

Reference #149: John Conway & Orlaith McCarthy, 15 Dartmouth Square West.

My name is John Conway. I am representing my wife and myself as residents of # 15 Dartmouth Square West where we have lived for the last 42 years. We have raised our family there and it continues to be the focal point of the lives of our adult children and our grandchildren.

We are reference # 149 in TII's Responses to Submissions. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on TII's response to the observation which my wife and I made to An Bord Pleanála in Jan 2023. You have heard many arguments yesterday from technical experts about why Charlemont is the wrong place for the centre city terminus. In the time available to me today, I wish to concentrate on just one issue which is construction phase noise and disturbance.

If TII's plans are approved, the construction phase will last 8 ½ years. The site will be in very close proximity to our home and massive excavations are planned.

TII state that 'no profound impacts are predicted, and that on implementation of mitigation measures, the residual impacts are predicted to be 'moderate'.

I wish my wife & I could take comfort from that statement. But the fact is that it is contradicted by the data which TII itself provided in its Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR).

Throughout this very long construction period, my wife & I will be confronted with an intolerable burden in terms of noise, dust and ground vibration. We have no wish to leave our home or move away from this community, but we feel we are forced into considering alternative plans for accommodation, as we will be in our 80s before the construction phase is completed.

I have no technical expertise in measuring noise. So, I don't know what 86 decibels sounds like. But I expect it's pretty loud! However, I can work out percentages – and I can calculate that 86 is 32.3% above 65. The significance of the number 65 is that this is the Construction Noise Threshold level which TII use in their modelling in the EIAR chapter 13 Appendix A13.7.

The significance of the number 86 is that it is the number which TII have calculated will apply during the South Station Works Excavation – Ground Level construction phase. So, the noise level at our home during this phase of the construction will be almost one third higher than the threshold.

Indeed, according to TII's own figures in the EIAR the noise level at our home will be above the threshold level for ALL of the 6 phases of the 8 ½ year construction period. I have taken the numbers directly from TII's tables in Appendix A13.7. They are the predicted decibel numbers for 15 Dartmouth Square West in each of the construction phases:

- Advanced Enabling & Utility Works, Site Prep Works 79
- Station Piling Works – North 84
- Station Piling Works – South 68
- South Station Works Excavation – Ground Level 86
- South Station Works – Underground 80
- Finishing & Fit-out Works 74

The tables show our home to be in the RED ZONE for both weekdays (7.00 – 19.00 and Saturdays 7.00 – 13.00) for 5 of the 6 phases of the construction activity. The RED ZONE means that the predicted magnitude of impact being assessed by TII is 'significant to very significant'.

The only period of construction when our home is not in the Red Zone is Station Piling Works – South where the Predicted Magnitude of Impact is listed as ‘moderate to significant’ for both weekdays and Saturdays .

That’s an awful lot of hours of noise over the 8 ½ years of the construction period!

Mitigation?

TII’s Mitigation Policy is set out in Appendix 14.6. Unfortunately, this document does not give us much comfort! The main plank of TII’s mitigation policy is apparently to build a wall!

This wall or noise barrier will sit between our back garden and the construction site. Remarkably, it has increased in height substantially in the last week or so! It’s gone from 4 metres (in the TII response document) to 4.5 metres, then to 6 metres and now to 7 metres, I believe!

I wonder how effective it will be in containing noise and dust from the site. But if TII believed it would be effective at 4 metres – why are they now proposing to increase the height to 7 metres? There is also likely to be an issue with light restriction and shadow which a 7 metre wall will create. I believe that a transparent wall is now being mooted! But I doubt if that will mitigate our feeling of being boxed in.

Past Experience

The 17 residents of Dartmouth Square West have already experienced a number of years of severe disruption which was caused during the construction phase of the redevelopment of the Carroll’s Grand Parade building (aka the Hines Development).

By comparison with what is contemplated by TII, this construction was very much smaller in scale and more contained. It did however involve a certain amount of pile driving activity and the noise effects were measured by 3 receptors placed in residences along the length of Dartmouth Square West.

The results showed a daytime peak range of noise during the pile driving activity of 76 to 86 decibels and a daily average range of 68 to 78 decibels.

These numbers are above the TII’s EIAR tolerance threshold of 65 decibels but lower than the predicted numbers above for the MetroLink project. The residents who lived through that experience can confirm that the noise environment then was mightily unpleasant. We simply could not contemplate a prolonged period of perhaps 8 or more years of the same again – or indeed significantly worse as predicted by TII’s own numbers.

Rehousing?

The mitigation policy measures listed in Chapter 14 by TII include ‘temporary rehousing’. If the actual noise figures for Dartmouth Square West do not exceed the predicted values of the EIAR model – then my reading of the table on page 9 of Appendix A which sets out Airborne Noise Trigger Values of the document A14.6 Airborne & Groundborne Noise Mitigation Policy suggests that our homes will be right on the cusp of ‘eligibility’ for rehousing which requires noise values to exceed 85 decibels.

The prospect moving out of our home for ‘temporary rehousing’ will be very unappealing to a couple in their 80s. But I can imagine that it is a great deal less appealing to parents of a family

of young children, who will have to find accommodation within reach of their children's existing schools.

Subsidence & Settlement

Apart from noise during the construction phase, my wife & I also have grave concerns about the effects of ground settlement and subsidence on the structure of our Victorian home.

You have heard geotechnical engineering experts speak on this subject yesterday, with particular reference to the West side of Dartmouth Square. Our homes are especially at risk because of our very close proximity to the Big Dig, and the nature of the construction methods used in the 1890s when they were built. I'm referring to the lack of foundations and the 'untied' nature of the ceilings.

Specific reference is made in TII's response to our observations to vibration during blasting at Charlemont Station. They predict 'an exceedance vibration level' of 40% above the threshold, resulting in 'a potential significant impact'. Now, 40% over the limit sounds a lot! But the mitigation measures outlined by TII don't sound very convincing.

So, we are worried not just about cracks appearing on our walls – but about the idea that our ceilings could collapse on top of us! That's another reason why we might find ourselves in 'temporary rehousing' in our 80s.

Concluding Remarks

There have been many arguments presented over the last couple of days highlighting the unsuitability of Charlemont as the location for the city centre terminus. My wife and I and our neighbours on the West side of Dartmouth Square face a very prolonged period of severe disruption to our living conditions. Not only will we have to face the consequences of the Big Dig immediately behind our homes, but we will also have to contend with access problems and parking and traffic disruption while the road in front of us is dug up to redirect utilities.

Dartmouth Square is an Architectural Conservation Area and our homes are Protected Structures. Residents take pride in the neighbourhood and feel a responsibility to protect the heritage that we enjoy so that it can be passed on to future generations. We are encouraged to do so by Government policy and fairly strict regulations about what can & cannot be done. As an agent of Government, TII should be held to the same standard. If TII is permitted to proceed with its plans, there is no doubt in my mind that the West side of Dartmouth Square will not survive, and the integrity of Dartmouth Square will be hugely compromised.

The extent of the disturbance and disruption which we face has forced my wife and myself to give serious consideration to selling up and moving out. This is not an option we desire but we have engaged with an estate agent to explore the possibilities. Compared to a hypothetical situation where there were no plans for a terminus at Charlemont, in his professional opinion the open market value our home has already suffered a reduction of almost 20%. This situation can only get worse with the passage of time if TII receives the green light to build the terminus at Charlemont. I urge An Bord Pleanála to recognise the unsuitability of Charlemont as a terminus on the grounds of the arguments presented to this Oral Hearing by local politicians, by residents and by the experts engaged by the Dartmouth Community.

Thank you for your attention.