**Belfast City Council**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Report to:** | Development Committee |
| **Subject:** | Response to York Street Interchange proposals |
| **Date:** | 16th October 2012 |
| **Reporting Officer:** | John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470 |
| **Contact Officer:** | Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459 |

| 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. Following a request for further information from Roads Service, a report to consider the potential implications arising from the four options was presented to Committee on the 21st August 2012. It was agreed that a cross-party working group would be established to examine whether a consensus could be reached in respect of the Council's preferred option for York Street Interchange. A meeting of the cross party working group took place on the 8th October 2012. |

| 2 | **Key Issues** |
|---|---|
| 2.1 | Details on the four options were previously presented to Committee and are summarised below:<br>**Option A**<br>• Movement between the M2 and Westlink will be via underpasses below ground level and Westlink to M3 movement also via an underpass<br>• The M3 to Westlink movement will remain signalled controlled<br>• All slip roads at Clifton Street remain open<br>• This option is the lowest cost of approximately £72m<br><br>**Option B**<br>• 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.<br>• 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.<br>• Movement between the M3 to Westlink (westbound) will be via new bridge over York Street.<br>• All Slip roads at Clifton street remain open<br>• This option has the highest estimated cost at approximately £100m.<br><br>**Option C**<br>• Movement between M2 and Westlink will be via underpasses below existing ground level underneath a new York Street bridge and existing Lagan Road and Dargan Rail Bridges<br>• Westlink to M3 movement will be via an underpass below existing ground level and new York Street bridge.<br>• All slip roads at Clifton Street remain open<br>• The cost is approximately £98m<br><br>**Option D**<br>• Movement between M2 and Westlink will be via new bridges over existing Lagan Road and Dargan Rail bridges, approximately 18 metres above existing ground level<br>• Westlink to M3 movement via traffic signal controlled junctions at York Street<br>• Nelson Street and M3 to Westlink movement via new bridge over York Street<br>• M2/M3 bound on-slip from Clifton Street closed, all other slip roads at Clifton Street remain open<br>• The cost approximately £95m |
| 2.2 | The following issues were considered in more detail at the cross party working group meeting:<br>• 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.<br><br>• Options B and D propose separate flyovers which will be 18 metres above ground level. These options may 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 however, the proposed separate flyovers in Options B and D will potentially have less land take than the underpasses.<br><br>• Option A and C propose the movements between the strategic roads via underpasses which would have a very much reduced visual impact but have potential to cause increased severance from the city centre for the communities in the north of the city.<br><br>• The M2/M3 bound on-slip from the Clifton Street junction will be closed under proposals for Option D. |
| 2.3 | **Preferred options**<br>In the consideration of all the options the cross party working group suggested that Option B or C offered the most effective solution in terms of enhanced connectivity for the strategic road network. In relation to the identification of a preferred option, the working group agreed that DRD should consider measures to ensure land in the vicinity of the new road infrastructure is considered for public realm improvements, potential development opportunities or for the enhancement of pedestrian or cycling |

| | |
|---|---|
| | connections. The issue of 'left over' or surplus land resulting from the proposed development should be assessed at this stage and considered for regeneration opportunities to maximise the potential benefit for the city. |
| 2.4 | The Forum for Alternative Belfast proposed a modified version of Option C as the preferred option. Their proposals include the introduction of covered sections for the new underpass elements and the introduction of new building blocks alongside the proposed road infrastructure The objectives for this approach are to introduce additional development to shield existing areas from potentially negative impacts and improve pedestrian connectivity. Whilst the Council would support the principles of identifying new development opportunities and improved connectivity as outlined in previous reports there has not been the opportunity to assess the potential costs or viability of the proposals. Details of the FAB proposal is outlined in Appendix 3. |
| 2.5 | Based upon air quality modelling data, the Health and Environmental Services Department indicated 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. These conclusions are based upon the limited air quality modelling data provided to the Council by Roads Service and its consultants. The full response relating to air quality is outlined in Appendix 2. |
| 2.6 | In the consideration of all the options it is suggested that the Council would recommend Option B or C in terms of the enhanced connectivity for the strategic road network. However, the Council would seek 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. This would include consideration of the potential to actively use spaces below the flyover in Option B or cover some of the proposed cut sections in Option C. The final designs should also consider the potential for reallocation of surplus road space within the surrounding network and opportunities for the redesign of the Dunbar Link. A draft response containing proposed Councils comments relating to Option B & C is outlined in Appendix 1 |

| **3** | **Equality and Good Relations Considerations** |
|---|---|
| 3.1 | No considerations. |

| **4** | **Recommendations** |
|---|---|
| 4.1 | Recommendation that the Committee agree to submit comments relating to Option B & C as the basis for a response to the Department for Regional Development. |

| **5** | **Decision Tracking** |
|---|---|
| Submission of an agreed response following consideration and agreement of the Committee. | |

| **6** | **Key to Abbreviations** |
|---|---|
| DRD – Department for Regional Development | |

| **7** | **Documents attached** |
|---|---|
| Appendix 1: Proposed response<br>Appendix 2: York Street Interchange Air Quality Assessment Comments.<br>Appendix 3: FAB comments relating to the York Street interchange | |

**Appendix 1**

Councils Draft comments on York Street Interchange proposals

The Council considers that Option B or C offered the most effective solution in terms of enhanced connectivity for the strategic road network. In relation to the identification of a preferred option, the Council would recommend that DRD should consider measures to ensure land in the vicinity of the new road infrastructure is considered for public realm improvements, potential development opportunities or for the enhancement of pedestrian or cycling connections. The issue of 'left over' or surplus land resulting from the proposed development should be assessed at this stage and considered for regeneration opportunities to maximise the potential benefit for the city.

The Council would recommend that DRD work with other agencies to ensure a joint approach to the assessment of the regeneration impact of land associated with the transport proposal. Opportunities to create employment uses and attractive and safe open space that contribute to the regeneration of this part of the city should be maximised. This proposal is particularly important given the location within the inner city directly adjacent to a number of existing city neighbourhoods.

The proposal in Option A & D to retain 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. With the high level of investment proposed, the Council considers that continuation of such interruptions in traffic flows between the strategic roads should be removed. The proposal to close slip road access in Option D is also not supported.

The Council would recommend that the final road infrastructure in addition to improvements to the strategic network also enhance connections to the north of the city and improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. This should include consideration of the potential to actively use spaces below and adjacent to the proposed flyover infrastructure as well as the potential to partially cover the proposed cut sections.

There are a number of proposed developments in the vicinity of the road infrastructure proposals that could be affected. The Council would recommend that in taking forward the preferred option, the proposal takes account of the proposed development in the area, such as the proposed UU campus development on York Street are included. 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 at the York Street interchange should be used to deliver positive impacts for the northern city centre area and surrounding communities. The potential for surplus road space within the surrounding network should be explored in relation to the 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.

## 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 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 heath-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 infraction 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.

Appendix 3

FAB proposals on a modified version of Option C