



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Transport Issues – Response to York Street Interchange proposals
Date:	21st August 2012
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Department for Regional Development (DRD) Roads Service presented options for the proposed York Street interchange to Development Committee on the 27 June 2011 as part of a public consultation process and a note of elected members comments are attached in Appendix 1.
1.2	The existing York Street Interchange is a key junction on the strategic road network which links three of the busiest roads in Northern Ireland, the Westlink and the M2 and M3 motorways. It is the main gateway to Belfast from the North, provides access to the port of Belfast as well as facilitates local traffic movement. It is considered that the existing traffic signal control at the York Street junction causes delays and congestion particularly at peak times, therefore DRD Roads Service have identified a number of options to remove the bottleneck.
1.3	Four options (A, B, C and D) aimed to improve traffic flow on the strategic road network have been proposed. The options will provide direct links between the Westlink and the M2 and M3 motorways by creating new flyovers and/or underpasses below the existing Lagan Road and Dargan Rail bridges.

2	Key Issues
2.1	Details on the four options are outlined below: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Option A proposes movement between the M2 and Westlink via underpasses below ground level and Westlink to M3 movement also via an underpass. The M3 to Westlink movement will remain signalled controlled. This option is the lowest cost of approximately £72m.– Option B proposes movement between M2 and Westlink (southbound) via a new bridge over existing Lagan Road and Dargan Rail bridges, which will be approximately 18 metres above existing ground level. The movement between

Westlink and M2 (northbound) and Westlink to M3 (eastbound) will be via an underpass below existing ground level and under new York Street bridge. The movement between the M3 to Westlink (westbound) will be via new bridge over York Street. This option has the highest estimated cost at approximately £100m.

- **Option C** proposes movements between M2 and Westlink via underpasses below existing ground level underneath a new York Street bridge and existing Lagan Road and Dargan Rail Bridges and Westlink to M3 movement via an underpass below existing ground level and new York Street bridge. The cost is approximately £98m
- **Option D** proposes movements between M2 and Westlink via new bridges over existing Lagan Road and Dargan Rail bridges, approximately 18metres above existing ground level, Westlink to M3 movement via traffic signal controlled junctions at York Street and Nelson Street and M3 to Westlink movement via new bridge over York Street. The cost approximately £95m

2.2 Key issues

- Options B and D propose separate flyovers which will be 18 metres above ground level. These options could have greater potential impact on the surrounding communities in terms of their visibility and the raised road profile adjacent to the Henry St and Portland Place communities.
- Option A and C propose the movements between the strategic roads via underpasses which will be less visible but have potential to cause further severance from the city centre for communities in the north of the city.
- Option A & D will have signalled controlled junctions at York St for traffic moving from the Westlink to M3 which will result in an interruption to the traffic flows for this route.
- A mapping exercise carried out by the Council estimates the amount of residual land which may be available for potential development / regeneration as a result of each proposed option is as follows:
 - Option A – 5.24 hectares
 - Option B – 5.47 hectares
 - Option C – 3.99 hectares
 - Option D – 6.28 hectares
- The proposed separate flyovers in Options B and D will potentially have less land take than the underpasses. However, the height of the proposed road infrastructure is 18 metres above ground level which could cause blight to the regeneration potential of the surrounding sites.
- The Council would recommend that measures are in place to ensure land in the area affected by any of the proposals is considered for public realm improvements, possible development or for improving pedestrians and cycling connections. The issue of 'left over' land in connection with road development should be assessed and considered for regeneration opportunities rather than become unused and potentially unsafe areas.
- The Council would recommend that government agencies take a joint approach to assess the regeneration impact of land associated with the transport proposal. Opportunities to create employment uses or attractive and safe open space should be maximised. This proposal is particularly important given the location within the inner city and directly adjacent to a number of city neighbourhoods.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Council would recommend that the road infrastructure is designed to improve connections to the north of the city and improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists including consideration of the potential to actively use spaces below the flyovers and cover some of the proposed cut sections. <p>2.3 There are a number of proposed developments in the vicinity of the road infrastructure proposals that could be affected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - City Quays (the site borders Corporation Street to the east) The City Quays proposal is for 120 residential units and mixed use development. A section of the underpass proposed in Option A and C will border Corporation Street and will be below ground level. There will be land available in Options B & D between flyover proposal and Corporation Street which could be potentially developed to create a buffer or intermediate land uses. - Nelson St, Little Patrick St, Little York St, Great Georges Street – This site is zoned for social housing in Draft BMAP and is subject to a planning application by NIHE for 64 social housing units and a second planning application from a private developer for Apartment Development of 217 units. The road proposals will impact the site as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Option A - three lanes of traffic are proposed on Great Georges St with signalised junctions Option B and D - a new M3 to Westlink bridge is proposed which will run adjacent to the site Option C - M3 to Westlink underpass is proposed - Corporation Street (next to Sinclair Seaman’s Church) There is a planning application for 44 residential units 13 storeys with commercial units at the ground floor. The M3 on slip (2 lanes) is in close proximity. - Proposed University of Ulster Campus York St: the proposal to upgrade the York Street interchange should take account of the proposed UU campus development on York Street. The major upgrade to the strategic road network will have implications for local traffic movements in the north of the city and the accessibility of the new campus. Any increase in the efficiency of the proposed junction arrangements that the York Street interchange should deliver positive impacts for the northern city centre area and surrounding communities. There could also be potential surplus road space within the surrounding network and opportunities for the redesign of the Dunbar Link. The reduction in road space could contribute to enhanced connectivity within the city centre and the integration of the areas to the north of the Frederick Street Dunbar Link axis.
2.4	<p>The proposed options could have a potential impact on the design and orientation of the proposed commercial, educational or residential units and would need to be considered in the final layout of the buildings. The proposed road will also have implication in terms of noise, air pollution and visual amenity which should be fully assessed.</p>
2.5	<p>There are also implications for the wider area in relation to the potential impact on Air Quality. Based upon air quality modelling data provided to the council to date, it appears that Option B could provide for the greatest potential for improvements in ambient nitrogen dioxide levels for residents living directly adjacent to the A12 Westlink in locations such as Great and Little George’s Streets. However, rerouting of road traffic will also result in a small worsening in nitrogen dioxide levels along</p>

	Garmoyle Street for Option B. These conclusions are based upon air quality modelling data provided to the council by Roads Service and its consultants. Therefore, it is understood that the data is not reflective of the impact of forthcoming local developments such as the University of Ulster Belfast Campus or Royal Exchange. In addition, the air quality assessment does not appear to have characterised the impact of the proposed road re-profiling on the potential for regeneration of the 'Little Italy' area, which is centred on Little Patrick Street, and its environs. The full response relating to air quality is outlined in Appendix 2.
2.6	All the proposed options will have implications in relation to adjoining areas or communities and the potential for future regeneration. The issues relate to the extent of land affected by the different proposals and the potential impacts on existing or proposed regeneration schemes. From the information provided it is difficult to quantify what these might be beyond the purely physical land take implications. As noted above the flyover options B and D would result in lower land take for the development of the new infrastructure and based on limited data available for assessment these options are likely to have more favourable outcomes for air quality.
2.7	In the consideration of all the options it is suggested that the Committee seek assurances that: the road infrastructure is designed to improve connections to the north of the city and improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists (including consideration of the potential to actively use spaces below the flyovers and cover some of the proposed cut sections); and the final designs consider the potential for reallocation of surplus road space within the surrounding network and opportunities for the redesign of the Dunbar Link.

3	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
3.1	No considerations.

4	Recommendations
4.1	Recommendation that the Committee consider the potential implications arising from the outline options and if appropriate select a preferred option as the basis for a response to the Department for Regional Development.

5	Decision Tracking
Submission of an agreed response to the consultation following consideration and agreement of the Committee.	

6	Key to Abbreviations
DRD – Department for Regional Development NIHE – Northern Ireland Housing Executive	

7	Documents attached
Appendix 1: Previous comments following the DRD presentation to Development Committee Appendix 2: York Street Interchange Air Quality Assessment Comments.	

Appendix 1

Previous Council comments made at the Roads Service presentation on options for the proposed York Street interchange to Development Committee on the 27 June 2011

- Clarification is sought on whether consideration has been given to making York Street two-way as part of the proposed scheme. The Committee would be keen for proposed improvements in the strategic road network to take account of the potential to deliver improvements in the connectivity for the local road network and communities.
- There are concerns relating to the potential impact of the proposed road scheme on local inner cities communities in particular the potential to cause further severance from the city centre. Opportunities to improve connectivity and regenerate deprived communities should be highlighted and delivered in conjunction with other government agencies.
- Further information and analysis is required on the potential impacts the proposed options will have, in terms of noise pollution and air quality, on existing residential areas and any proposed residential development sites in the vicinity.
- Additional information was requested on the efficiency of the proposed junction options and value for money in relation social and environmental impact.
- The Council would request consideration is given to the identification within the option proposals of opportunities for the reallocation of existing potentially surplus road space in the surrounding network.

Appendix 2

York Street Interchange Air Quality Assessment Comments.

Members will be aware that the Department for Regional Development Roads Service has brought forward proposals to address the traffic bottleneck that exists at the junction of the A12 Westlink, M2 and M3 motorways where they bisect York Street.

As part of the public consultation process that commenced in June 2011, Roads Service has sought views on four preliminary engineering options that involve the construction of a series of overpasses and underpasses near to Great George's Street, York Street, Corporation Street and Nelson Street. This area of the city has been used historically for industrial activities but it has the potential to be regenerated for residential housing, commercial and other uses, assuming sympathetic local environmental conditions. Indeed, the council is aware that a range of residential planning applications has already been approved for this locality and that a number of other residential and commercial planning applications are pending. Moreover, this area functions as the main access route to the city for commuters travelling from the north via the M2 Motorway and from the east of the province. For this reason, it is considered important that its redevelopment reflects the council's wider vision for city regeneration, as well as supporting forthcoming local landmark development projects such as the Royal Exchange, the University of Ulster Belfast Campus and the proposed City Quays development at Clarendon Dock. Finally, it should be noted that numerous residential premises are situated already near to the A12 Westlink in areas such as Great and Little George's Streets. Accordingly, Elected Members directed that, in reviewing the four preliminary road options for this location, officers should consider the overall sustainability of each option to take account of local social, economic and environmental impacts.

Members are advised that, as part of its statutory environmental protection obligations for the city, the council has completed a series of reviews and assessments of local air quality under the auspices of Part III of the Environmental (Northern Ireland) Order 2002. The most recent review and assessment confirmed that levels of nitrogen dioxide, associated principally with road transportation, continue to exceed both national and European health-based standards for air quality along the M1 Motorway and A12 Westlink corridor. This situation has recently necessitated a joint Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and DoENI application to the European Commission for a 5-year derogation to the compliance date for achieving nitrogen dioxide limit values for the Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area. If accepted, the revised compliance date for achieving European Commission nitrogen dioxide limit values for the Belfast area will be 1 January 2015. Accordingly, the council is keen to ensure that the proposed interchange proposals do not lead to a worsening of air quality near to York Street, thereby leading potentially to infringement proceedings by the Commission and restricting the type of the redevelopment that can occur at this location.

As highlighted previously, Roads Service published four preliminary options as part of the public consultation exercise but did not complete an environmental impact assessment for each option. For this reason, the council has been unable to provide a comprehensive consultation response to Roads Service to date that addresses our environmental concerns. Accordingly, council officers requested that Roads Service undertake an air quality impact assessment for each of its engineering options in accordance with the provisions of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges and government local air quality management technical guidance including LAQM.TG(09). Council officers met with representatives of Roads Service on 2 April 2012 to review the outcome of this air quality impact assessment.

The air quality impact assessment suggests that in 2020, when the road reprofiling is assumed to be complete, nitrogen dioxide levels will comply with both national and European annual mean air quality standards at all receptors. However, the assessment appears to have taken account only of existing residential receptors and, therefore, it has failed to consider the impact of, and upon developments that have already been granted planning

permission, or those with pending applications for this location. By way of example, it is understood that the assessment has not considered the impact of the new University of Ulster Belfast campus at York Street, which will provide facilities for around 15,000 students or the impact of the proposed road reprofiling on approved residential premises to be located between Corporation Street and Nelson Street. In assessing the impact of the four road options, the report has characterised the impact on air quality as a large, medium or small improvement, a small, medium or large worsening, or an imperceptible change.

Unfortunately, the format of the air quality impact assessment report did not appear to comply fully with government technical guidance and, in addition, the impact of the proposed road revisions on a number of air quality standards for nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter were not made available to council officers. Accordingly, the council's air quality officer subsequently contacted Roads Service and its consultants to highlight the abovementioned omissions and to request clarification. The council received a response by email from Roads Service on 11 May 2012, although the response related principally to technical aspects of the air quality assessment process and did not provide additional information regarding projected air pollution levels. The Roads Service did indicate, however, that more detailed air quality modelling results would be included in the published 'Options Appraisal: Local Air Quality Report' which, it is assumed, will form part of the 'Stage 2 Preferred Options Report'.

Accordingly, from the air quality modelling data and referring to the four road reprofiling scenarios, Options A and C are both expected to result in a small improvement in annual mean nitrogen dioxide levels along Great and Little George's Streets during 2020, a small worsening along Garmoyle Street and an imperceptible impact at all other locations. Option B will result in broadly similar reductions in annual mean nitrogen dioxide levels to Options A and C but will deliver a marginally better improvement along Little George's Street. Finally, Option D will result in a medium improvement in annual mean nitrogen dioxide levels along Little George's Street in 2020 but will cause a worsening along North Queen Street, Brougham Street and at Nelson Street.

In conclusion, and based upon air quality modelling data provided to the council to date, it appears that Option B will provide for the greatest improvements in ambient nitrogen dioxide levels for residents living directly adjacent to the A12 Westlink in locations such as Great and Little George's Streets. However, rerouting of road traffic will also result in a small worsening in nitrogen dioxide levels along Garmoyle Street for Option B. These conclusions are based upon air quality modelling data provided to the council by Roads Service and its consultants. Therefore, it is understood that the data is not reflective of the impact of forthcoming local developments such as the University of Ulster Belfast Campus or Royal Exchange. In addition, the air quality assessment does not appear to have characterised the impact of the proposed road reprofiling on the potential for regeneration of the 'Little Italy' area, which is centred on Little Patrick Street, and its environs.