

Department for Regional Development – TransportNI

**The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993
The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972**

A24 BALLYNAHINCH BYPASS

PUBLIC INQUIRY

January 2015

**Proof of Evidence
(Background to the scheme, Policy and Procedures)**

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Personal Details

My name is Eoghan Daly. I am the Strategic Road Improvement Manager for Southern Division of TransportNI. I have a BEng Honours Degree in Civil Engineering and an MSc in Construction and Project Management. I am a Chartered Engineer and Member of the Institution of Civil Engineers. I have over 15 years experience in various aspects of road design and scheme development.

1.2 Project Role

I was appointed to the post of Strategic Roads Improvement Manager in Southern Division, on a temporary basis, in March 2014 and am the Project Sponsor for the A24 Ballynahinch Bypass.

I have been involved with this strategic road improvement since early 2014 and have managed its design development, consultations and progress through the statutory processes in accordance with the relevant procedures.

I manage the consultancy team from AECOM who provide the technical expertise in the design of the project. For the purposes of this Proof of Evidence, references to Aecom include reference to its former legacy companies, including URS and Scott Wilson.

My role at this Public Inquiry is principally to provide evidence on the background of the Proposed Scheme, the policy context in which it is being progressed and the statutory procedures that the project went through that resulted in the decision to hold a Public Inquiry.

With me today are George Kissick, AECOM's Project Manager, Russell Bissland, AECOM's lead Transport Planner and Gareth Coughlin, AECOM's Environmental Team Leader.

2. THE EXISTING SITUATION

2.1 The A24 forms part of the T2 Trunk Route from Belfast to Newcastle. The A24 in Ballynahinch is used by both strategic traffic, including commuters travelling to and from Belfast, and local traffic.

2.2 Ballynahinch is a market town, situated approximately 24km (15miles) from Belfast, and approximately 16km (10miles) from both Downpatrick and Lisburn. Due to the town's strategic location between several surrounding settlements, a number of roads in addition to the A24 radiate from the town.

2.3 Ballynahinch forms a bottleneck for strategic traffic, as the A24 through Ballynahinch is the main route for converging traffic from the west (M1/A49) and north (A21/A24) of the province. This problem is particularly prevalent during the Easter and summer holiday seasons with road users seeking to access the popular seaside town of Newcastle and the greater Mourne area.

2.4 The A24 trunk road conveys traffic through town centre streets which are fronted by retail, commercial, educational, public service and residential properties.

2.5 Approaching the town centre on the A24 from the north, a 40mph speed limit, extending some 0.6km from the end of the national speed limit, precedes the 30mph speed limit. On entering the 30mph zone hard shoulders are replaced with a mixture of verges and footways and a petrol service station, schools and manufacturing works give way to housing.

2.6 Throughout the commercial district dedicated on-street parking is a feature, usually on both sides of the road. Footways are provided on both sides of the road. Traffic lights and delivery vehicles stopping in the running lanes to pick up/set down goods to the adjacent premises impede progress of through traffic in this part of the town. A gyratory system is in place where 4 one-way streets circulate traffic around the town centre.

2.7 The A24 exits the mini roundabout at Dromore Street to the south along Church Street. The eastern footway ceases in the vicinity of the police station,

approximately 900m before the unrestricted/30mph speed limit signs (north of Spa Road junction).

2.8 Within the speed restriction there are many shops and dwellings, as well as a health centre, a bus depot and four schools fronting the route. There are approximately 130 properties with direct vehicular access to the A24.

2.9 On exiting the speed restriction, approximately 3.5km after entering it, the A24 to the south, crosses the Ballynahinch River, on the A24 Drumaness Road. The western footway extends a further 300m to the Ballymaglave Road.

3 TRUNK ROADS AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES

3.1 The Department for Regional Development is responsible for ensuring that the public road network is managed, maintained and developed. The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 defines the procedures to be followed when the Department proposes to build a new trunk road or carry out improvements to a road within the trunk road network.

3.2 The current programme to improve transportation links in Northern Ireland has evolved over the last fifteen years or so. Key documents and strategies guiding this programme include:

- The White Paper ‘*A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone*’ published 1998;
- “*Moving Forward: The Northern Ireland Transport Policy Statement*” published 1998;
- “*Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025*” published 2002;
- “*Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002-2012*” published 2002;
- “*Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan 2015*” published 2005;
- “*Expanding the Strategic Road Improvement Programme 2015 – Consultation Document*” published 2005;
- “*Investment Delivery Plan (IDP) for Roads*” published 2008;
- “*Draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021*” published 2011;
- “*Regional Development Strategy 2035*” published 2012; and
- “*Ensuring a Sustainable Transport Future – A new approach to Regional Transportation*” published 2012.

- 3.3** The Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025 (RDS) guides the development of Northern Ireland up to 2025 and beyond. The importance of the RDS is underpinned by Article 5 of the Strategic Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 and was recognised in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government.
- 3.4** The Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) supports the RDS and makes a significant contribution towards achieving the longer-term transportation vision contained within the RDS. The strategic direction and underlying principles of the RTS were agreed by the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2002.
- 3.5** The RTS envisaged significantly increased investment in Strategic Road Improvements (SRIs) focussed on removing bottlenecks on the Strategic Road Network, recognising the key role that SRIs will play in delivering a modern, safe and sustainable transport system for Northern Ireland.
- 3.6** The Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan 2015 (RSTNTP) is based on the guidance set out in the RDS and RTS. It sets out how the RTS will be implemented and confirms the individual schemes and projects to be implemented (subject to economic assessments, statutory processes and availability of resources) to support the RDS and RTS objectives and targets. It includes a programme for the implementation of Strategic Road Improvements to remove bottlenecks on the network where lack of capacity is causing serious congestion, and to improve the environment by providing bypasses of towns situated on the Regional Strategic Transport Network, thus relieving the effects of heavy through traffic. As part of this programme, the A24 Ballynahinch Bypass scheme has been identified as an additional major highway scheme which should commence later in the plan period.
- 3.7** In recognition of the changing challenges facing the region, the Executive agreed that the Regional Development Strategy, which was published in 2001 and reviewed in 2008, needed to be revised. Following public consultation, the RDS 2035 was published on 15 March 2012. Whilst many of the

objectives of the previous strategy are still valid this document now replaces it.

3.8 A revised strategy document - Ensuring a Sustainable Transport Future—A New Approach to Regional Transportation was published on 28 March 2012. The new approach to regional transportation compliments the Regional Development Strategy and aims to achieve its vision for transportation. One of the main Strategic Objectives of the Strategy is to *'improve connectivity within the region'* by completing the work identified in the current RSTNTP and Strategic Road Improvement Programme.

4 SCHEME DEVELOPMENT, STATUTORY PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC CONSULTATION

- 4.1** In August 2005, Scott Wilson was commissioned by the Department for Regional Development Roads Service (now TransportNI) to provide consultancy services in connection with the A24 Bypass route around Ballynahinch, County Down. The development of the A24 Bypass route has been carried out in accordance with the Department's procedures set out in Roads Service Policy and Procedure Guide E030 (RSPPG_E030) and the requirements of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB).
- 4.2** A Preliminary Options Report which summarises the outcome of a DMRB Stage 1 Scheme Assessment was completed in May 2007. Three corridor options, one to the west and two to the east of Ballynahinch, were assessed against the 5 Government criteria of Environment, Safety, Economy, Accessibility and Integration as well as Engineering. The report concluded that the eastern options were preferable based on engineering considerations as they would require fewer structures and crossing of roads and services, due to the shorter carriageway lengths required. All three options provided broadly similar decreases in personal injury accident numbers as well as having positive Benefit-to-Cost Ratios (BCRs), although these were significantly higher on the eastern corridor options.
- 4.3** An addendum to the Stage 1 Preliminary Options Report was prepared during 2007 to appraise an additional corridor (eastern corridor route Option C). This additional corridor was further to the east of Ballynahinch and avoided an isolated farm complex.
- 4.4** The Preliminary Options Report was formally approved by the Investment Decision Maker (IDM) in the form of the then Roads Service Board in January 2009. This is RSPPG E030 Approval Gateway 0. Following Approval Gateway 0, a DMRB Stage 2 Scheme Assessment was undertaken for three route options within the preferred route corridor.

4.5 These route options were exhibited on 12 November 2009 at a non-statutory public consultation event in the town centre's Market House, to invite comments from the public on the option being considered. The findings from this consultation event were one of many factors taken into consideration at the end of the assessment during the identification of the preferred route. The Stage 2 Preferred Options Report was approved by the IDM on 23 January 2012. This is RSPPG E030 Approval Gateway 1.

4.6 The Preferred Route was then further developed into a Proposed Option. This development work included completing a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) examining the impacts of the scheme under a range of headings, detailing the factors that would be put in place to mitigate the impact of the proposed changes.

4.7 The statutory changes to the trunk road network, in terms of designation of the roads, were also determined in the draft Direction Order, with the draft Vesting Order prepared to reflect and enable the necessary purchase of lands.

4.8 The documents published for statutory public consultation w/c 23rd and 30th March 2015 included the:

- Environmental Statement;
- Draft Direction Order; and
- Draft Vesting Order.

4.9 The documents were made available at various locations and an Orders Exhibition was held on the 14th and 15th April 2015 in the Market House, Ballynahinch where members of the TransportNI and their technical advisors were available to explain the details of the Proposed Scheme. 36 responses were received by the Department prior to the consultation closing date of 19th May 2015. 23 of these responses raised objections to elements of the Proposed Scheme. Many of the objections related to a number of issues,

however, the breakdown of the predominant theme of each objection is as follows:

- 11 relate to direct impacts on land holdings, either business (farmland & outbuildings) or domestic;
- 3 relate to concerns about the environmental impact including the potential for increased flooding;
- 3 relate to changes in access arrangements/impact of the bypass on passing trade;
- 2 relate to the uncertainty in the timeframe as to when the Proposed Scheme may be delivered and related compensation for the impact;
- 2 relate to the scope of the scheme and potential wider impacts of the scheme;
- 1 relates to the provision of a compact grade-separated junction at Crossgar Road; and
- 1 was received from Northern Ireland Electricity.

4.10 Two further objections were received after the consultation closing date:

- 1 relates to the direct impact on a sports facility; and
- 1 relates to access into an area of development land.

4.11 There were 5 letters in support of the scheme 8 comments that did not express a view either in favour or against. One further letter of support was received after the consultation closing date.

4.12 In addition to the consultation highlighted above, there have been a number of meetings with key stakeholders to allow the Department to consider and where appropriate incorporate stakeholder requirements and possible mitigation measures during the development of the Proposed Scheme. Many of these meetings took place after the formal objections were lodged.

4.13 On consideration of the responses submitted, the Department has determined it appropriate to convene a Public Inquiry to examine the case for and against the Proposed Scheme.

5. PUBLIC INQUIRY

- 5.1** The Department has appointed Mr Mike Shanks as the Inspector to the Inquiry. Formal notice of the intention to hold a Public Inquiry was published in the Belfast Gazette, the News Letter, the Irish News, the Belfast Telegraph, the Mourne Observer and the Down Recorder during week ending 6 November 2015.
- 5.2** The Department has prepared responses to the objections that have been lodged and exchanged information with the objectors.

6. THE DEPARTMENT'S CONSIDERATION

- 6.1** The A2/A24 Newcastle to Carryduff Trunk Road Network linking the Belfast Metropolitan Area to South Down passes through the heart of Ballynahinch in a general north/south orientation.
- 6.2** The A24 from Belfast to Clough forms part of the Regional Strategic Transport Network (RSTN) within Northern Ireland. The RSTNTP includes a programme for the implementation of SRIs to remove bottlenecks on the network where lack of capacity is causing serious congestion, and to improve the environment by providing bypasses of towns situated on the RSTN. As part of this programme, the A24 Ballynahinch Bypass scheme has been identified a SRI which should commence later in the plan period.
- 6.3** The appraisal of proposals for improvement are assessed against the Government's five criteria of Environment, Safety, Economy, Accessibility and Integration and also against the scheme specific objectives, i.e.:
- To reduce journey times for strategic A24 traffic in the opening year;
 - To improve journey time reliability for strategic A24 traffic in the opening year;
 - To contribute positively to transport economic efficiency;
 - To contribute positively to road safety;
 - To minimise the impact of the scheme on the environment; and
 - To achieve value for money.
- 6.4** TransportNI has considered the options available and concluded that implementation of the Proposed Scheme would greatly benefit both strategic and local road users by reducing journey times, improving journey time reliability and improving safety on the A24 Belfast to Newcastle trunk road.

7. THE PROPOSED SCHEME

- 7.1** The proposed A24 Ballynahinch Bypass would tie into the existing road network at the northern extent of the scheme with a new 4-arm at-grade roundabout at the junction of the A24 Belfast Road and the A21 Saintfield Road.
- 7.2** Travelling in a southbound direction, the proposed alignment would split away from the existing A24 before passing over agricultural ground on a shallow embankment. The embankment height would then increase towards a new bridge constructed over the U123 Moss Road. A Differential Acceleration Lane would be provided for southbound traffic exiting the new roundabout (at Saintfield Road) onto the bypass. This will provide an overtaking opportunity for approximately 660m before tapering in to a single carriageway on the approach to the B7 Crossgar Road.
- 7.3** The proposed mainline would continue to the south-east with a double crossing of the Glassdrumman River. The proposed alignment would then turn toward the south and enter a significant section of cutting where the bypass would pass under the B7 Crossgar Road.
- 7.4** The proposed cutting on the eastern side of the mainline to the south of the B7 Crossgar Road would be in excess of 30m deep and would be formed into the side of an existing drumlin which would be graded back from the road.
- 7.5** The proposed mainline would then veer in a south west direction with a culverted crossing of Windmill Stream. The proposed mainline would then rise onto an embankment over existing agricultural land and the recorded flood plain on its approach to the crossing of the Ballynahinch River. The proposed bridge crossing of the Ballynahinch River and its associated flood plain would be approximately 90m in length.

- 7.6** The proposed mainline would terminate at the southern end with a new 4-arm at-grade roundabout located at the existing junction of the B2 Downpatrick Road and the A24 Drumaness Road where it would tie into the existing road network.
- 7.7** A Wide Single 2+1 (WS2+1) carriageway would be provided for northbound traffic exiting the new roundabout (at Downpatrick Road) onto the bypass. This will provide an overtaking opportunity for approximately 880m before tapering in to a single carriageway on the approach to B7 Crossgar Road.
- 7.8** Due to the strategic nature of the proposed bypass, there would be no provision for direct access to adjacent agricultural land.
- 7.9** Saintfield Road Roundabout would be constructed at the junction of the A24 Belfast Road with the A21 Saintfield Road and would connect these roads to the proposed bypass. The old Saintfield Road would be stopped up at its northern end where it would be crossed by the new bypass and a separate new access to existing properties would be required.
- 7.10** Downpatrick Road Roundabout would be constructed at the junction of the A24 Drumaness Road with the B2 Downpatrick Road and would connect these roads to the proposed bypass. The Crabtree Road would be stopped up at its northern end where it would be crossed by the new roundabout. A new Crabtree Link road some 100m to the south of the new roundabout would provide access to properties and the retained portion of Crabtree Road from the A24 Drumaness Road.
- 7.11** The proposed bypass would intersect the existing U123 Moss Road on low-lying ground to the eastern side of the Ballynahinch town Settlement Limit. Several residential properties are located in the vicinity of this crossing point as well as a small engineering business and premises. There would be minimal change to the alignment of Moss Road on either side of the underpass.

- 7.12** It is proposed that a compact grade separated junction would connect the B7 Crossgar Road with the proposed bypass. The junction would include connector loops in the north-east and south-west quadrants which would include nearside diverge tapers. A new overbridge would carry the Crossgar Road over the proposed bypass. A section of continuous single lane dualling would be provided on the mainline in the proximity of this junction to prevent vehicles from turning right either onto or off the proposed bypass. The north-east connector loop would incorporate a junction with the realigned C370 Ballylone Road. The existing Ballylone Road would be severed by the proposed bypass. In order to maintain connectivity with the B7 Crossgar Road the Ballylone Road would be realigned to a priority junction with the north-east connector loop.
- 7.13** The existing junction of the U127 Crabtree Road with the B2 Downpatrick Road is in close proximity to the priority junction between the Downpatrick Road and the A24 Drumaness Road. The existing junction of the Crabtree Road would be stopped up to vehicular traffic and a new link road provided with a new priority junction onto the existing Drumaness Road.
- 7.14** A shared footway/cycleway extending between the terminal roundabouts would be included within the proposed A24 Ballynahinch Bypass scheme. It would be a minimum 2.0m wide with a 1.5m separation from the carriageway and would be widened where possible, over visibility splays for example to provide a 3.5m wide facility, including a 1m separation strip from the carriageway. It is proposed that the footway/cycleway would be connected to the existing road/pedestrian network at the terminal roundabouts where crossing facilities would be provided through carriageway splitter islands as well as at the Crossgar Road junction.
- 7.15** A 'Park & Share' facility to accommodate 27 parking bays (including 3no. disabled bays) would be constructed on the northern side of the proposed Saintfield Road Roundabout between the A24 Belfast Road and A21 Saintfield Road.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1** TransportNI has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of the options for the Proposed Scheme including a full environmental impact assessment which has identified appropriate mitigation measures that would be implemented in the future construction contract by the appointed Contractor.
- 8.2** The Proposed Scheme has a TransportNI approved Estimate Range of £40-£50Million. The economic assessment demonstrates that the Proposed Scheme would provide a good economic return with a Benefit to Cost Ratio of 2.146 under the predicted traffic growth forecast over the 60 year economic life of the scheme.
- 8.3** Implementation of the Proposed Scheme would greatly benefit both strategic and local road users by reducing journey times, improving journey time reliability and improving safety on the A24 Belfast to Newcastle trunk road.