

Public Consultation on the A5 Western Transport Corridor

[Transport NI]

Consultation Response from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (Council) welcomes the opportunity to respond to Transport NI on their public consultation on the A5 Western Transport Corridor - Dual Carriageway Scheme.

Brief Background for Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

The District Council area is home to 114,992 people (as of 30 June 2014). The District Council area is Northern Ireland's largest region in terms of land mass - approximately 3,000km², or 20% of NI - and the smallest in terms of population. As a result, the population density of approximately 41 people per km² is the sparsest in NI. This is a feature of the region which also provides challenges to service delivery.

Consultation Feedback

The Council views this Scheme as extremely important in order to sustain ongoing economic regeneration and community rejuvenation.

The Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area, has often been disadvantaged in relation to public transport provision and road infrastructure development. Therefore, the introduction of a Dual Carriageway network within the area which not only connects local urban/rural centres, but also will help to improve North/South travel/transport, is to be welcomed.

Road Safety

The Council is confident that the Northern Ireland Executive led Scheme should lead to improved road safety and an increased number of safer 'overtaking opportunities' within the area. The Council welcomes this, as the District (as well as Northern Ireland as a whole) has suffered enormously due to Road Traffic Collisions for the last number of years. So far within the Council District there has been one loss of life due to a Road Traffic Collision, with 14 deaths across Northern Ireland following Road Traffic Collisions. Last year (2015) there were eight deaths within the Fermanagh and Omagh District directly linked to Road Traffic Collisions, which represent 11% of the Northern Ireland total fatalities on the roads (74 individuals). The Council believes that every death on the roads is too many and welcomes any programme/scheme/attempt to make the roads of Northern Ireland, and the Council District, safer.

Benefits for Local Businesses

The introduction of the A5 Western Transport Corridor should also prove beneficial for businesses located within the west of Northern Ireland. The new Dual Carriageway Scheme will allow for better transport links between urban centres within the west of Northern Ireland (e.g. Omagh, Strabane, Ballygawley and

Derry/Londonderry,) as well as improving cross-border linkages and access to international gateways.

Availability of Public Transport

Alongside the improvements contained within the roads infrastructure, the Northern Ireland Executive (in particular the new Government Departments – Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs and the Department for Infrastructure) should work together to ensure more funding is allocated for transport in the more rural areas of Northern Ireland – i.e. the Fermanagh and Omagh District. Large numbers of individuals within the Council area do not have access to a vehicle (**16.5%** of households within the Fermanagh and Omagh District [NISRA Statistics]). These individuals should be able to avail of the benefits of the journey times, transport links and the new infrastructure via public transport.

The Vesting and Acquisition of Land

The Council understands that the majority of the Vesting Orders for this Scheme have been considered. From the Department's 'Notice of Intention to make Vesting Orders' (February 2016) the Council notes that the Department is still in the process of 'proposing to acquire lands for the construction of the dual carriageway'.

However, the Council would like further clarification on the payments that will be made to landowners/farmers, whose land will be acquired. It is imperative that these individuals get a 'fair price'. Landowners in England and Wales are and have been offered an additional 7.5 per cent basic loss payment and an additional 2.5 per cent occupier's loss payment. This is on top of the market valuation.

The Council welcomes the fact that the Land Acquisition and Compensation Bill for Northern Ireland has passed its final stage in the Northern Ireland Assembly and would stress the importance of its implementation prior to any necessary vesting in the development of the A5.

Dual Carriageway – length and distance

The Council would like to seek assurance that the type of road that will be developed in all three Sections starting in New Buildings will comprise 1005 Dual Carriageway.

The Council would be concerned to ensure that the Dual Carriageway starting within Section One does not merge into a 'single carriageway road' which will be developed as part of Section Two, or indeed Section Three.

Timeframes

The Council is concerned in relation to the timeframes proposed within the Consultation Documents.

If funding is reduced or the Department suffers budget cuts within the next number of years, how likely is it that Section Two and Three could be pushed back even further, or even cancelled? This introduction of a Dual Carriageway is seen as an integral part of the economic regeneration and community rejuvenation of areas of western

Northern Ireland. As such, funding must be secured that will ensure that the Scheme will be completed.

The fact that within the Consultation Document (top of page 4) it states 'the Proposed Scheme 2016 may no longer be constructed in its entirety within a three year period as originally anticipated' causes concern. The Department must ensure that all timescales are met, especially due to the longevity of the three various Sections of the Scheme.

Whilst the Council understands that contractors have already been appointed to deliver the three Sections and that contractual law would impact on any changes to the proposed timeframes, Council would encourage the Department to consider whether any preparatory work for Phases 2 and 3 could be undertaken in order to mitigate against potential delays in delivering the timetable for the completion of the entire Scheme.

The Council would also like Transport NI to outline if there are any contingency plans in place if one (or more) of these Contractors are unable to complete their duties within their Section.

Conclusion

The Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the A5 Western Corridor Scheme.

The Council welcomes the commitment demonstrated by the Northern Ireland Executive, and indeed Transport NI, to the west of Northern Ireland and in particular the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area. There is a need for Transport NI and the Northern Ireland Executive to be mindful to all legislative and regulatory requirements in the development of this Scheme and particularly welcomes the development of Habitat Assessments and consideration of other Environmental aspects within the Environmental Statement.

The Council encourages Transport NI to take the comments, contained within this Consultation Response, on board in relation to the overall development of the A5 Western Corridor. The Council would also urge Transport NI to respond to the Council with comments on the specific questions raised within this document.