

## Observation from St Mochta's Residents Association, Coolmine, Dublin 15

**Case reference: 314232**

**DART+ West Railway Order - Dublin City to Maynooth and M3 Parkway**

This observation on Dart West is on behalf of St Mochta's Residents Association, located in close proximity to the Maynooth rail line, in Coolmine, Dublin 15.

We believe that Dart West is a positive initiative that will increase connectivity between west Dublin and Dublin city centre. We hope that An Bord Pleanála will approve the Dart West project, **subject to certain amendments and conditions**. We also urge An Bord Pleanála to hold an **Oral Hearing**, to enable local communities express their views and concerns, so we can work with Irish Rail, to ensure the Dart West project is a success for everyone.

*The public consultation to date has been inadequate:*

The way that Irish Rail has conducted their non-statutory consultations has been poor and contrasts with the extent of information and publications supplied to impacted areas by the Bus Connects project. There has been an over reliance on online consultation, which has meant the exclusion of the older population, which is a large demographic in the Coolmine area. There has been a shortage of hard copy material, which would have enabled residents to read the information pertaining to their locality. The huge number of online documents - grouped by subject, rather than by area - has made it much more difficult to determine the specifics relating to each location. There is also a shortage of photomontages, pictures, drawings and pedestrian/cycle bridge measurements in the documentation, which has made it even harder to visualise the changes proposed. All in all, many residents in Coolmine remain unaware of the impact and timelines of the Dart West project and those that are aware have still struggled to access or interpret the information supplied by Irish Rail.

*Irish Rail are relying on out date data:*

To date, Irish Rail has not been able to confirm the number of trains planned for off peak times. Nor have they supplied a plan for peak time trains, which remains subject to demand. In addition, capacity reports which are essential for ramping up the train frequency has not been provided. The data that Irish Rail is using for their calculations, predates Covid and does not take into account the increase in remote or hybrid working, which has grown from the 4% remote working, in 2016, that Fingal Co Council estimated in the draft Fingal Development Plan 2023-2029. Irish Rail need to update their figures, to reflect the "new normal" and provide projections based on these figures, before the project is approved.

*The Level Crossings need to be kept open:*

Following on from the point above, Fingal Co Council - again in the draft Fingal Development Plan 2023-2029 - estimated that 91,000 Fingalians travelled within Fingal, for work and education. This figure contrasted with the 56,000 Fingalians, who travelled from Fingal to Dublin City Centre, for work and education (both figures from 2016). Local journeys are important journeys - for work, education, family, childcare and retail etc. There has been a route across the rail line, at Coolmine, since the 1860s. In fact, the route across Coolmine level crossing, dates back to at least the 1790s, when Kirkpatrick bridge was built across the canal - the earliest bridge in the area. The local

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community in Coolmine, including St Mochta's estate, have been travelling this route for a very long time and continue to do so, for a multitude of reasons, on a daily basis.

The belief that the Dart West would result in fewer car journeys is misguided, as it only applies when individuals are travelling in a linear direction, between Maynooth and Dublin City Centre. It does not take into account local journeys which cannot be completed by rail, but would be greatly impacted by level crossing closures. This inconvenience cannot simply be ignored by Irish Rail (or Fingal County Council). Automated level crossings are used successfully, across traffic junctions, around the world. Nor has there been any safety data provided, to show that the Coolmine level crossing is a safety concern. Dart West needs to work in tandem with the local road network, not against it.

In July 2022, St Mochta's Residents Association carried out a survey of residents, to explore opinions on Dart West and the closure of the level crossings. Of the 75 residents (27% of the estate population) who completed this survey, 85% used the level crossings daily or frequently, as opposed to 54% who used the train daily or frequently. 87% of the residents surveyed were extremely or very concerned about the level crossing closure and 90% were extremely or very concerned about the impact on traffic. The data from our estate is mirrored by neighbouring estates and demonstrates the importance of the level crossings, to our community.

### *There will be major traffic implications:*

Currently there are 5 crossing points, over the Maynooth rail line, between Castleknock and Clonsilla - 2 bridges and 3 level crossings. These are vital arteries, used by the residents of St Mochta's estate and other estates, on both sides of the rail line. Reducing 5 crossing points to solely the 2 bridges (Dr Troy bridge and Castleknock bridge), at the same time as developing a new townland (Kellystown) is a recipe for traffic chaos. Both bridges are already gridlocked at peak times. Irish Rail have included references to upgrading traffic junctions, however, they can only do so much to alleviate the traffic. As stated above, many journeys cannot be made by rail - regardless of the increase in rail service - and the roads in the Coolmine area are already busy, particularly at peak commuter times.

### *Antisocial behaviour:*

To access St Mochta's estate, from Coolmine train station, residents have to walk along Sheepmore Lane, a quiet laneway, which borders the canal. At night, or on dark winter evenings, Sheepmore Lane is already a lonely walk and this would be amplified by the creation of a quiet cul de sac on the Coolmine Road, if Coolmine level crossing is closed. The houses north of the level crossing, on the Coolmine Road, do not face onto the road and the erection of a 2.4 metre palisade fence would turn this proposed cul de sac into a problem area and would be a perfect storm, in terms of personal safety and antisocial behaviour. Sheepmore Lane is already a problem area, for dumping and drug dealing and, with less activity on the Coolmine Road, at Coolmine Station, this is only likely to increase.

### *Pedestrian/Cycle bridges are poorly designed:*

As part of the mitigation measures, for the level crossing closures, Irish Rail propose to introduce large, modern pedestrian/cycle bridges. As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to access the detail, outlining the measurements of the proposed bridge for Coolmine. What is clear, is that the older

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residents in the area, those who are less mobile and those who cannot participate in Active Travel, would be obliged to use these large ramped pedestrian bridges, instead of simply crossing the level crossing, as they have always done. The recently opened pedestrian ramp at Pelletstown train station, also along the Maynooth line, has been highlighted as a concern for wheelchair users, or those with mobility concerns (source Access for All Ireland). The bridge proposed for Coolmine level crossing would provide similar challenges and Irish Rail have not included lifts in their proposed plans.

### *Resulting environmental concerns:*

One of the most positive aspects of Dart West is the planned move from diesel to electric trains, which is to be welcomed. The desire to move people out of their cars and take the pressure off the busy road network is also a worthy objective, where feasible. Irish Rail must, however, be cognisant of the fact that the Maynooth line is located directly beside the Royal Canal, a proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA), with wildlife protected under the Habitats Directive. While a Natura Impact Statement is provided, it is inevitable that wildlife would be impacted during the construction phase and in the 24/7 lighting that would be required once completed. The visual impact of the proposed pedestrian/cycle bridges in Coolmine, Clonsilla and Porterstown, is awful and would detract from the landscape along the Deep Sinking, a particularly beautiful stretch of the Royal Canal, in Dublin 15.

### *In Summary:*

St Mochta's estate supports the introduction of the Dart West project and wants An Bord Pleanála to approve this project, subject to the following conditions:

1. Irish Rail to provide up to date, post-Covid data
2. Irish Rail need to work with the local community, along the Maynooth line, to keep the level crossings open
3. Irish Rail should not build the poorly designed pedestrian/cycle bridges, which will not be needed if the level crossings are retained.

Finally, we strongly request an **Oral Hearing** be scheduled, as part of this approval process.

Yours faithfully

Christine Moore,

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