How Wales can speed up decarbonisation: Insights from transport and mobility, food and agriculture, and the circular and sharing economy

Key messages:

- Integrate planning, housing, and economic development for a more holistic approach to climate mitigation. Carbon emissions and environmental damage should be key features across all areas.

- Scale up or replicate the smaller, successful projects and schemes that have already gained momentum and funding (School Streets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), market gardens, Benthyg Cymru (Library of Things), repair cafés, etc).

- Create engagement strategies for the public and businesses across transport, agriculture, and the circular and sharing economy.

- Give a higher priority to community-driven or nature-based solutions, rather than those primarily pursuing economic growth and profit.

Centre for **Climate Change** and **Social Transformations**

CAST is a global hub for understanding the systemic and society-wide transformations that are required to address climate change. Based at the University of Bath, our additional core partners are the charity Climate Outreach, the University of Manchester, University of East Anglia and Cardiff University.

Introduction

This briefing is intended as a resource for the Welsh Government and those interested in the policy landscape of Wales. It summarises the findings from a series of workshops, organised by CAST, to appraise and evaluate the feasibility of a series of Welsh Government policies for reducing carbon emissions. This also explored the barriers and facilitators to action.

The workshops focused on high-emitting sectors which are more difficult to change. The participants included policymakers and practitioners from the circular and sharing economy (where services/goods are shared and reused) and transport and agriculture sectors.

The participants of our workshops put forward suggestions for decarbonising better in these areas, building upon existing policies and practices, which we have thematically grouped and summarised. They do not represent the views of all participants.

Research methods

This research used deliberative research methods across twelve workshops with a total of 51 participants – a mix of policymakers, councillors, business owners, community workers and farmers.[1] Each policy area had two groups and each group was invited to take part in a two-workshop programme. Participants were given a background paper summarising the Welsh Government's policy aims with added context from key UK Government documents and policy briefs from organisations such as the Climate Change Committee (CCC). Participants were invited to discuss this content in relation to their practical experience and comment on the viability of targets by reflecting on barriers and facilitators and offering examples of solutions that were working well or missing and in need of implementation.

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[1] The workshops were adapted for the current project from a method developed by the Hot or Cool Institute called 'Difficult Conversations'.

Transport

There should be **fair and equal access to sustainable transport**, including for rural areas – this should be a right for those living in Wales, not a service contingent on private companies. There should also be more **support for active travel and 'living locally'** due to the many co-benefits to health and mental wellbeing. A broader range of **travel policy initiatives that are embedded in the needs and lifestyles of local areas** are needed. These should avoid prioritising large-scale road infrastructure and the electric vehicle market, both of which are overly represented and benefit larger corporations rather than small businesses and local communities. More focus on **connecting active travel and other transport** modes and routes would be beneficial, including the linking of cycle routes with more bike hire options and availability.

Changes to how communities and industry are involved in transport are also key. Better access and routes to **community ownership and shared services** for local public transport are needed, as well as community energy networks to support electric vehicles (EVs) and shared mobility platforms to increase the suitability and, therefore, uptake of local travel options. There should be more attractive options for **businesses and industry to be involved** in local energy generation and distribution, local businesses for neighbourhood shopping, and car clubs.

Financial and planning changes are needed. There should be better **investment in buses** that utilise pre-existing infrastructure and could represent a cost- and time-effective solution. Additionally, there should be a requirement in planning legislation that **infrastructure and large-scale projects** (such as housing or entertainment and shopping hubs) **have suitable public transport and active travel** options.

Themes discussed

Food and agriculture

There are several areas where engagement can be improved. Local economies and job creation need to be supported to **connect people and communities to the food system** and provide information about sustainable and healthy food. This includes more food networks, market gardens, education programmes led by schools and local authorities, food-health awareness campaigns and community outreach. There should be better support and facilitation of networks for **sharing best practices** in mixed agriculture and horticulture, along with an increased **focus on how to scale up existing pilot schemes and small grants** with the consultation and involvement of organisations (such as CSA groups, Landworkers' Alliance and Soil Association). **Better and bolder communication** is needed to overcome a disconnect between what people buy and how they consume food and the production processes that have negative environmental impacts.

Issues around food production and land use, and the links to food consumption need to be addressed. There should be **lower consumption of poorer quality imported meat** to reduce emissions and negative environmental consequences, and consideration of the associated **environmental impact of imported feed**. Farmers' concerns about **unintended consequences for biodiversity and habitat loss** when tackling climate change, especially regarding afforestation, should be taken into account.

Financial changes are required as well as consideration of intersecting issues such as housing. Housing stock and **availability of lodgings in rural areas need to be considered** when attracting workers to the agricultural sector; currently the lack of housing and increased holiday homes and tourist rentals act as a barrier to employment. There is a wealth of good practice from Welsh Government funded pilot schemes and small grants. However, there needs to be **more financial security and incentives** for these approaches, with extra considerations for those on tenanted land. The dominance of supermarkets and the **'race to the bottom' on prices drives bad practice farming** (where the cheapest methods are most profitable). Regulations should reduce the negative impact of agriculture on carbon emissions and environmental damage. **Sustainable and environmental practices are currently untenable while there is a drive for economic growth** and profit in a competitive market.

Themes discussed

Circular and sharing economy

Government and industry need to consider the usefulness of **metrics that move beyond resource efficiency, shareholder return and GDP** to advance progress in the circular economy and there should be more standardised metrics and better use of labelling for consumer products. A traffic light labelling for reuse alongside the development of right-to-repair legislation similar to France would support the updating and repair of goods. This could help to **increase awareness around planned obsolescence** and overcome the problems associated with wasted resources and energy. This needs to be driven by policymakers to be adhered to through legislation and law.

Changes to business models and increased financial support are required. Policy should aim to encourage **change and innovation in more circular business models**, not just products and practices. This might mean more sharing and rentals and could include more delivery and pick-up services for existing outlets. Government should also **scale up the funding for sharing economy networks** such as repair cafés and Benthyg Cymru (Library of Things) which have been extremely successful but have a limited scope and reach, and therefore lower impact.

The Welsh Government should **build on existing enthusiasm from SMEs** to engage with the circular economy and engage with larger corporations. The potential for higher impact and wider consequences of this would be beneficial. The sharing economy is an **opportunity to bring together communities and provide local hubs** for socialising and interacting, as well as supporting local economies and jobs.

Cross-domain policy recommendations

The findings above outlined domain-specific suggestions. Below, we outline a series of cross-domain policy solutions to be considered by the Welsh Government.

1) Greater collaboration and connection

There is a need to **strengthen collaboration between the Welsh Government and local authorities** in Wales. These bodies should learn from the expertise and experience of key stakeholders, businesses and the public, and increase effective engagement to scale up initiatives and build widespread adoption of low-carbon practices.

Policy should recognise the potential **synergies between initiatives in transport, food, and the circular and sharing economy** where strategies for climate mitigation can work towards common goals and shared objectives. These include policy approaches to housing, employment, and public health. Using the Well-Being of Future Generations Act as a model for this will be useful, and considerations should be made towards further integrating the legislation to include private business and building connections between successful organisations and public services.

2) Public engagement

The Welsh Government should **improve its public engagement strategies**, as there is a public awareness gap around understanding the urgency and seriousness of the transformation required for meeting net zero targets and carbon emissions reduction. This should be addressed alongside positive (though realistic) visions to bring about confidence in the future from role models and other people who are trusted.

Many **solutions in working towards decarbonisation** are well understood by stakeholders and are embedded in the needs and requirements of communities, which **need to be formalised and nurtured to facilitate communication**. Recent examples of deliberative democracy and citizen's assemblies could help this to manifest. This could also be complemented by engaging with the connections made by outreach and community projects related to schools and education, market gardens, food co-operatives, and sharing economy hubs (such as Bethyg Cymru – 'Library of Things' –and repair cafés). There are good examples of successful and progressive projects, but they are not being scaled up or rolled out more widely, and there is little or no focus on how multinationals or bigger businesses are expected to engage.

Further reading

- CAST Briefing 01 (2019) Engaging the public on low-carbon lifestyle change. (https://cast.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CAST-briefing-01-Engaging-the-public-on-low-carbon-lifestyle-change-min.pdf).

- CAST Briefing 20 (2023) How can politicians avoid a net-zero backlash? The role of public engagement: a briefing for policy makers and communicators (https://cast.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CAST-the-cente-for-climate-change-and-social-transformations-cast-briefing-20-how-can-politicans-avoid-a-net-zero-backlash-the-role-of-public-engagement-a-briefing-for-policy-makers-and-communicators.pdf).

- CAST Briefing 21 (2023) How public engagement can support reducing car use: A briefing for policy makers and communicators. (https://cast.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/CAST-the-centre-for-climate-change-and-social-transformations-briefing-21-how-public-engagement-can-support-reducing-car-use-a-briefing-for-policy-makers-and-communicators.pdf).

- Climate Outreach (2023) Towards a UK public engagement strategy on climate change (https://climateoutreach.org/reports/towards-uk-public-engagement-strategy/).

- Net Zero Wales Carbon Budget 2 (2021) (https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-10/net-zero-wales-carbon-budget-2-2021-25.pdf).

- CCC (2020) Advice Report: The path to a Net Zero Wales. (https://www.theccc.org.uk/publications/).

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CAST is a global hub for understanding the systemic and society-wide transformations that are required to address climate change.

We research and develop the social transformations needed to produce a low-carbon and sustainable society; at the core of our work is a fundamental question of enormous social significance: How can we as a society live differently – and better – in ways that meet the urgent need for rapid and far-reaching emission reductions?

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