



Subject:	York Street Interchange (YSI)
Date:	14 April 2021
Reporting Officer:	Alistair Reid, Strategic Director of Place & Economy
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<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
	Following a request by Members at the City Growth & Regeneration Committee in March, this report provides an overview on decisions taken by Committee and Council since the inception of discussions on the York Street Interchange (YSI) that have informed the Council's position on the proposed scheme.

<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the background to, and context of, Council's position on the York Street Interchange scheme; and,</li> <li>• Note the chronology of events in relation to the YSI including the formal considerations by the Council.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
<p>3.1</p> <p>3.2</p> <p>3.3</p>	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>The existing junction links together the three of the busiest roads in NI and provides access to the Port of Belfast from the Strategic Road Network and is the main access to Belfast from the north. The capacity of the existing York Street junction is limited by competing traffic flow priorities and physical constraints (properties and railway). This lack of junction capacity to accommodate continuous through movements contributes to congestion on surrounding parts of the network; delays for freight, public transport and private vehicles.</p> <p>The current signalised junction arrangement was not designed to deal with over 100,000 traffic movements per day. The current configuration is a source of traffic congestion for both the strategic and city networks that requires careful traffic management, particularly in peak periods, to ensure that the different components do not become blocked and cause significant delays across the network. As recognised in the Regional Transportation Strategy where such "<i>localised restrictions cause undue congestion and thereby delay for freight, public transport and cars</i>" they are considered to be bottlenecks that undermine the effectiveness of the Strategic Road Network.</p> <p>The location of the strategic junction on the edge of the city centre provides some unique challenges in terms of local accessibility particularly for pedestrians as they have to cross six lanes of traffic at two locations on their route into the city. There are challenges in relation to the access to the Yorkgate Station and an absence of cycling facilities to support movement through the junction.</p>

3.4	<p><u>Context</u></p> <p>The Council has consistently supported YSI, subject to detailed design considerations and confirmation of mitigation measures to be put in place by DfI to avoid adverse impacts. The evolution of the scheme and associated issues have been discussed at a range of committee meetings contributing to the formal Council responses which highlighted issues in respect of: connectivity, walking, cycling, air quality, noise, contaminated land and regeneration. A timeline of the key events in relation to the YSI is appended at Appendix 6.</p>
3.5	<p>A 2005 initial feasibility study led to the Preliminary Options Report (2009) and subsequent public consultation (2011) on four layout options. Two of the four options supported fully connected through movements of strategic traffic (Options B&amp;C) with Option B incorporating a significant additional 18m high bridge structure whilst Option C proposed an underpass arrangement. The Council recommended Option B or C and DfI subsequently selected Option C, a fully grade-separated underpass option.</p>
3.6	<p>On consideration of consultation responses, and the high profile nature of scheme, the Department for Regional Development (DRD) Minister at that time decided to hold a Public Inquiry. The Public Inquiry Inspector supported the issues raised by the Council in relation to design; linkages and connections; air quality; contaminated land and noise.</p>
3.7	<p>A Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) was established in January 2015 to consider and advise on the aesthetic / design aspects of the scheme, with Council representatives included in the membership. The SAG reconvened in September 2017 following the Public Inquiry Inspector's report recommendations and with wider community representation.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Key Dates</u></p> <p><b>December 2005</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department for Regional Development (DRD) YSI feasibility study completed.</li> <li>• Options ranged from traffic management options, which could have been implemented in the short term to provide immediate improvements, to full grade-separation options that removed the conflicts between traffic movements implemented in the longer term.</li> </ul>

3.9	<p><b>October 2012</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• BCC response to DRD YSI consultation requested assurance from DRD that any new road infrastructure is designed to improve connections to the north of the city and improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists.</li><li>• Council also requested consideration be given to the potential reallocation of surplus road space within the surrounding network e.g. Dunbar Link.</li></ul>
3.10	<p><b>January 2013</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• YSI update paper submitted to BCC Development Committee.</li><li>• Committee noted the preferred option and supported continued engagement with DRD on the next stage to seek to influence the design of the preferred option to reflect the aspirations of the Council.</li></ul>
3.11	<p><b>March 2015</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shadow Strategic Policy &amp; Resources Committee approved the draft response to the Environmental Statement consultation.</li><li>• Response highlighted the need to carefully consider connections to the north of City, increase opportunities for active travel linked to new UU campus and also highlighted issues relating to air quality, noise and contaminated land.</li><li>• Committee approved the draft response.</li></ul>
3.12	<p><b>November 2015</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• YSI Public Inquiry over three days, including site visits.</li><li>• Council raised the following issues: design, linkages and connections, air quality, contaminated land and noise.</li><li>• In relation to design and connectivity issues the Council emphasised the need for careful design to reduce the visual impact of the interchange and to enhance connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists.</li><li>• The Council suggested that some modest investment by DRD in the design of the interchange proposal with the aim of improving development and regeneration potential and non-motorised movement could generate significant future social, economic and environmental benefits for the York Street area and for the wider city.</li></ul>

3.13	<p><b>8th November 2017</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City Growth &amp; Regeneration Committee received an update paper on the outcome of the Public Inquiry and Council's ongoing involvement.</li> <li>• Noted that at the Inquiry Council officers made representations on the need for careful design to reduce visual impact and enhance connectivity and raised issues around air quality, noise and vibration and contaminated land.</li> <li>• The Inspector's report recommended that DfI Roads liaise with Council throughout the remainder of the design phase and construction phase.</li> <li>• As a result, the Strategic Advisory group was reconvened in Sept 2017.</li> <li>• After discussion, the Committee noted the YSI update and the ongoing participation of Council officers in the process</li> </ul>
3.14	<p><b>January 2020</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The New Decade, New Approach deal includes YSI as a key infrastructure project that will benefit from increased funding for capital infrastructure from the UK Government's 'infrastructure revolution'.</li> <li>• At the SP&amp;R meeting held on 21 February 2020 members adopted the recommendation that the YSI scheme be included as a specific point for further discussion with the Minister for Infrastructure and this has subsequently happened</li> </ul>
3.15	<p><b>Summer 2020</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In July 2020 the Minister for Infrastructure announced the external review of the YSI scheme.</li> <li>• At its meeting on 12th August 2020 the City Growth &amp; Regeneration Committee agreed that the Council would write to the Minister for Infrastructure to express its support for the external review of the YSI project, and to offer an opportunity to engage with the review process.</li> </ul>
3.16	<p><b>January 2021</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council received a response from the Minister indicating that the review was carried out by a panel of accredited reviewers, independent from the project in early November 2020.</li> <li>• The letter also advised that the review is now complete and Minister Mallon is currently considering its findings.</li> </ul>

3.17

**March 2021**

Infrastructure Minister announces the outcome of the review of the YSI scheme and stated that *“I want the scheme to maximise focus on wellbeing, sustainable travel, creating thriving liveable places and communities as well as responding to the climate emergency and connecting people and opportunities”*. The Minister also approved the six recommendations by the independent review panel and additional actions, as follows:

1. The YSI project brief should be reviewed and revised to ensure it aligns with the concept of “place making” and new best practice in terms of urban transport design, and with the Minister’s agenda.
2. The wider area impact and benefits of the Project should be evaluated using appropriate quantitative and qualitative assessment mechanisms.
3. The current Project costs should be updated to act as a benchmark to inform any decision on future alternative development.
4. There needs to be a system of ongoing communications with all interested parties. This should include updating the 2017 Communications Strategy and employing a robust Communications Structure now as well as during any construction phase. Communications should be ongoing and not just point in time.
5. There needs to be much closer co-ordination both within the DfI and between DfI and other relevant departments and interested parties at both policy and delivery levels with regard to YSI development and delivery.
6. There needs to be a co-ordinated decision made in the context of emerging policies, which then needs to be applied to ensure that the YSI project aligns to this context

- The SAG is to be reconvened and the communications strategy updated to ensure local communities and other stakeholders are kept informed of future developments
- Consultants have been retained by DfI to carry out further work particularly around place making and optimisation of scheme delivery for communities, connectivity and green recovery, the wider living places agenda, and future development of Belfast.
- A further update report from the consultants is anticipated in the autumn of 2021.

3.18

Further details on this review process will be brought to Committee when available.

	<p><u>Related Issues</u></p>
3.19	<p><i>Environmental Health</i></p> <p>Whilst Council statutory powers to enforce construction hours of work, noise limits, etc. do not apply to works carried out by Government Departments it was agreed through the Public Inquiry that Council should expect the same degree of liaison or co-operation from DfI as from private developers. DfI requested further input from Council into hours of proposed work during construction phase to inform the new tender processes.</p>
3.20	<p><i>Air Quality Management Area (AQMA)</i></p> <p>YSI is within one of Belfast's four Air Quality Monitoring Area's (Westlink Corridor). The area was originally declared in 2004 for predicted exceedances of both nitrogen dioxide (NO2) and particulate matter (PM10). In 2015 the area was revoked for PM10 but continues in relation to NO2.</p>
3.21	<p><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
3.22	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices</b>
	<p>Appendix 1 Development Committee consultation response to YSI proposal (October 2012)</p> <p>Appendix 2 Development Committee - YSI Proposals (January 2013)</p> <p>Appendix 3 Shadow SP&amp;R Committee YSI - Environmental Statement consultation (March 2015)</p> <p>Appendix 4 Council representations to YSI Public Enquiry (September 2017)</p> <p>Appendix 5 DfI response to BCC re. request to participate in YSI external review</p> <p>Appendix 6 York Street Interchange scheme timeline of key events</p>