

3 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

3.1 Introduction

As noted earlier, two public consultations were held to elicit public opinion on the dualling proposal. The well-attended 2-day exhibitions yielded an abundance of constructive comment. Visitors were encouraged to discuss the proposals with the Roads Service and Consultant staff manning the exhibition, and to comment in writing via the brochure questionnaire, letter or email. This section of the report summarises the outcome of these two public consultations, with specific reference to the Randalstown to Toome stretch.

3.2 Analysis of Questionnaire Responses

For comparison, this section has been split into two components, the first dealing with the February 2005 Exhibition, and the second dealing largely with the June 2005 Exhibition.

3.2.1 February 2005 Exhibition

As mentioned in Section 3.1, visitors were encouraged to complete questionnaires after viewing the public exhibition in Toome. More than 200 people attended the exhibition (216 actually took time to sign in) in Toome House, over the 2-day period. 210 completed responses were returned (228 respondents if including multiple signatures) and these have provided some vital information concerning public opinion on the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson dualling scheme. Of these 210 responses, 186 submitted just a questionnaire, 11 responses were just a letter, and 13 responses were a questionnaire with an accompanying letter. Whilst public opinion varied, most people accepted the principle of providing a dual carriageway between Randalstown and Castledawson, however there were differing views about the route it should take. By analysing the questionnaires, it is possible to get a clearer view of the general consensus on the dual carriageway proposal.

From addresses on the completed questionnaires, it is evident that most people attending the Public Exhibition were from Randalstown, Toome or Castledawson and the hinterlands, including Magherafelt and Ballyronan. However, several were from further away including Antrim, Belfast, Bangor, Limavady, Ballymena, Newtownards, Cookstown, Dungannon, Dungiven, and Londonderry.

Representatives from several organisations also attended, including the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Lough Neagh & Lower Bann Advisory Committee, North West Chamber of Commerce Initiative Ltd., Londonderry Chamber of Commerce, Agricultural Engineers and Farrier Services, GE McLarnon & Sons Ltd., The Potting Shed, Moneynick Service Station, Castlewood Contract Furniture, CCMS, SDC Trailers, as well as the Local Community Response Coordination Committee. Several individual constituency MLA's and Councillors also attended.

Question One: Do you support the principle of providing a continuous dual carriageway standard road between the western end of the M22 motorway at Randalstown to the Castledawson Roundabout? Tick Yes or No; if No, please give your reasons.

149 respondents (or 65.4% of the written responses) said Yes, 53 respondents (or 23.2% of the written responses) said No, and 26 respondents (or 11.4% of the written responses) left the question blank.

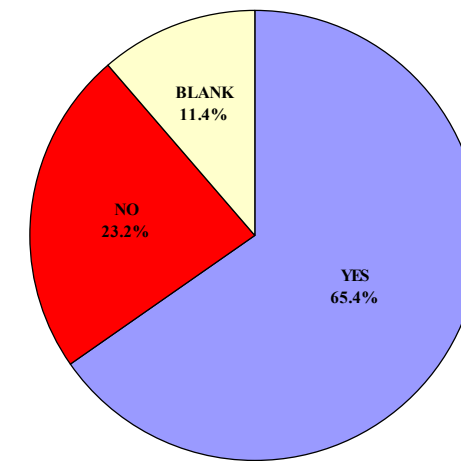


Figure 3.1: Opinion on the provision of a continuous dual carriageway between Randalstown and Castledawson Roundabout (February 2005).

Question Two: If YES, which of the options do you prefer?

Question two was the key question of the entire exhibition and questionnaire exercise, seeking respondents to select a preferred route option for the stretches of dual carriageway either side of Toome. The results for the Randalstown to Toome stretch are shown in Figure 3.2.

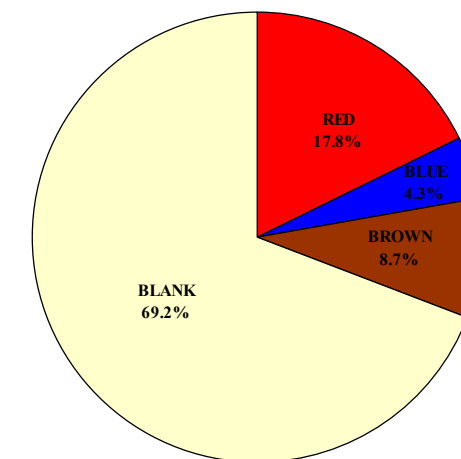


Figure 3.2: Route Option preference between Randalstown and Toome (February 2005).

Of the three route options between Randalstown and Toome, 41 respondents (18% of the written responses) preferred the Red Route, which was the northern most and partially on-line option of the three route options shown. 10 respondents (4% of the written responses) preferred the Blue Route, which passes completely off-line, south of the Moneynick Road, and 20 respondents (9% of the written responses) preferred the Brown Route, which passes parallel to, but further south of the Blue Route. Two respondents indicated a preference for the Blue and Brown Route. 159 respondents (69% of the written responses) did not indicate a route preference, possibly because they disagreed with the scheme or route options shown or because they lived outwith the affected area and therefore had no real preference or informed opinion.

Question Three: Please give your reasons

Whilst respondents were encouraged to comment on their choice of route option, most respondents used this section to express broad ranging opinion on the proposal.

202 respondents (or 96.2% of the written responses) went beyond the tick-box answers and made written comment on the proposals. The comments are summarised in Figure 3.3.

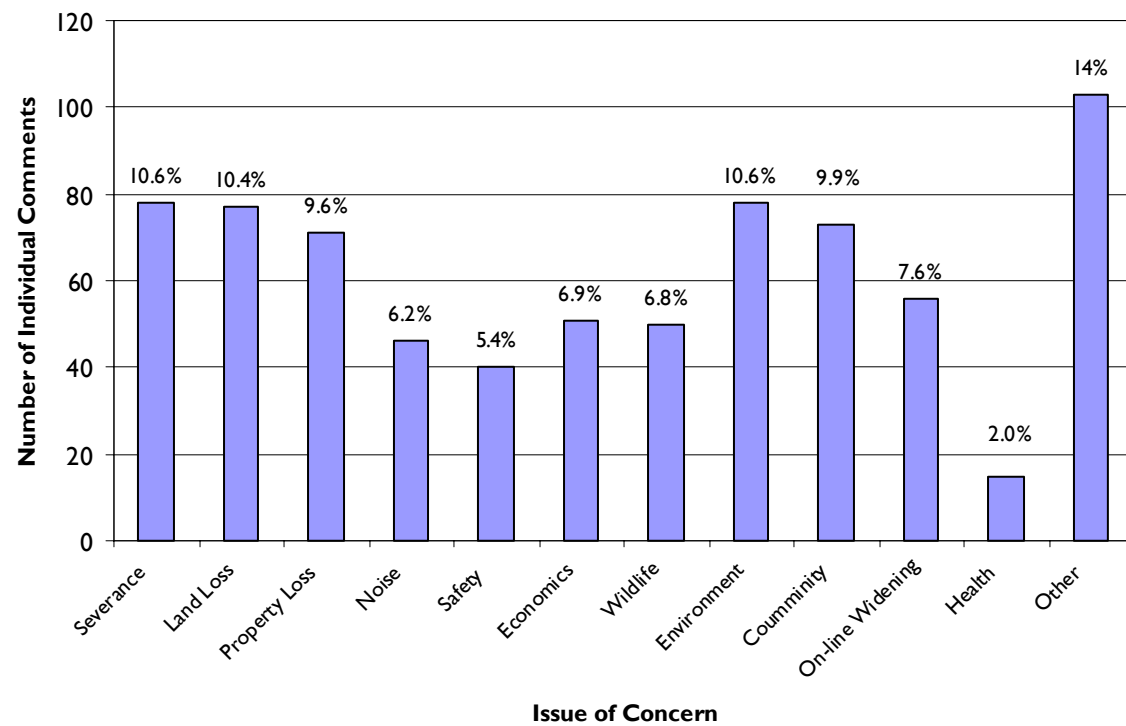


Figure 3.3: Comments made on the February proposals.

The majority of comments concerned Severance and the Environmental issues (in each case 10.6% of the respondents). Between Randalstown and Toome, comments related to the severance of working farm units. Environmental concerns included mainly loss of habitat, air and water pollution and visual impact. 6.8% of respondents expressed concern about the impact on wildlife, particularly the impact on over

wintering whooper swans which feed extensively on lands immediately west of the Lower River Bann. 10.4% of respondents expressed concern about loss of agricultural land. 9.9% of respondents expressed concern about access arrangements, the detrimental effect on the rural community and the potential for conflict between neighbours concerning the route of the road. 9.6% of respondents expressed concern on potential property loss, either of individual farmsteads or more developed areas. 7.6% of respondents expressed the opinion that a new carriageway should be constructed alongside the existing road. This preference for online dualling was also expressed by many who visited the exhibition.

14% of respondents made ‘other’ comments, which were either general comments about the scheme or specific to their individual situation. Comments included the lack of public consultation or advance warning to potentially affected landowners. Some wanted a motorway rather than dual carriageway the whole way to Londonderry whilst some wanted a dual carriageway with direct access. Some wanted to see an improvement in public transport facilities and some were concerned about creating traffic bottlenecks elsewhere.

3.2.2 June 2005 Exhibition

More than 200 people attended the second exhibition (200 people actually took time to sign in) in Toome House, over the 2-day period. 249 completed responses were returned (265 if including multiple signatures) and again, these have provided some vital information concerning public opinion on the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson dualling scheme, and how opinion has changed from the February 2005 consultation. Of these 249 responses, 229 were just a questionnaire, 8 responses were just a letter, and 12 responses were a questionnaire with an accompanying letter. Whilst public opinion varied, the majority of the people accepted the principle of providing a dual carriageway between Randalstown and Castledawson, although there was differing views about the route it should take.

From the addresses on the completed questionnaires, it is evident that most people attending the June Exhibition were again from Randalstown, Toome or Castledawson and the hinterlands, including Magherafelt, Bellaghy and Ballyronan. However, several responses were submitted from further away, including Antrim, Belfast, Bangor, Doagh, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Cookstown, Dungannon, Dungiven, Ballyclare, Ballycastle, Armoy, Dunloy, Maghera, Augher, Downpatrick, Comber, Portadown and Londonderry.

Representatives from several organisations also attended or made submissions, including the Ulster Farmers’ Union, Lough Neagh & Lower Bann Advisory Committee, North West Chamber of Commerce Initiative Ltd., Londonderry Chamber of Commerce, Agricultural Engineers and Farrier Services, GE McLarnon & Sons Ltd., The Potting Shed, Moneynick Service Station, Derry City Council, CCMS, Wetlands & Wildfowl Trust, RSPB, Fisheries Conservancy Board for NI, Northern Ireland Electricity, The Elk Inn, Planning Service, and Sustrans. One MP and several individual constituency MLA’s and Councillors from both Antrim Borough Council and Magherafelt District Council also attended.

A written and signed petition from the Northern Route response Group (NRrG) was also submitted during the exhibition. Approximately 100 individuals had signed the petition. This demanded the immediate removal of the Purple Route between Randalstown and Toome, from the Stage 2 Assessment procedure.

A written and signed petition was submitted by one of the potentially affected landowners, south of the Moneynick Road, between Randalstown and Toome. The petition was signed after the February Exhibition, but not actually submitted until after the June Exhibition. Approximately 79 individuals had signed the petition, which requested the inclusion of an on-line option and a northern route option, north of the existing A6. It also requested that the road be designed to Category 5 standard.

Question One: Do you support the principle of providing a dual carriageway standard road between the western end of the M22 motorway at Randalstown to the Castledawson Roundabout? Tick Yes or No; if No, please give your reasons.

218 respondents (or 82.3% of the written responses) said yes, it should be improved, 14 respondents (or 5.3% of the written responses) said no, and 33 respondents (or 12.5% of the completed questionnaires) left the question blank.

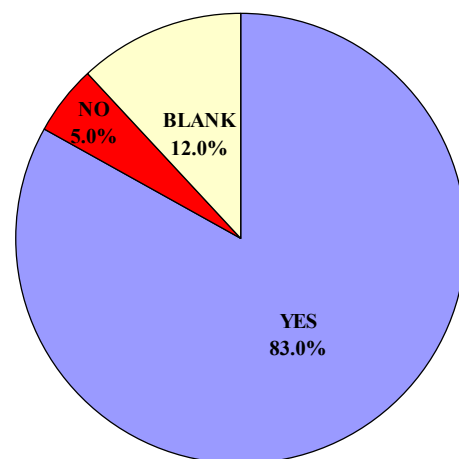


Figure 3.4: Opinion on provision of a dual carriageway between Randalstown and Castledawson Roundabout (June 2005).

This was a significant change in the views expressed at the February consultation, when only 65.4% of respondents were in favour of providing a continuous dual carriageway between Randalstown and Castledawson, and 23.2% of respondents were not.

Question Two: If Yes, which of the options do you prefer?

As with the first exhibition, this question was the key of the exhibition and questionnaire exercise, seeking respondents to select a preferred route option for the stretches of dual carriageway either side of Toome. The results for the Randalstown to Toome stretch are shown in Figure 3.5.

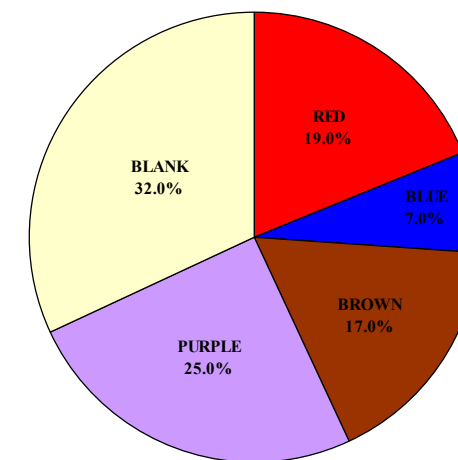


Figure 3.5: Route Option preference between Randalstown and Toome (June 2005).

Of the four route options now shown between Randalstown and Toome, 52 respondents, (19% of the written responses) preferred the partially realigned Red Route, which was the northern most of the southern route options and on-line between Gallagher Road and Drumderg Roundabout. 19 respondents (7% of the written responses) preferred the Blue Route, which passes completely off-line, south of the Moneynick Road, and 45 respondents (17% of the written responses) preferred the Brown Route, which passes parallel to, but further south of the Blue Route. 69 respondents (25% of the written responses) preferred the Purple Route, the new route passing parallel and to the north of the Moneynick Road, introduced based on feedback from the February 2005 public consultation. One respondent indicated a preference for the Red, Blue and Brown routes (i.e. any of the southern route corridor options), four respondents indicated a preference for the Blue and Brown routes, and one indicated a preference for the Brown and Purple routes. 86 respondents (32% of the written responses) did not indicate a route preference, possibly because they disagreed with the scheme or route options shown, or because they lived outwith the affected area and therefore had no real preference or informed opinion.

Only some of these proportions are similar to the trends shown from the February 2005 results. At that time, 18% preferred the Red Route (now 19%), and 4% preferred the Blue Route (now 7%, a rise of 3%) However in the case of the Brown Route, 9% preferred it in February 2005 (now 17%, a rise of 8%). The most significant fact is that the number of people leaving this part of the question blank actually fell by 37% from the February 2005 exhibition. It became evident during the June exhibition that the public were largely interested in selecting either a northern (Purple) Route, or a southern (Red, Blue or Brown)

Route. Of those who indicated a preference, it is evident that the majority of people preferred a southern route option, and of these, a slight majority (of approximately 2%) preferred the Red Route over the Brown Route between Randalstown and Toome. The least preferred option still remained the Blue Route.

Question Three: Please give your reasons

As in the February consultation, respondents were encouraged to comment on their choice of route option. Most respondents also used this section to express broad ranging opinions on the proposal.

230 respondents (or 92.4% of the written responses) went beyond the tick-box answers and made written comment on the proposals. The comments are summarised in Figure 3.6.

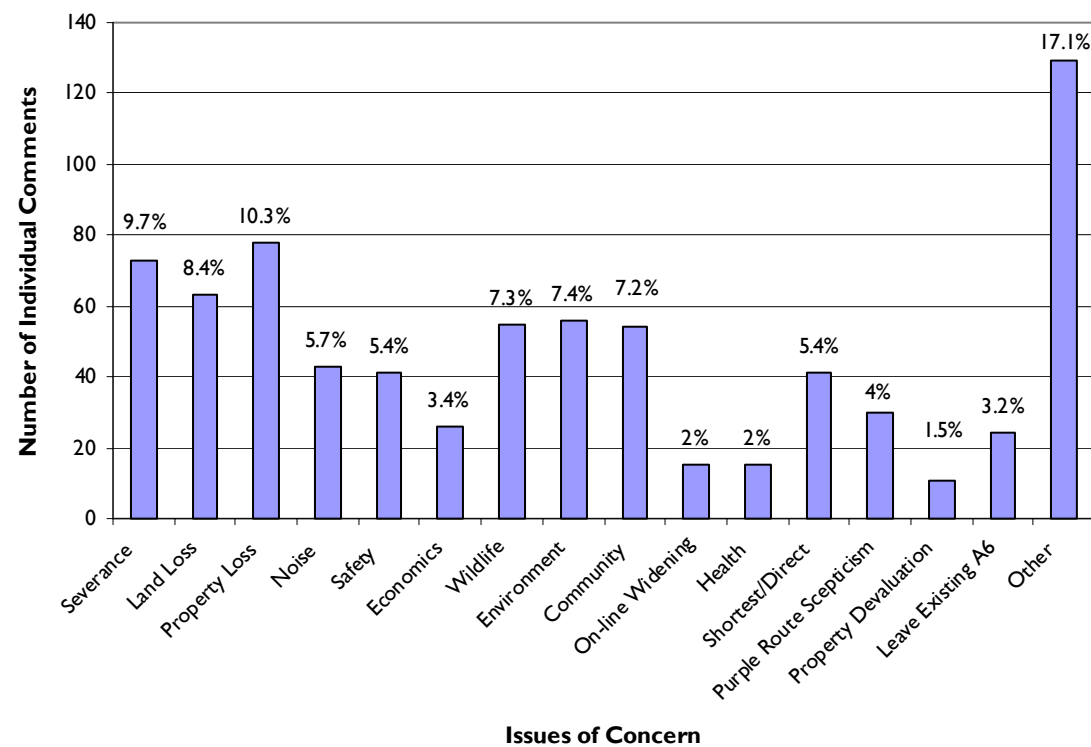


Figure 3.6: Comments made on the proposals (June 2005).

The majority of the comments (10.3% of the respondents) were concerned about property loss, primarily the loss of either individual farmsteads or developed areas. Severance was another significant issue raised by 9.7% of the respondents. Between Randalstown and Toome, comments related to the severance of working farm units. 8.4% of the respondents expressed concern about loss of agricultural land. These were also the main concerns expressed at the February 2005 consultation.

Several new issues were flagged during the June consultation exercise. 5.4% of respondents were of the opinion that the shortest most direct routes should be selected, suggesting that the Purple Route was the shortest. 4% of respondents were sceptical about the late introduction of the Purple Route, suggesting

that its inclusion arose directly from active lobbying by some landowners affected within the south corridor.

There was a most significant reduction in opinion that a new carriageway should simply be constructed alongside the existing road. During the June exhibition, it was evident that the public realised the benefits of separating local and strategic traffic through offline construction, retaining the Moneynick Road for use by local traffic between the towns. Support for online widening reduced from 7.6% by the February respondents to 2% by the June respondents; 3.2% of the June respondents actively indicated their preference for leaving the existing A6 intact for local traffic. Some respondents were concerned that adoption of the Red Route, the access lane built to facilitate residents between Drumderg Roundabout and Lismacloskey Road, may be an attraction to the travelling community. Similarly, several respondents commented that the Red Route would deny residents on the Moneynick Road, east of Ivybrook direct access to Toome.

17.1% of respondents made ‘other’ comments, which were either general comments about the scheme or specific to their individual situation. Comments included that there was stress and anxiety among the local community as to whether they were going to be affected by the various route options or not, concerns over loss of privacy due to proximity of new route to their dwellings, farm unit viability and severance of family properties. Some respondents commented about Toome bypass, either in terms of its operation, or landowners affected by its construction.

3.3 Comments at the Public Exhibition

Questionnaire and written responses were generally consistent with comments and views expressed by members of the public at the exhibition. Additional comments made during the exhibitions are listed below: -

Randalstown to Toome

- Partial horizontal realignment of the Red Route Option at Drumcullen, slightly further southwards, to avoid the loss of one property.
- Consideration of a northern route, largely following the alignment of the 1960's proposed extension of the M22 motorway to Castledawson roundabout.
- Consideration of an on-line widening option to reduce the loss of agricultural land and subsequent farm unit severance.
- Partial realignment of all three route options in the area of Greenan Road, reducing the impact on a commercial property.

3.4 Conclusion and Recommendations

The two Public Exhibitions generated considerable public interest in the proposed scheme between Randalstown and Castledawson. 216 people took the time to sign-in at the February exhibition and 200 at the June exhibition, although significantly more than this actually attended on both occasions. Conclusions drawn from the two exhibitions are:

February 2005 Exhibition

- 210 responses (completed questionnaires and/or letters), commenting on the proposals were returned.
- 65% of the people agreed that a dual carriageway should be provided.
- Of the route options between Randalstown and Toome, 18% preferred the Red Route, 9% preferred the Brown Route, 4% preferred the Blue Route and 69% expressing no preference.
- The most common questionnaire issues concerned community and agricultural land severance, property loss, land loss, and the overall environment.
- A significant number of questionnaire comments sought further consideration of on-line widening options.
- It was also suggested that consideration should be given to an alignment between Randalstown and Toome, largely following the 1960's M22 motorway proposal.

June 2005 Exhibition

- 249 responses (completed questionnaires and/or letters), commenting on the proposals were returned.
- 82% of the people agreed that a dual carriageway should be provided.

- Of the route options between Randalstown and Toome, 19% preferred the Red Route, 17% preferred the Brown Route, 25% preferred the Purple Route, 7% preferred the Blue Route and 42% expressing no preference.
- The most common questionnaire issues concerned property loss, community and agricultural land severance, land loss and the overall environment.
- A significant number also were in favour of leaving the Moneynick Road intact, for the use of local traffic.

Based on discussions with the local community and landowners at the February exhibition, and subsequent questionnaire returns, a number of amendments to the route options were examined in response to opinions and concerns expressed.

Randalstown to Toome

- Additional 'on-line' option.
- A northern route based on the 'old motorway' line.
- Partial realignment of the Red Route Option at Drumcullen slightly further southwards to avoid the loss of one property.