

Department for Regional Development

The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993

The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972

Departmental Statement
on the
A55 Knock Road Widening, Belfast

Environmental Statement Public Inquiry

Direction Order Public Inquiry

Vesting Order Public Inquiry

Stopping-up of Private Accesses Public Inquiry

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Department for Regional Development's Roads Service proposes to widen a 1.3km section of the A55 Outer Ring at Knock Road (Trunk Road T14). The section to be widened is between Glen Road and Kings Road, providing two lanes in each direction, together with a central median to accommodate right turning vehicles. The scheme will also upgrade existing junctions and provide improved facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. Ascot Park will also be stopped-up.
- 1.2 The scheme will help to reduce congestion for strategic traffic by providing more capacity along the road thus improving air quality for the local residents. It will also reduce the potential for collisions by providing facilities for turning traffic at junctions and side roads and will provide a more consistent standard of carriageway appropriate to the Outer Ring Road.
- 1.3 The A55 plays an increasingly important role as a key strategic road link in Belfast therefore the scheme proposes to improve the safety and efficiency of the Outer Ring at Knock such that it can better perform this strategic function.
- 1.4 This document sets out the need for the scheme and provides a brief overview of its development, with a description of the final proposal which will be examined at a Public Inquiry commencing on 8 November 2010.

2.0 The Existing Situation

- 2.1 The A55 Outer Ring Road provides a strategic link between the M1 at Stockman's Lane and the A2 Bangor Road at Tillysburn. Most of the route is served by dual or four lane carriageway, however a section of the road at Knock has only one lane in each direction.
- 2.2 The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP), published in 2004, proposed the widening of the narrow section of the Outer Ring Road at Knock to 2 lanes in each direction, together with right turning facilities.
- 2.3 This section of road, carrying approximately 38,000 vehicles per day, can cause traffic delay and congestion, especially at peak periods. The lack of provision for traffic turning in and out of the numerous frontage properties and side roads contributes to a significant number of collisions and sight lines are poor in many instances.
- 2.4 The section of road between Clarawood and the Kings Road has 10 junctions (plus the entrance to PSNI). The side roads from four of these junctions are culs-de-sac – Kingsden Park caters for 2 houses, Knockmount Park caters for 22 properties, Ascot Park caters for 49 properties, and Knockcastle Park caters for 26 properties. On its northern side, a further 47 properties have direct access onto the Knock Road.

3.0 Background and Project History

- 3.1 Dualling of the Knock Road was first proposed in the Belfast Transport Plan of 1969.
- 3.2 The Belfast Urban Area Plan (BUAP) 2001, published in 1989, proposed the widening of the Knock Road to a dual carriageway standard between the Service Stations and the Upper Newtownards Road. The proposal also included a service road provided for the full length of the scheme on its northern side (i.e. utilising the existing road) and a new link between Ascot Park and Shandon Park (permitting closure of the Ascot Park junction).
- 3.3 When the scheme was included in the BUAP, the houses within the protection corridor were subject to blight. Following blight notices, Roads Service purchased 36 properties on the southern side of Knock Road, including Nos. 11 & 13 Shandon Park. These are the only two properties which have not yet been demolished.
- 3.4 Following the publication of the BUAP an exhibition for a dualling scheme was held in 1991. However the proposed scheme was delayed due to lack of funding.
- 3.5 In 2001 capacity improvements were carried out at the Kings Road junction, which were based on a 4 lane single carriageway standard rather than the previous BUAP dual carriageway scheme.
- 3.6 All transport proposals have since been reviewed as part of the process to develop the Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) and the BMTP. The RTS identified improvements that address bottlenecks on the strategic highway network as one of its priorities. The BMTP process identified the A55 Outer Ring Road as part of the strategic highway network with an increasingly more important role in the future, and proposed widening to a 4 lane single carriageway at an estimated cost of £4.0m.
- 3.7 Options for providing capacity enhancement on the A55 Knock Road section were developed prior to BMTP but were not taken forward by Roads Service.
- 3.8 The Stage 2 Assessment began with a preliminary appraisal of the three main options A, B and C which had previously been developed as part of the BMTP. Roads Service presented these for inspection at an informal public consultation held in June 2006. Feedback from this consultation led to the development of a hybrid of option B with a component of option C. In order to identify this hybrid it was labelled option D.

- 3.9 Following assessments in terms of safety, economy, environmental impact, accessibility and integration the Stage 2 Scheme Assessment Report (Preferred Options Report) recommended that this option be taken forward as the preferred option due to its relatively lesser impact on the local community, lesser impact on the environment and improvements to the safety of pedestrians and cyclists in relation to the existing situation.
- 3.10 The Preferred Option identified by the above procedure was presented to the Roads Service Board on 7 February 2007. The Board approved a recommendation to widen a 1.3km section of this road to provide 2 lanes in each direction, together with a central median to improve safety for right turning vehicles. The scheme with a current estimated cost in the range £12 million to £16 million would also upgrade existing junctions and provide improved facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.
- 3.11 The Minister announced the commencement of statutory procedures in May 2007. The Regional Development Committee agreed to the making of the draft Direction Order in October 2009.

4.0 Public Consultation

- 4.1 The BMTP identified the Knock Road section of the A55 as a bottleneck in the strategic road network. The Plan was endorsed by the Northern Ireland Assembly and published in 2004 after extensive consultation with public representatives, statutory bodies and other key stakeholders.
- 4.2 In June 2006, Roads Service held an informal 2 day public consultation in the Stormont Hotel to explain the scheme development process and seek the public's initial views on 3 options being considered to improve this section of road. The options ranged from minimal widening, providing a 4 lane single carriageway, to a dual carriageway scheme that included parallel access roads for local residents.
- 4.3 The above event was publicised in May 2006 through three daily newspapers, invitations to all public representatives from Belfast and Castlereagh councils, internet and through leaflet drops (approximately 500) in the local area.
- 4.4 Feedback from this informal consultation helped to develop a preferred option incorporating elements from the original options which could then be further refined as part of the statutory procedures.
- 4.5 Between 9 and 11 July 2007, Roads Service staff distributed an information leaflet to over 1000 households living alongside Knock Road. The leaflet outlined the background to the scheme, the current environmental/geotechnical surveys being carried out and the next steps for the widening scheme.

- 4.6 Between May and July 2008 Roads Service staff commenced initial consultation with landowners who would be directly affected by the proposed scheme. Approximately 35 residents living alongside Knock Road were visited to gauge opinion and consider the impact of the preferred option on individual properties.
- 4.7 In June 2009 further consultation was carried out with residents directly affected by proposals to introduce a single access serving Nos. 60-68 Knock Road and 1-1a Kingsden Park and adjacent lands.
- 4.8 Since November 2006 seven meetings have taken place between local residents groups and Roads Service staff to discuss the impact of the widening scheme and residents concerns.
- 4.9 In preparation for the publication of the statutory orders and public exhibition in November 2009, approximately 2700 leaflets were distributed to residents on either side of Knock Road as well as libraries, businesses, police headquarters and Shandon Golf Club. The statutory orders were published in three local newspapers and invitations to a two day public exhibition were sent to all public representatives from Belfast and Castlereagh councils, PSNI, local MLAs and MEPs.
- 4.10 The public information days were well attended and feedback on the preferred option was welcomed. The proposal was presented in plan layouts, cross sections and 'before and after' photographic images at various locations along the scheme length.
- 4.11 The publication notices and display boards at the exhibition also outlined an official consultation period where anyone who wished to object to the statutory orders being made could do so in writing between the publication date and the end of December 2009.
- 4.12 The display board information, options reports and background to the scheme proposal are also available to view on the Roads Service website.

5.0 Statutory Procedures

5.1 Environmental Statement

- 5.1.1 Part V of The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993* sets out the statutory requirements for assessment of environmental impacts of road schemes and requires the Department to determine using the Annexes within EC Council Directive 85/337/EEC on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment, (as amended by EC Council Directive No. 97/11/EC and Directive No. 2003/35/EC of the European Parliament and

*Part V was substituted by the Roads (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999, (S.R. 1999 No. 89) and amended by The Roads (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 (S.R. 2007 No. 346)

Council), whether or not a relevant project should be made subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment, and to publish this determination. The Department determined that the Project fell within Annex II of Directive 85/337/EEC and that an Environmental Statement should be prepared.

5.1.2 The environmental impact assessment was carried out and an Environmental Statement (ES) prepared by consultants, Amey, in accordance with the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 and the relevant EC Council Directives. The ES was published on 11 November 2009 with the statutory consultation period extending to 31 December 2009. The ES contains the findings of an environmental assessment and describes the measures proposed to mitigate the impact on the natural and built environment.

5.2 Notice of Intention to Make a Direction Order

5.2.1 As the A55 Outer Ring is a trunk route, a Direction Order is required in accordance with the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 for new sections of the route. For this purpose, a draft Order has been prepared and published (hereinafter described as the "Direction Order") and will be the subject of consideration at this Public Inquiry.

5.2.2 The Direction Order sets out, in detail, the following:

- designation of the widened section of road as a new trunk road; and
- the stopping-up to road traffic of a public road (Ascot Park at its junction with Knock Road).

5.2.3 Signs were posted on the road named in the Notice where stopping-up is proposed, to inform local residents.

5.3 Notice of Intention to Make a Stopping-up Order (Private Accesses)

5.3.1 The Stopping-up Order is required under Article 69 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 and sets out in detail the stopping-up to road traffic of five private accesses (serving 60 Knock Road, 62 Knock Road, 64, 66 and 68 Knock Road, 1 and 1a Kingsden Park and 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 9a, 11, 13, 15, and 17 Ascot Gardens) onto the A55 Knock Road.

5.4 Notice of Intention to Make a Vesting Order

5.4.1 The notice of intention to make a vesting order (hereinafter described as "Vesting Order") includes provision for acquisition of those lands and interests considered by the Department to be necessary for construction of the scheme with regard to:

- constructing the new route and alterations to side roads;

- demolishing three residential properties due to widening and provision of service roads;
- allowing for alterations to water courses;
- allowing for space to extend an existing culvert; and
- providing access to severed land and property

5.5 Publication of Notices

5.5.1 In accordance with the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 and the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, the Department placed the Notices relating to the Environmental Statement, Direction Order Vesting Order and Stopping-up Order in the Belfast Gazette on 13 November and in the following newspapers on 11 and 18 November 2009

- Belfast Telegraph
- Irish News
- News Letter

5.5.2 Copies of the Environmental Statement, Direction Order, Vesting Order, Stopping-up Order and associated maps were made available at the following locations for inspection:

- Roads Service Headquarters, Room 2-13, Clarence Court, 10-18 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8GB
- Roads Service - Eastern Division, Hydebank, 4 Hospital Road, BT8 8JL
- Belfast City Council, City Hall, Belfast
- Castlereagh Borough Council, 1 Bradford Court, Upper Galwally, Belfast
- Ballyhackamore Library, 1-3 Eastleigh Drive, Belfast

These documents were also circulated to 57 statutory consultees seeking their comments on the proposals.

5.6 Comments and Objections

- 5.6.1 As of 28 February 2010, a total of 126 responses have been received, 114 from private parties, 1 from Marie Curie, 1 from Shandon Golf Club, 1 from Sustrans and 9 from statutory consultees. In view of the Environmental Statement, Direction Order, Vesting Order and Stopping-up Order being published at the same time, many correspondents commented or objected to more than one of the orders. Some submissions would therefore be placed before all inquiries.
- 5.6.2 A total of 11 submissions were received after the objection period deadline, but these have been included in the overall figures and the issues raised in these submissions have been registered.
- 5.6.3 The main grounds for the objections received are:
- the consultation process;
 - effects of increased traffic in the local residential area;
 - justification for the proposal;
 - inadequate traffic modelling and appraisal;
 - road safety;
 - environmental issues; and
 - effect on property.
- 5.6.4 Owing to the number and nature of the objections received, the Department considered that a Public Inquiry should be held.
- 5.6.5 On 1 March 2010 Regional Development Minister Conor Murphy announced the decision to hold a public inquiry for the proposed widening of the A55.

6.0 Policy

- 6.1 The A55 Knock Road widening scheme is informed by the following strategic and policy frameworks.
- 6.2 **Shaping Our Future: Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025 (RDS):** The RDS contains a Spatial Development Strategy and related Strategic Planning Guidelines which aim to provide long-term policy directions, from a strategic spatial perspective, for the public and private sector and the whole community in Northern Ireland. A key element of the strategy is the emphasis on the development of a modern integrated transport system. Its stated longer term vision for transportation 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 everybody’s quality of life”*.
- 6.3 **Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002–2012 (RTS):** The RTS, a daughter document of the RDS, identifies strategic transportation investment priorities and considers potential funding sources and affordability of planned initiatives for the period 2002-2012. The purpose of the RTS is to

support the RDS and to make a significant contribution to achieving the longer-term vision for transportation. Delivery of the RTS is being progressed through three transport plans: the Sub-Regional Transport Plan; the Belfast Metropolitan Plan; and the Regional Strategic Transportation Network Transport Plan.

- 6.4 **Belfast Metropolitan Transportation Plan 2015 (BMTP):** The BMTP represents the implementation of strategies set out in the RDS and RTS and sets out transport schemes and measures expected to be carried out up to 2015 within the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA). The longer term vision for the Belfast metropolitan area's strategic highway network identifies a more important role for the A55 Outer Ring Road as a strategic road link. The Plan identifies a number of proposals to improve safety and efficiency of the A55 and provide a more consistent standard of road, one of these being the widening scheme at Knock Road.
- 6.5 **Investment Delivery Plan (IDP) for Roads:** The IDP, published in April 2008, sets out capital allocations for the current 3 year budget period to 2010/11 and indicative capital allocations for the 7 years thereafter. This document sets out the capital roads programme which is deliverable through the funding envisaged in the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI). In relation to the A55 Knock Road it anticipates procurement through to completion within the 2013/14 to 2017/18 timeframe.
- 6.6 The above policy documents and other documents related to the A55 Knock Road that have been referred to in this statement are available to view at Roads Service Eastern Division, Hydebank and links to these documents will be created from the following Roads Service website:

http://roadimprovements.roadsni.gov.uk/index/schemes/knock_road.htm

7.0 The Department's Consideration

- 7.1 The BMTP contains a number of highway proposals to enhance the operation of the strategic road network such that it can safely and efficiently cater for longer distance movements of freight to, from and between different parts of the BMA. Of particular importance are locations of regional importance such as Belfast city centre, the regional gateways and potential strategic development and employment locations.
- 7.2 The highway strategy is in line with the policies outlined in the RDS and the RTS.
- 7.3 The RDS recognised the need to:

“Assess the need for future strategic road improvements in the BMA in the context offacilitating the efficient movement of freight , especially

managing access to the motorway system and the regional gateway, the Westlink and river crossings as a regional priority....and providing environmental and safety benefits and removing congestion and pollution blackspots" (BMA 3.4)

- 7.4 The A55 is a trunk road connecting the M1 at Stockman's Lane to the A2 Bangor Road at Tillysburn and is part of the outer orbital metropolitan transport corridor identified in the BMTP. Its importance as part of the strategic road network was recognised in the RTS. The RTS confirmed the need to address bottlenecks on the strategic highway network where a lack of capacity causes undue congestion and thereby delay for freight, public transport and cars. Figure 5.5 of the RTS illustrates the types of strategic highway schemes envisaged by the RTS and this includes the widening of the A55 at Knock Road.
- 7.5 Traffic Surveys carried out on the A55 Outer Ring Road found that the Knock Road currently carries on average 38,000 vehicles per 24 hour-day (2-way) and is one of the busiest strategic roads within the BMA. National traffic growth forecasts can be used to predict a future traffic flow of over 59,000 vehicles per day by 2028. This flow comprises both local and strategic traffic.
- 7.6 There were 74 personal injury collisions on this section of the A55 between January 2001 and December 2008; 14 of these were serious and none were fatal. With traffic levels continuing to grow, it can be expected that traffic congestion will increase and consequently that road safety may deteriorate.
- 7.7 Much of the A55 Outer Ring Road has two lanes in each direction either as a single or dual carriageway. The section between Kings Road and Shandon Park is only a single lane carriageway and restricts flow of through traffic causing delays and congestion at times as well as driver uncertainty leading to a reduction in perceived safety. The BMTP therefore proposed widening this section to two lanes in each direction, with appropriate junction improvements.
- 7.8 The main objectives of the A55 Knock Road widening scheme are:
- to improve road safety by providing facilities for turning traffic at junctions;
 - to reduce traffic congestion for strategic traffic by providing more capacity along the road;
 - to provide a more consistent standard of carriageway appropriate to the outer ring road as part of the strategic road network;
 - to improve the air quality by reducing the amount of congestion;
 - to minimise the impact on the natural and built environment.

7.9 Roads Service concludes that the A55 Outer Ring Road is an important component of the strategic road network and accordingly the proposal to widen the section between Glen Road and Kings Road is fundamental to the improvement of transport management within the BMA. 'Do-Minimum' or carrying out 'selective' improvements are not considered to be realistic long-term options.

8.0 The Proposal

8.1 The proposed scheme will widen a 1.3km stretch of the existing Knock Road carriageway between Glen Road and Kings Road, providing two lanes in each direction together with a central median to accommodate right turning vehicles. This will be designed to urban dual carriageway standards with a 30mph speed limit.

8.2 The proposed carriageway will consist of two lanes westbound made up of 3.5m and 3.3m lane widths, 4.5m wide central median hatching and two similar lanes eastbound. A combined footway/cycleway on the City side will vary from 4.5m to 5.0m width and on the Dundonald side will be a 3.5m width.

8.3 On the approach to the Shandon/Sandown junction there will be solid splitter islands in each direction to prevent conflict between lanes of queuing traffic with right turning vehicles from properties. The islands will extend approximately 115m to the west of the junction and 75m to the east.

8.4 There will be an improved junction layout at Sandown/Shandon Park which will provide a fully controlled signalised junction for pedestrian, cyclist and vehicular movements.

8.5 In the interests of safety there will be two service roads constructed on the southern side of Knock Road. One service road will be constructed from Shandon Park serving Ascot Park and Ascot Gardens. Another service road will be constructed from Knock Road to serve Nos. 60-68 Knock Road as well as 1-1a Kingsden Park and adjacent lands.

8.6 Retaining walls and vehicle restraint systems (safety fencing) will be provided along selected lengths of the verge, where potential hazards pose a particular level of risk to road users, such as significant embankment heights and open watercourses.

8.7 An existing culvert located approximately 100m north of Cherryvalley, will be extended by 10m, to carry the new widened road over the Knock River.

8.8 Localised environmental impacts have been assessed as not being significant and the route has been deemed to have a moderate impact on local landscape which can be limited with appropriate mitigation. The Environmental Statement recognises the need for landscape mitigation

measures and substantial planting of appropriate varieties of indigenous species is proposed at various locations along the route.

- 8.9 Roads Service consultants will work closely with Rivers Agency regarding road drainage discharge rates and will ensure appropriate attenuation if required for carriageway run-off before entering receiving watercourses.

9.0 Conclusion

- 9.1 The Department has carried out a comprehensive study into the various options and undertaken a full environmental impact assessment of the preferred scheme. It has concluded that, although the construction of this scheme will have some environmental impact on the surrounding area, the effects can be appropriately mitigated. The widening of the A55 Outer Ring at Knock Road is preferred to a 'do-nothing' approach, or to implementing other small scale improvement measures along this strategic route.
- 9.2 'Shaping our Future', the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland, recognises that upgrading will be required on key sections of the strategic road network, to reduce congestion, improve safety, and improve reliability of journey times. Northern Ireland is almost totally dependent on a road based transport system, reflecting the small internal transport market and dispersed settlement pattern. The A55 Outer Ring Road provides a strategic link between the M1 at Stockman's Lane and the A2 at Tillysburn and is one of the most heavily trafficked corridors in Northern Ireland. It is therefore important to carry out this widening scheme to provide a safer and more consistent standard of carriageway appropriate to the Outer Ring Road.
- 9.3 The Department is satisfied that the selected proposal offers value for money.