

**Department for Regional Development
The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993**

**Departmental Statement
for the**

**A6 TOOME TO CASTLEDAWSON DUAL CARRIAGEWAY
PUBLIC INQUIRY**

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Contents

Introduction..... 1

Strategic Policy 2

The Existing Situation 4

Background 5

The Department’s Consideration 7

The Proposal..... 8

Conclusion..... 10

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Department for Regional Development Roads Service proposes to upgrade the A6 from the western end of the M22 Motorway at Randalstown to the Castledawson Roundabout to dual carriageway standard. Part of the route at Toome has already been improved to dual carriageway standard. The Toome to Castledawson part of the dualling scheme will provide a dual carriageway connection from the Toome Bypass to the Castledawson Roundabout.
- 1.2 In March 2007, Roads Service published notices in the local press stating that an Environmental Statement had been prepared and that anyone wishing to submit an opinion should do so before the end of April 2007. Simultaneously, Roads Service published notices in the local press stating that the Department proposed to make an order directing that the proposed dual carriageway would become part of the Trunk Road network and that the Department proposed to acquire lands by vesting order for the purposes of constructing the dual carriageway: the notices also stated that anyone wishing to object to the proposed orders should do so in writing before the end of April 2007. The notices specified how comments on the Environmental Statement and/or objection to the proposed orders could be made and the manner in which these were to be made.
- 1.3 One hundred and thirty nine letters of objection (one with a 119 signature petition) and twenty four letters of comment were received regarding the Toome to Castledawson Dualling Scheme. Given the nature of the proposals and the likelihood that a number of the objections could not be resolved, the Minister for Regional Development announced that a Public Inquiry would be convened to give Roads Service and objectors a fair opportunity to be heard and to question the case for and against the scheme.

2. Strategic Policy

2.1 The current programme to improve transportation links in Northern Ireland has evolved over the last decade or so. The key documents and strategies guiding this programme are:

- The White Paper “A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone”¹ published 1998;
- “Moving Forward: The Northern Ireland Transport Policy Statement”² published 1998;
- “Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025”³ published 2002;
- “Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002-2012”⁴ published 2002; and
- “Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan 2015”⁵ published 2005.

2.2 The Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025 (RDS) guides the development of Northern Ireland up to 2025 and beyond. The importance of the RDS is underpinned by Article 5 of the Strategic Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 and was recognised in the Northern Ireland Executive’s Programme for Government.

2.3 The Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) supports the RDS and makes a significant contribution towards achieving the longer-term transportation vision contained within the RDS. The strategic direction and underlying principles of the RTS were agreed by the Northern Ireland Assembly on the 3rd July 2002.

2.4 The Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan 2015 (RSTN TP) sets out how the RTS will be implemented and confirms the individual schemes and projects to be implemented (subject to economic assessments, statutory processes and availability of resources) to support the RDS and RTS objectives and targets. The Regional Strategic Transport Network (RSTN) incorporates 5% of the road network, which carries around 37% of total road traffic movements, and all of the rail system. The top tier of the Region’s long distance routes connecting the cities and main towns to the major regional gateways and the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA) are designated Key Transport Corridors. These are:

- the **Eastern Seaboard Corridor** – road and rail links between the BMA and Dublin and northward to Larne;
- the **North Western Corridor** – links the BMA to Londonderry;
- the **Northern Corridor** – links the BMA to Antrim, Ballymena, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Limavady and Londonderry by road and rail;
- the **Western Corridor** – links west of Lough Neagh between Donegal, Londonderry, Strabane, Omagh, Monaghan and Dublin; and

¹ A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone, DETR, July 1998

² Moving Forward, DOE(NI) November 1998

³ Shaping our Future: Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025, DRD, September 2001

⁴ Regional Transportation Strategy 2002-2012, DRD, July 2002

⁵ Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan 2015, DRD, 2005

- the **South Western Corridor** – links the BMA to Craigavon, the Fermanagh Lakelands, the Sperrins and to important cross-border routes.

2.5 Table 5.2 of the RSTN TP includes a proposal to upgrade the North Western Key Transport Corridor to dual carriageway standard between the western end of the M22 Motorway at Randalstown and the Castledawson Roundabout.

3. The Existing Situation

- 3.1 The A6 is an important part of the North Western Key Transport Corridor, connecting Belfast and Londonderry via Toome, Maghera and Dungiven. The corridor is of strategic and economic importance within Northern Ireland, providing an essential road link between the Belfast Metropolitan Area and the North-West.
- 3.2 The existing road between Toome and Castledawson is a rural single carriageway trunk road, starting at the Creagh Roundabout at the western end of Toome Bypass and continuing west for about 5.4 kilometres to the Castledawson Roundabout. It traverses gently undulating till covered terrain for most of the route. East of the Creagh Roundabout, the road continues as dual carriageway bypassing Toome, single carriageway to Randalstown and then motorway to Belfast. West of the Castledawson Roundabout the road continues as single carriageway to Londonderry.
- 3.3 There are a number of significant ecological heritage sites within the surrounding area. A number of designated sites exist close to Toome, including Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Ramsar site, Lough Beg Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), Lough Beg National Nature Reserve (NNR), Lough Neagh ASSI, Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Special Protection Area (SPA), and Toome ASSI.
- 3.4 Traffic on the route increases from approximately 11,800 vehicles per 12-hour day⁶ east of the Castledawson Roundabout to 14,500 vehicles per 12-hour day west of Toome.
- 3.5 Parts of the route have been improved over the last 4 decades or so. Hard shoulders were added to part of the Hillhead Road west of Toome and the original concrete surface overlaid with asphalt. A single carriageway Bypass of Castledawson was constructed in 1992: this started at Annahorish east of Castledawson and continued across country to the south of Castledawson to the Castledawson Roundabout. Increasing traffic volumes has reduced the number of safe overtaking opportunities for road users, resulting in increased journey times and increased risk of frustrated drivers attempting to overtake in unsafe circumstances.
- 3.6 The A6 and the local roads connecting to it service a scattering of hamlets, rural housing and commercial properties resulting in an unacceptable number of potential points of conflict between strategic traffic using the main road and traffic turning into the several side roads, domestic and commercial accesses and field accesses along the main road. Excluding field accesses, the road is considered to have a low access density. Research⁷ indicates that accident rates can be related to the number and form of accesses along a route.

⁶ Neutral month weekday count 7:00am to 7:00 pm

⁷ DMRB 6.2.6 TD 42/95 Geometric Design of Major/Minor Priority Junctions, Highways Agency, January 1995

4. Background

- 4.1 During the latter part of World War II considerable thought was given in Northern Ireland to “post war planning”. A subsequent report “Road Planning in Northern Ireland” laid the foundation for, amongst other things, improvement of the road connection between Belfast and Londonderry. This developed into the 1960s plan for a motorway standard from Belfast to Castledawson and high standard single carriageway from Castledawson to Londonderry. Financial constraints stopped the motorway construction short at Randalstown.
- 4.2 By the mid 1970s, the A6 west of the Castledawson Roundabout had been largely improved to high standard single carriageway. At that time, a new high standard single carriageway road was planned from the Castledawson Roundabout through to Donnelly’s Bridge (west of Toome) where it would join to the planned high standard single carriageway road between Donnelly’s Bridge and the western end of the M22 Motorway at Randalstown. Roads Service reviewed this plan in the mid 1970s and proposed that a new 3.5 kilometre long road should be constructed from the Castledawson Roundabout to connect to the existing A6 in the townland of Annahorish. This road plan was included in the Magherafelt Area Plan 1976-1996 as a road improvement to be carried out during the plan period. The 3.5 kilometre long single carriageway Castledawson Bypass was opened to traffic in autumn 1992.
- 4.3 As noted at Section 2, the current programme to improve transportation links in Northern Ireland has evolved over the last decade or so and includes The Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan 2015 (RSTN TP), which confirms the individual schemes and projects to be implemented (subject to economic assessments, statutory processes and availability of resources) to support the RDS and RTS objectives and targets. The RSTN TP includes a proposal to upgrade the North Western Key Transport Corridor to dual carriageway standard between the western end of the M22 Motorway at Randalstown and the Castledawson Roundabout.
- 4.4 The proposal is also an RSTN TP ‘preparation pool’ scheme, i.e. a high priority scheme that Roads Service is committed to progressing through the statutory procedures of Environmental Appraisal, Direction Order (equivalent to planning approval) and Land Vesting. Preparation Pool Schemes are expected to be implemented within the next five years or so (subject to clearing the statutory procedures, having a satisfactory economic appraisal and the availability of funds at the time).
- 4.5 Development of the scheme has closely followed the Department for Transport’s New Approach to Appraisal (NATA)⁸ which provides a framework to appraise, and determine the prioritisation of, transport investment proposals. This takes into account the Government’s five criteria Environment, Safety, Economy, Accessibility and Integration, to inform the choice between different options for solving the same problem, the prioritisation between proposals and the assessment of value for money.
- 4.6 The scheme development process, which included public consultation and consideration of a range of options, concluded that a new dual carriageway should overlap the western end of the Toome Bypass, continue cross country to the north of the existing road to join the Castledawson Bypass east of the River Moyola and then as online dualling (i.e. a new carriageway built alongside and to the south of the existing single carriageway Castledawson

⁸ A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England: Guidance on the New Approach to Appraisal, DETR, July 1998

Bypass) to connect to the Castledawson Roundabout. Part of the existing A6 Hillhead Road would be left for local access.

5. The Department's Consideration

5.1 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 the people of Northern Ireland. As part of this aim, Roads Service is committed to providing an all-purpose dual carriageway on part of the Belfast to Londonderry Route on the grounds that it will provide:

- Better links to destinations such as Belfast and Londonderry;
- Better links to Belfast International Airport;
- Journey time savings and improved journey time reliability; and
- Substantial safety benefits.

5.2 The proposed dual carriageway will assist with the delivery of these objectives, whilst leaving part of the existing A6 between Toome and Castledawson for local access will greatly benefit local traffic (RTS paragraph 5.2.8). The new road will facilitate further expansion of local industry in the area (RTS SPG-ECON2).

5.3 The appraisal of the scheme⁹ against the Government's five criteria (Environment, Safety, Economy, Accessibility and Integration) concluded that the proposed scheme is consistent with these objectives, delivering:

- Significant savings in journey times, particularly for strategic traffic;
- Relief to the existing A6, particularly at the existing junctions which currently experience demand in excess of available capacity;
- An improvement in road safety which will reduce accident numbers;
- Substantial benefits over the 60-year assessment period which outweighs the costs; and
- Future maintenance cost savings although these are likely to be exceeded by road user delays during construction.

5.4 Roads Service concludes that construction of a dual carriageway between Toome and the Castledawson Roundabout will greatly improve conditions for both strategic and local traffic. 'Do Nothing' or carrying out of 'selective' improvements along the existing road are not considered realistic long term options.

⁹ NWKTC Toome to Castledawson Dualling SAR Final Report May 2007

6. The Proposal

- 6.1 The proposed road is a high standard dual carriageway. It has no private accesses, no central reserve crossovers and with the minimum of junctions. This standard of dual carriageway has considerable safety benefits for the road user.
- 6.2 The scheme would lead traffic onto a 6.7 kilometre long dual carriageway, constructed between Toome and Castledawson. The existing single carriageway Hillhead Road between The Creagh and the western end of the Castledawson Bypass would provide local access to The Creagh and the surrounding area.
- 6.3 The proposed scheme would:
- Deviate from the Toome Bypass, approximately 500 metres east of The Creagh Roundabout;
 - Continue offline, to the north of Aughrim Hill;
 - Rejoin the Castledawson Bypass at Brough Road;
 - Continue as online dualling (a new carriageway built alongside and to the south of the existing Castledawson Bypass) to the Castledawson Roundabout.
- 6.4 The existing Hillhead Road between Toome and the western end of the Castledawson Bypass would become a local road, providing easy access to the many properties and farms along the road.
- 6.5 Some alterations would be required to the local road network:
- A new compact grade-separated junction near Boilas Road would connect to The Creagh area. Similarly, grade-separated junctions would be provided where the proposed dual carriageway would cross the Deerpark Road and the Hillhead Road towards Knockloughrim, to connect to the local road network.
 - At Bellshill Road on the Castledawson Bypass, an at-grade junction would facilitate left in / left out access from both the north and the south of the carriageway. A pedestrian footway, built into a farm accommodation bridge, would provide safe pedestrian access over the new dual carriageway.
 - A bridge would carry Annaghmore Road over the new dual carriageway, maintaining local access to the surrounding area. There would be no connection between the Annaghmore Road and the new dual carriageway.
 - A pedestrian footbridge would be provided at Brough Road to provide a safe pedestrian access over the new carriageway.
 - A new road bridge would be constructed alongside the existing bridge carrying the Castledawson Bypass over the River Moyola.
- 6.6 Alternative private means of access from the local road network are included to ensure continued access to property and farms.

- 6.7 The Direction Order makes provision for the new offline dual carriageway to become part of the trunk road network and allows for the abandonment and stopping up of certain roads.
- 6.8 The Notice of Intention to Make a Vesting Order (NIMVO) includes provision for compulsory acquisition of those lands and interests necessary to construct the road. The NIMVO requires the acquisition of 56.3 hectares of land from 137 interests and the demolition of 1 residential property. Additional areas of land beyond the engineering works are included in the NIMVO, in order to allow for: planting of native trees and shrubs at key locations to assimilate the scheme into the existing landscape setting; the construction of Sustainable Drainage features; and private means of access to ensure continued access to property and farms.
- 6.9 The Environmental Statement is a detailed report of the findings of an environmental assessment carried out for the scheme. In particular, it predicts the environmental effects the scheme will have and details the measures proposed to reduce or eliminate these.
- 6.10 The dual carriageway has been designed to reduce, as far as possible, damage to the environment whilst taking account of other factors, such as road safety, engineering design and cost. The route avoids, as far as possible, areas most sensitive to changes in the environment. The proposed scheme would not directly affect any of the designated ecological sites in the wider area around Toome. Lough Neagh & Lough Beg Special Protection Area (SPA), part of which lies to the north of the existing Toome Bypass, is of international importance for over-wintering Whooper swan and in recognition of the proximity of the proposed new road, considerable study has focussed on the issue. Consequently, the road design incorporates measures to address potential impacts on areas used by swans outside the SPA boundary. Mitigation measures such as roadside planting and the creation of sustainable drainage features would help reduce the residual impact on local habitats and their associated wildlife.
- 6.11 The proposed scheme includes Sustainable Drainage features with surface water from the new road draining into a segregated system of drainage basins and swales. These would control the rate of outfall into local watercourses, thus reducing the likelihood / impact of flooding to surrounding lands. This drainage system would also be the basis for creating wet and marginal habitats and would help reduce pollutant levels in the highway runoff discharge to local watercourses.
- 6.12 It is anticipated that construction would take about 24 months. During construction, the Hillhead Road and the Castledawson Bypass would remain open to traffic. Side roads, where they cross the new dual carriageway, would experience sporadic disruption, however the aim would be to minimise disruption to local residents and road users.
- 6.13 Whilst the detailed construction sequence would be a matter for the Contractor, Roads Service would stipulate certain principles. Such measures would include limiting disruption to existing patterns of movement and limiting the routes for construction traffic use. The Contract would include provisions to minimise the effects of construction noise, temporary diversions, works access and working hours.
- 6.14 The proposals to upgrade the A6 between Toome and the Castledawson Roundabout are consistent with The Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002-2012 (paragraph 5.2.7) and The Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan 2015 (Table 5.2).

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 'Shaping our Future', the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland, recognises that Northern Ireland is almost wholly dependant on a road based transport system reflecting the small internal transport market and dispersed settlement pattern. The A6 (also designated as a trunk road) is an important part of the top tier of the Region's long distance routes connecting the cities and main towns to the major regional gateways and the Belfast Metropolitan Area. It is essential that this route conveys both social and economic traffic in an efficient and safe manner.
- 7.2 The upgrading of the A6 between Toome and the Castledawson Roundabout will have largely positive effects in terms of national, regional and local planning policies. General principles of road safety are promoted. The scheme is supported and safeguarded by a number of planning policies including those contained in the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025 and the Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland. Most policies at strategic level recognise that road transport will remain the predominant means of transport for the foreseeable future.
- 7.3 The Department has carried out a comprehensive study into the various options considered, including a full environmental impact assessment of the preferred scheme. It has concluded that construction of this scheme will have some environmental impacts and that measures can be implemented to reduce or eliminate these.
- 7.4 The Department is satisfied that the selected proposal offers value for money.