

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 4:

Make Torfaen more sustainable by connecting people and communities, socially, digitally, and physically

Investing in our rail network....

Investing in our rail networks supports sustainable transport, boosts economic growth, and improves connectivity between communities. Rail systems reduce road congestion and carbon emissions, making travel more environmentally friendly. They also provide reliable, affordable access to jobs, education, and services—especially for people without cars. Upgraded rail infrastructure can stimulate local economies, attract investment, and support regional development.



Remedial work to address historical issues with the platform at Pontypool and New Inn Railway Station was completed in December 2024.

Work to regrade and resurface the platform was carried out as part of a £7.1m project to transform the station and create a new park and ride facility.

The project was due to be completed in the summer, but the additional work, plus unforeseen issues, during construction, delayed the opening.

At the end of February, the new park and ride facility was officially opened. It comes after the Office of Rail and Road authorised the new facility to enter service.

The car park - accessible via a new road from the A4042 - includes 129 general spaces, 11 accessible parking bays, motorcycle bays, secure bike spaces and drop off bays. The site also includes a number of electric vehicle charging bays which will be available for use in the next few months.

A new footbridge and lifts suitable for wheelchairs and bikes have also been installed, as part of this development.

The £7.1m project is one of the first to be completed as part of the Cardiff Capital Region Metro Plus scheme to create a £50m South Wales Metro system.

The work has included:

- Improvements to the platform and seating area
- Improved CCTV and lighting
- New customer information systems and help point

It's hoped the new facility will encourage more people to use the station, leading to an increase in train services.

This has been an exceptionally challenging project that has involved several organisations working together, to create a new regional transport hub, as part of the South Wales Metro scheme.

The new facility will not only benefit people who already use the station but will hopefully encourage others to use it as well. Increasing the number of people who use the station will mean we can lobby for more trains, which will be beneficial to commuters and those who want to travel more sustainably.

(The project has been funded by Cardiff Capital Region, Welsh Government and Torfaen Council. Other Metro Plus schemes include Caerphilly Interchange, Merthyr Tydfil Interchange and Porth Transport Interchange).

Delivering active travel and safe routes to schools....

Providing active travel routes for our schools—such as safe walking and cycling paths encourages healthier lifestyles, reduces traffic congestion and pollution, and promotes independence among children and young people. It supports physical and mental wellbeing, improves concentration and readiness to learn, and helps build lifelong habits of active travel. These routes also enhance safety, reduce transport costs for families, and contribute to more sustainable, connected communities. Investing in active travel around schools' benefits pupils, families, and the wider environment.

At the end of May 2024, ten of our primary schools signed up to a new scheme encouraging children to walk, scoot or cycle to school, on a regular basis.

As part of this scheme, pupils record how they travel to school each day, as part of the Walk Once a Week - or WOW - initiative, launched by the Living Streets charity and funded by Welsh Government.

As an incentive, pupils can earn up to 11 different badges for walking, cycling or scooting to school at least once a week, and the information can be used by schools to inform and develop their active travel plans.

Since 2021, we have helped 16 schools to develop individual active travel plans, which aims to reduce the number of pupils and staff, who travel to school by car.

Griffithstown Primary School, in Pontypool, is one of the schools taking part in the WOW scheme and has recently developed an active travel plan.

The WOW initiative so far has demonstrated that by walking or cycling to school just once or twice a week can make a big difference to the amount of traffic near schools, which is safer and healthier for our pupils.

More pupils are now walking, scooting and cycling to a school in Cwmbran, since they introduced an active travel schools plan.

Llantarnam Primary School was the first in Torfaen to adopt the new generation of active travel school plan in July 2022, aimed at increasing the number of pupils who regularly travel actively to school. Since this time, our Active Travel Team has worked with the school to provide scooter storage, bike training, carry out surveys, create new active travel routes, and install a zebra crossing and additional entrances into the school. The school has since requested additional bike storage, due to the number of pupils now coming to school by bike.

The active travel plan has concentrated everyone's minds on the benefits of walking, cycling and scooting - we now talk to the children about the benefits, and we encourage them to have similar conversations at home.

According to the school's Living Streets WOW tracker, 68 per cent of pupils have walked, scooted or cycled to school so far this month.

Within 24/25, our Active Travel Team has supported another 13 schools in Torfaen to develop active travel school plans and is working with another three.

In October 2024, our Active Travel and Road Safety Team have also offered balanced bike sessions to all nursery, Reception and Year 1 primary school, providing younger pupils with the chance to learn the basics of how to ride a bike.

The aim of these sessions is to teach the children skills, in a fun and practical way, with lots of games and activities. By teaching our children these vital skills, we are not only promoting a healthier lifestyle but also ensuring they are well-prepared to navigate our roads safely.

So far, 24 schools have signed up for the training which aims to give children the building blocks to become a confident safe cyclist in the future.



(Balance Bike training is one of the initiatives rolled out in 2024/25 through active travel. Active travel received £250,000 2024/25 from the UK government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund).

In November 2024, according to the latest Wales-wide 'Hands Up' survey, Torfaen was reported as having the 4th highest percentage of pupils who travel actively to school – an increase of eight places compared to last year.

Implementing Welsh Governments Active Travel Act....

Reducing speed limits to 20 mph on roads—especially in residential areas and near schools improves safety, saving lives, and enhancing community wellbeing.

In January 2025, we reviewed the number of exceptions to the 20mph limit, in built up areas within Torfaen.

In September 2023, the Welsh Government changed the default speed limit from 30mph to 20mph within built up areas. The new legislation meant 30mph roads defaulted to 20mph, unless they met Welsh Government guidance to be classed as an exception.

At this time in Torfaen, 36 exceptions were identified as meeting the Welsh Government's criteria for a higher speed limit and [Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders](#) were put in place.

Last year, the Welsh Government invited residents to contact their local authorities to suggest additional exceptions and issued revised guidance to councils on the assessment criteria.

In total we received a total of 702 comments about roads in the borough, with a mix of views for and against exemptions.

We reviewed all the suggestions according to the revised guidance, and proposed the following roads to be added to the exceptions to the 20mph limit:

- Newport Road, Cwmbran (part)
- Estate Road, Blaenavon (including Gilchrist Thomas Industrial Estate)
- The A4043 north from Pontypool towards Abersychan (part)
- New Road, between Griffithstown and New Inn (part)
- Usk Road, New Inn (part)
- Riverside, Pontypool
- Turnpike Road, Llanyravon (part)
- B4236 Caerleon Road (part) - 40mph section

As at the end of February 2024, the formal process of introducing Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) to make the exceptions permanent was underway.

We appreciate that the new 20mph default speed limit has had a positive impact in many of our communities, reducing the speed of traffic and helping residents living on those streets and other road users to feel safer, although we do understand it isn't appropriate in every area.

Connecting Torfaen....

Providing communities with access to a community platform fosters connection, collaboration, and empowerment. These platforms enable residents to share information, access local services, participate in decision-making, and support one another. They strengthen social cohesion, improve communication between citizens and local authorities, and help identify and respond to community needs more effectively. By giving people, a voice and a space to engage, community platforms contribute to more resilient, inclusive, and proactive communities.

Throughout 2024, we have continued to collectively promote our 'Connect Torfaen Network' as the primary platform for our residents to access community led activity and support.

More than 1,000 people are now registered on our 'Connect Torfaen' website which includes over 300 community groups and organisations who promote their events and services.



There are around 400 community listings on the site on average every month, making it Torfaen's one-stop-shop for local activities and events.

Primarily, the platform aims to connect residents with community groups and services in their local area – allowing them to search for activities, attend events or sign up for volunteering opportunities.

Since its launch in 2021, the Council has featured lots of community-based opportunities, harnessing the support of the local community. This has included our:

- Greener Cleaner litter pick days: mobilising volunteers to keep our community clean.
- Canal project: working with residents to preserve and enhance our local waterways.
- Digital Inclusion gurus: connecting tech-savvy volunteers with those needing digital assistance.

(Our Connect Torfaen website is a collaboration between Torfaen Council, Torfaen Voluntary Alliance, Bron Afon Community Housing and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board).

It's a growing space where residents and service providers can find out more about what is already happening in, and being delivered, by their communities.

In addition, to support the implementation of our [**Community Wellbeing Strategy**](#) - 2023-2027, our frontline teams are starting to think differently about how, when and why support is provided to communities.

As well as using 'Connect Torfaen' to advertise our council services and projects, in the first instance, our teams also look to support our residents and explore what community-led activity already exists. Where our teams identify there isn't any community provision available, but there is a demand or need for it, we encourage our residents to feed this back to our Building Resilient Communities Team in order to work with local groups to see how a response could be developed.

Investing in our libraries....

Investing in our libraries is important because they serve as inclusive, accessible hubs for learning, community engagement, and personal development. Libraries provide free access to books, digital resources, and educational programmes, helping people of all ages improve literacy, skills, and wellbeing. They support children's learning, offer safe spaces for study and creativity, and help adults with job searches, digital inclusion, and lifelong learning.

Our Cwmbran Library is a well utilised community facility, of which we have invested nearly half a million pounds into.

Throughout the Summer of 2024/25, more than 900 children took part in an annual reading challenge with many coming into the library, every week to borrow books.

It is hoped that this new investment will help to modernise the facilities and attract even more visitors.

Libraries remain vital hubs for lifelong learning, public engagement, and personal growth. These renovations will help modernise the space whilst preserving its role as a welcoming and accessible resource for all.

The renovation is expected to include a reconfiguration of the existing space to provide more opportunities for agile working and study, a new teenage library and designated health and well-being and information and advice areas. New furniture and digital facilities will modernise the space and enhance the customer experience.

The library renovation opened in March 2025.

(The investment follows previous Welsh Government funding in Pontypool and Blaenavon Libraries, with



£300,000 allocated to Pontypool Library in 2011 and £100,000 provided when Blaenavon Library was moved into the World Heritage Centre in 2015. The Cwmbran Library renovation is part of wider plans to improve Gwent House over the next couple of years, ensuring that the community continues to benefit from modern, accessible, and welcoming spaces).

Our Key Challenges...

Digital:

We need to increase opportunities for our residents to digitally engage with us and provide support for those who are not digitally engaged - increasing digital engagement requires accessible, user-friendly platforms while also supporting those who lack digital skills or access. Bridging this gap is essential to ensure all residents can interact with services confidently and fairly, without being excluded from important information or opportunities.

Community Capacity:

We need to work more closely with our community councils to prioritise activity at a Community Council level around what will make the biggest difference to community wellbeing - working more closely with community councils requires strong collaboration, shared priorities, and clear communication. Aligning activities at a local level can be complex, but it's essential to ensure that efforts are focused on what will most improve community wellbeing and reflect the needs of residents.

We need to research and understand what impact our different activities / decisions will have on wellbeing, at a local level - understanding the local impact of different activities and decisions requires reliable data, meaningful engagement, and the ability to measure wellbeing in ways that reflect community experiences. Without this insight, it's difficult to make informed choices, improve services, and ensure that actions genuinely benefit residents at a local level.