

Development Committee

Thursday, 9th February, 2006

SPECIAL MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor McCausland (Chairman);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Convery); and
Councillors D. Dodds, Ekin, McCarthy, McGimpsey and
Newton.

Also attended: The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor
(Councillor W. Browne); and
Councillors Austin, D. Browne, McCann, McClenaghan,
McKenzie, Mhic Giolla Mhín, Moore, O'Neill, O'Reilly,
Patterson, Rodgers and Rodway.

In attendance: Ms. M.T. McGivern, Director of Development;
Mr. K. Sutherland, Planning and Transport Policy
Manager; and
Mr. N. Malcolm, Committee Administrator.

City Centre Ring Road

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 7th December, it had agreed to receive from representatives of the Roads Service a presentation regarding the City Centre Ring Road and a proposal to introduce two-way traffic in Hope Street.

Prior to the deputation being admitted, the Planning and Transport Policy Manager reviewed for the information of the Members the background to the proposals.

It was reported that Mr. Tom McCourt, Deputy Divisional Roads Manager, together with Mr. Stephen Pollock and Ms. Heather Bradley, were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman (Councillor McCausland).

Mr. McCourt informed the Committee that, subsequent to the publication of the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan in 2004, the Department of the Environment had developed a number of proposals in connection with various road schemes, including the Belfast City Centre Ring Road. He emphasised that the plans for the Ring Road had not been finalised. He pointed out that the main purpose of the presentation was to advise the Committee on the various options which were being considered in connection with the scheme to enable the Roads Service to obtain the opinion of the Members and advice from them as to how the Roads Service should consult with the communities affected by the Road. Mr. McCourt informed the Members that a private developer had submitted a proposal to introduce two-way traffic in Hope Street to facilitate a development scheme which he was undertaking. This project, which would be the subject of a planning application, would involve the localised widening of Hope Street, the costs of which would be met by the developer.

Mr. Pollock, with the assistance of visual aids, made a presentation regarding the proposals for the Hope Street, Bruce Street and Bankmore Link sections of the Ring Road. This scheme would result in a four lane road with a central median which would link Sandy Row/Boyne Bridge to Cromac Street/Ormeau Road. There would be traffic light-controlled junctions at Great Victoria Street and Dublin Road and it was intended to locate traffic light-controlled pedestrian crossings at a number of locations. It was envisaged that the pavements, which would be approximately five metres in width, would have trees planted on them, thus creating a boulevard-type atmosphere. In addition, the road would comply with the outline of existing and yet to be constructed buildings and would result in several development sites and areas of green space being created. Mr. Pollock emphasised that the proposed Ring Road would differ from the Westlink in that it would not sever the links which existed between the local communities and the City Centre.

Mr. Pollock referred to the various objections which the Council had submitted to the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan and stated that these had been taken into account when designing the City Centre Ring Road. In addition, he informed the Committee that an amendment to the Area Plan regarding the protection of land for roads purposes would be issued in the near future. He stated that it was intended that the Ring Road would remove extraneous traffic from the City Centre, which would be of benefit to the Department for Social Development in developing proposals for the improvement of the public realm within the City Centre.

During discussion, several Members expressed concern at both the proposals for the Hope Street scheme and the City Centre Ring Road. They pointed out that the latter scheme had the same drawbacks as previous plans for this stretch of road in that there were no social or economic benefits from the project and that it would impact adversely on the links which the local communities in the Sandy Row, Donegall Pass and Markets areas had with the City Centre. Mr. McCourt made the point that the proposed road was a direct result of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan's aim to remove traffic from the City Centre to enable space to be created for public transport and pedestrians.

The Chairman thanked the representatives of the Roads Service for being in attendance and for their presentation and they retired from the meeting.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed to note the contents of the presentation.

Chairman