

YMUNWCH Â'R MUDIAD

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Ref P-04-565

Dear William Powell AM, Chair of Petitions Committee

Petition Title – P 04-565 Revive Disused Railway Lines for Leisure

Thank you for approaching Sustrans to provide our views on the petition that suggests reviving disused railway lines as walking and cycling routes for leisure. We received this request on 22 April.

Members of the committee will be aware of Sustrans and our work in Wales, but I thought it would be useful to set this out in responding to the petitioner.

Sustrans, as the UK's leading Sustainable Transport Charity - was initially formed in the 1970s with exactly the vision of what is being called for- to convert former railway routes into vibrant community assets as shared use walking and cycling paths. Sustrans articulates the economic, social and environmental benefits of walking and cycling through our advocacy work but also our practical projects, the most well-known of which is the National Cycle Network which this year celebrates its 20th Anniversary.

There are now 14,000 miles of the Network across the UK, with about a third of the routes being traffic free sections, many of which are former railway lines. The network is used by over 5 million people every year. The Network in Wales extends to approximately 1,400 miles, with the South Wales Valleys having the highest concentration of routes thanks to our recent European Funded Valleys Cycle Network project. Our website www.sustrans.org.uk is a useful resource for finding out more and to download route maps and leaflets.

Sustrans works in partnership with local authorities and other land owners to identify routes and to plan network expansion, and we also take a leading role in securing funding for the

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necessary regeneration and construction work. A separate organisation, Railway Paths Ltd manages the estate function and has in its ownership many former railway lines yet to be converted into community routes.

Former railway lines often feature within network development plans that we discuss with local authorities, but these days the most important driver for bringing forward new routes is their potential for use by walkers and cyclists for everyday journeys. The process for selecting a former railway line would primarily be determined by location and proximity to communities, and usefulness to serve everyday journeys, for example the route to work or school. Tourism remains a factor, and some of Wales' most popular routes like Lôn Las Cymru consist of a series of local routes which join up together to be marketed as a long distance challenge route.

The Active Travel (2013) Wales Act is now the primary means for active travel network planning in Wales. The approach determined by the legislation requires local authorities to plan for and continuously improve a network of walking and cycling routes in designated areas. Within this provision councils will be consulting with residents and interested stakeholders to find out where people think new routes need to be developed to serve the needs of local communities.

Sustrans also engages with Visit Wales and Welsh Government about strategic network planning and promotion of walking and cycling for visitors to Wales. We have a popular series of maps and promotional materials which are aimed at the tourist market and we work with tourism destinations to promote walking and cycling and public transport as an alternative to the car for accessing key sites.

I trust my response provides sufficient information to outline Sustrans view. There are already systems in place to bring forward the conversion of disused railway lines for use as walking and cycling corridors. If the petitioners have specific sections of infrastructure in mind then they are very welcome to get in touch and we will be happy to share our knowledge of whether these former railway lines have been identified for future development.

Yours sincerely,



Jane Lorimer
National Director, Sustrans Cymru

