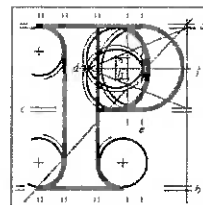


Our Case Number: ABP-317742-23



**An
Bord
Pleanála**

Cora Plant & D'OMuirthile
25 Seaview Park
Shankill

Date: 11 October 2023

Re: BusConnects Bray to City Centre Core Bus Corridor Scheme
Bray to Dublin City Centre.

Dear Sir / Madam,

An Bord Pleanála has received your recent submission in relation to the above-mentioned proposed road development and will take it into consideration in its determination of the matter. Please accept this letter as a receipt for the fee of €50 that you have paid.

Please note that the proposed road development shall not be carried out unless the Board has approved it or approved it with modifications.

The Board has also received an application for confirmation of a compulsory purchase order which relates to this proposed road development. The Board has absolute discretion to hold an oral hearing in respect of any application before it, in accordance with section 218 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Accordingly, the Board will inform you in due course on this matter. The Board shall also make a decision on both applications at the same time.

If you have any queries in relation to this matter please contact the undersigned officer of the Board at laps@pleanala.ie

Please quote the above-mentioned An Bord Pleanála reference number in any correspondence or telephone contact with the Board.

Yours faithfully,

Sarah Caulfield
Executive Officer
Direct Line: 01-8737287

HA02A

Teil	Tel	(01) 858 8100
Glaó Áitiúil	LoCall	1890 275 175
Facs	Fax	(01) 872 2684
Láithreán Gréasáin	Website	www.pleanala.ie
Ríomhphost	Email	bord@pleanala.ie

64 Sráid Maoilbhríde	64 Marlborough Street
Baile Átha Cliath 1	Dublin 1
D01 V902	D01 V902

Bray to City Centre Core Bus Corridor (Bus Connects) Scheme

Cora Plant & D O'Muirthile
25 Seaview Park
Shankill
Co. Dublin

9th October 2023

We hereby lodge an objection to the above proposed scheme, in particular the section of the proposed scheme between Loughlinstown roundabout and Wilford roundabout, in its current form on the basis that:

- The development of the proposed scheme has not sufficiently considered alternatives and future planned upgrades. With particular reference to the route option along the N11/M11 (the N11/M11 (Bus Corridor) Interim Scheme, the longer term N11/M11 Junction 4 to Junction 14 Improvement Scheme Upgrade Scheme and future LUAS extension. Reconsideration of the N11/M11 bus corridor route, in light of these other developments, is a fundamental oversight/omission in the progression of the preferred route through Shankill. This is of particular note given the relative "closeness" of this route to the emerging proposed route in the original route assessment process, along with its comparatively reduced environmental impacts.
- The lack of provision of suitable and safe cycle infrastructure along the proposed route, particularly from Loughlinstown Roundabout through Shankill village, results in a failure to meet a stated fundamental objective of the scheme.
- The overwhelming opposition to the route through Shankill that has been demonstrated throughout the entire public consultation process. The lack of consideration for public and community participation and input into the route selection process is contradictory to the Aarhus convention.
- The proposed scheme is not future-proofed and thereby fails to consider potential significant additional environmental impacts in the future.
- The environmental assessment has overstated the benefits in relation to bus journey time savings. This is largely due to the lack of dedicated bus infrastructure for the section of the route through Shankill. The EIAR states that, the proposed route results in only *modest savings* in journey times between Bray north and Loughlinstown. The assessment acknowledges that the vast majority of time savings are actually realised along the N11/Stillorgan/City Centre sections of the route. The modelled bus journey time savings and improvements in journey time reliability along this section of the route are also likely overstated as the modelling has likely not taken into consideration local traffic movements (loading/unloading, right-turning into/out of local roads, car park etc) within Shankill village and the likely impacts of same on bus journey times and reliability.
- The environmental assessment has understated the negative environmental impacts due to the practice of "grouping" trees to be removed without identifying and assessing the number and condition of individual trees to be removed along with associated quantification of negative impacts on potential habitat, climate, and landscape and visual amenity. That is, the assessment

has “down-played” the actual numbers of trees to be removed by reporting large areas to be removed as singular “groups”. This represents a significant Lacunae in the Assessment.

It is therefore contended that the section of the proposed scheme between Loughlinstown and Bray north be refused and this section replaced with the proposed N11/M11 interim route. This will result in significant economic savings and eliminate the significant negative environmental impacts associated with the proposed route. To address any social impacts in terms of public transport provision and integration, it is considered that buses serving the locality of Shankill continue to be routed through the village (connector buses). This would also enable the provision of enhanced cycle and pedestrian infrastructure/public realm improvements along the Dublin Road. This would have significant benefits and minimal environmental impact. It would also, address the current significant short comings of the proposed scheme.

In short, the very modest bus journey time savings for the section from Loughlinstown roundabout to Bray north and the obvious failure to meet stated project objectives means that the scheme, as currently proposed, cannot be justified given the significant and long-lasting environmental impacts.

The above noted points are detailed further as follows.

1. Reasonable alternatives not sufficiently considered:

The process to select the preferred route through Shankill has not taken adequate consideration of the subsequent significant design changes to the preferred route and the resultant significant reduction in level of service provided for both bus and cycle infrastructure since the route was first chosen. This is particularly relevant given the relative “closeness” of the preferred route to that of the alternative (route 2A) which runs alongside the M11 (which was in fact much more favourable in terms of environmental impacts).

In this regard the assessment and identification of Route 2B as the preferred route in the Route Options Report also did not adequately consider:

- The proposed N11/M11 (Bus Priority) Interim Scheme and the more comprehensive N11/M11 Junction 4 to Junction 14 Improvement Scheme (which is being progressed in tandem by Wicklow County Council) and potential cumulative impacts of same. The provision of these interim and more longer-term schemes considered in tandem are by-in-large representative of Route 2A identified in the route options assessment. The interim and longer term N11/M11 schemes in effect negates the need for the core bus corridor to be routed through Shankill village.
- The potential for future-proofing public transport by incorporating the proposed LUAS extension (the route of which will coincide with alternative Route 2A as indicated on DLR County Development Plan) thereby resulting in significant cost savings to the exchequer and overall environmental benefits (as the need for the currently proposed environmentally and financially costly route through Shankill would be avoided).

The Route Options Assessment (Feasibility Report 2017) noted that whilst Route 2B was considered preferable due to the lower capital cost when compared to Route 2A, it provided significantly less journey time reliability. It can therefore be concluded if:

- Route 2B was only slightly more favourable than 2A (and indeed 2A was significantly more favourable from an environmental impact perspective) and that;

- The journey time reliability of 2B is now further diminished due to the subsequent reduction in dedicated bus infrastructure (and its replacement with the less reliable bus priority measures), along with significant reductions to dedicated cycle infrastructure, and also that;
- The capital cost of 2A has been overstated, i.e. a significant portion of the costs will be incurred irrespectively with the provision of the N11/M11 Interim Bus Priority scheme, the longer term J4 to J14 Improvement Scheme and the future provision of the LUAS;

Therefore the assessment and conclusion that route 2B remains preferential and somehow performs better (economically and environmentally) than the alternative route 2A is fundamentally flawed and factually incorrect.

None of the above has been considered as part of subsequent assessments of the preferred route option, which have only considered and assessed alternatives “within” the preferred route option itself, and not considered whether it remains preferable to the alternative 2A given the subsequent design changes and developments. As noted in the EIAR “*Where substantial revisions had been made to the design since the publication of the Emerging Preferred Route options were assessed using MCA to determine the Preferred Route Option. The MCA assessed any newly developed options against the previously identified Emerging Preferred Route*”. That is, the developed route, which has changed significantly, has not been “sense-checked” against the other route alternatives.

The preferred route options report, which considers alternative design changes for sections along the preferred route, including along the R119 and Shankill village, notes that “*These design changes do not impact on the route selection; however, they have been outlined in more detail in Chapter 6 as they are key changes to the EPR design*”. It is not clear how the design team arrived at the conclusion that the design changes (which are noted as key changes to the EPR design) do not impact on the route selection as no assessment has been undertaken to assess this revised design with the alternative options considered – this is considered a significant lacuna in the Environmental Impact Assessment process for the project.

It could be further argued that the provision of a robust transport corridor along 2A, providing for bus and future Luas, could also either incorporate dedicated cycle facilities, or facilitate the provision of safe segregated cycle facilities along the R119 Dublin Road, thus addressing the serious shortcomings of the preferred route in this regard as outlined in the next section.

2. The Proposed Scheme does not meet its stated objectives.

The section of the proposed scheme from Loughlinstown to south of Shankill does not achieve its stated objectives particularly with regard to integrated sustainable transport, especially cycling:

“The aim of the Proposed Scheme is to provide improved walking, cycling and bus infrastructure on this key access corridor in the Dublin region, which will enable and deliver efficient, safe, and integrated sustainable transport movement along the corridor.”

This is due to the fact that cyclists will, by and large, be forced to share road space with buses and motor vehicles, thereby presenting a significant safety risk (as confirmed in the Road Safety Audit) which will present a barrier to alternative and sustainable modes of transport along this key Primary Cycle Route (as identified in the GDA Cycle Network Plan).

The objective to provide safe cycle infrastructure is mirrored in the DLR County Development Plan 2022-28 which states that segregated cycle facilities (from bus and general traffic) will enhance safety for cyclists.

Similarly the provision of bus lanes without segregated cycle facilities contravenes the “User Hierarchy” outlined in DMURS (2019) wherein pedestrian and cyclists are to be considered in advance of public transport and private motor vehicles.

The NTA’s own Cycle Design Manual (September 2023), Chapter 2 Design Principles states:

For mixed traffic when cyclists share the carriageway with vehicular traffic are “only suitable for roads with low traffic speeds and volumes such as quiet residential streets and access streets. Traffic management or calming measures are likely required to ensure low traffic speeds and or low volumes”and that “cycle streets can be considered on residential access roads when the volume of cyclists is typically greater than that of motorists”.

The proposed mixed cycle and traffic arrangement for the Dublin Road and through Shankill village are therefore clearly not appropriate nor are they compliant with NTA standards (see also Table 2.1 of the Cycle Design Manual which notes the proposed arrangement as “Not Suitable”) and present a significant risk to vulnerable road users and underpins the failure of the proposed scheme to meet its stated objective.

The EIAR and background reports acknowledge this failing by

- Stating that the design team will work with DLRCC to provide cycle facilities. If this is the case, and cycle facilities can be readily provided, then why has this not been done already or provided for in the scheme design?
- Proposing a reduction in speed limits in lieu of dedicated cycle facilities. Research has shown that this measure alone does not result in reduced speeds. On the contrary, widening of streetscape will likely result in increased vehicular speeds, exacerbating the risks to vulnerable road users.

The proposed route serves a number of schools (primary and post primary), however only a short section of two-way cycle track has been provided, whereas the remainder of the route from Loughlinstown Roundabout to south of Shankill village has made no provision for cyclists. Noting the NTA’s own cycle standards, it is not safe for children of that age to share bus lanes with buses and taxis as proposed. Indeed, recent reports (Journal.ie, September 2023) highlights “*new research that has found that close to 70% of children killed or seriously injured on Irish roads were either walking or cycling at the time*”, thereby reinforcing the principle of considering Vulnerable Road Users first when designing schemes, which the proposed scheme has not done.

EIAR Table 6.34 “Cycling Impact During Operational Phase” acknowledges the moderate negative impact of the proposed scheme on cyclists along the section between Loughlinstown Roundabout and Stonebridge Road even when compared to the existing (albeit substandard) arrangement.

Furthermore, the lack of provision of safe cycle infrastructure will not only impact vulnerable road users but will also negatively impact bus journey time reliability (as buses will be forced to travel behind cyclists on this busy cycle corridor). The Preferred Route Options Report acknowledges this, when considering shared bus & cycle lanes versus dedicated bus and cycle lanes by stating that this would “*interfere with bus travel times*” and journey time reliability, thereby undermining the levels of service stated.

The Road Safety Audit (Stage 1) highlights the concerns of the auditors with the lack of provision for cyclists through Shankill and the increased potential for conflicts with vehicles. The subsequent

response to this issue raised by the Design Team is unclear (a kicking of the can down the road perhaps?) by suggesting that alternatives are up to the Client to be progressed. It is worth noting that there is no detail provided as to what these alternatives are.

It is unclear why a Stage F Road Safety Audit (RSA) was never carried out on the initial route options assessed. A Stage F audit is carried out before the route is chosen. An RSA at this stage will identify safety features associated with each route option – this is clearly an omission from the assessment process, and again given the relative closeness of options, could have been a significant determining factor when selecting the preferred route.

There has been no review or assessment of the significant implications of removing the cycling infrastructure in terms of whether the route still “stacks-up” against the reasonable alternatives, i.e. dedicated bus and segregated cycle infrastructure running alongside the M11, or alternatively dedicated bus route along the M11, which would “free up” space along the R119 for a higher provision of dedicated cycle infrastructure, thereby meeting all objectives of the scheme in terms of bus enhancement and safe cycle infrastructure.

The lack of cycle infrastructure for extensive sections of the route is also at odds with the Climate Action Plan policy of “Avoid and Shift”, through “reducing travel demand with Improved Sustainable Mobility Alternatives” for pedestrians and cyclists.

The lack of appropriate, functional and attractive cycle and pedestrian facilities throughout the scheme will hinder required modal shift, particularly for local trips, thereby maintaining car dependency as well as continuing the interaction of buses and cyclists and general traffic within the Shankill area, thereby undermining provision for all road users, including buses.

3. Public participation in route selection, scheme design and resultant environmental impacts and mitigations has not been fully considered.

The development of the proposed scheme has not sufficiently considered feedback from public consultation process and the overwhelming objection to the proposed scheme. As such, the route selection and subsequent design process has ignored the principles of the Aarhus Convention in relation to public participation in the decision-making process. From the outset, when the process bypassed public participation in the route options stage and went straight to the emerging preferred route identification, the NTA has repeatedly ignored calls for the alternative routes to be considered further.

This approach is also at variance with the government’s own Town (*and village*) Centre First Policy, the vision of which is for “*Places that are shaped by the communities that live there, where local residents and the business community are enabled to plot the future of their own towns and villages*”. This scheme has a direct impact on the lives and environment of the Shankill community and as such the community should have had their say in the shaping of the project.

4. The proposed route fails in terms of future-proofing.

The stated environmental benefits of the proposed scheme fail to consider that the Shankill village area (the only section that will depend on bus priority rather than dedicated physical bus infrastructure) will remain the singular potential choke-point for bus transport along the entire route between Bray and the city centre. This relates to the retention of right-turning traffic into/out of

numerous uncontrolled side roads with associated potential to delay buses. In addition, loading/unloading activities, parking, and pedestrian and cycle activity, all of which are reflective of a vibrant village, will result in delays to bus services thus eroding and undermining the stated trip time savings and journey time reliability along the entire route.

This "bit-part" nature of the provision of dedicated bus infrastructure, along with less dependable bus priority traffic signals, will mean that in future, to address the obvious short-fall and resultant impacts on consistency of bus journey times will likely require the "retro-fitting" of measures through Shankill village. This would result in additional and significant negative environmental impacts, particularly in relation to impacts on air, noise and vibration, community, landscape and visual amenity. If this were to happen, apart from the additional negative impacts, it would also mean "project splitting" as the project would never be considered as a whole. This is a direct contravention of environmental assessment legislation.

5. The modest bus journey time improvements do not justify the environmental impacts.

The EIAR assessment has not taken into consideration the proposed routing of services along the N11/M11 (as part of the now proposed N11/M11 Interim Bus Priority scheme). The preferred option does not account for the fact that a significant proportion of buses will in fact bypass the village. This has resulted in a significant "over stating" of the potential benefits of this section of the route and undermines the cost benefit analysis and justification for the scheme given the significant environmental impacts.

Based on the results presented in Diagram 6.15 to Diagram 6.18 of the EIAR, the Proposed Scheme is expected to deliver bus journey time savings of c.5mins in the inbound direction, however it is acknowledged that these savings are only *modest through Bray, Shankill and the southern half of the Stillorgan Road*, whereas the actual savings are realised *beyond Stillorgan Park Road with further savings seen on the Morehampton Road approaches to Wellington Place, Waterloo Road and Appian Way as well as the Leeson Street Lower approach to the Eustace Bridge*.

Similarly in the outbound direction, the proposed scheme results in journey time savings of c.7mins, however again the report acknowledges that *"significant delay savings can be seen on Donnybrook Road between Victoria Avenue / Belmont Avenue and Anglesea Road / Beaver Row following the introduction of an outbound bus lane in the Proposed Scheme"* and *"In the PM peak, delay savings can also be seen on Leeson Street Lower between St Stephens Green and the Eustace Bridge"*, i.e. these journey time savings are again apparently realised on the section closest to the city and are not associated with the scheme proposal further south in Shankill and Bray. This is also clearly evident from graphs on figures 6.20 to 6.23 where the "jump" in time savings between the Do Minimum and Do Something scenarios are within the first c.2km (city) of the journey.

Tables 6.47 and 6.48 demonstrate modest increased in bus passenger numbers in 2028 & 2043 (c.9% and 6% respectively), however it is clear from the assessment and graphics presented in section 6.4.6.2.3 of the EIAR that the vast majority of this increase occurs along the existing N11 between Loughlinstown Roundabout and the city centre, while increases in passenger trips further south between Loughlinstown and Bray are extremely modest, thereby undermining the benefits of this section given the significant level of expenditure and environmental impact along this section when compared to the remainder of the route.

In addition to the above, it is unclear what consideration, if any, has been given in the bus journey time modelling to the fact that a significant section of the proposed route (through Shankill village)

relies solely on bus priority interventions in the absence of dedicated bus infrastructure. These bus priority measures do not provide the same confidence when estimating bus journey improvements when compared to dedicated bus lanes as they are subjected to multiple (and often time unpredictable) traffic impacts from, for example, loading and unloading, parking, vehicle turning and pedestrian and cycle movements associated with a vibrant village centre. In addition, the uncontrolled junctions along this section of route further adds to the potential impacts on bus service, for example when vehicles waiting to turn right block traffic (including buses) behind.

Similarly cyclists, of which there are many along this primary cycle commuter route, will also delay buses along this section of the route as the lack of segregated cycle facilities, and narrow road cross section which required cyclists to share the general traffic lane, will prevent buses from overtaking. This further undermines the validity of the modelling and bus journey times modelled.

It is therefore argued that the section of the route between Loughlinstown roundabout and Bray north provides negligible, or at best modest, journey time savings and bus reliability improvements. This fundamentally undermines justification of the scheme especially considering the significant environmental, social and economic impacts. In fact, it further justifies reconsideration of the alternative N11/M11 route for this section which would ensure positive journey time savings and bus reliability improvements are realised.

6. The significant and long-lasting environmental impacts have been understated:

The proposed scheme will result in wholesale loss of tree, hedgerow and associated habitat at a time of climate crisis and biodiversity loss, including as noted in Chapter 17 of the EIA the *loss of established property boundaries – including historic stone walls, mature trees and planting.*

Chapter 17 further notes *that the section between Loughlinstown and Bray north is of very high sensitivity and construction of the Proposed Scheme will involve very substantial works along the road corridor. The works will also involve long sections of temporary and permanent acquisition from Loughlinstown Roundabout to north of Shankill Village and from south of Shankill Village to Wilford Roundabout which will give rise to substantial disruption, removal of existing boundaries, including established and historic stone walls, tree planting, and planting belts at a range of properties including residential, community / institutional, agricultural, public park and cemetery.*

Chapter 17 of the EIA further notes *that the Loss of and impact on existing mature trees is particularly substantial along the existing road corridor north and south of Shankill Village. The sensitivity is high and the magnitude of change will be high / very high. The potential townscape and visual impact of the Construction Phase on trees and plantings is assessed to be Negative, Very Significant and Short-Term.*

In this regard the scheme directly contravenes a number of objectives in the DLR county development plan 22-28 which seek “to protect and preserve trees and woodlands” north and south of Shankill.

Noting the significance of the above, what is particularly concerning is that Arboricultural Impact Assessment significantly understates the level of tree loss. Significant areas where trees are to be removed are noted simply as “mixed group species” which down-plays both the quantum of trees and environmental impact of their removal. As such the level of environmental impact associated with the removal of these “groups” cannot have been fully assessed. Examples from the Tree Schedule provided include:

- G0088P which is noted as 1 no. stem, with height of 18m and diameter of 700mm, whereas in the accompanying table is noted as a “group of mature high value trees that includes beech, lime, and horse chestnut.
- G0090P extends to c.1,911m² of ash, lime, yew, sycamore and elder, yet is noted as 1 single group.

The proposal will require the removal of 41 similar “groups”. There is no indication however of the numbers of trees (of which will be semi-mature and mature trees) to be removed within these groups, therefore how can an assessment on the environmental impact on climate, landscape and habitat be complete. This is considered a serious Lacunae in the Environmental Impact Assessment.

There has been an impression portrayed that the design changes implemented have significantly reduced the environmental impact of the scheme. This impression has been (incorrectly) relayed in the media, noting for example the local SCAN magazine (September 2023) in which TD Cormac Devlin notes “*As a result of the meetings and submission, the NTA made significant revisions to the proposal – including saving almost all trees – which is very welcome*”. This could not be further from the truth, with the proposed scheme resulting in the removal of hundreds (many hundreds?) of trees.

The impression that the proposed scheme has resulted in the reduced numbers of trees is very misleading whereas in fact there is no proper estimate of the true impact when the number of trees impacted has been so significantly understated.

7. Conclusion

The development of the proposed scheme has not sufficiently considered alternatives, in particular the route option along the N11/M11 particularly given provision of the N11/M11 Interim Bus Priority Scheme and longer term Upgrade Scheme along with LUAS extension.

The lack of provision of suitable and safe cycle infrastructure along the proposed route results in core and fundamental objectives of the scheme not being met.

The overwhelming opposition to the route through Shankill has been demonstrated throughout the entire public consultation process and the lack of public participation in the route selection phase of the scheme.

The overstated benefits in bus journey time savings particularly given the lack of dedicated bus infrastructure for this section of the route, and the negligible bus journey time benefits on the section between Loughlinstown and Shankill. Therefore there is no justification for the significant, long-term, negative environmental impacts;

The understating of these negative environmental impacts due “grouping” of significant stands of mature trees and potential loss of associated habitat, climate and landscape benefits representing a Lacunae in the Environmental Impact Assessment.

It is recommended, to address the issues raised above, and to provide a more robust, future-proofed, reliable and less environmentally impactful route, that the proposed scheme should be routed along the N11/M11. Coupled with this, a level of bus service should continue to be provided through Shankill that serves the growing community, facilitates improved pedestrian and cycle infrastructure but avoids the environmental, social and economic costs and impacts associated with the proposed route.

The current scheme as proposed and as presented by the NTA should be refused permission.