

A32 Cornamuck Realignment, Omagh



**Notice of Intention to Proceed
Departmental Decision**

February 2016

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1 Content of Decision

- 1.1 The Department for Regional Development has decided to proceed with the A32 Cornamuck Realignment between Dromore and Irvinestown, Co Tyrone. The works will entail the realignment of the A32 Tummery Road, from a point 70m east of the U1624 Drumskinny Road junction, extending in a westerly direction to a point of 350 metres north-west of the C681 Longhill Road junction.
- 1.2 The scheme will provide approximately 1.6km of new and improved single trunk carriageway, including a 0.73km section of online widening and realignment with a 0.87km section of offline carriageway construction. The improvement works will provide a 7.3m wide carriageway with 1.0m hard strips and 2.5m wide verges. In addition, the scheme will improve the adjoining Longhill Road by providing 170m of offline realignment to facilitate a staggered junction where the new road will bisect the Longhill Road. The improved section of the Longhill Road will provide for a 6m wide carriageway with 2m verges to the northern section, and a 5.5m carriageway and 2m verges to the southern section. The works also include the provision of precast concrete drainage culverts, soft ground improvement works and substantial earthworks (maximum cut depth of 14.2 metres & maximum embankment fill height of 11.2 metres).

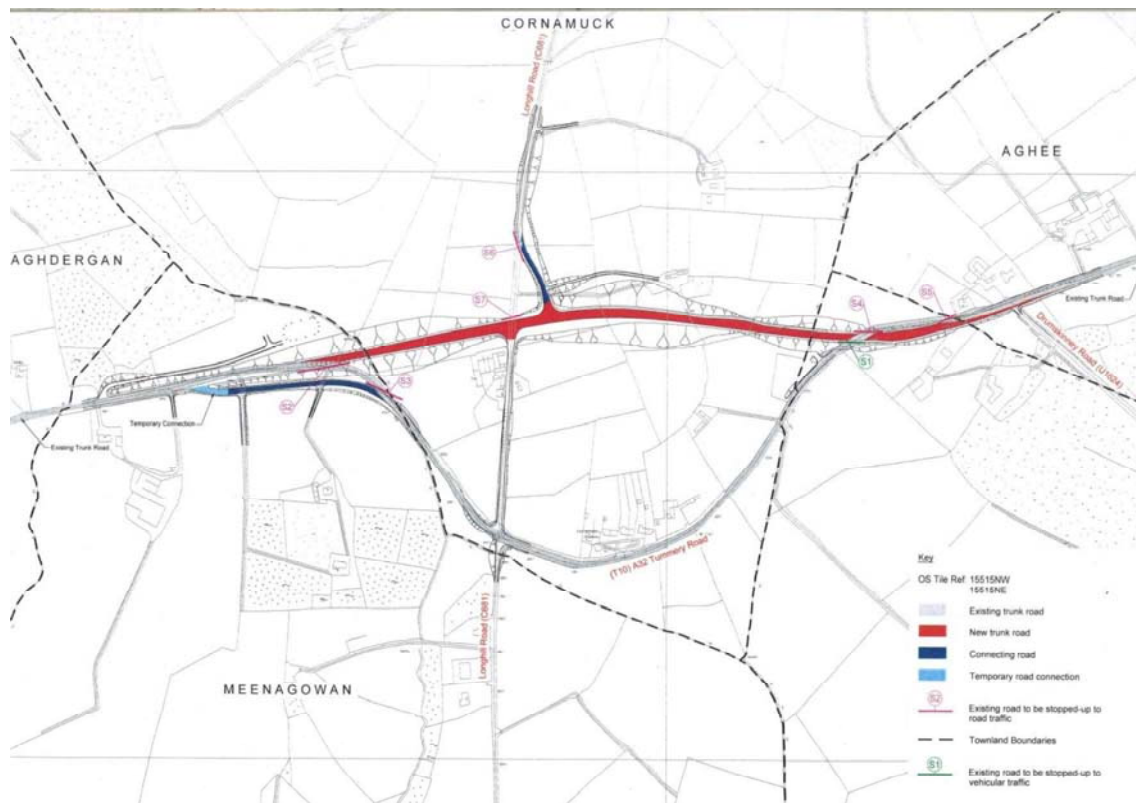


Figure 1.1 Extents of Proposed Scheme

- 1.3 Sections 2 and 3 below set out the main reasons and considerations on which the decision to proceed with the scheme is based and describes the measures that will be incorporated to mitigate any adverse effects.

2 Basis for Decision

2.1 Need for road realignment

- 2.1.1 The A32 at Cornamuck within the limits of the scope of this study, is a single carriageway with substandard horizontal and vertical alignment, the combination of which results in slower journey times, a lack of overtaking opportunities, compromised road safety and associated poor journey ambience.
- 2.1.2 The A32 Cornamuck Realignment Scheme is a priority scheme identified within an overall road improvement strategy for the A32 Omagh to Enniskillen route as developed by Transport NI between 2006 and 2008. The strategy report confirms that 55% of the A32 Omagh to Enniskillen route falls significantly short of current design standard. It recommends the delivery of nine carriageway improvements (both on-line and off-line) and targets the worst sections of the route with the objective of optimising the improvement in “ride quality” to alleviate distress to those travelling under blue light in ambulances between the Omagh County Hospital and surrounding district and the new South West Acute hospital in Enniskillen.
- 2.1.3 The opening of the new South West Acute hospital in Enniskillen in 2012 has added to the increase in traffic flows along the route. The inclusion of an Accident & Emergency Service to the Omagh area adds further emphasis to the need for safe, fast and reliable journey times along the A32 route.
- 2.1.4 The scheme objectives for the A32 Cornamuck Realignment are as follows;
- To improve the overall standard of the A32 route;
 - To reduce journey times along the route;
 - To provide overtaking opportunities;
 - To improve journey reliability;
 - To improve road safety;
 - To improve access to and from the South West Acute hospital in Enniskillen, for emergency vehicles in particular; and
 - To provide a net positive return on investment.

2.2 Policy Context

- 2.2.1 The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) sets out the spatial development framework for Northern Ireland up to 2025. The long-term vision for transportation contained within the RDS is:

“To have a modern, sustainable, safe transportation system, which benefits society, the economy, and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone’s quality of life.”

The scheme is compliant with the aims of the RDS as it will contribute to the creation of a modern, sustainable and safe transport system for the region, contribute to the economic development of rural Northern Ireland generally and improve accessibility.

2.2.2 Improvements to the A32 Omagh to Enniskillen route at this location were proposed in the consultation document 'Expanding the Strategic Road Improvement (SRI) Programme 2015', published in July 2006. At that time, a strategy for improving the A32 was also developed by Transport NI in the document 'A32 Omagh-Enniskillen Improvement Strategy' which considered alternative options to enhance the transport links between Omagh and Enniskillen. This study concluded that a series of on-line and off-line improvement schemes, including the A32 Cornamuck Realignment scheme, provided the best solution for the route.

2.2.3 The Investment Delivery Plan (IDP) for Roads (2008) identified Transport NI capital priorities over the ensuing ten years. The IDP informs and supports the Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan. The A32 between Omagh, Irvinestown and Enniskillen is one of the improvements listed within the strategic road improvements with a requirement "*to improve access to the new hospital at Enniskillen.*"

2.3 Scheme Development and Options Appraisal

2.3.1 In the first stage of development, three potential road improvement strategies were developed and assessed within the defined route corridor in terms of road geometry, buildability, safety, cost, and value for money. Accepting that there was very limited scope in terms of alignment alternatives the options appraisal sought to primarily identify the carriageway standard that should be applied. These were:

- Normal Single Carriageway (S2)
- Wide Single Carriageway (WS2)
- Wide Single 2+1 Carriageway (2+1)

Following this assessment it was recommended that the S2 & WS2 strategies be taken forward to Stage 2 of the development process with a view to assessing detailed single carriageway design options.

2.3.2 The two options (S2 & WS2) were assessed in terms of engineering, environment, traffic and economics. A Web TAG appraisal was also carried out.

2.3.3 The analysis indicated the S2 option had a marginally higher BCR resulting in a better return on investment.

2.3.4 Approval was granted by TNI Board in March 2012 to adopt the offline single carriageway (S2) as the preferred option for the Cornamuck realignment scheme. This option was therefore taken forward to Stage 3, i.e. detailed design.

2.3.5 In October 2014, Amey were commissioned to assist Transport NI in the design and development of the A32 Cornamuck Realignment scheme and take it through the statutory procedures.

2.4 Public Consultation

2.4.1 Meetings were held during late 2014 to inform all affected landowners of the proposal and to invite comment. Information leaflets were also distributed during December 2014 to householders within 300 metres of the scheme footprint.

2.4.2 A comments section within the information leaflet, give landowners and householders an opportunity to provide additional comments. No responses were received by the end of the consultation period in January 2015.

2.5 Scheme Progress

- 2.5.1 Since 2008 scheme design and development has progressed and an Environmental Statement was prepared and published as required by legislation. The main purpose of the Environmental Statement is to identify and assess the magnitude and significance of environmental effects associated with the implementation of the scheme and set out how these effects can be mitigated.
- 2.5.2 The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Report for the scheme (compiled in accordance with DMRB HD47/08) concluded that due to the potential significant effects on the environment, an EIA would be required in accordance with Article 67 of The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 [as substituted by the Roads (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999 and amended by The Roads (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007].
- 2.5.3 The scheme falls within Annex II to the EIA Directive (Council Directive 85/337/EEC as amended by Council Directive No. 97/11/EC and Directive No. 2003/35/EC of the European Parliament and Council) taking account of the relevant selection criteria set out in Annex III to the amended Directive. For Annex II projects, a process that determines if there are potential significant environmental effects must be followed.
- 2.5.4 The Department determined that an Environmental Statement (ES) should be prepared. The ES has been prepared in accordance with the methodologies outlines in DMRB Volume 11 Environmental Assessment (June 1993 and subsequent amendments), with cognisance of relevant legislation, guidance and best practice. Regulation 43(1) of The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) (which transposes Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 into Northern Ireland legislation) requires that a “competent authority”, before deciding to undertake, or give consent, permission or other authorization for a plan or project which—

(a)- is likely to have a significant effect on a European site in Northern Ireland (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and

(b)- is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site,

shall make an Appropriate Assessment on the implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives.

- 2.5.5 Regulations 43 & 44 of The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) transpose the obligations on the member state highlighted in Article 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 of the Habitats Directive. This statutory undertaking has given rise in Northern Ireland to the colloquial term of Article 6 assessment as under guidance from Europe an Appropriate Assessment is only part of the assessment process. This recommends a four stage approach to carrying out an Appropriate Assessment, these being:

Stage 1 – Screening

Stage 2 - Appropriate assessment

Stage 3 – Assessment of Alternative solutions

Stage 4 – Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain

2.5.6 A Stage 1 Appropriate Assessment was included within the Environmental Statement which was subject to public consultation along with the draft orders. The Stage 1 Screening Report concluded that given:

- the nearest European sites, namely Tonnagh Beg Bog SAC and Cranny Bogs SAC, are over 8Km from the Cornamuck site, and;
- the lack of source pathways (e.g. roads, watercourses, etc.), and;
- the nature of the Cornamuck construction works,

that no conservation objectives will be compromised by the proposed scheme. It is therefore concluded that there will be no impact on any Natura 2000 site as a result of the proposed scheme.

2.5.7 In the circumstances, the Department is satisfied that applying the above approach and for the reasons set out in the Screening Report no reasonable scientific doubt exists with regard to the effect of the scheme on any special areas of conservation.

2.5.8 Accordingly, in light of the Appropriate Assessment process undertaken and the information presented in the Screening Report within the Environmental Statement, the Department (as the Competent Authority) is content that the construction and operation of the A32 Cornamuck Realignment would not, by itself or in combination with other known plans or projects, adversely affect the integrity of the Tonnagh Beg Bog SAC or the Cranny Bogs SAC or their ability to meet their conservation objectives.

2.5.9 The Notice of publication of the Environmental Statement (ES), Notice of Intention to Make a Direction Order (NIMDO) and Notice of Intention to Make a Vesting Order (NIMVO) were published in the local press during the weeks ending 27th August and 3rd September 2015. The Statutory Consultation Period ended on 16 October 2015.

2.6 Response to Statutory Notices

2.6.1 The Department received a number of comments on the Environmental Statement from statutory consultees. Each of these has been considered individually, actioned appropriately and responses issued.

2.6.2 As no further comments were received it was decided to proceed with the scheme without recourse to a public inquiry.

3 Measures to Mitigate Adverse Effects

3.1 The scheme includes measures to avoid, reduce and where possible, offset the adverse effects of the project. These measures are set out in the Environmental Statement and are summarised below.

3.2 Land Use

3.2.1 The scheme will impact upon **eleven** landowners and will sever some agricultural holdings. There are a further 8 interests in the form of rights of way and tenancies. A total of 7.85 hectares will be vested for the scheme.

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- 3.2.2 The alignment design has sought to minimise land take and avoid demolition of buildings. No dwellings or buildings will be required for the project.
 - 3.2.3 In order to minimise agricultural land severance and ensure agricultural activities can be accommodated, field access, livestock holding pens and other mitigation measures will be provided, where appropriate.
 - 3.2.4 The Department will seek to agree all mitigation measures and accommodation works with the affected landowners.
 - 3.2.5 Taking into account the mitigation measures, the scheme will result in a **slight adverse** impact on land use.

3.3 **Geology and Soils**

- 3.3.1 The proposed scheme has the potential to affect the geology and soils of the area. Measures to minimise the impact of the scheme on local geology include minimising the excavation footprint, re-use of in-situ material and importation of additional material from local sources.
- 3.3.2 Land take over the length of the proposed scheme would affect surface materials (soils) during construction. Mitigation measures to be taken include controlled working practices by minimising land take, installing pre-earthworks drainage, avoiding repetitive handling of soils, limiting the size of stockpiles to reduce the compaction and erosion of material and reinstatement of soils to their original locations where possible.
- 3.3.3 A potential source of contamination is from coal tar which is present in the existing A32 pavement. The coal tar has potential to impact on soils and water quality during construction. The contract for the construction of the new road will make provision for dealing with this coal tar in accordance with Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) requirements.
- 3.3.4 A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will be prepared to manage any unexpected contamination generated during the Construction Phase of the scheme to prevent adverse effects on local groundwater, surface water, land and air receptors.
- 3.3.5 Overall, with mitigation, the proposed scheme will have a **slight adverse** impact on the geology and soils of the area.

3.4 **Water Quality and Drainage**

- 3.4.1 During the construction phase, works will be required to divert the Diamond Drain (an undesignated watercourse) and the Cornamuck Drain (a designated watercourse) as part of the scheme design. The alteration works to these watercourses have the potential to affect water quality.

Surface water

- 3.4.2 Construction works will be carried out in accordance with consent/licence conditions imposed by Northern Ireland regulators. Appropriate measures will be put in place prior to and during construction work in accordance with legislative requirements and good practice guidelines, including measures to manage silt laden runoff (pre earthworks drainage etc) and the storage and use of polluting substances on site.
- 3.4.3 The Contractor will prepare and implement a Silt Management Plan to manage and programme construction activities in order to prevent sediment generation, protect water bodies from sediment pollution and propose adequate measures to treat runoff prior to discharge.
- 3.4.4 The drainage design for the proposed road includes Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS) techniques together with conventional measures to provide treatment of road runoff.

Ground water

3.4.5 Site management practices will be undertaken in accordance with NIEA's Policy and Procedure Guidelines. A watching brief will be maintained during construction works.

3.4.6 Where the realigned road is in cutting and is below the water table, it is likely that a permanent system of ground water control will be required to maintain a depressed groundwater table and hence prevent seepage onto the carriageway.

Flood Risk

3.4.7 It is not possible to prohibit construction work within the watercourses. However, in order to mitigate against potential impacts on flooding, construction work within drainage channels will be monitored and limited.

3.4.8 Other potential impacts include affecting flooding in the area and increased pollution risk to groundwater and surface water. These will be monitored and assessed throughout the works and a temporary appropriate drainage system may be necessary.

3.4.9 Provided the above mitigation measures are implemented, there will be a **neutral** impact on water quality and drainage.

3.5 Ecology and Nature Conservation

3.5.1 Avoidance and impact reduction techniques to reduce the footprint of the proposed scheme as far as possible have been taken into account during the design process.

3.5.2 The greatest potential impact of the scheme is on mature trees and on ecological connectivity. Design and construction methods will reduce this impact considerably and post construction impacts will be moderated by the use of mitigation methods. The scheme will require the removal of habitats of generally low value. A number of roadside trees and hedges will be lost, but compensatory planting will replace these and will provide more extensive ground cover/foilage.

3.5.3 The scheme will have only slight effects on protected species including badgers, bats, birds and Irish hares and a neutral effect on otters. Impacts on bat flight lines will be reduced by landscape planting. Impacts on badgers and otters will be overcome by the provision of mammal fences, which have the potential to reduce the road casualty rates.

3.5.4 Overall, with mitigation, there will be a **slight adverse** impact on ecology and nature conservation.

3.6 Landscape Effects

3.6.1 The study area is primarily a rural landscape punctuated by farmsteads and small clusters of private dwellings and there are no international, national, regional or local landscape planning designations identified within the study area relevant to the scheme.

3.6.2 Overall, landscape impacts are very localised and landscape mitigation planting will help to blend the scheme into the landscape. *Side slopes to embankments and cuttings and land remnants will be subject to landscape planting. New boundaries will be planted with hedges to replace those lost by the scheme and help integrate the new road into the countryside.* The landscape impact is assessed as **moderate adverse**, due to the long-term impact of proposed earthworks on the landscape.

3.6.3 The proposed landscape mitigation planting will help to reduce the visual impacts of the scheme. It has been deemed that the residual impact significance will diminish over time from **Adverse** to **Neutral** as the landscape planting matures.

3.7 Cultural Heritage

- 3.7.1 A total of 30 cultural heritage constraints were identified from the wider Study Area for the scheme. These comprise of 1 no. Scheduled Monument, 1 no. Listed Building, 10 no. recorded archaeological (SMR) sites and 18 no. industrial heritage (IHR) sites.
- 3.7.2 The site of a corn kiln and an unrecorded dry-stone well are located within the footprint of the Scheme and will be removed during construction.
- 3.7.3 Subsurface remains of unrecorded archaeological sites may be present along the route. A geophysical ground penetrating radar survey will be undertaken in advance of the works to seek to locate any archaeological features and to inform and assist the development of a pre-earthworks soil strip and strip trenching strategy. The strategy will be agreed with NIEA Built Heritage Division prior to commencement of any ground investigation. Any features uncovered during the AI investigation will be recorded in accordance with best practice and the soil strip/trenches extended if necessary.
- 3.7.4 The overall significance of impacts to cultural heritage was considered to be **moderate adverse**, because of a recorded industrial heritage site (corn kiln). Confirmation of further mitigation measures to be employed in agreement with NIEA is anticipated to result in a **slight adverse / beneficial** impact.

3.8 Air Quality

- 3.8.1 No specific monitoring or mitigation measures are proposed as no significant adverse impacts on local air quality were predicted in the assessment.
- 3.8.2 However the construction phase of the scheme will result in dust and other air quality impacts. Mitigation measures will be put in place to minimise the impacts and it has been assessed that there will be a **slight adverse** impact during construction. These measures include dust control methods such as protecting surfaces from winds, spray exposed areas regularly to maintain surface moisture, minimise drop heights, wash paved roads and sheet and cover loaded vehicles.
- 3.8.3 On scheme opening, there will be both positive and negative impacts in terms of air quality. The realignment of the A32 road will move traffic further from some properties and closer to others. The shorter route length and maintained average speeds will result in a reduction in exhaust emissions. Overall there will be a **negligible** impact to air quality with no exceedance of National or European air quality standards.

3.9 Traffic Noise and Vibration

- 3.9.1 Mitigation measures that will manage construction noise and vibration impacts are proposed during the construction of the scheme including quiet working methods, reasonable hours of working for noisy operations, control of noise at source and monitoring of on-site noise.
- 3.9.2 The Contractor will establish and maintain good community relations through regular communication with landowners and ensuring measures are put in place to minimise noise impacts.
- 3.9.3 Overall, in terms of noise nuisance, the proposed scheme will be **beneficial** compared to existing conditions. This is because the realigned road results in the traffic noise being generally moved further away from residential properties, mainly Cornamuck bungalows.
- 3.9.4 In the long term, the re-alignment of the A32 Tummery Road is expected to result in both beneficial and negative effects on receptors (residential buildings) in relation to noise impact. In the short term, the effects on 27 receptors will be significant, however in the long term, only seven receptors are anticipated to experience significant effects. Two of these seven receptors are expected to experience **Significant Adverse** effect whereas the other five receptors are expected to experience **Significant Beneficial** effects in the long term.

3.10 Pedestrian, Cyclists, Equestrians and Community Effects

- 3.10.1 Two new bus lay-bys will be included, one on either side of the new carriageway. This will result in some minor increases and some minor decreases in the distance to walk to the bus stop by local pedestrians, depending on where they currently reside. Along the east bound carriageway, a 2 metre wide footpath will be provided between the junction of Longhill Road (North) and the bus lay-by, whilst an 80 metre long footpath will be provided between the stopped-up section of the A32 and the bus stop on the westbound carriageway.
- 3.10.2 Equestrians and cyclists using the A32 as a rural route for recreational purposes between Dromore and Irvinestown will have access to a wider carriageway on an improved road alignment with improved sight lines and 1m hard strips to both sides of the carriageway.
- 3.10.3 During construction road closures will only be undertaken in consultation with the NI Ambulance Service and other blue light services.
- 3.10.4 Overall, the scheme will have a **slight beneficial** impact for non motorised users.

3.11 Vehicle Travellers

- 3.11.1 The realigned carriageway and new junction arrangement may initially cause some minor frustration to some travellers until they become accustomed to the new road layout. However there will be appropriate advanced signage to identify the junctions and route options available to drivers. As vehicle travellers become accustomed to the new road network, route uncertainty will reduce.
- 3.11.2 The design standards to which the scheme will be constructed will mitigate most of the factors that increase the risk and hence the fear of potential collisions. The scheme and the new junction arrangements will have clear lane markings, safety barrier, signage and sight distances conforming to current standards. All road accesses will have sight-lines to current standard to enable safer access/egress which will reduce fear of collisions at conflict points. Journey times will be reduced, travellers will experience fewer delays and the improved alignment, will enable drivers to overtake slower moving traffic.
- 3.11.3 The views from the existing A32 are predominantly restricted to intermittent. There are some restricted views due to mature vegetation, the rolling landscape and bends in the existing road alignment. The proposed scheme will improve views from the road and enhance overall journey ambience
- 3.11.4 The proposed scheme will have a **slight beneficial** impact on both driver stress and views from the road.

3.12 Disruption Due to Construction

- 3.12.1 The A32 Cornamuck Realignment scheme has the potential to cause significant disruption during the construction phase. The scheme will require the disposal of a large volume of excavated material and the importation of construction materials; this will generate significant volumes of construction traffic. There are five residential properties, and one outbuilding within 100m of the scheme footprint, all of which have potential to be exposed to dust, noise and vibration associated with the construction phase.
- 3.12.2 Disruption associated with the construction of the scheme will be time bound, and it is anticipated that the works will take approximately 52 weeks to complete. The disruption caused during the construction period will be managed by the appointment under the contract of an Environmental

Manager and a Traffic Coordination Safety and Co-ordination Officer. The approved mitigation measures as detailed within the contractors Quality Submission and Construction Environmental Management Plan to minimise the impact of the construction works on the surrounding environment and local community will be monitored and adhered to.

- 3.12.3 The impact of the scheme, with the proposed mitigation measures, in terms of 'disruption due to construction' is assessed as **slight adverse**.

3.13 Plans and Policies

- 3.13.1 The proposed scheme conforms to the policies set out in the 'Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025' and the 'Regional Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002-2012'. The scheme will improve passenger journeys and freight transport links between Dromore and Irvinestown, as well as onwards to Enniskillen and the border.
- 3.13.2 Several aspects of the scheme have been identified which may cause significant impacts if mitigation measures are not put in place. These include issue relating to ecology, landscape, cultural heritage and the water environment. Mitigation measures have been proposed to ensure the scheme complies with 'PPS 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside'.
- 3.13.3 There is potential for major impacts on watercourses and aquatic life, and bat populations within the study area. 'PPS 2: Planning and Nature Conservation' strives to maintain the effective conservation of wildlife and mitigation measures will be implemented to ensure this policy is adhered to..
- 3.13.4 Overall, it has been assessed that the proposed scheme is compliant with mitigation or neutral with all of the plans and policies relevant to the scheme

3.14 Aquatic Ecology and Fisheries

- 3.14.1 The Diamond and Cornamuck drains support low-diversity, mainly pollution-tolerant, macro invertebrates (insects, etc) and have limited fisheries value. The proposed crossings of the watercourses will increase shading, and the impact, with mitigation measures, is considered to be **slight adverse**.
- 3.14.2 In order to control erosion and sediment movement during the works, general guidelines will be followed and off /on site runoff will be intercepted and managed through pre-earthworks drainage and settlement ponds. This limits the potential for soils to be eroded and enter streams in runoff.
- 3.14.3 In general sites such as storage areas, machinery depots, site offices, temporary access roads or sites used for disposal of spoil will be located as far as is practicable from watercourses. Disposal of spoil will not be carried out in any location where run off into watercourses can occur.
- 3.14.4 The most effective method of mitigating habitat loss is to minimise it or, where this is not possible, to create new compensatory habitat.
- 3.14.5 Overall, with mitigation measures, it is considered that the impact of the scheme on the fisheries and aquatic ecology of the will be of **neutral** significance.

3.15 Cumulative Impacts

- 3.15.1 With the implementation of the mitigation measures detailed above, in the ES and the outline Construction Environmental Management Plan, there will be no significant interaction of impacts on the A32 Cornamuck Realignment scheme. There are no planning applications in the study area that would lead to cumulative impacts. There are a number of proposed road improvement schemes along the A32 and the A5. However, with mitigation measures, there will be no significant cumulative impacts with other schemes.