

9 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

9.1 Key Objective

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

- Provide better links to destinations such as Belfast and Londonderry;
- Provide better links to Belfast International Airport;
- Provide journey time savings and improve the reliability of journey times; and
- Provide substantial safety benefits.

A dual carriageway between Randalstown and Toome will serve towards achieving this key objective by upgrading the A6 between the M22 and the Toome bypass.

The main objective of the Approved Options Report has been to select the Preferred Route for the A6 between the M22 at Randalstown and the Toome Bypass. Accordingly, this report has involved development, refinement and assessment of four Approved Route Options seeking to identify the Route Option which, overall, best satisfies the study objectives taking account of the five ‘Central Government Objectives for Transport’, namely, Environment, Safety, Economy, Accessibility and Integration.

The pertinent details of each Route Option and the summary findings of their impacts against each objective are presented in the Appraisal Summary Tables in Section 8.0.

9.2 Recommendation of Preferred Route

The Brown Route is recommended as the Preferred Route Option to be progressed through to Statutory Procedures.

It is apparent from the Appraisal Summary Tables that the Brown Route performs consistently well against the assessment criteria and overall performs better than the other three Route Options. The Brown Route will deliver the following benefits:

- It provides a high standard dual carriageway link on the A6 between the M22 at Randalstown and the A6 dual carriageway, Toome bypass, thus improving both local and strategic journey times;
- The Brown Route enables the removal of the strategic traffic from the existing A6 through the Moneynick area;
- Offline route options allow separation of local and strategic traffic, leaving the existing A6 to act as a local facility;
- The Brown Route would facilitate possible future full grade separation at Drumderg;
- The Brown Route has the potential to require the least property loss;

- The Brown Route would have the least impact on known archaeology;
- The Brown Route will provide positive economic and safety benefits;

The salient details and the respective benefits and disbenefits of each Route Option against the assessment criteria are summarised and compared below, demonstrating how the Brown Route performs consistently well.

9.3 Performance Against Assessment Criteria

9.3.1 Engineering

All four Route Options have been developed to a similar standard, suitable for the Approved Options Stage. All Route Options have been designed in accordance with standards set out in DMRB, with no departures from standard. The engineering elements of the Route Options are similar, in that each route option is similar in length, and each is dual two-lane all purpose with hardstrips. Each Route Option has one grade separated junction.

All four options have a similar number of sites of conflict or potential conflict with existing or proposed public utilities, though there are potentially more conflicts associated with the online dualling section for the Red Route.

All four options have similar buildability issues, mostly associated with the construction of structures at existing side road crossings. The Red Route is more complex due, to the online section between Drumderg roundabout and Gallagh Road, which will require major traffic management.

The Purple Route is likely to result in the greatest importation of fill material from an off-site location, with a subsequent environmental knock-on effect at its point of excavation.

9.3.2 Environmental

None of the Route Options will be in breach of the National Air Quality Standards and of these, the Brown Route has the fewest number of properties within 200m of its alignment.

The Brown Route has very limited cultural heritage impact on known archaeological artefacts, only impacting on a potentially destroyed enclosure near Randalstown, which is common to all four Route Options.

No designated nature conservation sites are within the route corridor. All options will affect hedgerows and trees along field boundaries and cross four minor watercourses. The Purple Route would result in the greatest loss of plantation forestry and loss of mature trees, particularly in the Artlone Road area.

Disruption during construction will be relatively low for all route options, except in the case of the Red Route between Lisnacloskey Road and Drumderg Roundabout (on-line widening), and the Purple Route

as it crosses over the Moneynick Road, where in both cases significant disruption to strategic traffic could occur.

The Blue Route would have the greatest impact in terms of potential property demolition. The Brown Route has the greatest potential to avoid property loss. Agricultural land loss and land severance is a significant issue associated with all route options.

From a noise perspective, all route options would have significantly fewer properties within 300m of the alignment compared to the existing route. All options would move traffic away from Moneynick Primary School, although the Purple Route would move traffic closer to Duneane Primary School and Presbyterian Church.

9.3.3 Traffic and Economics

All four Route Options will improve journey time reliability between major destinations such as Belfast and Londonderry. Moreover, within the study area there will be significant local journey timesavings.

All four options exhibit positive Net Present Values and good Benefit Cost Ratios, indicating value for money and high economic returns.

9.3.4 Safety

All four Route Options provide substantial but similar safety benefits over the existing A6 route between Randalstown and Toome. COBA analysis for each Route Option indicates considerable savings in the number of personal injury accidents over the 60-year assessment period.

9.3.5 Accessibility

The fully offline Purple, Blue and Brown Route Options would provide improvements for pedestrians and cyclists, by removing strategic traffic from the existing A6 between Randalstown and Toome, thus providing a quieter road through Moneynick. No community facilities are lost, and all route Options reduce the degree of severance experienced from Moneynick Primary School.

9.3.6 Integration

All four route options conform to the policies set out in the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025 and its 'daughter document', the Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002 – 2012. All four Route Options will provide improved passenger and freight transport links with Belfast and Londonderry through the upgrading of the A6 Route.

All options would have benefits in terms of removing strategic traffic from the Moneynick area, reducing congestion and thus improving public transport links by bus or coach. All options therefore

provide an improved environment for pedestrians, with the exception of the online section between Drumderg Roundabout and Gallagher Road for the Red Route.

9.4 **The Next Step**

The next step in this project is to progress the Preferred Route forward through the Statutory Procedures, entailing:

- Design development of the Preferred Route;
- Stage 3 (DMRB) Engineering, Environmental and Traffic and Economic assessment of the Preferred Route;
- Publication of the Environmental Statement in accordance with the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993; and
- Preparation of Direction Order and Vesting Order in accordance with the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993.

It is intended that the Environmental Statement would be published in Summer 2006. The target date for completion of the Statutory Procedures and start of construction is 2008, with the earliest possible opening of the Scheme projected at 2010.