

MODULE 2 PRESENTATION TO METROLINK ORAL HEARING 19/03/2024

District 7 Community Alliance

[SLIDE 1]

TONY KELLY:

Inspector,

My name is Tony Kelly, Chair of the District 7 Community Alliance and I am here with my colleagues, Raghnaill Ó Floinn, Secretary and Pauline Caddell, Committee member. The District 7 Community Alliance is a group of seven local residents associations and business groups representing over 2,000 households and commercial businesses in the North Inner City.

We cover an area stretching from Phibsborough Road to Dorset Street and from the North Circular Road to Dominic Street. (SLIDE 1). The proposed Mater Station lies in the centre of our area. We have held several meetings with our members on the MetroLink Project, so we are well placed to speak on behalf of the local community.

I will begin by making an opening statement, followed by some queries and will then hand over to Ms Caddell and the Mr Ó Floinn.

Introduction

First of all, can I say that District 7 welcomes the MetroLink Project and it will bring a much-needed boost to the local community. From the start of this process all we have asked for is that the communities we represent and the area in terms of its history and cultural significance be recognised and treated with respect. We now realise this was never going to happen as the NTA /TII and MetroLink see consultation as purely a box ticking exercise and, in their dealings with us, have shown nothing but contempt for local communities.

This was apparent from last week's meeting with TII whereby our concerns were not addressed (including no less than 11 specific queries which we were assured

would be addressed). All I'm interested in is the pretty little garden they were going to leave us with in place of our historic park.

So today we want to address the Board directly.

Communities like ours have not got the resources to take issues to the High Court or threaten all types of legal actions. So we rely on An Bord Pleanála to act on our behalf and hope you will see the merits of our argument.

We as a community have never opposed the concept of Metrolink.

We have welcomed it and recognise the need for it.

We also however firmly believe that we should have a say in what our area looks like after the completion of the project. We know the area best and will have to live with the consequences long after the work has been completed. None of our two major concerns – station design and park restoration - have been seriously addressed.

MetroLink has not engaged at all with the station design, presenting it as non-negotiable. It seems to think that 'consultation' should not go beyond the realm of selecting the pretty flowers for the park. We will also not be bought off by promises for art installations of dubious value to the park's surroundings that haven't even been budgeted for. That's right no budget as of yet. Just concepts.

I am aware of time and will now ask Pauline Caddell, Co-Ordinator of the Blend Residents Association to give a brief summary of the park's history.

PAULINE CADDELL:

[SLIDE 2] The area around the proposed MetroLink station has major literary and political significance, it is architecturally important and has an historical value unlike any other area of Dublin. Once locally called 'the horse field', the Four Masters' Park is a small green lung on Berkeley Road in the heart of the North inner city; one of a very few. The park itself has multiple historic resonances. The Celtic Cross was commissioned by Sir William Wilde, antiquarian, surgeon and

father of Oscar Wilde and executed by artist/sculptor James Cahill, the foremost sculptor of his era. It was erected in 1876 to commemorate the 240th anniversary of the completion of the Annals of the Four Masters in 1636, predating the only other memorial to the Four Masters, that in Donegal town erected in 1938. The park's current layout dates to the visit of John F Kennedy in June 1963. The field was on his route to Áras an Uachtaráin, so was beautified for the occasion. It was gifted by the Sisters of Mercy for the benefit of the local community. This Dublin memorial to the Four Masters Michael O'Clery, Peregrine O'Clery, Peregrine Duigan and Fearfeasa O'Mulconroy from the Franciscan friary in Donegal, were the 'four masters' who compiled the Annals in the Irish language between 1630 and 1636. The Dublin memorial is a fitting tribute, as much of the historical material was collected in Dublin and manuscript copies of their vast accomplishments in the field of historical research comprising of myths, legend, battles, date of kings etc. are preserved in the city. The importance of the park and its memorial cannot therefore be overemphasised.

It is unacceptable that we are dismissed with assurances that high-end design, quality materials and nice planting will be the end result of MetroLink's intervention in the park, when minimum detail is provided and specific questions are brushed aside with unseemly haste. We have expressed our willingness to engage in meaningful ways and have attempted to do so from the beginning. As one of our members pointed out, neither TII nor DCC have a good record when it comes to design in the public domain, and locals are anxious that this is yet not a further opportunity lost. We have been told there will be plenty of time for engagement in the execution of art works at some date in the future, yet no budget has been mentioned, nor any time line specified, nor how that engagement would play out. Apart from the park, questions we are currently asking are:

1. The inappropriate design of the entrance to the Metro in a highly sensitive conservation area.
2. The blocking of important vistas towards one of the most important preserved buildings in the area, the original, cut stone granite Mater Misericordiae Hospital

on Eccles Street.

MetroLink's response has been that the entrance is a generic design for all stations on the route so that people recognise it as the station entrance; a ludicrous response as if people are somehow foolish. One can only assume therefore that it's a marketing strategy. Yet it appears that at the insistence of the OPW, they may have to change the design for Stephen's Green, so why not this station? In 2020 when the station was first proposed at the present site, we collected over three thousand signatures through UPLIFT to 'Save the Four Masters' Park' from the proposed destruction. Those who signed included interested individuals, local residents' associations, the 107 businesses comprising the Dublin North City Business Association, and representatives of the culture community - artists, historians, architects, writers, actors, conservationists, councillors, TDs and many more. We trust An Bord Pleanála will take on our deeply felt concerns and address them as a result of this hearing.

Thank you Pauline.

I will now ask Ragnall Ó Floinn, the Chair of the Berkley Road Area Residents Association, as the community most affected by the proposals, to address its position which is shared by all District 7 affiliated members.

RAGHNALL Ó FLOINN

Unfortunately I was unable to make last week's meeting with TII (the second such meeting) but on hearing reports from those who did attend I was very disappointed to learn of the dismissive attitude of TII to our concerns.

Like previous speakers, I can confirm the support within our community for the MetroLink project, subject to the mitigation of the worst effects of construction. Many of these concerns about traffic, noise, dust, insurance, still have not been addressed. They have been skirted around with no real commitments given and until as a community we get these in writing, we would ask the Board to withhold

the granting of any permission.

Our fear is that once permission is given for the project, promises are forgotten.

I now come to our two principal concerns – the so-called ‘restoration’ of the Four Masters Park and the Station Canopy design and associated overground structures.

The Park

[SLIDE 3] The Four Masters Park is probably unique in Dublin if not in the whole country. It is small in size, enclosed by a set of iron railings but framed on each side by the Mater Hospital, the Georgian buildings of Berkeley Road and St Joseph’s Church with the Four Masters’ Cross in a prominent position.

[SLIDE 4] This enclosed park is now to be replaced by an open paved plaza with a much-reduced park behind (up to 50% of green space will be lost), allowing public access to it day and night with all the attendant dangers of anti-social behaviour. It will be dominated by the station canopy a design which ignores entirely the historical and cultural aspects of the park it will be replacing.

[SLIDE 5] TII state that they are reinstating the Four Masters Park and that only 10% is being taken by the Mater station canopy. However this calculation does not include the Dublin Fire Brigade lifts or the proposed skylights and other overground buildings. [SLIDE 6] TII say they are reducing the size of the skylights, but we have seen no proposed design and nothing in writing to this effect.

There is no indication as to how the paved area around the station will be maintained and cleaned to remove litter, broken glass and chewing gum. We have seen how the nearby Broadstone Plaza has been turned into a skateboarders’ paradise.

The proposed bollards are also out of character with the area and would be better

replaced by more sympathetic interventions.

We therefore request that the overground structures in the park, in particular the skylights, be eliminated or at the minimum reduced in bulk.

Station Canopy

[SLIDE 7] MetroLink has only very recently started to engage on the details of the station during this process. So far, we have been told that the station design and park 'restoration' is non-negotiable. It is now time to start engaging in a meaningful way with this community rather than engaging in box ticking or sham consultation.

To quote the Finnish architect, Juhanni Palasmaa

'The best architecture does not represent an abstract ideal, rather it embodies the peculiarities and idiosyncracies of the specific place. In contrast a generic and uninspired place may leave people feeling disconnected and uninspired.'

MetroLink's insistence on a generic design takes no account of the location's size, character or local environment.

Unlike other MetroLink stations with a canopy design, the canopy and the Dublin Fire Brigade lifts at the Mater Station are situated on a very small site which is surrounded by buildings, the small site makes the canopy and Dublin Fire Brigade lifts visually dominant. [SLIDES 8, 9] The visual impact of the canopy and lifts destroys the view of the beautiful entrance to the Mater Hospital. [SLIDE 10] This building is a National Monument, its commanding portico and entrance were designed to have been appreciated from a distance not from the bottom of the steps on Eccles St.

The Mater Station design and Dublin Fire Brigade lift are similar to those at only six other Stations (Northwood, Ballymun, Collins Ave, Tara St, Stephen's Green, Charlemont). Altogether there are six different Canopy designs along the line. For example, the Glasnevin and O'Connell St Station designs are both different to that proposed for the Mater. Why then can the Mater design not be altered?

[SLIDE 11] The heavy iron frame of the building is overbearing and will undoubtedly attract graffiti, particularly as at the site will be open 24 hours a day and the street quiet. This applies also to the glass and moreover, we understand that the glass is going to be tinted, further blocking views of the Mater Hospital entrance and surrounding streetscape. No provision appears to have been made by TII to develop a strategy to deal with graffiti; No water cleansing or water saving solutions are provided for the canopy and the large paved area around it.

As one of our residents said, with the large M on the side of the canopy, it might as well be a Mc Donalds as a MetroLink station.

We are therefore requesting a re-design of the canopy to be in more sympathy with the surrounding landscape and that the Dublin Fire Brigade lifts be clad in a more sympathetic material such as red brick to make them less intrusive.

I cannot emphasise enough the universal opposition to the plans for the 'restored' park and the proposed canopy design at the Mater Station. Ignoring our views will be an insult to the sacrifices that the people of this area will be making during the construction phase. If TII persists with its plan we, the local community, will be left to pick up the pieces and live with an unsustainable, graffiti-covered canopy sitting on a chewing gum and rubbish-strewn plaza.

In closing, I would also like to ask about community gain. We are told that no provision has been made by TII for this. Yet over the course of seven to ten years there will be a huge cost to the community.

There will be no inward investment in the area - the real estate market will stall, the value of the rental market on Berkeley Road will be diminished due to the ongoing works and DCC investment in the public realm will be stalled for the duration. Many of our businesses along Berkeley Road will close due to reduced footfall (I am already aware that this is being actively considered). Many of our elderly residents will no longer be able to meet in the local cafés on Berkeley Road for a quiet tea and chat. Individuals will face the potential cost of increased insurance premiums and interior damage due to dust, noise and vibration. They also face reduced accessibility in the surrounding streets during the construction period.

And in the end, we get no input into how our area will look once the works are completed and the contractors move off.

In this context we would ask what are MetroLink's proposals with regard to the mental and social well-being of our community during and after the proposed works?

As a community we demanded to be consulted and our concerns listened to.

I will now hand you back to Tony.

[Tony to mention here the commitments made below raised at first Oral Hearing and at two meetings with TII which have not yet been answered]

1 Planning

TII gave a commitment that the planning application list would be updated. Has this been done?

2 Coordination with other major infrastructure developments

TII agreed to come back to us on this.

3 Station Design

TII agreed to come back to us with alternative proposals.

4 Restoration of Park

TII agreed to come back to us with alternative proposals.

5 Concerns of Berkeley Road residents and businesses in proximity to works

TII to confirm that Berkeley Road (15M distant) is closest of any areas to station works. TII to confirm this? How has this been factored in to the mitigating factors for noise, dust, air quality, etc.?

6 Concerns of Berkeley Road businesses in proximity to works

How can we be reassured that these will not suffer during the years of construction works?

7 *Aspergillus fungus*

We sought written reassurance from TII to our residents that they will not be at risk.

8 *Airborne Noise*

TII agreed to come back to us in writing on discrepancies regarding figures given in Table 13.64

9 *Extension of Insurance Period*

The issue of extending the period of building insurance by a year was raised.

TII agreed to come back to us on this.

10 *Community Liaison Officer*

Will the Mater Station will have its own dedicated Community Liaison Officer or will it be shared with others?

TII agreed to come back to us on this

11 *Community Gain*

We are still unclear as to what, if any gain there will be to the local community during and after the works. If none of our concerns are addressed seriously and merely dismissed, the local community will have lost all faith in the 'consultation' process.