

Our Case Number: ABP-318220-23



An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

James O'Connell
2 Shangort Park
Knocknacarra
Galway
H91 C6XW

Date: 31 July 2025

Re: N6 Galway City Ring Road
Galway.

Dear Sir / Madam,

An Coimisiún Pleanála has received your recent letter in relation to the above mentioned proposed road development. The contents of your letter have been noted.

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

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

Yours faithfully,

Lauren Griffin
Executive Officer
Direct Line: 01-8737244

HA06

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James O'Connell
No 2 Shangort Park
Knocknacarra, Galway
H91 C6XW

Date: July 28th, 2025

Re: An Coimisiún Pleanála - Case reference: MA07.318217, N6 Galway City Ring Road
Protected Road Scheme 2018, and N6 Galway City Ring Road Motorway Scheme 2018

To whom it may concern,

I wish to offer an observation on the further information submitted by the applicants, particularly regarding their reliance on strategies, policies, and evidence and the resulting issue of *prematurity*.

According to the Irish Planning Institute, the purpose of planning is to promote *responsible decision-making* about the competing uses of land and resources, within legal, political, and administrative frameworks. Central to this process are *consultation* and *consensus-building*, which underpin the *legitimacy* of planning decisions made in the public interest.¹

The Galway Transport Strategy (GTS) 2016 is the strategic framework within which the impacts of the proposed N6 Galway City Ring Road (GCRR) on people, the environment, and the climate are being assessed. Based on the additional information submitted, it is evident that many of the project's proposed benefits, as well as mitigation measures for its negative impacts, are dependent upon the implementation of the full GTS. A non-exhaustive list of dependencies includes:

- Reduced city centre congestion - dependent on delivery of GTS measures such as public transport priority corridors, pedestrianisation, cycling infrastructure, and traffic management.

¹ Irish Planning Institute. About Planning. Available at: <https://ipi.ie/about-us/about-planning/>

- Increased bus reliability and frequency - requires reallocation of road space to buses, achievable only if through-traffic is diverted via the Ring Road, a GTS measure. The Cross-City Link bus corridor is under judicial review, and a decision on the Dublin Road scheme is still pending, meaning certainty as to this effect of the GTS is lacking.
- Improved conditions for walking and cycling - assumes road space will be freed, which again depends on GTS implementation.
- Travel time savings for commuters - based on integrated traffic modelling that presumes full GTS implementation.
- Mitigation of emissions associated with the GCRR - is highly dependent on GTS measures.

However, the policy and legal context in which the GTS was developed has changed significantly since 2016. Examples of developments include:

- The National Planning Framework
- The National Sustainable Mobility Policy
- Successive Climate Action Plans, national carbon budgets
- The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021
- Planning Act 2024 which is meant to create a more defined hierarchical plan and strategy-led approach to planning.

The evidence to inform strategic transport planning in Galway has also evolved. Examples include:

- The Economic Cost of Congestion in the Regional Cities 2022–2040²
- The Five Cities Demand Management Study
- The Galway Light Rail Transit Feasibility Study
- National research on societal climate concerns and support for climate action³

² Department of Transport. Economic Cost of Congestion in the Regional Cities 2022–2040. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-transport/publications/the-economic-cost-of-congestion-in-the-regional-cities-2022-2040/>

³ Environmental Protection Agency. Climate Change in the Irish Mind. Available at: https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/climate-change/climate-change-in-the-irish-mind/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Moreover, public expectations regarding strategic transport planning objectives and their prioritisation may have shifted in the decade since the GTS public consultation. In contrast with Galway, other metropolitan areas—Dublin, Cork, Limerick, and Waterford—have had transport strategies developed that reflect the substantial shift in policy, law, and societal concerns since the mid-2010s. In Galway, the National Transport Authority (NTA) initiated the Galway Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (GMATS) in 2022, with pre-draft stakeholder consultation in 2023. However, on 16 July 2025, Minister Darragh O’Brien confirmed:

‘The NTA considers that it is appropriate to await An Coimisiún Pleanála’s determination on the re-submitted N6 Galway City Ring Road application. The NTA will then review the timeline and publication date for GMATS when this determination has been made. Of course, once sufficiently developed, the draft Galway Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy will be opened to full public consultation.’⁴

This creates a circular dependency: the GCRR application is justified on the basis of the GTS, yet the GTS is being replaced and the finalisation of its replacement (GMATS) is being postponed pending a decision on the very development that is meant to be assessed within it. This is arguably irrational/unreasonable and undermines a strategy-led approach to transport planning in Galway. Making a determination on permission for a project of this scale in the absence of GMATS risks prejudicing the higher-order strategy development process. It could limit meaningful deliberation about the nature, location, and timing of other potential transport measures in Galway—deliberation that should be led by both public consultation and the updated legal, policy, and evidential context. The intentional postponement of GMATS until after a decision is made on the GCRR application deprives members of the public of a meaningful opportunity to participate in shaping a transport strategy that reflects the significant changes in policy, legal obligations, evidence, and societal concerns since the GTS was adopted in 2016. Instead of enabling inclusive deliberation on Galway’s future transport priorities, the strategic direction of GMATS risks

⁴ Kildare Street. Written Answers, Wednesday July 16 2025. Available at: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2025-07-16a.140>

being effectively predetermined by the prior approval of such a major infrastructure project – a situation that is contrary to the principles of public participation and responsible planning. In addition, the effects of the GCRR on the environment, people, and the climate cannot be reliably assessed unless it is assessed within the context of GMATS—the strategy that will actually be implemented, and which may differ meaningfully from the GTS given the policy, legal, evidential, and societal changes that have occurred since the GTS was developed.

In this context, and given the GCRR application's reliance on the GTS, I am concerned that the application raises the issue of *prematurity*. Prematurity has been described as '*not a legal concept, but a matter of planning judgement and planning policy which is essentially a matter for the decision maker. The concept of prematurity in the planning context...allows a decision maker in effect to postpone a decision relating to the grant of permission for a proposed development until what is otherwise a relevant emerging local planning policy has been settled*'.⁵ Furthermore, it has been stated in the Irish context that those seeking development permission should have: '*certainty and precision as to the relevant criteria by which any application for [planning] permission will be judged*'.⁶

Unlike development plans, which follow a fixed statutory review cycle, metropolitan area transport strategies in Ireland are not subject to any mandated timetable. As such, the issue of prematurity carries greater weight, since there is no predictable point at which a transport strategy will be updated or public input sought. GMATS has already been under development for more than two years but its finalisation is now being deliberately delayed. Making a decision on the GCRR before this relevant emerging higher-order strategy is finalised creates a lack of *certainty* and precision as to the relevant criteria, and also means the potential effects of the GCRR on people, the environment, and the climate cannot be reliably assessed. For example, there is no guarantee that GMATS will replicate the de facto mitigating effects attributed to the GTS, such as reducing emissions and generally mitigation measures are meant to be known and described at the planning application stage. In

⁵ Foskett J, *Murphy v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government* [2012] EWHC 1198.

⁶ Peart J, *Ebonwood Ltd v Meath County Council* [2004] 3IR 34, 49.

addition, the ability to reallocate road space, which is critical to the project's proposed benefits, cannot be taken as a given as an outcome of GMATS.

Without the clarity GMATS would provide, the projected impacts and benefits of the GCRR remain speculative. This introduces the risk of strategic failure in Galway's transport planning, potentially locking in land use and transport decisions that have long-term, intergenerational social, economic, and environmental implications. Rather than deferring GMATS until after the GCRR application is determined, requiring GMATS to be finalised first would reflect a precautionary planning approach—one that promotes *responsible decision-making, public participation, and consensus-building*. It would enable Galway's future transport direction to be shaped through inclusive consultation, in line with current law, policy, and evidence. It would enhance the legitimacy of the planning decision by adding certainty and ensure a strategy-led approach that serves the common good for generations to come.

Yours Sincerely,

James O'Connell