

Submission: 28.10.2022

Re: "DART+ West Electrified Railway Order 2022"

I am writing to you to express my strong objection to the railway order pertaining the partial acquisition under CPO of Ashtown Stables for the purposes of a proposed access road at Ashtown Stables due to the proposed level crossing closure at Ashtown.

The proposed tunnel is extremely isolated and secluded. As a regular user of the area, I would be extremely concerned for my safety if I had to use this tunnel at any time of day and I would not feel comfortable with any of my friends or family using this tunnel, regardless of age. In particular at night-time, I would feel extremely intimidated and anxious using this tunnel in the fear that I would encounter another person while I was alone and become the victim of an attack. The proposed presence of CCTV brings no comfort to me, CCTV will not prevent me or anybody else from being attacked. It's also deeply concerning to know that if I was to be attacked in the tunnel or area surrounding it, the closest group of individuals to me would be 130m away in Martin Savage meaning that there would be little to no chance of anyone coming to my aid. This would strongly deter me from using the Rathborne area at all. It was extremely disconcerting to see that these concerns regarding pedestrian safety were so readily dismissed by Irish Rail members when raised on public webinars. Overall, it is extremely disappointing to see that Irish Rail have not shown due consideration to the safety of residents and users of the Ashtown and Rathborne area in their planning.

Having spoken with a number of residents and local users of the area, I am not alone in my safety concerns in regards to the tunnel. It would greatly deter myself and many others from using the local shops, restaurants and other businesses within the Rathborne area. Many others, young and old have expressed a similar opinion whereby they would not use the Rathborne area for their daily groceries or for a coffee etc. if they had to pass through an unsafe tunnel. This puts local businesses in the Rathborne area in an extremely unfair position. From the proposed design it is clear that the tunnel will create a huge divide between the Ashtown and Rathborne area, subsequently tearing apart a community.

The manner in which Irish Rail have conducted their public consultation process has been highly debatable. Having spoken to a number of residents and business owners within the area many of them informed me that they were completely unaware of the proposed work by Irish Rail, this is largely due to the severe lack of information and advertisement of the plans that has been provided by Irish Rail to the community. The vast majority of information regarding the plans for the area and any information regarding upcoming webinars is all held online. In particular, this has put the elderly members of the Ashtown and Rathborne community at a huge disadvantage, not only are they missing out on essential information regarding the drastic changes to the area they live in but they are also at a huge disadvantage because they have not had the opportunity to voice their opinions at public webinars. Irish Rail stated they would not be holding any in person public meetings, clearly Irish Rail are not fully committed to ensuring they receive as much community feedback as possible or that their feedback is inclusive of all age ranges. It is highly questionable how Irish Rail intends to use feedback received if it is not fully representative of the community that lives there.

During the Irish Rail webinar held on the 14th of September 2021 Irish Rail stated that they wanted to “hear our voices” however it’s difficult to believe this given their actions at this webinar. Irish Rail muted every individual’s microphone meaning that only Irish Rail were able to speak, no members of the community were given the opportunity to voice their comments and feedback. In addition to this, Irish Rail did not respond to every comment and question posted in the chat box. They were able to pick and choose what they wanted to respond to, this allowed them to easily avoid any unwanted or difficult questions posed to them. When Irish Rail misinterpreted the question, they did not bother to clarify with any of the attendees whether they had understood the question correctly. Efforts made by attendees to clarify the question they had asked were subsequently ignored. Furthermore, Irish Rail gave no attendees the opportunity to respond to the answers they gave, often being dismissive of the attendees opinions and observations on the current design, this was extremely disappointing to witness at what is supposed to be a public consultation.

In short, it is clear that public participation was not at the forefront of the DART+West design, this statement is completely false given the behaviours, actions and overall disdainful attitude seen by Irish Rail to date. The manner in which Irish Rail have conducted their public engagement thus far has been nothing short of appalling and is extremely disrespectful to the communities who will have to suffer the consequences of Irish Rail’s poor planning and design.

In the DART+West Public Consultation No.2 Brochure it states that investment in the DART+West Programme is needed in order to achieve Climate Change Targets by Supporting the Government’s Climate Action Plan. This is a contradictory proposition; the Climate Action Plan has placed a large focus on the importance of afforestation and the maintenance of trees and forest lands. Trees play an essential role in reducing emissions and improving air quality of an area, each year more and more trees are planted at Ashtown Stables. Any construction or taking of land at Ashtown Stables will result in the loss of hundreds of trees in an area that is already greatly lacking in trees and green spaces. Ashtown Stables acts as an oasis for nature and wildlife amidst the apartments and housing of the Rathborne and Ashtown area, any impact on Ashtown Stables will have a huge negative effect on the surrounding environment and the overall well-being of the communities that live there.

The Climate Action Plan further highlights the importance of trees in providing a space for wildlife to grow and live which is a huge factor in addressing the biodiversity crisis. Any construction to this area would cause major disturbance to these animals. Let alone the disturbance that would be caused to the 40 horses who call Ashtown Stables their home. Horses are extremely sensitive creatures and are highly susceptible to any changes in their surroundings and environment, big or small. It is clear that Irish Rail has shown that they do not fully understand the implications and consequences of their plans on the welfare of the 40 Ashtown horses. The proposal to remove a portion of the land is completely unsuitable as the horses require all of that land especially in Winter months as the bottom field is highly prone to flooding. The horses require all the space that they currently have.

Ashtown Stables is a truly special place. The Reid family have created an extremely

welcoming, friendly and warm environment where children and adults of all ages and backgrounds can come together and learn an invaluable skill and most of all have fun, enjoy themselves and make lifelong friends in the process. The Reid family are extremely kind and giving of their time, anyone who has ever met Chris or Kevin or any of the Reid family can see how truly dedicated they are to both teaching and caring for their herd of over 40 wonderful horses. They are the most hardworking individuals that I have ever come across and that anyone is likely to come across and have dedicated themselves to making Ashtown Stables the wonderful place it is today for the Ashtown community and all the surrounding communities who have greatly benefited from it over the many years.

I have been riding at Ashtown Stables for over 15 years. It was the highlight of my week when I was a child and continues to be the highlight of my week 15 years later. As a child growing up, I wasn't interested in other sports such as GAA, hockey or anything like that but after my first trip to Ashtown Stables I fell in love and haven't stopped going since and I hope to continue going for many many more years to come. My fondest memories are at Ashtown Stables from pony camps to park rides and all the memories of the friends I've made along the way.

Each week Ashtown Stables provides lessons to countless children and adults from all over Dublin and surrounding areas. Aside from learning how to ride, Ashtown Stables has taught myself along with all the many other members invaluable life skills. From a physical perspective horse riding develops coordination, balance, fine motor skills, muscular strength and flexibility. In addition to this, horse riding teaches you decision-making, concentration, communication, problem-solving and responsibility. Personally, I know that my confidence has greatly grown from the skills and opportunities that Ashtown Stables has given me. Regularly caring for the horses teaches children understanding, empathy and compassion; these are essential social skills for starting and maintaining relationships throughout life. This is evident from the many friendships that the children have made with each other and the relationships and understanding they all have of each and every one of their favourite horses and ponies. These are skills that I have been able to transfer to my adult life, this is not something that a child can learn sitting at home in front of a screen or from any textbook.

6000 submissions were received by Irish Rail in support of Ashtown Stables. This speaks volumes to the significant impact they have on the community and the immensely positive impact they have on individuals who attend the stables. It highlights that the stables is a vital part and much-loved amenity of the Ashtown area.

COVID-19 has undoubtedly highlighted the importance that outdoor activities and exercise has on both our mental and physical health. Ashtown Stables gives both adults and children a wonderful opportunity to connect with nature and interact with animals on a weekly basis, for many living in apartments and built-up areas this may be the only opportunity they have to do so. To take this away from them will naturally result in a hugely negative impact on their mental health. Many of the adults who ride at Ashtown Stables regularly comment on how solely focusing on their horse and being outside in the fresh air each week in a fun and enjoyable environment allows them to unwind and forget their worries after a busy or tough week at work. Without this outlet, many have commented on how their mental health would struggle. It is evident that

Ashtown Stables has a significant positive impact on the physical, mental and emotional well-being of the many adults and children it attracts.

Every child who enters and leaves the gates of Ashtown Stables is constantly filled with a look of pure joy, excitement and happiness. It's unimaginable to think that their favourite place, filled with their favourite horses and their favourite friends could be so unnecessarily taken away from them. My best memories are at Ashtown and I would hope that each of the children at Ashtown today would be able to continue to make the same wonderful memories that I have been so fortunate to have.

I am not alone in my love for Ashtown Stables and strong appreciation of the Reid family for everything they have done for me and the wider community. The support that has been shown to the Reid's and Ashtown Stables speaks volumes to the significant impact they have on the community and the immensely positive impact they have on the lives they have touched over the years. It will undoubtedly be a catastrophic loss for everyone if Ashtown Stables was to be impacted.

To summarise, I strongly oppose the proposed plans for the Ashtown area. From a public safety perspective, the tunnel is extremely unsafe and will attract a huge amount of anti-social behaviour and crime to the area. I believe that Irish Rail have not conducted their consultation process in a fair and professional manner, largely due to their lack of transparency, failure to adequately inform the communities involved, lack of professionalism seen on webinars and overall disregard for public opinion. From an environmental perspective, it would be a huge loss for the area to lose one of the only green spaces it has available to them. In addition to the catastrophic effects any construction would have on the many wildlife species living in the area. Ashtown Stables is the only remaining stables within the city centre and within the boundary of the M50 meaning it is the last remaining stables accessible by public transport. Ashtown Stables is a treasured and much-loved amenity, it has been highly valued by generations from the Ashtown and surrounding areas for over 40 years and therefore must be preserved at all costs.

The current preferred design is highly unsuitable for the Ashtown area and is one that the community very strongly rejects.

I request that there should be an oral hearing and that I be informed and be in attendance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emer Rafter'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'E' and a stylized 'R'.

Address: 115 Castleknock Park, Castleknock, Dublin 15, D15VEH2