



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-311682-21

Development

BusConnects Galway: Cross-City Link
(University Road to Dublin Road)

Location

University Road to Dublin Road, Galway
City

Prospective Applicant

Galway City Council

Planning Authority

Galway City Council

Case Type

Pre-application consultation under section
51A of the Roads Act 1993, as amended

Date of Site Inspection

20th April 2022

Inspector

Niall Haverty

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. Galway City Council ('the prospective applicant') requested pre-application consultations under Section 51A of the Roads Act 1993, as amended, for the development of the BusConnects Galway: Cross City Link project ('the proposed development'). Two pre-application consultation meetings took place between An Bord Pleanála ('the Board') and the prospective applicant, on 13th January 2022 and 29th March 2022, respectively.
- 1.2. This Report is prepared following receipt of a written request by the prospective applicant to close the pre-application consultation, dated 14th April 2022. This Inspector's Report provides an overview of the proposed development, a summary of the two meetings and the advice provided by the Board, the relevant legislative provisions, and a list of recommended Prescribed Bodies that should be forwarded copies of the application.

2.0 Roads Act Legislative Provisions

- 2.1. Section 51A of the Roads Act 1993, as amended, provides for consultations with An Bord Pleanála, before making an application under Section 51 for a proposed road development.
- 2.2. The Act provides that the Board may give advice in relation to the procedures involved in making the application, and what may have a bearing on its decision in relation to the application in respect of the effects of the proposed road development on the environment, or an area, site or land, and proper planning and sustainable development.
- 2.3. Consultations under section 51A of the Roads Act differ from other strategic infrastructure legislation such as, for example, Seventh Schedule type development. The Act does not require the Board to provide an opinion on whether the proposed development comprises strategic infrastructure or not. Following the completion of any consultations between the Board and the applicant, the Roads Act states that the applicant may apply to the Board for approval in relation to a proposed road development.

3.0 Proposed Development

3.1 Overview

- 3.1.1. The proposed road development is referred to as the BusConnects Galway: Cross-City Link (University Road to Dublin Road) and it is stated to form part of the wider BusConnects scheme.
- 3.1.2. The Cross-City Link is a corridor for public transport, cyclists and pedestrians linking the eastern and western suburbs of the city through the city centre. It will provide high quality footpaths, pedestrian crossings, segregated cycle facilities and dedicated 'bus only' lanes to provide priority for public transport.
- 3.1.3. The Cross-Link runs in a general west-east direction, from University Road to the west of the city centre, via Salmon Weir Bridge, St. Francis Street, Eglinton Street, Williamsgate Street, Eyre Square, Forster Street, College Road, Lough Atalia Road and Old Dublin Road to the east of the city centre.
- 3.1.4. The proposed works include reconfiguration of traffic movements to facilitate improved pedestrian, cyclist and bus accessibility and movement, infrastructural works at certain roads and junctions and improvements to public realm at a number of locations within the city centre, including Eyre Square North, Wood Quay and in the vicinity of the Salmon Weir bridge.
- 3.1.5. The proposed development also includes portions of the Inner City Access Route, entailing road reconfiguration works at Headford Road, Dyke Road, Bóthar na mBan, Bóthar Uí Eithir and Fairgreen Road.
- 3.1.6. The cover letter accompanying the request states that non-statutory public consultation was undertaken from October 2020 and that a preliminary design has been prepared by the prospective applicant in conjunction with their consultants and the National Transport Authority. It is stated that an EIAR and NIS is envisaged as being required for the project.
- 3.1.7. Prior to the pre-application consultation meetings, a set of draft general arrangement drawings of the project was requested and received. These drawings identify the roads and streets affected by the proposed development and the extent and nature

of the works proposed. A detailed description of the proposed development is also contained in the submitted draft EIA Screening Report.

3.2. **Natural Heritage Designations**

- 3.2.1. The proposed development will traverse the Lough Corrib SAC (Site Code 000297) at the existing Salmon Weir Bridge. Portions of the proposed development in the vicinity of Lough Atalia at College Road and Old Dublin Road will be close to the Inner Galway Bay SPA (Site Code 004031), Galway Bay Complex SAC (Site 000268) and the proposed Galway Bay Complex pNHA.

4.0 **Pre-Application Consultation Meetings**

- 4.1. As noted above, two pre-application consultation meetings took place, which are summarised below. Please refer to the records of the meetings included on the file for further details.

4.2. **First Meeting (13th January 2022):**

- 4.3. The applicant made a presentation (copy included on file) addressing: planning policy context; public consultation process to date; stakeholder and landowner engagement; description of the scheme, EIAR and NIS requirement; and an indicative programme. Following the presentation, the following issues were discussed:

- **Nature of the application:** Whether it would be an application under section 51 of the Roads Act with an accompanying CPO application or whether it might comprise a 'busway' application as defined in section 44 of the Roads Act. This was noted for consideration by the prospective applicant.
- **Extent of CPO:** The CPO application will include 22 folios, including 2 No. dwelling houses that it is proposed to demolish to facilitate the development. The houses in question were stated not of particular heritage value. Other lands affected by the CPO include a petrol station and gardens of dwelling houses.
- **Status of GTS and Development Plan:** The Board's representatives queried whether the GTS would be reviewed in 2022, noting reported comments by

the Minister. The prospective applicant clarified that the current GTS was implemented in 2016 and there is no timeline for review of same. They also stated that, while the new Galway City Development Plan is currently being developed, the proposed application will be made under the current Plan. The Board's representatives advised that any changes in policy should be considered in the application.

- **Traffic assessment:**

- The prospective applicant outlined the proposed re-designed bus routes, confirmed that they could be implemented independently and clarified that it is operating on the basis of a bus every 2 minutes crossing the Salmon Weir Bridge. Each route, of five, will operate at 10-15 minute frequency.
- The prospective applicant stated that 24hr traffic restrictions over portions of the route, such as at Salmon Weir Bridge, had been considered but the benefits did not outweigh the challenges of extinguishing accesses. The viability of closing the bridge to private vehicles during the proposed hours will be assessed in the Traffic Assessment section of the EIAR.
- The nature of the Traffic Assessment and likely impacts on modal share was discussed. The prospective applicant advised that the assessment would address the impacts of redistributed traffic on surrounding roads and streets.
- The Board's representatives queried the bus parking indicated to the south of Galway Cathedral. The prospective applicant advised that it would not be an interchange and would not be limited to private coaches.
- The Board's representatives noted that a considerable amount of on-street parking was being retained and queried whether this would conflict with the objectives of the project, including reliability of bus services. The prospective applicant stated that it did not anticipate this causing delay to bus routes because of the localised nature of access being proposed.

- **Alternatives:** The prospective applicant stated that the alternatives in the EIAR will look at various options including mode, route and scheme options.

- **Materials:** Public realm works will be in keeping with the Galway Public Realm Strategy. The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to consider the landscape and cultural heritage value of public realm spaces, impacts associated with ancillary elements that often accompany such transport projects and impacts on existing historic street furniture/paving etc. It was clarified that bus lanes will be designated primarily through road markings and signage as opposed to different surface finishes.
- **Construction phase impacts:** The Board's representatives advised that the prospective applicant comprehensively address potential construction phase impacts such as noise, dust, disturbance, run-off, traffic management, potential night-time works and impacts on residential amenity and on commercial/business operations.
- **Cumulative impacts and in-combination effects:** The Board's representatives advised that cumulative impacts and in-combination effects should be comprehensively addressed in the application.
- **Extent of works:** The extent of works in the vicinity of Eyre Square were discussed. The prospective applicant gave an overview of the physical intervention/construction works required along the route. The Board's representatives requested an overview document and drawings detailing the physical intervention works required along the length of the proposed scheme.
- **EIA:** The basis upon which the prospective applicant had determined that EIA was required was discussed. It was emphasised that the prospective applicant should be clear in the application as to the reason for preparing an EIAR, with reference to the relevant legislation. The prospective applicant was requested to submit a copy of its EIA Screening Determination, once it has been made.

4.4. **Second Meeting (29th March 2022):**

- 4.5. The applicant made a presentation (copy included on file) outlining: scheme changes since the previous meeting; draft EIA screening report; photomontages; responses to particular queries; and the timeframe for the submission of the application. A copy of the draft EIA screening report was submitted in advance of the meeting.

4.6. Following the presentation, the following issues were discussed:

- **Nature of application:** The applicant was advised to ensure that they refer to the correct legislation when making their applications for the proposed development and the CPO.
- **Inner City Access Route:** The Board's representatives noted that a large part of the Inner City Access Route was also being delivered as part of this application. The applicant was advised to be clear in including this in the development description. The prospective applicant stated that they were providing as much of the ICAR as was needed to implement the Cross City Link. With regard to the consenting mechanism for the remainder of the ICAR, it was stated that this was under consideration.
- **Alternatives:** It was clarified that this would be done at macro and micro levels, including mode, route options and scheme design.
- **Site compound:** The prospective applicant clarified that the construction site compound by the docks would be rented from the Harbour and not acquired by way of CPO. It was clarified that this site, haul routes and stockpiling of materials would be addressed in the Construction Environmental Management Plan. The Board's representatives noted the proximity to the water and the need for management of stockpiles and potential pollutants.
- **Phasing:** Noting the Citywide scope of the project, the Board's representatives advised that the prospective applicant be clear in the application as to how the phasing of the project would be managed and the associated timescales.
- **Development Plan:** It was noted that the application would be lodged during the lifespan of the current Development Plan, but that a decision would likely be made after the new Plan comes into effect. The prospective applicant stated that they have been engaging with the planning department to ensure the proposed development will not be in contravention of the Development Plan. It was also noted that the prospective applicant would continue to monitor the emergence of any revised Galway Transport Strategy.

- **EIA Screening:** There was a discussion held around the draft EIA Screening Report which was provided to the Board prior to the meeting. The Board's representatives re-iterated the importance of being very clear in the application documentation as to what environmental impacts are driving the necessity for an EIAR.
- **Timeline:** The prospective applicant stated that it intends to submit the application to the Board at the end of May 2022.
- **Application procedures:** A brief discussion was had regarding application procedures.

4.7. A set of photomontages of the proposed development that was presented at the second meeting was submitted with the letter requesting closure of the consultation stage.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1. Under the provisions of Section 51A of the Roads Act 1993, as amended, a road authority can enter into consultations with An Bord Pleanála prior to submitting an application under Section 51(2) in relation to a proposed road development.

5.2. The Board may give advice to the road authority or the Authority regarding the procedures involved, what considerations relating to the effects of the proposed development on the environment, or the proper planning and sustainable development may have on its decision in relation to the application. During the two meetings held, advice was provided, as noted on the attached file.

5.3. The prospective applicant now wishes to close the consultation stage, following which they may apply to the Board for the approval of the roads project.

5.4. A recommended list of Prescribed Bodies who should be forwarded copies of the application documentation is as follows:

- Section 51(3)(b) of the Roads Act 1993, as amended, lists the following bodies:
 - (i) The Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland.
 - (ii) Bord Fáilte Éireann.
 - (iii) An Taisce – the National Trust for Ireland.

- (iv) The Environmental Protection Agency.
- (v) Any other prescribed body or person.
- The Board considers that the following prescribed bodies, as per section 51(3)(b)(v) above, should also be notified:
 - (i) Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
 - (ii) Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications.
 - (iii) Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.
 - (iv) Minister for Transport.
 - (v) Northern and Western Regional Assembly.
 - (vi) Irish Water.
 - (vii) Inland Fisheries Ireland.
 - (viii) Transport Infrastructure Ireland.
 - (ix) National Transport Authority.
 - (x) The Heritage Council.
 - (xi) An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

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Senior Planning Inspector

22nd April 2022