

MetroLink Opening Statement Fingal County Council

My name is Roisin Burke, I am a Senior Planner employed by Fingal County Council (FCC) in the Planning & Strategic Infrastructure Department. It is in this capacity that I am representing Fingal at this oral hearing. I hold a Masters in Town & Country Planning and a Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Surveying and have worked as a planner in various local authorities for the past 20 years.

This statement follows on from Fingal County Council's written submission to An Bord Pleanála (ABP) in June 2023 regarding MetroLink Railway Order.

Fingal County Council fully supports the development of the MetroLink project. It represents an important shift in how our communities will embrace sustainable travel that will also benefit the social, economic, environmental, and cultural assets of our County. The benefits associated with the arrival of MetroLink to Fingal and Swords cannot be underestimated.

MetroLink will deliver high capacity, high frequency, high-quality sustainable transport infrastructure between Swords, Dublin Airport and Dublin City and we, in Fingal, will seek to maximize the opportunities created within the corridor of this key piece of infrastructure, in the interests of the economy and well-being of the county's residential and business/employment population.

Essentially, Fingal County Council believes MetroLink will:

- Support Fingal in becoming climate resilient, reducing private car use, and enable a reduction in our transport related carbon emissions in line with sustainable mobility.
- Act as a catalyst for future economic and physical development of the County and the wider Metropolitan Area of Dublin, providing a strategic development corridor link linking Swords through Dublin Airport to Dublin City Centre.
- Create fairer and more equitable access to employment opportunities, education, health, goods, and services, enabling all individuals to participate in activities in their communities.

My colleague Gerald Curley, Senior Executive Engineer in the Planning & Strategic Infrastructure Department of Fingal County Council is also available to address any engineering queries.

The proposal for a metro system for Dublin has been central to planning and transport strategy for the Greater Dublin Area for over 20 years. MetroLink has evolved from the previous proposal in response to the development of planning and transport policy and to address the challenges that face Dublin and Ireland today and into the future.

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The requirement for the proposed MetroLink Project is supported in current policy from national to local level.

Locally within Fingal, work to support and facilitate the delivery of MetroLink has been ongoing for some time. The previous Development Plans, 2005 – 2011, 2011 – 2017 and 2017 – 2023 all acknowledged the need for a rail line serving Dublin City, the airport, and Swords and all aimed to expediate its delivery and utilise the benefits of the project for the wider community.

The current Fingal Development Plan (FDP) 2023 -2029 was adopted in February 2023 and came into effect in April 2023 and no further changes/variations to the development plan have been made since.

MetroLink is identified in the Development Plan as a critical piece of transport infrastructure for Dublin and the wider region and part of the wider transport offering in the context of the ambitious objectives for Fingal. Throughout the Development Plan, MetroLink is acknowledged as a key strategic element for the sustainable growth of the County which will provide for infill and regeneration opportunities and unlock significant long-term capacity in the key town of Swords, the lands at Lissenhall and the South Fingal area and support the sustainable growth of Dublin Airport.

MetroLink fulfils key strategic objectives of the FDP 2023-2029 for sustainable, compact and consolidated growth and the integration of land-use and transportation, facilitating connectivity between existing and new communities and employment areas along the route.

Critically in the Development Plan, MetroLink is supported by a dedicated Metro and Rail Economic Corridor (MRE) zoning. This zoning was first created as a zoning in the 2011 – 2017 Development Plan as a response to the then MetroNorth project. This zoning, which has been refined in subsequent Development Plans, is located along the majority of the route and its associated stops. The objective of this zoning is to facilitate opportunities for high-density mixed-use employment generating activity, commercial residential development.

In recognising the potential of MetroLink to act as a catalyst for future economic and physical development of the county and the wider Dublin Area, Fingal County Council has already produced a number of policy documents and frameworks to guide development in areas on or adjacent to the route. We also propose a number of further land-use plans to be prepared during the new FDP 2023-2029 plan period.

In relation to Land-Use Plans relevant to the MetroLink alignment, Fingal County Council has prepared and adopted Dublin Airport Local Area Plan 2020, Dublin Airport Central Masterplan, Barrysparks & Crowscastle (Swords) Masterplan, Fosterstown (Swords), Estuary West

(Swords), Lissenhall East Local Area Plan 2023 (Swords). In the Fingal Development Plan 2023 – 2029, we have undertaken to prepare the Swords Local Area Plan and Northwood Framework Plan.

Additional studies and strategies have also been undertaken by Fingal County Council in advance of the delivery of MetroLink, including the *South Fingal Transport Study 2019* and *Sustainable Swords*. Planning consent has also been received for the R132 Connectivity Project (Jan 2022), which runs directly adjacent to this Project and provides for pedestrian and cycle lanes along the R132 Corridor and at grade crossings at key locations which align with the Seatown and Swords Central Stations.

The Council is confident that Fingal will be transformed by the arrival of MetroLink which will have wide-ranging positive implications for the county and, in particular Swords. These plans, policies and frameworks demonstrate this, and we will continue to work to prepare for its delivery.

In relation to the Fingal County Council administrative area, 7 no. stations are proposed at Estuary, Seatown, Swords Central, Fosterstown, Dublin Airport, Dardistown (future station) and Northwood.

Of particular importance to Fingal County Council for all stations is the provision of high-quality design and a well-planned public realm, which will enhance the overall experience and functionality of the stations and successfully integrate MetroLink with future development on lands immediately adjoining the route. Pedestrian and cycle accessibility and permeability are necessary to maximise the potential catchment of each station. Also key to this project is the opportunity to implement initiatives aimed at achieving local biodiversity net gain, where practicable. TII has agreed to work collaboratively with FCC, to agree additional landscaping and planting, sharing of replacement plans and method statements for FCC comment in advance of the commencement of construction.

The Fingal Development Plan written statement and maps specifically identify the MetroLink route and their stations. The alignment of the Railway Order is reflected on the maps and the principle of the route through these lands is considered to meet the policies and objectives and zoning requirements of the Development Plan.

The area at the Estuary Station, Lissenhall, is identified as the Strategic Long Term Reserve lands for the Fingal County Council area.

Separately at the Estuary stop, Fingal County Council has raised concerns in relation to the number of bicycle parking. The proposal of 252 bike spaces appears insufficient and does not reflect the substantial development of a new urban neighbourhood which will be created at

this location. Through further discussions with TII and FCC, TII has committed to the provision of a more appropriate level of bicycle parking spaces, which are of high quality, safe, secure, and located with ease of convenience to Estuary Station.

As outlined by the TII earlier, the lands for Fosterstown Station are zoned HT (High Technology) and RW (Retail Warehousing) in the Fingal Development Plan. The proposed station lies within lands predominantly zoned as HT with part of the station zoned RW. Under the HT zoning, 'public transport station' does not come within either 'Permitted in Principle' or 'Not Permitted' uses and the proposed development should be assessed in terms of its contribution towards the achievement of the Zoning Objective and Vision and compliance with the policies and objectives of the Development Plan. Under the RW zoning objective, 'public transport station' is a 'Not Permitted' use. However, the location of a station here is justified by virtue of the need for a station serving this area, which is identified in the Development Plan and the overarching need for the project in this location and therefore in this instance, it is considered acceptable.

At Dublin airport, Fingal County Council has raised concerns regarding the MetroLink surface connection within the airport and both the building and the setting of the Protected Structure of the Church of Our Lady Queen of Heaven (RPS No. 864).

The surface connection within the airport has rows of bus parking bays in proximity to the protected structure which between the MetroLink proposal and the proposal contained in the current Dublin Airport Infrastructure Planning Application (F23A/0781) is now presented as having parking infrastructure on three sides.

The design of the surface treatment and landscaping of the area around the Metro Station Entrance needs to be integrated into an overall Ground Transportation Centre design which is sensitive to the location and setting of a protected structure of national significance (Church) within it.

And again, the alignment also adjoins the protected structure at Santry Lodge, Old Ballymun Road, Santry. The proposed route of the Metrolink does avoid the historic building of the Former Charter School but will alter and impact the overall site of Santry Lodge.

Fingal County Council has raised concerns regarding this, and further to discussions with FCC, TII is committed to ensure the landscaping reflects the sensitivity of the location and setting of the protected structure within Santy Lodge. Further consideration will be given to details such the front boundary and entrance, design of entrance gates and finish of new boundary wall, new planting, colour and design of any protective fencing.

Since Fingal County Council's written submission to An Bord Pleanála in June 2023 regarding Metrolink Railway Order 2022, FCC and TII have had further discussions regarding a number of issues of concern to the Council. Together, we have agreed a number of suggested revisions to requested conditions, which will be submitted to the Inspectors.

Ger and I are happy to answer questions relevant to our fields of expertise.

Finally, Fingal County Council are confident of the significant benefits the MetroLink Project will bring to Fingal and the wider Dublin region.

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