

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department for Infrastructure

TRAVEL DISRUPTION DUE TO ROADWORKS: BELFAST GRAND CENTRAL STATION:

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Mr O'Dowd (The Minister for Infrastructure):

A Chairde,

I wish to inform members of the forthcoming opening of Belfast Grand Central Station. Specifically, to alert you to: (1) the potential for significant traffic and travel disruption over the coming weeks and months as the project moves into the final stages ahead of opening. 2) the significant opportunity the Station will provide to support modal shift and improve connections for our communities, as well as facilitating the economic development for the region.

As the largest integrated transport facility on the island of Ireland, Belfast Grand Central Station will cater for around 20 million passenger journeys a year. It will also provide enhanced walking and cycling provision encouraging more sustainable travel for a cleaner, healthier city while also helping reach the Executives' climate goals.

To date, the new station has been built right in the heart of the city with minimal disruption. But now, as we enter the final stages of construction, there will unfortunately be an impact on both the rail and road network, and I wanted you to be aware of these implications and how they are being managed. It is anticipated that the following work will be required in advance of the station opening in the autumn:

- Permanent closure of Great Victoria Train Station from early May.
- Closure of the railway line between Belfast and Lisburn during July and August.
- Lane closures across a number of streets near the new station.

There will also be an impact on traffic when Durham Street will be closed from October 2024, to facilitate the completion of the station in 2025.

Therefore, as part of the preparation for the phased opening of the new station, my Department and Translink have been working closely together to seek to minimise the impact of these disruptions to the wider public, business community and surrounding communities. This will include:

- A revised rail timetable from early May 2024.
- Revised Metro and Ulsterbus timetables and bus substitution during the July and August closures to mitigate the impact on services.
- Relocation of some services to Laganside Buscentre away from Europa Buscentre.
- Additional park and ride capacity at existing sites.
- A number of temporary alterations to the highway network including junction upgrades and additional temporary bus lanes.
- Advance notice of proposed changes and potential impacts to key stakeholders, including the public and public transport passengers.
- Promotion of the use of alternative travel choices through temporary bus lanes and other active travel and bus priority measures.

Whilst the development of these mitigation measures has been informed by an extensive and detailed assessment using the best available models and data, the overall effectiveness of the measures will depend on the public changing their current travel patterns by choosing alternative modes and times

for their journey or by taking a different route to avoid congested areas in the vicinity of the construction works. During the construction phase, traffic and travel patterns will be continuously monitored and if necessary additional mitigation measures may be considered.

Nobody likes to be stuck in traffic or late getting to where they need to be, and therefore my Department and Translink are also working in partnership with a range of organisations to advise them of the project, the potential impact and help drive modal shift to public transport and active travel. To date a range of partners have already endorsed the scheme including the NI and Belfast Chambers, Visit Belfast, Belfast City Council, the Consumer Council and Sustrans. Stakeholder engagement will continue and this work will be supplemented with ongoing communication to make people aware of the likely disruption. The key message during this period is that Belfast remains open for business, but that people should plan ahead when they are intending on travelling into the city centre and consider using public transport as their choice of travel.

Is mise le meas,

JOHN O'DOWD MLA
Minister for Infrastructure