

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

The content of this ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the Official Report (Hansard) process.

Regional Development

A31 MAGHERAFELT BYPASS

Published at 4.00 pm on Tuesday 25 March 2014

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): As Members will be aware, funding for the A31 Magherafelt Bypass was approved by the Executive in July 2013. I now wish to inform Members of my decision to proceed with this £40 million strategic major works project, with the making of the necessary Vesting Order and Commencement of Procurement for the scheme.

Following the public inquiries for the scheme the decision to progress the scheme was announced in September 2010. At that time the Environmental Statement Notice to Proceed and Direction Order were published, however, it was made clear that the timing of the making of the necessary Vesting Order would be subject to the normal budgetary process.

When developing major road schemes it is important that the obligations placed on the Department, by national and EC Habitats legislation, are fully considered. Part V of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 sets out the statutory requirements for the assessment of environmental impacts of road schemes. Having caused an Appropriate Assessment screening exercise to be carried out, and an independent review of that screening exercise, and having considered the Environmental Statement and the consultation responses to it, I am satisfied that the likely significant environmental effects of the proposed scheme have been properly assessed and have been sufficient to inform judgements on the scheme. Accordingly, in light of the assessment undertaken and information presented within the Statement to Inform the Appropriate Assessment screening exercise and the Environmental Statement, I accept the Department's conclusion (as the Competent Authority) that construction and operation of the A31 Magherafelt Bypass scheme would not by itself, or in combination with other known plans or projects, adversely affect the integrity of any Natura 2000 sites and the Lough Neagh Special Protection Area.

I have carefully considered the Department's Statement and agree with its conclusions. I have therefore decided to proceed with the scheme. In doing so, I commit my Department to carrying out the necessary works to facilitate the Inspector's recommendations and the environmental design measures, as well as the mitigation measures detailed in the A31 Departmental Statement.

Construction of the scheme will provide approximately 6 km of new carriageway between the A31 Moneymore Road at Coolshinney Road, south west of Magherafelt, and the A6 at Castledawson Roundabout, north east of Magherafelt.

The new carriageway runs to the east side of Magherafelt and will provide significant benefits to the road user, with the main objective of the scheme being to reduce congestion within Magherafelt town and to improve journey times and road safety.

As well as benefitting the economy, the scheme will also benefit the local construction sector through an increase in demand for construction materials as well as boosting commercial trade and the construction industry in the surrounding area.

I have asked my Department to make the necessary Vesting Order and to commence procurement. Subject to the successful completion of the procurement process, construction of the scheme is programmed to start late 2014 and is expected to take around 20 months to complete.

Please note the above statement is embargoed until 4.00 pm on 25 March 2014