for car users, especially to Abergavenny and Swansea.

Participants expressed a hope that, once the road opened, long distance travellers would not need to use the local A roads, as they had before. Thus the new road would improve the situation on local roads in the residential areas. Participants hoped that the opening of the new road would divert traffic from minor roads, which experienced significant increases in traffic during construction.

This is illustrated by the following quote in which a participant lamented the increased traffic through Beaufort Hill during the construction phase of the scheme:

“There’s been a massive difference with the flow of traffic since the beginning and even now where the road is pretty much flowing on the Heads of the Valley there’s still an increased amount of traffic through Beaufort Hill” (Beaufort FG1).

Accordingly with the view of the respondent, this over-use of local roads was due to the speed limit imposed on the old A465, which made people more likely to use Beaufort Hill instead of the old A465:

“People are choosing to come this way rather than going over the top at the moment, because it is a forty mile an hour limit [currently on the A465] and I think it’s probably shorter to come through Beaufort rather than to limit themselves at forty mile an hour up the main road” (Beaufort FG1).

In this situation, participants expected the new road, once opened, to reduce congestion, especially at junctions and roundabouts, which constituted a hot spot for traffic and accidents:

”One good thing they’ve done away with now with these new roads is a roundabout that’s where a lot of problems, roundabouts. You want the Asda roundabout you can be stuck there a long time if you go on at a certain time stuck so with the new road you won’t go round no roundabouts at all” (Garnlydan FG1).

Reducing congestion was considered as quite an important benefit for local car drivers, whose perceptions were of an *unbearable situation during the construction phase of the project*, especially where considerable disruption to their journeys occurred on a regular basis:

“Because that road, well at the moment when there’s an accident, and all the traffic’s got to go everywhere. It’s gridlock isn’t it, it’s like anywhere it’s gridlock round here you just can’t move” (Garnlydan FG1).

Road users appeared to have had to deal with continuous disruptions mostly connected with the road construction itself, which it needs to be emphasised has been an on-going issue over a 5-year period, as for example around Princetown, which some participants felt was overwhelmed by traffic at peak hours:

“Princetown it’s jam packed because obviously all the people that would usually use the Heads of the Valley are now detoured and they come in through Princetown so at five o’clock or round five o’clock, between five and six you can add at least ten minutes to your journey because it takes forever to get out of the lanes on to the road” (Bryn Bach FG1).

Participants were thus hoping that the complete opening of the road would improve the traffic flow situation. The next quote highlighted this expectation, stressing the issues around difficult access to retail due to congestion:

“You know when the road’s all open like Merthyr, I can't believe you know, the Asda bit. I find it unbelievable because the queuing on this brand new system some days when they come in from like Merthyr, Swansea way to Asda you know sometimes, like the queue, I just think like what all this money and they have all this ground and we're all single file queuing it's unbelievable” (Bryn Bach FG1).

A further final point that emerged has been the expectation by several participants for the road to reduce car accidents, as considered in depth in the accidents section of this report.

After the A465 opening, we ran a second wave of focus group during which we asked participants to do a post-opening evaluation of the road benefits. This ***after evaluation has been partial*** because the area was still experiencing disruption from the road works connected with the de-trunking of the former A465, which was also still closed in parts.

What did emerge from the discussion was that the users who benefitted the most from the new road were long distance drivers and commercial drivers.

A participant said to us:

“The ones that will benefit of this lot is the lorry driver, long distance lorry driver” (Garnlydan FG2).

As expected, the road was able to reduce travel times and improve east-west connectivity, making it easier to reach Abergavenny or Merthyr. There was also an increase in accessibility for drivers that needed to get to the Rassau Industrial Estate and to locations close to the newly provided slip roads.

However, despite the benefits for long distant travellers, the local community, and especially the most deprived groups without access to a car, felt that by and large they did not experience significant benefits from the new infrastructure, as well summarized in the next quote:

“Generally people from Ebbw Vale and Beaufort and all that who are not working, which is as you know we're in a deprived borough, there are a lot of those people who perhaps don't own cars, don't go there ... and I don't think it's would have any difference to them at all in their lives [...]I think it will have

little impact on Blaenau Gwent as a community. The elderly, young children or you're talking about the general community, I don't think any of them will have noticed there's much different, other than perhaps traffic will pass their front doors those that live on the main road" (Beaufort FG2).

Despite a generally positive perception of the new road, participants in the second wave of focus groups were aware that the main reasons for building the new road were ***not connected to the needs of the local community***. This was clearly expressed by the words of a participant that said that the road was:

"...not for our reason.[..] If it was to benefit the people there was better ways I think to do it"(Bryn Bach FG2).

Residents said they were generally benefitting more from the availability of the new cycle lane for leisure use, and those from Rassau the new underpass to walk or cycle to the industrial estate.

4.2 Local regeneration from the new road

Closely related to the user benefits of the road in local people's minds were the expectations that new A465 will support regeneration of the local economy. Their expectations went far beyond local and personal mobility issues and were connected with the local rates of structural unemployment following closure of the steel works and coal mines, the lack of local services and other social issues in the area, such as housing and new employment opportunities. Most participants expected the road to primarily bring jobs which would assist: "the third generation of a household not working" (Beaufort FG1).

Local residents hoped that the road would attract new businesses able to employ local work force, starting a process of revitalization of the local economy:

"Hopefully the dual carriageway will bring more companies to these areas where the younger generation have got a chance to start their working life because Tredegar, in my opinion, is a total ghost town" (Waundeg FG1).

In participants' opinion, improved road safety would also contribute to increasing employment as reported by a respondent from Beaufort:

"Well three lane roads are deadly, old-fashioned. It should never have been a three lane should it? It's going to help the infrastructure now really for jobs and

that's what we want and we were losing jobs because of the road structure” (Beaufort FG1).

Participants hoped the road would encourage the economic growth of the area, as a result of making the journey quicker and easier from Swansea right through to the Midlands. Rassau residents in particular hoped that the road would permit a re-birth of the Rassau and Tafarnaubach industrial estates, which were providing most of the jobs at the moment and were facing a long-term decline:

“It's hopefully going to regenerate the Rassau industrial estate because that's like a ghost town at the moment, Tafarnaubach as well, I think you know as a council perhaps needs to look at the likes of the battery company up on the mountain and get them back on board and say look the road is here now, let's rebuild this factory because that's probably one of the largest employers still available” (Beaufort FG1).

The communities were aware of the need to not only attract businesses to the area, but also to ensure that they were viable in the long term. There had been issues in the past with business leaving the area soon after having opened, as reported in the Beaufort focus group:

“The other problem we've had of course is businesses being attracted to the area to pick up an initial grant or some kind of funding and then running out of money of course and then closing down”(Beaufort FG1).

However, there was also scepticism about the ability of the road on its own to generate the creation of new jobs: “Nothing's [investment / regeneration] going to come [just as a result of the road]” (Bryn Bach FG1).

Participant also felt the risk of the road increasingly making the area a transit area, diminishing the number of people stopping in the communities to shop/visit/invest: local businesses would be bypassed by the new road, reducing customer numbers. A participant to the Bryn Bach Primary School focus group explained us the situation of a local business (a pub and restaurant) situated close to the road, which saw a dramatic reduction in passing trade since the new road started being built:

“[We] had people as far afield as Gloucester coming to the pub if they've been on days out ... Whereas now they just kind of put their foot down and go, had there been and it wasn't just for us there was another pub but that's obviously

now gone but there's nothing there to say you know get on with this touring and use this area so once again Tredegar is, forget it, just bypass it, straight underneath, put your foot down, don't stop, don't collect twenty pound [laughs] just go and it is a feeling of well you don't want to be here, just go" (Bryn Bach FG1).

Whilst doubts were expressed about the ability of the road to bring economic benefits, new hopes were put in the building of the proposed Circuit of Wales motor-racing development, which it was generally felt would not have come to the area without the new road, but with it would bring considerable regeneration in the form of tourism and new local employment opportunities.

The majority of participants were positive about the race circuit: 'it will bring jobs and make the road part of event management plan (Beaufort FG1)'. A local secondary school teacher in the area spoke for many when she said:

"As a teacher in Ebbw Vale I say that to my kids on a regular basis as a bit of a motivation for them the fact is that we've got a possibility of a brand new racetrack on site, engineering, hospitality, a lot of high skilled jobs, language based, unless they step up a gear and actually want to actually succeed in school then those jobs are not going to be theirs, they'll be sweeping the track, they'll be picking up the rubbish". {Brynmawr School stakeholder interview, June 2015]

The Blaenau Gwent area has a long history of economic decline and social deprivation with a lack of high skilled job opportunities. Local people have placed high hopes firstly on the road and then in the racetrack construction as a lever for regeneration. A Rassau Councillor explained:

"This area of Rassau is very deprived area, there's a lot of people on low wages and there's a lot of people unemployed and the jobs aren't out there, hopefully this new road will bring this racetrack. I was in a presentation meeting with that last week and it looks pretty promising, I don't think there'll be six thousand jobs, but if we have a thousand to fifteen hundred that's a lot of jobs". (Rassau stakeholder interview, June 2015)

The expectations for a more prosperous life in the valleys were predicated on the new road according to some, as evident in the next quote:

“We’ve got to try and build on something and thankfully we’ve now got a road which is a blessing when the Black Rock (A465 Section 2) is done it’ll be fantastic. We’ve got to aim now on other things and if the racetrack does come which I’m hoping it will then there’s engineering companies that’s coming with it and they say that they’re going to start taking on apprentices, training and working with the colleges. Now if that did come off there’s the little beginning that’s giving that light at the end of the tunnel but without the new road even that wouldn’t have come” (Beaufort FG1).

It was also noted, however, that other factories were also still closing and so:

“If [the road] does bring in [job opportunity], it’s only really going to offset with what have been lost in the area really, I don’t think there have been many gains” (Rassau FG2).

A similar situation was reported with regard to the Tafarnaubach industrial estate, where, a participant said,

“There’s more empty factories there than ever anywhere I’ve seen” (Waundeg FG2).

In particular participants reminded us of the view they expressed in the first focus group; that the lack of a slip road directly into the Tafarnaubach estate was a cause of future decline and a missed opportunity. The slip road could have indeed “kill[ed] two birds with one stone”, as a participant said, “encouraging more industry and [...] making it safer for the school at the same time” (Waundeg FG2),

The participants felt that the effect of the new infrastructure on jobs availability was very limited: “that’s nothing to do with the road. The road will have an effect on it but I would only say about ten percent [...] Perhaps even less” (Bryn Bach FG2). A feeling of resignation was noted amongst the participants. One said:

“I even got told [...] that the reason part of the layout on the road was done and some of the junctions were done in the way they were was not really anything to do with Tredegar or Ebbw Vale to make it easier for us; it was so that when the race course starts being built the links into that can be made easier which I haven’t got a problem with the race course I’m happy for it to come but I do think who’s more important, us here all year” (Bryn Bach FG2).

Another participant continued:

“Because we’re all tiny little villages you know obviously when the fat cats come in they don't give a damn about the little villages.[...]And we are community spirited in here”(Bryn Bach FG2)

With this feeling of resignation, several participants doubted that the Circuit of Wales would bring direct benefit to the local economy, being a foreign investment, located away from the existing local services and providing its own work-force and accommodation facilities, as people told us in Garnlydan. Also with regard to this project, participants expressed concerns over its ability, together with the road, to attract people to the towns.

A participant said to us: “It would be nice rather than just making people get *through* the area very quickly if we can encourage them *to stop* for some reason and see what is [there]” (Beaufort FG2), whilst another person stressed: “[the road] it’s getting people *through* here rather than *in* here” (Beaufort FG2).

Finally, participants reiterated the detrimental economic impact on the area during the road construction period. A participant at the Bryn Bach Primary School focus group spoke about the effects of the works on Bryn Bach park business:

“They had a big fair all through the summer to try and bring people back for the summer because the previous summer sales had dipped and that I think was a knock-on effect from the fact that we had traffic cones everywhere so you’re not going, if you had to drive here you’re going to drive somewhere else that you haven't got to worry about the road” (Bryn Bach FG2).

Also the temporary closure of the former A465 and the fast changing in the road network redistributed the shopping patterns of residents. For example a resident from Tredegar told us in the post opening focus group that they were “doing more shopping or trying to do more shopping in Tredegar whereas personally I used to go to Ebbw Vale” (Bryn Bach FG2), in order to avoid the disruptions.

Local business people, such as the stakeholder we interviewed on the Rassau Industrial Estate, seemed to think that the road could be generally good, but was not affecting them directly (generalised perception of benefits): they recognise how this work, together with the improved routes to south (Newport and Cardiff) had increased the number of English people coming to live in the area attracted by the cheap housing

market. They highlighted the fact that the area was changing, but the regeneration would have happened anyway (e.g. reopening of the railway line from Ebbw Vale to Cardiff).

It was however clear that the road in itself was not enough to regenerate the area:

“There’s not been investment in the last ten years so I don’t see the road is going to make any difference” (Bryn Bach FG1).

Other measures are needed, such as public transport investments:

“That is one of the problems in the Valleys I mean you’ve got this Heads of the Valley Road up there and you might regenerate some of these estates but if you live down here and you’re going to be working twelve hour shifts you can’t rely on public transport so you need a car. Of course if you have been unemployed for a number of years, you probably can’t afford a car”.

Similarly, other participants mentioned the closure of local schools as a big issue for the communities:

“It’s just the way the times have gone, it’s nothing to do with the road, it’s just the school’s closed over there and everybody just seems to keep themselves to themselves now”(Garnlydan FG1).

Participants also commented on other recent investments in the wider area:

“There’s a lot of you know work going on you know but it’s not what you’d call job work, you’ve got a new college, we’ve got a new school, we’ve got a new leisure centre all from European money presumably which is the source of it” (Beaufort FG1).

In particular several participants to the Bryn Bach Primary School focus group mentioned the leisure centre as a destination, commenting with some complaints on its quality:

“The leisure centre was a bit of a farce to be honest, it’s a lovely leisure centre, I have just taken up going to the gym and it was quite nice going there but what I was really disappointed is they wanted to bring businesses to Ebbw Vale into the Valleys, they wanted to bring events like swimming galas and things like that so they were going to put an Olympic size pool in, fabulous, brilliant. So

the building will take an Olympic size pool, they built it wrong so there's not an Olympic pool" (Bryn Bach FG1).

The participants felt that access and availability of amenities could be further improved. They were aware that areas with an aesthetically appealing built realm and quality amenities improved the sense of place and contribute to regeneration:

"Because it is nice to see I suppose I mean round by us as well to make it look nice as well you know because you see a lot of other areas getting things done up and all that and it does present things better"(Waundeg FG1)

In general, local people hope that the road would bring benefits such as more jobs and reduced traffic accidents, but the road as infrastructure in itself was impacting only a minority of drivers and was not integrated in the daily lives and mobility patterns of the communities:

"I go to Asda's it's as easy for me to go on the new road as the old road but I still go on the old road because I just like it, I'm driving past the fields, I haven't got all this traffic to look at" (Bryn Bach FG1)

In the second round focus groups, we found that the construction of the road had not had the expected impacts in terms of attracting businesses in the area or supporting local regeneration, confirming the issues raised previously by participants. What we found was that the road had especially in Tredegar, exacerbated the perception of a lack of investment and marginalisation:

"Tredegar now has been completely and utterly by-passed" (Bryn Bach FG2).

Discourses also emerged around an unbalanced distribution of resources in the area, where Ebbw Vale was perceived as the town benefitting the most. For example the issue of turning off street lights between midnight and 5am was symbolic of this unfairness:

"Our town [Tredegar], is in pitch darkness, Ebbw Vale is lit up like a Christmas tree" (Bryn Bach FG2).

This builds upon similar narratives that emerged in the round one focus groups, when a respondent said us:

"All the money goes to Ebbw Vale and our tax goes high, we are paying for there" (Bryn Bach FG1).

This idea of divided fortunes between the three main communities of the area, Tredegar, Ebbw Vale and Brynmawr is an on-going feature of ex-mining communities within the area, which see themselves as largely self-contained and unrelated to an adjacent community in the adjacent valley, despite their seeming proximity to each other.

It was clear to local people, in both phases of the focus group exercises that:

“The road is just part of a wider set of things so it’s like the road is good but you need a lot of other, you are sort of saying look because of the rail station, because of this, journey times are shorter maybe people will start to see Tredegar as a place where you can get to” (Waundeg FG2).

There was a level of scepticism towards claims of wider economic benefits which might arise from improving the A465, as recounted by the Brynmawr Secondary School senior manager: “increased accessibility will not help the situation”, where there are very limited opportunities for high skills/high pay jobs. Moreover, they expressed the concern that increased accessibility provided by the A465 scheme together with other road schemes in the Newport/Cardiff direction and the rail link would risk turning the Valleys into dormitory settlements.

4.3 Local access to services

A local land use planner who was interviewed at an early stage of the fieldwork voiced an opinion that the A465 project will be positive for the area because it has increased local accessibility to features such as the train station in Ebbw Vale, cheap housing and the green spaces such as the National Park. This comment appears to be from the point of view of benefits to outsiders coming in. This opinion was in contrast to the local community perspectives from the focus groups, especially the ones that did not have access to a car.

In the mapping exercises that formed part of the focus group exercises (see Section 3.4 above), we found that local residents had quite limited travel horizons in comparison to what we would expect from the Census commuting data (presented in the main report). While a few people worked outside the local area, this was not the case for the majority and was not seen as the norm. To the question: “Where do people round here work?” a mother of a child at Bryn Bach Primary School focus groups replied:

“I think it’s like a twenty mile radius usually, I don’t find that a lot of people that I’ve spoken to when I’ve sort of moved to the area ten years ago travel quite a way to their jobs. I used to travel to Cardiff and I was probably one of the few that did a long distance travel” (Bryn Bach FG1).

Similarly, a respondent from Waundeg explained: “generally people work within I’d say a ten mile radius of Tredegar, within ten miles, about twelve miles”. Participants however reported knowing people that commuted to Cardiff for work and leisure purposes mainly by car, but also by the train:

“It’s surprising how many people will live in Ebbw Vale area and commute to Cardiff” (Garnlydan FG1).

Participants also noted being obliged to travel to localities elsewhere due to the lack of local services and amenities nearby. For example, people living in Blaenau Gwent said they had to go to Abergavenny hospital but would have preferred going to Merthyr.

“there’s not much else around here say to go so it’s like as I say travelling further afield so likes as I say Crickhowell or then Cwmbran” (Garnlydan FG1).

A major change in travel patterns was also reported due to the closure of local secondary schools, which have merged into the bigger education complex in Ebbw Vale. This was mentioned by all the participants who felt that it contributed to a general increase in need to travel and was linked to increased levels of driving to other places for shopping or leisure:

Serious issues were raised over the reliability, frequency and cost of local public transport services (and subsequent need to use a taxi in order to travel at night), and of car dependence because of this. The dangers of using other substitute modes of travel such as walking and cycling in the local area were also raised. In particular public transport services scored poorly in the perceptions of local residents. They considered moving around without a car as “pretty horrendous”. For example from Princetown a bus journey to Merthyr would require:

“You would catch the bus that comes from Tredegar to Rhymney Railway Station, you’d get off that on Rhymney Bridge then you’d either have to hope that you’d catch the connecting bus which you usually wouldn’t, then you’re waiting another about twenty minutes to catch a bus to Merthyr and same on

the way back. Usually it's quicker to walk from Rhymney Bridge to Prinetown than wait for the bus" (Bryn Bach FG1).

The journey time via public transport was considered to increase dramatically with respect to car use:

"It takes me three-quarters of an hour just to go seven miles on a bus you know you're going round everywhere, it's maddening" (Garnlydan FG1).

One participant noticed that any daily activity would take a very long time to be performed by public transport. The following quote explained the problems of trying to be on time for a hospital appointment using public transport, and being unable to afford the taxi for the same journey:

"First you haven't got a car from here so you're talking about being out of the house like two, two and a half hours to three hours beforehand and then you've got to come back, you've got that time coming back as well" (Waundeg FG1)

This lack of efficient and reliable public transport services was evident in all the locations. It contributes to a sense of isolation for non-drivers, as a mother of a child at Bryn Bach Primary School, recalled how she felt when she first moved to Waundeg several years ago:

"We moved up by Waundeg and I sort of was like oh my God where am I, where's the nearest shop, what do I do and I moved from middle of the country where we had one bus a week but I still felt isolated" (Bryn Bach FG1).

Walking to the local centre was reported to often be the only alternative to ensure access to services for non drivers: "it's easier to walk" said an older female respondent non-driver from Garnlydan, when asked about teenagers habits moving around the area. This pattern was confirmed during the Brynmawr Secondary School focus group during which male students reported mainly using walking as an alternative to parent's lifts. Female students expressed a greater preference for being taken by car to leisure and social locations. Very few students reported to using public transport. Female non-drivers from Garnlydan reported also walking to Brynmawr [2.8 miles], and: "sometimes we walk to Ebbw Vale [2.5 miles] so we do a lot of walking".

Cycling levels were considered low and possibly reduced as consequence of the road construction. However, participants hoped that cycling infrastructure would improve

cycling rates in the future; for example BG council informed us of a cycle route strategy, as part of environmental improvement work and the Welsh Active Travel Act. During our meeting, councillors informed us that at the construction design stage the council worked with Carillion to design a cycle trail running next to the A465 route, linking to this network. Part of the cycle infrastructure would be incorporated into the former A465 de-trunking process.

In this general situation of low accessibility for non-drivers, the new road was considered to be used by the people that had already access to a car and that went to work in other localities such as Merthyr, Ebbw Vale, Cardiff, Tredegar Town, Abergavenny and Newport. The new road was perceived as convenient for some journeys but not all. For example, participants considered it convenient to use the new road from Garnlydan to Abergavenny, but not between local destinations where accessing the smaller number of slip roads would make for circuitous routes (Garnlydan FG1 and Rassau FG1). Moreover, in the participants' opinions, most local services would require north-south access (except the hospital in Abergavenny), whilst the road would provide east-west connection. So for most local trip types the road would have relatively little effect.

For car drivers, the road was considered beneficial for longer distance leisure trips, as a respondent from Waundeg said:

“This is what we call the Heads of the Valleys Road. We are Valleys people and it will give us more opportunity if you've got transport on weekends to bung the kids in the car and get out and about and show them city life”(Waundeg FG1).

Bus users, however, were not expecting an improvement due to the new road: “It [the new road] doesn't really [help commuting by bus], I don't know what the bus will be like because that, all that's going to be altered.”

It was felt that some places would not to be affected by the new road either positively or negatively. For example, a business representative for one of the factories on the Rassau Industrial Estate reported that although most employees were generally from the local area (Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale, Tredegar), all drove to the factory via a route that was not affected by the new road. Employees would continue to drive there anyway as there was no public transport connection available: the local bus only starts operating at around 8am, which was not early enough to get to work. The

representative told us that the company had not lobbied for more public transport because it had no troubles in recruiting employees. They could indeed rely on the proportion of the local labour force with access to cars.

Participants also said they would be willing to use trains more often, but complained about access to and from stations, speed and frequency of the services, especially towards Cardiff. Trains were reported to stop early at night and be slow. A participant told us:

“The Ebbw Vale line takes almost exactly the same time as the Merthyr, the Rhymney line, Rhymney has got like twenty stops, Ebbw Vale has got like three or four and yet it takes the same time so it’s not very quick that line is it if you are going to Cardiff I mean because it goes down to Newport and then it picks up speed once it gets to Newport and goes hell for leather into Cardiff but that down the valley it’s quite slow” (Beaufort FG2).

In this context, a young participant at the Beaufort focus group told us that “It’s just easier to go by car it is, I do find it a lot easier to be honest”. This not only confirms the dramatic car-dependency culture of the area, but also suggests that it is likely to increase as a result of the the new road infrastructures. This runs counter to the sentiments of the new Welsh Active Travel Act and will only be resolved through integrated planning of its complimentary infrastructures with the local authority.

4.4 Affordability

During the first focus groups, issues of affordability were raised as closely connected with accessibility. As has already been seen, there was a general perception that the car was the ideal mode to access local services in the area, but this was expensive and thus not affordable for a significant number of local residents (although car ownership in the area is generally high for the income profile of the communities, nearly a third of households do not have access to a car). Public transport and taxis were also considered to be expensive.

A participant in Waundeg felt that the only economic advantage of the new road would be fuel savings per mile (but also implicitly ascribed valuing travel time savings in his comment):

“We'll save money using the new... Yes here we've more fuel consumption than over there, you can be over there by half nine” (Waundeg FG1).

Issues of affordability emerged again in the second round of focus groups with regard to the increased distance that residents were forced to cover due to the closure of the former A465. A participant from Rassau said: “it's not really hard to get to it's just you've got to use more petrol and it takes more time”. Residents also believed public transport would become more affordable, “It's cheaper, cleaner and quicker” (Waundeg FG2) and would have supported increasing availability of public transport.

The question of affordability also emerged in the discussion with regard to the planned Circuit of Wales initiative: local residents said they would not be able to access and directly benefit from the new facility provided, as it will be targeted toward wealthier people outside the area, as is made clear in the words of a Rassau resident:

“To be honest an indie car track, who can afford a hundred and fifty pound a ticket for a day like? Nobody round by here”.

4.5 Community severance

One of the *a priori* claims for the Section 3 of the A465 was that it would reduce community severance between North and South Rassau. In the focus groups, however, the most significant concerns about severance were expressed about farthest west end of Section 3 by the Waundeg community. This was less in relation to the A465 itself and more in connection with the new roundabout and slip roads that have been constructed over the top to make it a 'grade separated' junction.

As emerged from the analysis of accident and security concerns in the next section, closure of the Bryn Bach subway is one example where these concerns over severance were raised, compounded by the perception of inadequate pedestrian facilities across the Nant-y-Bwch roundabout. As explained by the Head Teacher of Bryn Bach Primary School, the most deprived part of the catchment for the school was Waundeg, where there was a high proportion of non-car owners/people unlikely to use the new A465 as drivers.

The route to school before construction included the subway, which was subsequently closed. The perception of teachers, parents at the school and local residents who also

have to use the new crossing facilities to access local shops and services in Tredegar (there are no local facilities on the Waundeg Estate) was that the new alternative proposed (crossing several signalled crossings on Nant-y-Bwch roundabout and narrow pavement sections near the Texaco garage) would be more dangerous. Severance thus increased. This has the potential to impact upon children's attendance at school as the walk was seen as too dangerous to be done without adult supervision.

During the road construction, the construction company Carillon provided a bus service for pupils. However, this service ended with the road opening and is not being extended by the local authority who are experiencing budget cuts and have also reduced their school crossing patrol from three to one as a result of these cuts.

Mothers expressed concerns with regard to the end of the bus service in June:

“Well they put a bus on for us up here for our kids but it's finished now when they break up school so we haven't got a bus in September now so like the majority of kids have got to walk down there, past the garage which there's a lot of traffic on anyway so I don't feel safe. You had the crossing lady then by the subway to cross them over there, crossing over by the Crown and then one up by the school but like XXXX said there's only one crossing lady there now so” (Waundeg FG1).

Focus group participants reflected that many parents will prefer to drive than letting children walk in an unsafe environment, as reported in the next quote:

“I will be driving down to school when this bus is taken off until that is made safer basically because it's not safe at the moment and you can't say when it's going to be completed and you think all the traffic that's coming down the Heads of the Valley has got to bypass Tredegar but a lot of business does come to Tredegar and goes to that industrial estate” (Waundeg FG1).

Generally, walking around the Waundeg area was reported to be an issue for non-car owning residents. A respondent from Waundeg told us:

“There's my friend's nan she went down to Bryn Bach school for a Family Day where they go down for the kids and she was stood there for twenty-five minutes when them lights wasn't working and not one car stopped and she's an old pensioner like so a lot of people don't want to go and use it like so we have to

have a bus, well how often does the bus comes up here, every hour isn't it the buses up here so" (Waundeg FG1)

In the second wave of focus groups, we found an increase in concerns about severance, especially in connection with the closure of the former A465 for detrunking. In particular, participants living in Tredegar reported feeling "cut off" or "ostracised". A participant at the Bryn Bach Primary School focus group strongly stressed this point:

"I personally just feel like there's been a brick wall put up. We've done that blue circle, that's like the brick wall that has been put there to stop anyone coming into Tredegar".

Both the old road closure and the difficult situation at the Nant-y-Bwch roundabout increased severance in the area, so that access to Tredegar was considered to be more difficult not only for residents, but also for potential visitors. The potential negative impacts arising included reducing the chance of people visiting Tredegar and other local services.

Participants from Tredegar also extended this perception of severance towards other localities that they found harder to reach given the changed configuration of the road network. A participant to the Bryn Bach Primary School focus group said to us: "I do feel for the people in Rassau and Garnlydan because they've basically been cut off that's how it, they've been cut off".

To confirm this feeling, Rassau residents also told us of their perceived increased severance and unease regarding access to other locations due to the detrunking and changes in junction access points to Section 3. A participant confirmed that Rassau residents had increased journey times and access problems due to the closure of the main access road to Rassau:

"They cut the road off from there to there well that was like everybody's access point down to there isn't it so they've all got to go now either Morrison's and then go all the way round at the moment while that road is cut off".

This perception of severance was further increased by the lack of 'recognition' of their communities as places in the Valleys. Residents reported a sensation of being an ignored non-place, not even mentioned in road signage. This is what they told us in this regard:

“If you were coming from Abergavenny there was no signage put up where to get off for Ebbw Vale. They had a sign saying the works which is all well and good we know it as the works but you wouldn't have known that the works meant Ebbw Vale” (Bryn Bach FG2).

We generally found that the closure of the old road had created a confusion in the local communities. This resulted in more difficulties moving around the local area; participants had often had to change their travel patterns in order to readapt to the new road network configuration. This negative impact may diminish in time as the former A465 becomes fully operational.

4.6 Accidents (road traffic collisions) and security (crime and fear of crime)

Worries about accidents and security were closely related to concerns about community severance. However, all participants in the first wave of focus groups perceived the old A465 as a highly dangerous road in terms of vehicle crashes prior to its upgrade. Consequently participants had very high expectations for accident reduction on Section 3. In particular, they expected the new dual carriageway to be able to prevent dangerous overtaking, as evident in the words of a participant in the Waundeg focus group:

“I think the new dual carriageway will be a breath of fresh air to Tredegar community and communities dotted along the edge of the Valley Road because my opinion was that the three lane road was out-of-date and very dangerous as fatal accidents in the past will qualify for coming in” (Waundeg FG1).

As mentioned in the previous section, for several participants deductions in traffic collisions was indeed expected to be the greatest benefit of the Section 3 upgrade. This benefit would outweigh all the disadvantages, as repeatedly stressed by the participants at the Garnlydan focus group that, despite having several years of disruption during the construction, were welcoming the new road:

“It's an inconvenience having the road dug up along here and they're making a mess here and houses have been cracking from the explosions, hairline cracks haven't we but when it's all done it's saving lives in the end of the day isn't it

that's the way I feel and I don't know if anybody else will feel it but I'm glad it's being done anyway" (Garnlydan FG1).

There was indeed a strong perception in all communities we spoke with of deadly accidents happened in the past along the old A465, though the mapped data suggested other roads in the area may be equally dangerous. The common narrative was however focussed on the danger on the Heads of the Valley road.

Safety concerns were also directed towards the de-trunked section of A465 that in the future might become *even more dangerous* thanks to the reduced usage and the increased possibility to speed up on it. This concern was expressed both during the Beaufort and the Bryn Bach Primary School focus groups and it has been well summarised by the words of a participant:

"It'll stay open but the feedback that I've personally had and the conversations I've had with other people is the death toll will end up over the next ten years rising on that section of road purely for the fact that you're going to have all your young speed petrol heads racing up and down it" (Bryn Bach FG2).

Concerns regarding accidents were also raised regarding the increased traffic on local A roads during the construction phase, as mentioned in the user benefit section. Also roundabouts caused concerns. In particular, participants hoped to have them substituted with slip roads, perceived to be safer, as considered by a participant in the next quote:

"Rhydney for example that was a bad roundabout but there's no roundabout there any more it's a slip road and that's the modern thing today is slip roads instead of roundabouts. If you ever go to Germany on the autobahns you'll never see a roundabout, it's all slip roads and I think it's the safest way" (Waundeg FG1).

During the focus groups, participants undertook various discussions regarding junctions, their safety and location. For example, Garnlydan residents expressed concerns about the junction between Llangidnir Road and the detrunked A465. Also residents, businesses and the Bryn Bach school would like to have seen a slip road constructed close to the local Tafarnaubach industrial estate, avoiding the dangerous circulation of lorries on the local roads (particularly along Merthyr road in front of Bryn Bach primary school). A participant said:

“If they’d had the slip-on by Ron Skinner’s [a car showroom in the local industrial estate] and slip-off at the Plymouth they would have detoured all the traffic”(Bryn Bach FG1).

Participants considered this a missed opportunity that also generated a conflict between the local Bryn Bach Primary School and the Ron Skinner & Sons car showroom, responsible for heavy vehicles circulating close to the school entrance.

The comments above illustrate the location specific effects of infrastructure on perceptions of safety. On the one hand the new infrastructures were felt to increase safety, on the other hand, in some locations people were concerned with increased dangers connected with Section 3 as with the Bryn Bach Primary School case. Here traffic safety and childrens’ safety have been the principal areas of concern during the focus group. Participants believe that the road changes would make the area near them more dangerous for their children walking to school.

During the construction, the subway used by Waundeg residents to cross the A465 and access the local Bryn Bach Primary School was closed. Participants did not feel the subway was the ideal crossing point. However compared to the crossings over Nant-Y-Bwch roundabout a subway would have been preferable. Preferable to either of these explained Mothers in Waundeg and Brynbach focus groups would have been a pedestrian bridge over the road. The bridge was not built due to its high cost, despite the strong complaints, as stressed in the next quote:

“Even with the first lot of complaints that we put to them about the safety of the children and we said about a bridge then and it was deemed too expensive to put a bridge in because not only would it have to be like steps up, across, steps down, they had to put provisions in for people in wheelchairs to be able to cross, that’s why they then came up with the idea of the traffic the lights wasn't it, there was only lights on the one side for a long time” (Bryn Bach FG1).

The constructor proposed to provide traffic lights to allow the children to cross the roundabout and provided a temporary bus service during the construction phase. This idea was the focus of considerable concerns expressed during our visit to the area. A participant from Waundeg, the area most affected by these decisions, reported about this hazardous situation:

“When the kiddies go to school and when people are rushing to and from work they tend to jump the light a little bit anticipate the amber and it’s deadly” (Waundeg FG1).

There were also additional concerns over goods traffic on Merthyr Road outside Bryn Bach Primary School. Participants felt this was a result of the positioning of junctions in section 3 generating increased traffic on surrounding roads. The impacts of this extra traffic were perceived to be congestion and increased risk of accidents.

In the second wave of focus groups, safety was confirmed to be an important priority for local residents and still one of the main expectations for the new road. A participant from Garnlydan stressed again the local priority of decreasing road accidents overall:

“There’s one thing you said there about if you are worried about jobs and that at the end of the day it’s going to save a lot of lives [...] Yes that’s more important. [...]That is the main thing”(Garnlydan FG).

In the post opening focus groups participants reported to believe the new road (A465 Section 3) to be “a lot safer” than the old one, as expressed by a participant from Beaufort. However, concerns were raised over the lack of lightening on Section 3: “this new dual carriageway is not lit at all.[...]I think every dual carriageway should have lights on” (Garnlydan FG2). The new cycle lane along Section 3 and the one planned along the detrunked former A465 were believed to ensure, thanks to their segregation, better safety for cyclists and pedestrians.

During the post opening focus groups traffic along local A roads was perceived to be heavier due to the detrunking road works and associated diversions. These local A roads were still perceived as highly dangerous, for drivers (in particular Beaufort Hill and Tredegar Road), but also for pedestrians and cyclists. A participant said: “Beaufort is really a dangerous place to drive in” (Beaufort FG2). Moreover, the situation of cyclists did not seem to have been significantly improved: “If you know the area you’re not that stupid to get on a bike and try and cycle around here unless you take your bike somewhere like the lake and you know you’re safe” (Bryn Bach FG2). Due to the closure of the old road, participants were forced to use alternative routes that are perceived to be less safe, such as the ‘S bends’ – Prince Philips Ave. between Garnlydan and Rassau.

In addition to this, participants at both Bryn Bach FG2 and Waundeg FG2 reported increased concerns over child safety at the Nant-y-Bwch roundabout, confirming the anxieties they expressed in the previous focus groups. In particular, the closure of the bus service provided by Carillon to the school exacerbated mothers' concerns with child safety during the journey to school. The traffic lights were perceived to be dangerous both for pedestrians and drivers. Participants strongly criticized their design that provided a poor sightline for drivers which obscured the view of pedestrians trying to cross. A mother of a child at the school told us:

"Those lights are ridiculous[...] You've got the lights before the junction kind of thing getting on to the roundabout they're green so people are thinking they can just shoot round and they can't because there's oncoming traffic coming round[...] it is so chunky you can't see any on-going traffic so I can see the need for the lights because otherwise you are just going to smash.[...]If you wasn't local" (Bryn Bach FG2).

Concerns were expressed again with regard to the presence of lorries at the school entrance due to the failure to construct of a slip road to serve the Tafarnaubach industrial estate. A mother voiced her concerns strongly: "Oh it's terrible with the lorries outside there especially when it's time to pick 'em up and it's terrible.[...] But I don't think anything is going to be done until unfortunately a kiddie is going to get killed" (Bryn Bach FG2).

Further anecdotal evidence illustrates the perception of safety in the area:

"Three weeks ago my daughter is Year Four now and she does not need mummy to collect her from the gate but I do and I was walking her back to the car so we crossed the road walking up the street, there was two little 'uns who are a year below her in front of us and I had to shout because the lorry passed us, mounted the kerb and they were there and I'm thinking you are so high up how can you judge if you were not going to hit them or not by mounting the kerb so it's completely dangerous, I've had to shout to these two little boys it was move because I was petrified for them and I'm thinking but there was no need for that lorry to be going up there" (Bryn Bach FG2).

Evidence from the Bryn Bach Primary School and the Waundeg focus groups, suggests that this has induced greater demand for trips to school by car. One mother said the only people that continue to walk were the ones without car:

“I wouldn't feel safe personally myself never mind having an eight year old with me and it's like a little train of people and it's the ones that don't have cars that have to walk down with the children but there's say six/seven children and there's about four adults so they're making sure they've got their numbers right with the kids because [...] It's not really safe and in all honesty I think they'd drive if they had cars, there are cars out here as well, it's only through necessity that they are walking they don't think it's safe either, they're not happy that they've got to walk them down there's no subway, there's no bridge, you literally are putting your life in the hands of other drivers and that's never a good sign really is it”(Bryn Bach FG2).

To resolve this issue, Waundeg residents strongly recommend the reintroduction of the school bus that was previously provided by Carillon during construction. To solve the issue with lorries on Merthyr Road, focus group participants recommended closing the Merthyr road to heavy traffic.

Cycling safety was also a major issue in most of the areas. Most of the focus group participants were not regular cyclists, but participants cited examples of people they knew who used it increasingly for recreation and also to commute to work, for example from Rassau to the industrial estate. Safety however remained a major issue, as shown:

“My cousin cycles to the Rassau and he had a collision with a car so he doesn't cycle any more, the traffic was so congested the car stopped at the stop and he was knocked off his bike so he won't, he runs now” (Bryn Bach FG1).

Similarly a respondent from Bryn Bach Primary School responded to the question “Does anyone cycle?” recalling the perception of high danger:

“Well I used to but that is lethal. I mean in all fairness the school you know they do everything fair play they've got a cycle safety club for the children but I think it would probably add to the congestion because I follow my daughter down on her bike her and her friend because it's so bad the traffic from that industrial

estate I'm afraid to leave them come on their own so I follow them down at dawn time and another mother comes and follows them up" (Bryn Bach FG1).

Generally the overwhelming presence of traffic, on major and minor roads, dramatically affected the perception of safety both for walking and cycling, reducing their use and increasing severance, as explored in the next section.

In Rassau, a participant expressed concerns about children's safety at the tunnel under the road on the Trefil Path, where there was "a little fence about this height, no grid on it, nothing at all so the kids can just walk around through the tunnel, up a bit of a little bank you know only like that and they're straight on the motorway" (Rassau FG2).

The safety concerns of residents suggest negative impacts on children's ability to enjoy the local amenities: "There's loads of kids that say mam can I walk on my own, so-and-so can walk home and I say no. {...} No it's about the safety on the roads" (Waundeg FG2).

During both the first and second phase of this study, participants expressed few concerns regarding personal security, considering the area quite safe, especially around Beaufort (Beaufort FG1). The subway under the old A465 between Waundeg and BrynBach was discussed in relation to personal security issues:

"I just had a bit of a fear of [the subway] I don't know why so I wouldn't but driving up in the mornings I would drop Nicole at school and then I would drive to work and most of the kids didn't use the subway coming to school they were crossing the slip road bits anyway" (Bryn Bach FG1).

All the other safety concerns we heard were strictly related to traffic issues, perhaps unsurprising in an area suffering considerable congestion and car-dependence.

4.7 Noise and air quality

Across all the focus group exercises, participants did not consider road noise or air quality as key concerns. Any residents that might be affected seemed resigned to the

pre-existence of road noise coming from the old A465 and were used to it as a consequence of them living near a main road:

“We hear motorbikes flying up the Heads of Valleys but I mean you’ve got to be a certain person to complain when you live by a road, that’s where you live”(Waundeg FG1).

With regard to the construction of Section 3, residents on the whole expected to continue to hear noise from the road. However, some residents, especially from Rassau, expressed concerns with regard to a possible increase in traffic related noise in conjunction with the construction of the new infrastructure. In this regard, they believed that adequate measures should be taken to reduce noise in the construction of the new road:

“The only thing people are worried about is noise but apparently they’ve put in sound barriers anyway haven’t they. We probably won’t hear it as much up there as we can here” (Rassau FG1).

Other Rassau residents stated that they expected to hear industrial noise, noise from drivers ‘racing’ on the old road, and noise from new infrastructures such as the new gas generators at Rassau industrial estate.

Despite these pre-opening concerns, however, after the opening of the new road residents from all the locations of the focus groups found the new road quieter than expected. This reduction in noise thought to be because through traffic on Section 3 does not have to slow for roundabouts as it did on the old A465 (e.g.as recounted by a participant from Waundeg)

There was some evidence of displacement of noise. The areas closer to Section 3 had increased noise levels, such as the northern part of Garnlydan where a resident reported:

“Before there was nothing behind me it was just reservoirs and lovely and quiet, now in my back garden I can hear all the traffic”.

On the other hand, areas closer to the former A465, closed at the time of the focus groups, noticed noise reduction, especially in comparison with the construction period, as reported by a participant to the Bryn Bach Primary School FG2: “It’s not so much it’s not noisy is it now that it is open but obviously when they were doing it”.

Only in the Garnlydan post-opening focus group did residents express satisfaction with regard to the improved air quality. This reduction was connected with the diversion of heavy traffic from the old A465 onto Section 3. However, at the same time, Waundeg residents noticed increase levels of dust near Section 3.

4.8 Construction disruption

Carillion were appointed in 2010 to deliver the scheme. The principal work on site started in January 2013 and was completed in 2015. The Scheme was officially opened in September 2015. Many residents have experienced severe disruption from the previous stage of construction on Section 1 of the A465 corridor and will continue to do so from the Section 2, which is directly to the east of the study area is scheduled for completion in 2018 (<http://a465gilwern2brynmawr.co.uk/scheme-plans/>). The social (and economic and environmental) impacts of this disruption is not currently assessed anywhere within scheme appraisal in the UK, but can have a serious deleterious affect on local people's quality of life and accessibility, as was noted within the focus groups. Although some efforts were made to mitigate some of these direct effects, issues such as increased dust, machinery noise, heavy-plant vehicular access nuisance on small side roads and most importantly general traffic displacement onto other roads was generally considered to have been poorly managed. Also the cost of increased journey times for this long period of construction disruption is not included within any cost benefit analysis.

In the focus groups, participants reported several accessibility issues in reaching local destinations connected both with the former A465 closure and the Section 2 works. These works caused increased traffic problems on local A-roads that were the only alternative available. For example, a few participants from Beaufort and Rassau confirmed that the traffic "certainly has increased around that area by Morrison's which I wasn't expecting."

The road opening has generated a different composition of the traffic in the local roads, but has not reduced traffic volumes, as a participant to the Beaufort focus group reported:

“With regard to traffic there are less lorries. [...] But there seem to be more cars. [...] A lot more cars” (Beaufort FG2).

The increased use and traffic on local A-roads was considered to be due to a situation of general confusion among drivers that were not updated on the state of the works and often not aware that other options were available. In this situation, a participant said, “More local people are using the side roads rather than the main roads” (Bryn Bach FG2).

Confusion was also generated by the layout of the new road and the unfamiliarity with it. For example, according with a participant view,

“People are not using [the new road,] they are confused and I travel it a little bit but it’s very confusing you don’t want to go too fast because you’re going to miss your turnoff and you’re going to end up when you are going to Tredegar where I get off you end up in Rhymney Bridge” (Beaufort FG2).

Due to this initial confusion, participants, felt less inclined to use Section 3 for everyday journeys:

“I think once it’s all sorted at my, I probably wouldn’t be using the new road that often unless you’re going directly from Abergavenny to Merthyr or somewhere because I probably would still use the old roads” (Beaufort FG2).

In the second wave of focus groups, we found that access times to some long distance destinations had *increased* after the opening of the new road. This is because of the construction that has now commenced on section 2 of the A465, showing that is difficult to separate out the impacts of different sections of the road in the minds of local people (see also section on “Construction disruption”).

For example, a participant from Beaufort reported that:

“If you come from Tredegar [to go to Brynmawr and Nantyglo] you cut ten minutes off it using the new road”. However, he continued that “unfortunately the ten minutes you’ll gain coming over to Brynmawr you’ll lose about half an hour getting into Gilwern” (Beaufort FG2).

Some participants felt that the new road construction is limiting the possibility of leisure walks in the area. They told us that some walking routes have become inaccessible

during the new road construction, such as the Nine Arches bridge walk, as a participant reported:

“We used to walk up to Waundeg through the subway up to you know the Nine Arches we'd cut through Waundeg over the Nine Arches, down Dukestown Cemetery and then back round down into Ashvale, can't do that now because all the paths are blocked aren't they, the Nine Arches is blocked” (Bryn Bach FG1).

This was also commented upon by another respondent in the Waundeg focus group, who considered the local cycling infrastructures:

“I know they've been quite peeved off by the things like the cycle routes being shut for I don't know the reason but no hard reason as in looking at it, it's just that oh we'll just stick fences across and maybe it's the construction site so you can't have people passing but I know people have been a bit wound up” (Waundeg FG1).

Despite this situation during the road construction, especially in the Waundeg area, some participants expected that new infrastructures would be put in place on local roads. Though local roads are not directly part of the Section 3 works the expectation was for a more coherent network of cycle infrastructure to facilitate safer cycling. A respondent from Rassau considered the possible future benefits of having cycle lanes alongside Section 3:

“If you wanted to go to like a lot of kids like go to the Trefil in the summer on their bikes [...] they would have had to go on the road to go that way whereas now if they put a cycle lane in they won't have to be anywhere near the road” (Rassau FG1).

4.9 Local community engagement

Most participants reported a general satisfaction with the engagement process carried out by Carillion:

“I think myself that everything that they seem to have done they've done very, very well, we haven't had really many complaints” (Beaufort FG1).

Several participants, confirmed they had been given plenty of opportunities to “see the plans” (Beaufort FG1). The Rassau councillor, also one of the land owners that had gone through a land purchase compensation scheme, reported having had frequent meetings with Carillion representatives and effective communication with them:

“I’ve been meeting them for the last two and a half years on a quarterly basis which I have found good you know it’s been excellent for us to meet them. We currently have a liaison meeting every quarter with them and any problems we got they deal with it and they know that if they don't deal with it you’ll fetch it up in that meeting and they don't want that but they’ve been very co-operative, they’ve been a good company to deal with, I haven't had all that much trouble with them you know and they’ve done a fair bit for us around here”.

On deeper investigation, however, this positive response needs to be contextualized within a fairly low level of expectation among residents of resignation towards the possibility of being *effectively heard* by the constructors, as shown by next quote:

“We have no control over what’s going on ...There's not a lot you can do really it's a motorway isn't it, do you know what I mean, they just dig it out with big machines, lay all the sub-bits, put the road down, put the signs up and that's it” (Rassau FG1).

This attitude of low expectation and resignation was found with respect to several aspects of the road construction: for example with regard to disruption management:

“People were saying that they were surprised about the lack of disruption and I mean they're expecting a lot of disruption now on the next phase but they were surprised at how well they kept the traffic going” (Beaufort FG1)

A similar phenomenon happened with the noise levels:

“We hear motorbikes flying up the Heads of Valleys but I mean you've got to be a certain person to complain when you live by a road, that's where you live” (Waundeg FG1).

Residents thus expected high disruption and low engagement. In this context, any action that differed from their expectation was seen as highly positive, as in the words of the councillor. The low expectations might also have been expressed by low

attendance at consultation events: “I suppose that you could almost name the people you would see there” (Beaufort FG1), due to the “apathy of the area” (Beaufort FG1). Carillon provided local communities with several consultation and meeting opportunities, but, these seemed to have focussed on keeping people informed about the advancement of the works; “but we weren't involved in the decision making”. Engagement seemed limited to the information stage and only in rare cases climbed other steps of the participation ladders (Arnestein 1969): participants from different communities reported: “there is a general feeling that well the decision’s already been made” (Beaufort FG1); “we were just given the opportunity if you wanted to come and be told what we are doing” (Bryn Bach FG1). The same perception echoed in Rassau where participants said:

“Respondent 1: Yes they had one consultation here with Carillion.

Respondent 2: But that was just to keep people informed of what’s going on. I mean it’s not as if we really got a say in what they’re doing, do you know what I mean”(Rassau FG1)”.

Similarly in Waundeg a participant reported: “ Well we never had much chance to voice an opinion”. These quotes highlighted a sharp contrast with the perception of the local councillor, who felt “very engaged with the whole decision process’. This marks a clear distinction between official stakeholder engagement and community engagement: the former is quite well managed within the consultation process, the latter less so because different processes are needed.

We found however some examples of greater engagement which led to changes in construction details. The Garnlydan football ground represented one positive example. After a consultation, indeed, the original construction plan was modified to accommodate the needs of the local football club:

“The objections that people put in they listened to because they were going to come off in Garnlydan near the football field and they would have taken part of the football field away and they listened to that and they decided not to” (Beaufort FG1).

Perhaps as a consequence of this, we had very few negative comments about the scheme from the Garnlydan participants, as evident in the next quote:

“People have no issues with what they’ve done, they’ve done what they promised they said they was going to do and they didn’t take the football field away when there was an opportunity that they could have and they backed against it they listened to what the people wanted, so we’ve had no issues with them at all” (Garnlydan FG1).

The positive experiences of Garnlydan however were contrasted against the less positive experiences around Bryn Bach and Waundeg, especially with regard to safety. A mother of a child at Bryn Bach Primary School told us, regarding the debate around a possible slip-road West of the Waundeg intersection that:

“If you went back eight or ten years ago when they started doing the road people asked and it was proposed that they have a slip-on and a slip-off up by Ron Skinner’s. It was an opportunity because they were doing the roads anyway so it would have been at little extra cost to them wouldn’t it because they were already doing it and if they’d had the slip-on by Ron Skinner’s and slip-off at the Plymouth they would have detoured all the traffic” (Bryn Bach FG1).

Another mother from the focus group continued:

“But they should have come you know well before and listened and taken into account what local people wanted then perhaps we would have had our slip road on and off at Ron Skinner’s which could have been done ten years ago. No they didn’t, they just come and they did what they wanted to do”(Bryn Bach FG1ent).

The constructor’s ability to satisfy local needs varied thus between areas and, possibly, costs of the intervention required. There were also issues around the timing of the engagement that participants in most of the communities perceived to be done only after decisions were already taken.

Bryn Bach and Waundeg focus group participants discussed a rejected proposal for a footbridge between the two communities, which is illustrative of perceptions of engagement processes:

“The gentleman said so it’s not really viable because it would be too expensive and a woman turned round and said so you are putting a price on whether my child’s safety it worth it” (Bryn Bach female respondent).

Interviews and focus group comments suggest that there was a mismatch between the positive actions and offers of Carillion and the reluctance of the local council to act upon them (this was followed up in a group interview with BG council in the second fieldwork phase). For example, the head of Bryn Bach Primary School informed us that the council rejected Carillion's offer to install sidewalk pedestrian barriers, possibly to avoid taking on further maintenance liabilities or, as pointed out by Welsh Government's Highways Agency in an interview, in accordance with technical guidance on minimum pavement width required so that barriers can be installed.

Moreover, during the interview with the Welsh government, we were informed that, despite the strong request by the school and school users, neither the Council nor the Education Department would be continuing the bus service that Carillion provided during the construction phase. This was because bus services are available only to pupils who are in catchment and over 3.5 miles from school, and are not provided for shorter journeys even if there are severance issues.

Focus group participants recalled this mismatch between the offer of assistance from Carillion and reluctance from the Council to accept them:

“There were meetings but you were just, it was like no, this is our plan, this is what we're doing and it was like but could we do this bit? No, this is what we're doing. So it wasn't a meeting of how would you feel about the road or how would you like us to do it, how do you think we could do it, it was this is what we're doing”(Brynbach FG1).

Despite, as shown above, the overall acceptance of the management of the disruption, some people complained about the pace of the work. Residents were surprised about the works stopping on evenings and at weekends rather than keeping the project to schedule:

“Carillion would rather pay the penalties to have a later completion date than actually pay the extra cost of labour” (Beaufort FG1).

Participants also complained about “metal statues” or other public art initiatives in Tredegar and Ebbw Vale town centres. They saw this as poor engagement and a waste of money that could have spent, instead, in improving access or safety. We are unsure whether the public art was an engagement activity or part of the local council's own budget.

To sum up, the communities affected were not openly complaining of a lack of engagement, but were aware that it could have been done better:

“I think that they [the construction company] should be doing something similar to what you [the research team] have done today then by coming and sitting down with a map, sitting down and things like this, sitting with us and saying what you’re saying so tell me the answer to your question and then they can find out, they can say they are there fighting the side but they’re not fighting anything because they haven't got our side to fight, they’re agreeing to what they think is better without actually knowing what is better for the local people” (Waundeg FG1).

The quote suggests that more time should be given to engagement, which should acquire in depth understanding of people’s needs in the context of the geography of the area. This will inform the appraisal process of the social impacts of alternatives and the distributional effects on the wellbeing of the local population. This should be done before any action is taken.

In the second of focus groups, we found that engagement levels had noticeably decreased since Carillon left the area and, as already emerged in the first phase, a disparity between the view of public representatives and of local communities. Residents were finding often difficulties to gather information about the still on-going construction works, road opening and closure. Especially in Bryn Bach Primary School, Waundeg and Rassau, they stressed the lack of “public information available constantly” (Bryn Bach FG2). Participant confirmed and stressed again engagement issues highlighted in the pre-opening study:

“Well we never had much chance to voice our opinion. [...] it’s still the same, we don't have no correspondence, we don't have no meetings, we don't hear off no one now because it’s done so they don't come and ask us other than yourselves have asked us how it’s affected us” (Waundeg FG2).

Moreover, participants reported it hard to access the necessary information to deal with a rapidly changing road network and strong disorientation of drivers. A mother of a child at Bryn Bach Primary School said us:

“The old road that’s shut at the moment and we don't know what’s happening, no one knows what’s happening”(Bryn Bach FG2).

This lack of information was caused by two important factors.

Firstly, information about the work status of events such as the road inauguration was spread through social media, often hardly accessible to local communities for their demographic composition. As a participant said,

“We’ve got a very, very, very large elderly to use a nice word, elderly community, my mother’s sixty-five yes she’s on Facebook, it’s taken me three years to teach her but how many others are?” (Bryn Bach FG2)

Twitter also replaced the local newspaper that was distributed in the local area and participants complained about the absence of information on the state of the road in the local newsletter produced by the Council.

Secondly, we found a lack of communication between the better informed councillors and their constituents. This was made clear when a councillor said that they would inform local people:

“Only if they make contact, if they’ve got a problem and they make contact with you, you know what’s going on and say oh that yes that’s going to be put right, six months and that will be done but you know you can’t”(Beaufort FG2).

On the same topic, a participant lamented that:

“There was nothing saying, there was nothing from the councillors even was there you know considering they are here for us apparently there was nothing from them and there was several of those councillors on the walk.” Bryn Bach FG2

Together with the lack of information, residents also expressed concerns about the responsibilities for the new road, not knowing whom to contact in case of issues regarding the road (e.g. in case of snow, in case traffic lights are not operating...). For example, with regard to the issues at the Nant-y-Bwch roundabout a participant told us:

“The School couldn’t do anything. I spoke to the council and then they passed me like the council said it’s nothing to do with them, if we wanted to do that that was up to us, there was nothing to say that we couldn’t do it, nothing to say that you know that we could so it was just up to us” (Waundeg FG2).

This situation had left people in the area with a sense of disempowerment:

“You can take as many photos as you want to, you can film it, the only way something will ever get done [...] If there’s an accident, a bad accident.”

A different situation was found in Garnlydan where contacts with Carillon were still being maintained and few complaints were made:

“We have [contacts] through the football club we do because we’re trying to get car parking in the temporary road so save them digging it back up we want a car park so at the minute it’s going through planning” (Garnlydan FG2).

4.10 Final comments

The focus groups exercises indicate that most local people are in favour of the new road even when they do not think it will personally benefit them. This is for two main reasons: principally the reduced vehicle accident rates. A secondary point is that a number though not all perceived the potential for the road to encourage local regeneration. For some population segments, the road will also significantly improve local car-based access to Abergavenny where the nearest hospital is located and Swansea where there are many job opportunities and shopping and leisure facilities.

The new infrastructure will not provide much in the way of improved local accessibility with most people saying they will continue to use the former A465. It was difficult for people to assess the impact of this on their travel behaviours at the time of the study because parts of it were still closed for detrunking works.

Most of the negative social impacts experienced from the communities were connected with the disruptions that have occurred (and will continue to do so) during road construction. These are associated with the de-trunking of the old road and the construction of Section 2: congestion, severance, noise, pollution, increased journey times and lack of accessibility. These disruptions, despite being temporary, have impacted the communities, their livelihoods and economies several years, thus creating cumulative impacts: for example, residents tended to compare impacts with the situation during construction resulting in positively assessing the post-construction levels of noise, pollution, and disruptions. We recommend these cumulative disruption impacts to be taken into account when assessing the feasibility of infrastructures.

The main negative perception of the new infrastructures was the issue of severance and pedestrian safety in connection with the new roundabout construction at

Waundeg. The new crossing facilities that have been provided are considered to be unsafe and only time will tell if this is so. The overall perception of this section of the road, however, is that it has cut off walking access between a low-income social housing estate and its main local centre, making it a non-viable residential area for non-car owning households.

The positive claims of the pre-appraisal study relating to 'reduced severance' between North and South Rassau were not referred to by local residents. Neither were any benefits from noise reduction or improved air quality particularly noted. This is thought to be largely due to a topographical issue whereby these communities are largely separated by the effect of the hillside on which they are built and so do not perceive the old road to have 'cut through' their area.

There was a general perception that the community engagement process could have been better handled, especially in the Waundeg area. In particular, low-income and traditionally hard to reach groups do not tend to engage with their local councillors and so do not feel 'kept in the loop' via this means of communication. Neither do they tend to search council websites and similar electronic media for information pertaining to their local area.