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A1 Beech Hill to Cloghogue

Environmental Statement

Non-Technical Summary

Department for Regional Development
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ROADS Service

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NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Introduction

This Non-Technical Summary presents a brief overview of the findings of the Environmental Statement, which reports on the environmental impacts, mitigation proposals and general effects of the proposed dual carriageway. The attached sheets (1-4) illustrate the scheme in a series of aerial photographs, between Beech Hill and Cloghogue.

Background

The A1 route between Beech Hill and Cloghogue forms part of the Euro Route 001 between Larne and Rosslare. It also forms part of the Eastern Seaboard Corridor, and is one of the Key Transport Corridors identified in the Regional Development Strategy document "Shaping our Future", published by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. The corridor is of strategic and economic importance within Northern Ireland, providing an essential road link to the ports of Belfast, Warrenpoint and Dublin. The route is being progressively upgraded to dual carriageway standard from Belfast to the Border. The Beech Hill to Cloghogue scheme is the final section to be considered for dualling and is bounded by the A1 Loughbrickland to Beech Hill section to the north, currently under construction, and the A1/N1 Newry to Dundalk section to the south, currently at tender stage.

One of the key objectives of Roads Service is to facilitate the safe movement of people, goods and services for the social and economic benefit of all people in Northern Ireland. As part of this aim, Roads Service is committed to providing an all-purpose dual carriageway between Belfast and the Border on the grounds that it will:

1. provide better links to major destinations such as Belfast and Dublin;
2. provide journey time savings and improve the reliability of journey times; and
3. provide substantial safety benefits.

Preliminary Study

The wider area between Beech Hill and Cloghogue has been considered in a phased process in order to identify a suitable line for the new dual carriageway. In the first phase, ten different options were reviewed and three were selected for further study. During the following phase, the three approved options were taken through a Public Consultation exercise and following further refinement and study, a preferred option was announced in September 2003.

Environmental Assessment Process

The Environmental Statement is issued in accordance with EC Directive 85/337/EEC as amended by Council Directive 97/11/EC and required by Article 67 (as substituted by the Roads (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999) of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993. The assessment has been undertaken as part of the statutory process for the scheme.

The assessment has been prepared in accordance with Article 67 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 and the requirements of Volume 11 of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges.

Consultation

An integral element of the environmental assessment exercise includes consultation with statutory authorities and various other interested groups. Some 37 different Statutory and other bodies have been consulted during the development stage of this scheme. MEP's, MP's and MLA's for the region have also been consulted. Newry and Mourne District Council have been updated on a regular basis during an ongoing consultation process.

A public consultation exercise was carried out in February 2003. This involved a Public Exhibition held centrally in the area, at the Newry Arts Centre. This was well attended and various comments and views expressed provided valuable feedback for the ongoing scheme development.

The Existing Environment

The study corridor lies within the Newry Basin, situated between the Ring of Gullion to the southwest and the Mourne Mountains to the east. It encompasses a predominantly rural landscape composed of attractive river valleys, pastures, and small woodlands, with a scattering of bungalows and large farms along rural roads. It is a compact, small-scale landscape where low gorse hedges and tree belts separate fields, and narrow hedge-banked roads follow the contours of the drumlins.

To the south of the study corridor, Camlough Mountain, Ballymacdermot Mountain and Cloghogue Mountain are dominant features and are within the Ring of Gullion, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

To the north, the study area is predominantly an agricultural landscape, consisting of semi-improved and improved agricultural grassland. However, closer to Newry, the landscape changes to become more industrial and residential in character.

There are a number of industrial sites in the study corridor, including the Carnbane Industrial Estate, which is situated to the immediate northwest of Newry. Whilst the existing Newry bypass bounds much of the residential development, there are several locations, particularly extending northwards along the A27 Tandragee and A28 Armagh Roads, where housing continues to develop.

The study area is rich in cultural heritage sites and includes significant landmarks such as the Craigmore Viaduct and the Egyptian Arch, which carry the existing railway line.

There are no designated ecological sites within the study corridor, and the ecology is regarded as being of local importance. Isolated parcels of maturing mixed woodland exist to the immediate north and west of Newry and along the banks of the Newry/Clanrye river system and the disused Newry/Portadown Canal. Moreover, these river corridors provide valuable riparian habitat. The Newry and Bessbrook Rivers are designated as Salmonid watercourses, under the terms of the EC Freshwater Fish Directive.

Environmental Assessment

Air Quality

An air quality assessment has been carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, which is the standard methodology for major road schemes. The results indicate there will be no significant effect on either local or regional air quality as a result of the proposed scheme. Local air quality pollutant concentrations would remain well within the Relevant Air Quality Standards and are actually forecasted to marginally decrease from existing levels in the proposed year of scheme opening. Moreover, there would be fewer properties in proximity to the proposed dual carriageway, than along the existing A1 and hence with strategic traffic reassigning to the proposed dual carriageway from the existing Belfast Road, there would be a net benefit with improved air quality for the majority of properties between Beech Hill and Camlough Road. In terms of regional air quality, generally there would be an overall reduction in concentrations from existing levels.

Cultural Heritage

In terms of cultural heritage, no listed buildings or structures would be directed affected by the proposed scheme, however several would be in close proximity. The greater impact would be associated with the known archaeological record and industrial heritage sites. However, by way of mitigation, it will be necessary to undertake further investigations of specific sites in advance of construction commencing. Whilst direct impacts on archaeological features is limited, it is inevitable that with a scheme of this scale, there will be an impact on the settings of several cultural heritage sites. Of particular note, the Craigmore Viaduct

structure, presently hidden from view for the existing A1, will be visible from the proposed dual carriageway. There will be no impact on private park and demesnes or on National Trust property. Topsoil stripping will be subject to archaeological monitoring during the construction Contract.

Disruption due to Construction

During the construction stage of the project, there will inevitably be disruption to the travelling public, both on the existing A1 between Beech Hill and Cloghogue, and on the adjacent local road network. This will be minimised by the introduction of temporary traffic management schemes, yet maintaining the necessary road safety standards. As with any major road construction scheme, there will be noise, vibration, visual and air quality impacts in the immediate vicinity of the works. There is also a risk of accidental spillage affecting the watercourses, which the proposed dual carriageway would traverse. The Construction Contract will incorporate measures and controls to minimise adverse effects where possible.

Ecology & Nature Conservation

From an ecological and nature conservation aspect, the proposed scheme would not directly affect any designated ecological sites. The closest designated site is Castle Ennigan Area of Special Scientific Interest to the east of Beech Hill. Moreover, there would be no residual impact on potential Countryside Policy Areas, or potential Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance. With the implementation of a range of mitigation measures, the residual impact on local habitats and their associated wildlife should be minimal. Although there will be a permanent realignment of a stretch of the Bessbrook River, with proper design of the river banks and in-stream substrate, the opportunity exists to actually improve on the existing nursery habitat. A protected mammal survey to check for the presence of badgers and bats will be undertaken in the field season preceding construction. Similarly, a bird survey of the riparian and wetland habitat associated with the Newry River, in the vicinity of the proposed scheme, should also be undertaken during this field season. Following these surveys, appropriate mitigation measures will be implemented, if required, in accordance with the requirements of the relevant authorities.

Landscape & Visual Effects

The proposed scheme would impinge on the eastern fringe of the Ring of Gullion Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, between Bog Road and Cloghogue. It would also introduce a main road into a tranquil rural landscape between the proposed Sheep Bridge Junction and the A27 Tandragee Road. It is inevitable that the proposed scheme would have some degree of adverse impact on the surrounding landscape. There will also be varying degrees of adverse impact on the visual amenity experienced from dwellings in the vicinity of the proposed dual carriageway and on a number of key views. Mitigation of these impacts has

been considered through the alignment of the road, the design of structures and planting to address residual impacts. Between the Egyptian Arch and Cloghogue, the proposed scheme would be on the alignment of the existing A1, thereby, although a wider road corridor, reducing potential impacts. Along this section, as generally elsewhere in the scheme, the construction of grade-separated junctions with associated lighting and large bridge structures would be the most visually significant features of the scheme.

Land Use

With implementation of a scheme of this scale, it is inevitable that various land use types, both private and public will be affected. To this end, there will be the loss of several residential properties and several parcels of private garden. There will also be the loss of several farm outbuildings, and some small parcels of industrial and commercial land. In terms of recreational land, there will be the loss of several small football pitches, west of the Carnbane Industrial Estate, between the Newry Canal and former railway line. A small parcel of land zoned for industrial development, at the northernmost end of the Carnbane Industrial Estate, will also be required as part of the scheme.

A significant number of individual agricultural landowners would be affected by the scheme, either by partial loss of a parcel of land owned by them or by the total loss of a plot. The greatest landuse loss would be in terms of the area of agricultural land required for the scheme, of which a significant proportion is classed as being Best & Most Versatile based on its underlying soil characteristics. Several farms would also be severed by the proposed scheme.

Traffic Noise & Vibration

The potential noise impact of the proposed road scheme has been predicted for the year of opening, and the design year. The overriding benefit of the scheme is that there will be fewer properties in proximity to the proposed dual carriageway than along the existing A1 and hence, with strategic traffic reassigning to the proposed dual carriageway from the existing Belfast Road, there will be a net benefit with reduced noise levels for the majority of properties between Beech Hill and Camlough Road. However, the proposed route will impact properties that are not currently subject to noise exposure from transportation noise, due to their rural location with low existing ambient noise levels.

Where the potential noise impact from transportation noise may exceed relevant Standards, mitigation measures have been provided. The potential noise impact of temporary construction noise has been assessed and a number of mitigation measures and best practice guidelines have been provided to minimise the noise impact.

Pedestrian, Cyclist, Equestrian & Community Effects

Local vehicle movements will be significantly improved on the local road network around Newry due to the removal of strategic traffic from the existing bypass between Damolly and Camlough Road Junction. There will be improved and safer access between Martin's Lane to the east and Chancellor's Road to the west, through the provision of a vehicular overbridge at Martin's Lane.

A 'Park & Share' facility will be provided adjacent to Sheep Bridge Junction and a similar facility will be provided adjacent to Cloghogue Junction.

Implementation of the scheme will result in a safer environment for pedestrians and cyclists generally on the local road network, due to the removal of a significant proportion of strategic traffic, particularly between Corcreechy Road, along the existing Belfast Road, to Carnbane Way and Craigmore Way. A new dedicated footway/cycleway will be provided between Beech Hill and Corcreechy Road.

The schools in proximity to the proposed scheme will experience an overall benefit in terms of safer access across the strategic route, via either the proposed road bridge over the mainline at Martin's Lane or the Chancellor's Road Junction.

In terms of recreational areas, there would be the loss of several small football pitches, west of the Carnbane Industrial Estate, between the Newry Canal and former railway line.

Vehicle Travellers

With scheme implementation, new and interesting views will be opened up to the travelling public over the surrounding rural landscape to the north of Newry. Moreover, the dominant landmark of the Craigmore Viaduct, not currently seen by travellers on the A1 will be visible from the proposed dual carriageway.

Driver stress for strategic traffic between Belfast and Dublin is predicted to significantly reduce over existing conditions. Similarly, with implementation of the proposed scheme, driver stress for traffic movements on the local network is forecasted to significantly reduce over existing conditions.

Water Quality & Drainage

Over the northern sector, from Beech Hill to the Camlough Road Junction, it is likely that with the use of sustainable drainage features, there will be an overall improvement in water quality discharging to the river system. A more regulated surface runoff will be experienced, especially in the tributaries, and the risk of flooding directly attributable to the road will not

be increased. The implementation of sustainable drainage features will attenuate flood flows and contain pollutants, which currently discharge directly into the Newry/Clanrye system with little or no treatment.

Over the southern sector of the proposed scheme, from Camlough Road to Cloghogue, there will be a negligible difference in the quality of water discharging into the surrounding drainage network, in comparison with existing conditions.

The probability of a serious accidental spillage incident on the proposed scheme falls well within recommended guidelines. Similarly, the predicted impact on water quality in all cases falls well within the permitted Environmental Quality Standards. The proposed dual carriageway will not significantly affect the floodplain capacity of the Newry / Clanrye system.

Although there will be a permanent partial realignment of the Bessbrook River, there will be a negligible impact on its water quality or drainage characteristics. Moreover, there may actually be an improvement in suitable nursery habitat for the Salmonid fish population.

Geology & Soils

Due to the undulating topography of the surrounding landscape, it is inevitable that there will be significant earthworks associated with the scheme. Where the proposed scheme will be in cutting, there will be the creation, in places, of fresh rock cuttings of varying lengths and heights. Similarly, there would be the creation, in places, of fresh drift exposures of varying lengths and heights. Several of these new exposures may be of geological interest. There would be the loss of some 'Best and Most Versatile' land, especially over the northern end of the scheme, between the Belfast Road and Armagh Road.

The previous rock cuttings at Cloghogue exposed geologically significant features, and while alterations will be necessary to accommodate the new dual carriageway and interchange, care will be taken to minimise the impact and to maintain the integrity of the Geologically Important Site.

Policies & Plans

At a national level the government seeks to strengthen economic and social cohesion by enhancing linkages through its policies within the Regional Development Strategy 2025 and the Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002 – 2012. The route conforms with the policies in the above strategies, in terms of its designation as a key transport corridor and the importance of development of economic growth along this corridor.

The Beech Hill to Cloghogue dualling scheme is included in the preparation pool of the Proposed Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan 2015 and highlights in particular the strategic importance of Newry as a main hub and gateway settlement and the role the road has to play in the future economic development of the area.

Summary

It is recognised that a scheme of this nature has a significant impact on existing landuse and in particular on private homes, farm buildings, business premises and recreation areas. Impacts on the physical environment are also inevitable. The route for the new dual carriageway has been chosen and modified to minimise such impacts, where possible. As a result of careful conceptual design and strategic mitigation, the permanent environmental impacts of the scheme have been significantly reduced. There will inevitably be disruption to the travelling public and local communities during the construction stage, however suitable traffic management facilities will minimise these temporary impacts.