

# City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 22nd November, 2023

## SPECIAL HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Nic Bhranair (Chairperson);  
Alderman Lawlor;  
Councillors Bunting, Canavan, Douglas,  
Duffy, Flynn, Garrett, Gormley, Lyons,  
Maskey, McCabe, McCormick, McDowell,  
I. McLaughlin, McMullan, Murray, and Walsh.

Also in attendance: Councillor de Faoite.

In attendance: Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager; and  
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

### Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors McAteer and McDonough-Brown.

### Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

### Presentations

#### Translink - Late Night Services

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting in October, it had agreed to invite Translink to attend a future Committee to discuss its night-time provision of services, in regard to a Motion previously raised in relation to the need for late night public transport services, and also write to Translink to outline its concerns in relation to the potential for night-time services to be cut over the Christmas period for 2023 and to clarify Translink's plans for the Winter months.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. D. Bannon, Belfast Area Manager, representing Translink to the meeting.

Mr. Bannon presented a video on the launch of the late-night service in the run up to Christmas and outlined the positive consultation which had taken place with stakeholders of the city.

He provided an overview of the planned routes which included:

- **NI Railways Midnight Mover** - Trains would be in operation from 1st- 22nd December 2023 inclusive;
- **Metro Nightmovers** – Metro buses would be in operation from Friday 24th Nov until Friday 22nd December inclusive (earlier start date to coincide with the Purple Flag event) and highlighted the promotional single fare of £6 to be offered for all Metro special departures; and
- **Ulsterbus Nightmovers (Goldline/Urby)** - several additional late departures from Europa Buscentre on Friday and Saturday nights from Friday 1st December until Friday 22nd December.

He highlighted that this would be a commercial service to cover the costs of running the additional service and, due to financial pressures, Translink would be unable to run the same service as last year. He also pointed out that, to make the additional service viable, Translink Smartcards and concessions would not be applicable.

During Members questions, Mr. Bannon explained further that the Christmas Late Night service was a starting point which Translink would like to grow, develop and support in the future. He advised that longer-term late-night services and funding options were being considered.

In response to a Member's question regarding the potential for anti-social behaviour on the late-night service, he advised that the Trade Unions and Safety Representatives had been consulted and highlighted the driver protection safety measures that were in place.

Mr. Bannon described that if required to meet demand that contingency plans were in place if additional buses were required for the late-night service.

In response to Members suggestions for additional routes to be added to the late-night service, Mr. Bannon advised that this could not be considered for this year but additional routes would be explored for the future.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked Mr. Bannon for his attendance and they retired from the meeting.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

### **Department for Infrastructure Roads - Autumn Report**

The Chairperson introduced Mr. D. McFarlane, Divisional Roads Manager, Mr. G. Salmon, Network Traffic Manager, Mr. P. Thompson and Mr. D. Williams, Section Engineers, to the Committee and they were admitted to the meeting to present their Annual Report.

Mr. McFarlane provided an overview of works completed across the Council area during the year 2022/23 and outlined the initial proposals for schemes to be undertaken in the year 2023/24.

He advised that the Secretary of State provided all NI Departments with budgets for 2023/24 and the Department was managing a 14 per cent reduction in its 2023/24 Resource budget allocation when compared to 2022/23 on a like for like basis. Despite every effort to reduce spend across the Department and its Arms Length Bodies, it was still faced with a significant funding gap.

He highlighted that the opening Capital budget for structural maintenance of the road network in 2023/24 was £85m, which was welcomed but still fell well short of the £143 million (£192m at today's prices) required annually to maintain the road network in a reasonable condition.

He informed the Committee that the Department's ability to spend its budget allocation was dependent on having sufficient contracting resource to hand to deliver the work. Following the legal challenges to the award of asphalt resurfacing contracts in 2021, the Department had successfully procured a new term contract for the Council area in March 2023. Regrettably, it had meant that limited planned work took place during 2022/23 but progress was now being made to deliver much needed resurfacing across the Council area. The Department was developing a Procurement Enhancement Programme to further improve the procurement and delivery of contracts.

He stated that Capital funding had continued to be provided for Active Travel schemes given the requirement of the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 to invest into walking, wheeling and cycling. The Department had put in place a range of measures to increase delivery of high-quality active travel infrastructure throughout Northern Ireland.

He advised that the Department was working closely with Councils to better understand their five-year active travel programme and developing an appropriate grant and support framework for the delivery of greenways. He pointed out that DfI had commissioned a Northern Ireland wide Active Travel Network Delivery plan which was due for consultation in 2024. When completed, this Plan would provide a firm basis for the prioritisation of delivery of active travel infrastructure within and connecting our towns and cities. Mr. McFarlane reported that the Plan would complement and take account of the greenways network and advised that DfI were also implementing changes in the procurement of their active travel supply chain to ensure sufficient design resources are available to deal with increased demand in the coming years.

He stated that, due to the acute budgetary pressure, the Department was currently continuing with a Limited Service policy for routine maintenance activities such as defect repair, grass cutting and gully emptying. The Limited Service policy allowed the Department to repair defects greater than 50mm on all roads including low trafficked rural roads and on high trafficked roads, defects greater than 20mm would also be repaired. The Department would aim to cut all roadside verges and sightline grass at least twice between April and October on the on more heavily trafficked roads and once a year on other roads. This aimed to balance the need for road safety while protecting our environment and encouraging biodiversity. However, sightlines at bends and junctions would be cut as frequently as required to ensure public safety.

Mr. McFarlane informed the Committee that, at present, a full street lighting repair service continued during 2023/24. However, with the uncertainty around budgets it was important for Dfl to monitor all maintenance activities within the constrained funding available going forward and difficult decisions might need to be made to re-align activities within funding levels as the year progressed.

He highlighted that the Division was currently facing significant staffing pressures which was impacting on its ability to deliver key services and public safety responsibilities. Therefore, in an effort to maximise their effectiveness, he would strongly encourage Councillors who had access to the internet to please report road defects using the Dfl online reporting facility provided by NIDirect. He pointed out that operational staff would be available to assist with any emergency and public safety related queries.

He provided the Committee with updates on the main strategic transportation schemes for the city, together with an overview of the Dfl Roads Programme of Works for 2023/24 for those projects and schemes that had been completed and were in progress, which included updates on minor works, maintenance of structures and inspections.

He also provided a summary of the York Street Interchange, Belfast Cycling Network, network traffic and street lighting, collision remedial schemes, traffic schemes and pedestrian measures and resident's parking schemes.

He highlighted that Dfl Roads were involved and consulted on a number of schemes that required input such as the Eastern Transport Plan, BRT2, Department of Communities 5 C's and the Bolder Vision. Mr McFarlane informed the Committee that Dfl would present the results of the Eastern Transport Plan consultation in the new year.

He advised that, in response to the Council's recent correspondence in relation to the implementation of Quietways, the Department did not have the capacity to consider this request at present.

In advance of the meeting, the representatives had been provided with issues which the Committee had previously raised. Mr. McFarlane provided an update on a range of matters including: an update on the traffic management survey at Orpen; legislation in the erection and removal of flags; Belfast Cycle Network update and delivery; Active Travel budgets and planned projects; Active Schools Travel programme budget; progression of the BRT2; and updates to Highway Code. He advised that written response would also be provided to the Committee for information.

During discussion, the representatives answered a range of questions in relation to the following issues raised by the Committee:

- Network Development at Ravenhill Park and Onslow Parade;
- The pedestrian crossing on Knockbreda Road;
- A55 residents crossing timeline and lessons learned;
- McKinsty Cuts proposed works timeframe;
- Gray's Park resurfacing;
- The impact of the ETP on the Belfast Cycle Network;

- Site specific solutions rather than 20mph zones roll out;
- Winter Preparedness work undertaken; and
- Traffic Calming and Assessment process re Lawn Brook Avenue.

In response to Members questions in relation to the need for stakeholder engagement for the progression of the mural project on the Finaghy Bridge and need for remedial works, the Senior Development Manager advised that, as the community group were unable to gain permission for the installation of a mural at the Bridge, they had proceeded to another site. Members stated that this was a temporary scheme but that the longer-term objective of addressing the visual appearance of the bridge remained. Mr. McFarlane stated that the barriers had to perform a high standard of vehicle protection given the railway underneath and that any proposal would need to be taken forward in conjunction with NI Railways and DfI.

In relation to the suggestion for managing biodiversity and the unmanicured look of grass verges with more manageable planting, Mr. McFarlane welcomed the idea and highlighted the need for potential partnerships to implement such initiatives.

The Members drew the attention of the officers from DfI Roads to a number of additional matters, which Mr. McFarlane advised would be investigated and a further update submitted to the Committee in due course:

- A request to meet with the relevant officer in relation to the Belfast Cycle Network at Ardenlee Avenue (Councillor de Faoite);
- A request to meet with stakeholders in relation to a residents parking scheme in Iveagh/Royal Victoria Hospital area (Councillor Walsh);
- Resurfacing of Balmoral Avenue clean-up (Councillor Bunting);
- Unadopted Alleyways - work with stakeholders to clean up (Councillor Bunting);
- Road Safety and signage at the Bunscoil Phobal Feirste, Shaws Road (Councillor Garrett);
- M1/Black's Road Pedestrian Barrier and resurfacing – alternative options as further accidents raises concern (Councillor Garrett);
- Residents parking scheme at Rugby Road/Clonard Park (Councillor Gormley);
- Potential for pedestrian crossing on Upper Dunmurry Lane for new housing estate (Councillor Nic Bhranair);
- Status of road surfacing issues at Buttermilk Loney (Councillor McDowell);
- Update on the delay of DfC Public Realm schemes impacting the Greater Shankill Area (Councillor McLaughlin); and

- Traffic Flow/Yellow box request (Councillor Lyons).

Mr. McFarlane advised that, where relevant, action would be taken on these issues if it was deemed necessary after inspection.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance and they retired from the meeting.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and that, where relevant, DfI Roads would provide further information on the issues raised.

Chairperson