

### 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 Toome to Castledawson 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 individuals 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.

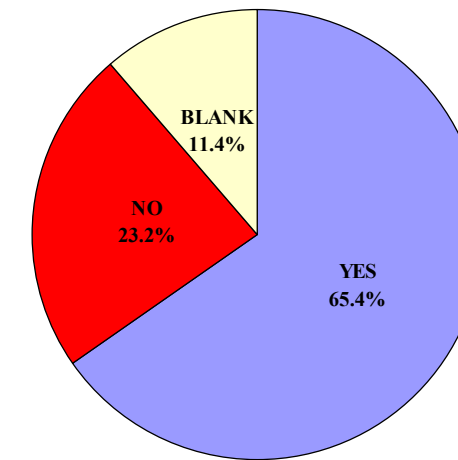


Figure 3.1: Opinion on the provision of a continuous dual carriageway between Randalstown and Castledawson (February 2005).

**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 Toome to Castledawson stretch are shown in Figure 3.2.

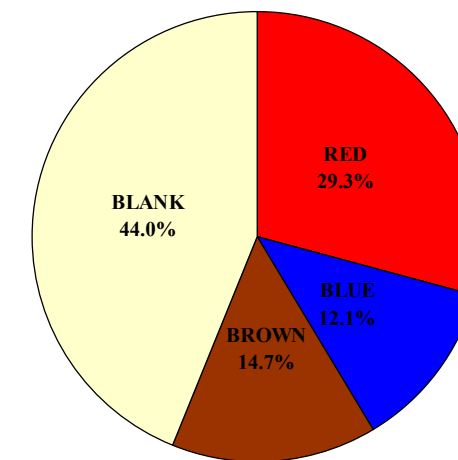


Figure 3.2: Route Option preference between Toome and Castledawson (February 2005).

Of the three route options between Toome and Castledawson, 68 respondents, (29.3% of the written responses) preferred the Red Route, or northern route option around the Creagh. 28 respondents (12.1% of the written responses) preferred the Blue Route option, which passes through the middle of the residential area of the Creagh, and 34 respondents (14.7% of the written responses) preferred the Brown

Route option, which passes south of the Creagh, along the northern side of the Moyola River. Two respondents indicated a preference for the Red and Brown routes, one respondent indicated a preference for the Red and Blue Routes, and one respondent indicated a preference for the Blue and Brown Routes. 102 respondents (43.9% of the written responses) left the question blank, possibly because they disagreed with the scheme or route options shown, or 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.

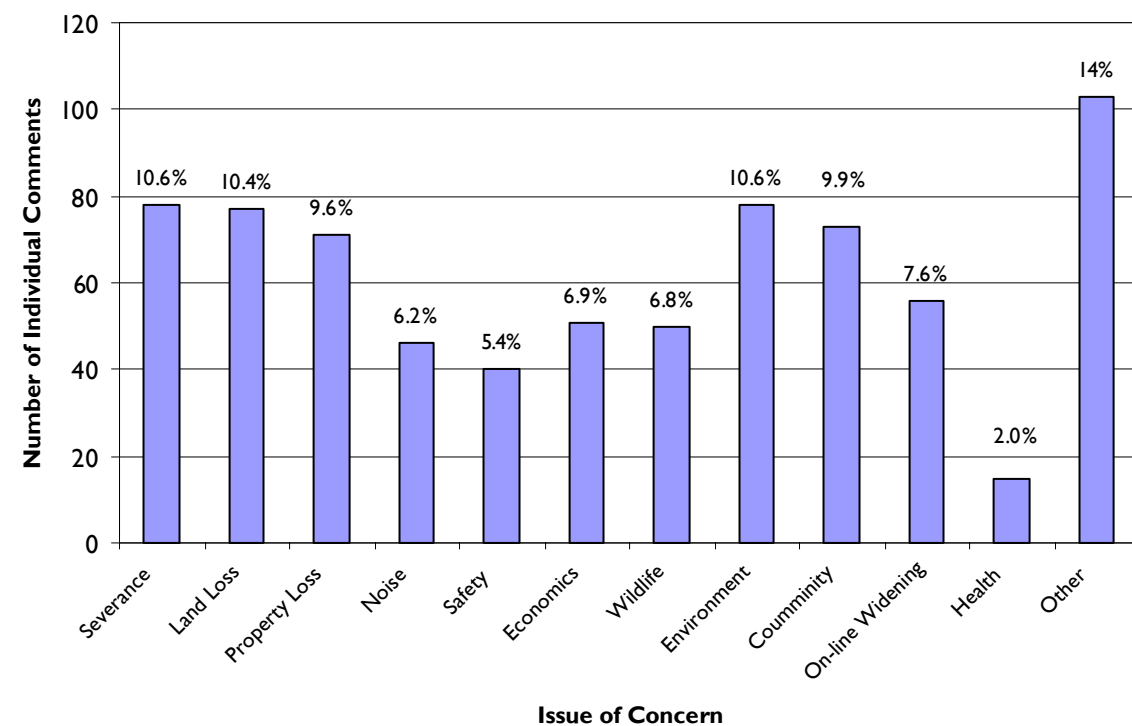


Figure 3.3: Comments made on the February proposals.

The majority of comments concerned Severance and the Environmental issues (in each case 10.6% of the respondents). Between Toome and Castledawson the issue raised was that the Blue Route would sever the scattered Creagh community. 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 such as the Creagh on the Blackpark Road. 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. Several people commented that the Brown Route between Castledawson and Toome would potentially improve access down the western side of Lough Neagh and onwards to County Tyrone. Others commented that the route should follow the disused railway line, westwards from the Creagh.

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.

**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 written responses) left the question blank.

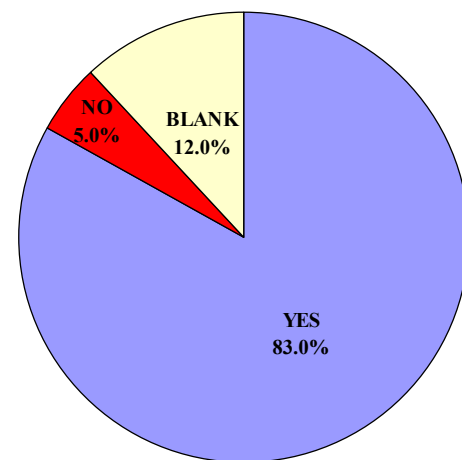


Figure 3.4: Opinion on provision of a dual carriageway between Randalstown and Castledawson Roundabout (June 2005).

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 Toome to Castledawson stretch are shown in Figure 3.5.

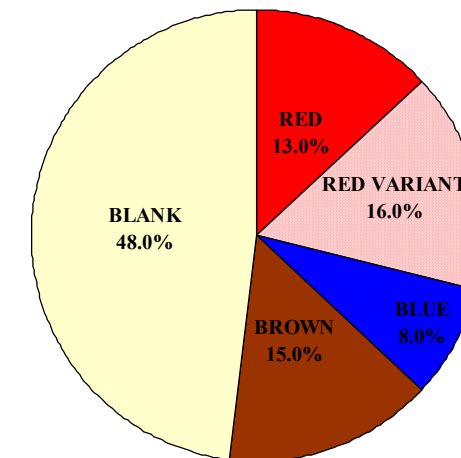


Figure 3.5: Route Option preference between Toome and Castledawson (June 2005).

Of the four route options now shown between Toome and Castledawson, 38 respondents (13% of the written responses) preferred the Red Route, and 44 respondents (or 16% of the written responses) preferred the Red Variant, both of which pass to the north, around the Creagh. 23 respondents (8% of the written responses) preferred the Blue Route, which passes through the middle of the residential area of the Creagh, and 43 respondents (15% of the written responses) preferred the Brown Route, which passes south of the Creagh, along the northern side of the Moyola River. Twelve respondents indicated a preference for the Red and Red Variant routes, two respondents indicated a preference for the Red, Red Variant and Blue Routes, and three respondents indicated a preference for the Blue and Brown routes. 137 respondents (48% of the written responses) left the question blank, possibly because they disagreed with the scheme or route options shown or they lived outwith the affected area and therefore had no real preference or informed opinion.

These proportions are largely similar to the trends shown from the February 2005 results. At that time, 29.3% preferred the Red Route (now 29.0% if the Red Route and its Variant are combined), 12.1% preferred the Blue Route (now 8%, a fall of 4%), and 14.7% preferred the Brown Route (now 15.0%). The number of people leaving this part of the question blank actually rose by 4% from the February 2005 exhibition. It is evident that the least preferred option is the Blue Route, which would result in the greatest property loss and create significant severance within the Creagh community. It is evident that the Red/Red Variant routes passing round to the north of the Creagh and Aughrim Hill would be the preferred option, with a small majority (of approximately 3%) preferring the Red Variant over the Red Route between Castledawson and Toome.

**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.

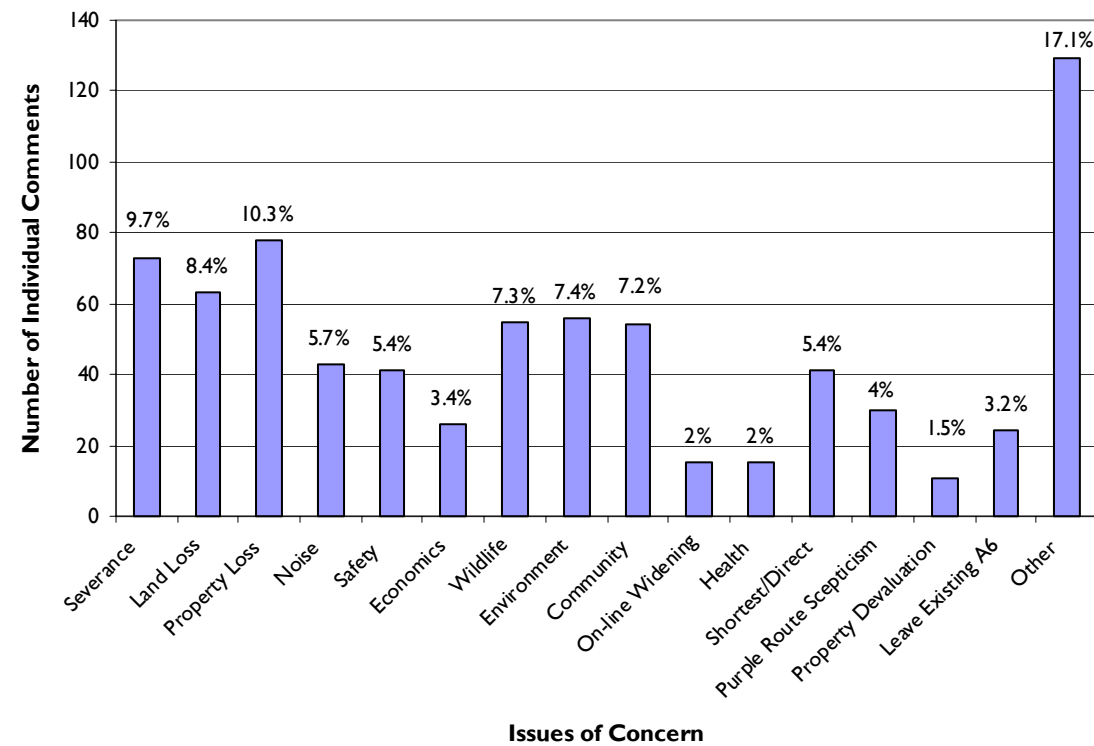


Figure 3.6: Comments made on the proposals (June 2005).

The majority of the comments (10.3% of the respondents) were concerned about property loss, primarily concerning the loss of either individual farmsteads or developed areas, such as the Creagh on the Blackpark Road. Severance was another significant issue raised by 9.7% of the respondents. Between Toome and Castledawson, the issue raised was that the Blue and Brown routes would respectively sever the Creagh and parish communities. 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 Blue Route was the shortest.

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 Hillhead 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.

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: -

- A significant number of people expressed great concern about community severance and property loss arising from the Blue Route proposal.
- Environmental concerns arising from the brown route proposal: road drainage polluting the river and the road embankment increased risk of widespread flooding.
- Partial horizontal realignment of the Red Route Option between Toome and Castledawson, at its eastern end, to follow the existing Toome bypass over a longer stretch. This would significantly reduce the impact on the fields to the north used by a significant over wintering Whooper Swan population.

**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 Toome and Castledawson, 29% preferred the Red Route, 15% preferred the Brown Route, 12% preferred the Blue Route and 44% 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.

*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 Toome and Castledawson, 29% preferred a northern route around the Creagh, north of Aughrim Hill (13% for the Red Route, and 16% for the Red Variant), 15% preferred the Brown Route, 8% preferred the Blue Route and 48% 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 Hillhead 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, an amendment to the route options was examined in response to opinions and concerns expressed. This was a variant, partially realigning the Red Route Option at its eastern end to follow the existing Toome bypass over a longer stretch. This variant would significantly reduce the impact on the fields to the north used by a significant over wintering Whooper Swan population.