
Written Ministerial Statement

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Department for Regional Development

A5 Western Transport Corridor – Publication of Notice of Intention to Proceed and Making of Statutory Orders

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Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): On 14 February 2012, I announced a programme of improvements to our strategic road network over the next four years. This programme included two sections of the A5 Western Transport Corridor project, subject to the outcome of public inquiries. Public Inquiries have been held and the Inspectors submitted their report to the Department on 24 February 2012.

The Inspectors recommended that the scheme should proceed as proposed by the Department, subject to a number of key recommendations, including the postponement of the Ballygawley to Aghnacloy section of the scheme and retaining the A4/A5 Tullyvar Road roundabout at Ballygawley.

Having discussed the Inspector's report with my Department's officials and having given the matter due consideration, I concur with the main recommendations made by the Inspectors.

I am satisfied that the proposed scheme will help to improve road safety and provide a more appropriate standard of road on this key strategic route. There are almost 1400 junctions and accesses onto the existing A5 which contribute to the potential for accidents along this route. The collision history is a factor which cannot be ignored and the A5 upgrade will help to reduce the number of collisions by providing improved cross sections, forward visibility and alignment as well as separating strategic and local traffic.

In making this decision I am also well aware of the strong local opposition to some elements of the scheme. I can assure Members that Roads Service will continue to have discussions with affected landowners with a view to resolve, where possible, any outstanding individual difficulties.

The strategic road network comprises the main arteries of the Northern Ireland economy, linking towns, cities, air and seaports to help boost industry and commerce as well as facilitating tourist travel. The A5 Western Transport Corridor is one of five key Transport Corridors in Northern Ireland and this upgrade will not only have positive economic and construction industry benefits but also help towards balancing regional infrastructure.

As well as providing much needed jobs within the construction sector, the scheme should also lead to an increase in demand for local suppliers of construction material as well as giving a significant boost to commercial trade in the surrounding area.

Funding in the current Budget Period is committed to constructing the 2 stretches of the scheme between New Buildings and north of Strabane, and from south of Omagh to Ballygawley. Timing of construction of the remainder of the scheme will be dependent on the availability of funding through the Investment Strategy for NI 2011-21, further contributions from the Irish Government and subsequent budget settlements beyond 2015.

I have therefore asked my Department to publish Notice of its intention to proceed with the scheme and to make the necessary statutory orders. The Vesting Order will cover the 2 stretches of the scheme the Department is progressing at this time. Also, in line with the Inspectors' recommendation to postpone the Ballygawley to Aghnacloy section of the scheme, I have decided that the Direction Order should only be made for that section of the scheme between New Buildings and Ballygawley.

The northern section of the scheme between New Buildings and Strabane will be constructed by the Balfour Beatty/BAM/FP Mc Cann Joint Venture and will provide 15 kilometres of new dual carriageway. Construction of the southern section between Omagh and Ballygawley will be carried out by the Graham/Farrans Joint Venture and will provide 23 kilometres of new dual carriageway. At the southern end it is also proposed to upgrade the link between the new road and Ballygawley Roundabout to dual carriageway status thus ensuring continuous dual carriageway/motorway entirely between Omagh and Belfast. Work on both stretches is expected to start in the autumn this year and will take around two and a half years to complete.