

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department for Infrastructure

ANNOUNCEMENT OF DECISION TO PROCEED WITH THE A1 JUNCTIONS PHASE 2 ROAD IMPROVEMENT SCHEME, THE RELEASE OF THE INSPECTOR'S REPORT AND DEPARTMENTAL STATEMENT AND THE MAKING OF THE NECESSARY STATUTORY ORDERS

Published at noon on Thursday 28 January 2021.

Ms Mallon (The Minister for Infrastructure): I wish to inform Members of my decision to accept the outcomes of the Public Inquiry for the A1 Junctions Phase 2 Road Improvement Scheme and to proceed to progress the scheme in readiness of funding becoming available.

I am delighted to announce this key step in the development of this significant scheme, which is seeking to address safety issues along a 25km stretch of the A1 between Hillsborough and Loughbrickland. I am very aware of how important the A1 improvements are for the many people who have expressed their support for the scheme, especially to all those who have lost loved ones. Today let me once again express my deepest sympathies to the families of all those who have lost their lives. The decision to improve this road will be an important announcement for many and I can assure Members that I am committed to doing all that I can to deliver this scheme and will work with the Finance Minister and Executive colleagues to secure the necessary funding as quickly as possible.

Progressing a scheme of this scale represents significant investment in this strategic road which links Belfast and Dublin and carries around 40 000 vehicles per day. The provision of the upgrade will greatly improve road safety for all of these motorists as well as providing more reliable journey times for the thousands of travellers using the route daily. My announcement to proceed with the Scheme also delivers on promises made in the New Decade, New Approach deal, to improve connectivity and safety on this strategically important transport corridor for our island.

I am familiar with the difficulties faced by strategic and local motorists travelling the A1 route and welcome the positive outcome from the Inquiry. Consultation will continue with key stakeholders particularly landowners affected by the scheme on proposals to minimise any related impacts.

A Public Inquiry was held in March 2020 into the proposed scheme and the Inspector reported his findings to the Department in October 2020. Following a thorough examination of the Inspector's comments and recommendations and all other representations made, I believe the scheme should be progressed as quickly as possible, subject to completing all the necessary statutory processes and securing the necessary funding.

Part V of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 sets out the statutory requirements for the assessment of the environmental impacts of major road schemes. Having caused the examination of the environmental information, which includes the Environment Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), the consultation responses to the EIAR, together with the recommendations of the Inspector, I am satisfied that the likely significant environmental effects of the proposed scheme have been assessed. This has provided me with the necessary information which I consider reasonable and sufficient to allow me to make a reasoned conclusion on the significant effects of this project on the environment. My reasoned conclusion therefore is that the proposed scheme will not have any significant adverse impacts on the environment (including designated sites and protected species) that cannot be addressed by the mitigation and monitoring measures set out in the Departmental Statement. In deciding to proceed with this scheme, I am committing my Department to carrying out all the

necessary actions to facilitate the Inspector's recommendations and the mitigation and monitoring measures set out in the Departmental Statement.

My Department will now publish the formal "Environmental Impact Assessment: Notice to Proceed" and will make the Direction Order and the Stopping Up (of Private Accesses) Order for the scheme. The associated Vesting Order will be made when funding for the scheme has been secured

The Departmental Statement, Inspector's Report and associated documents are available for viewing at the Department's website; <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/a1-junctions-phase-2-notice-intention-proceed-documents>

This is an important announcement and another step forward by my department in delivering on the promises of New Decade New Approach made to our communities, and thereby improving road safety, better connecting our communities and improving the lives of all of our citizens.