



Report of Public Consultation Meeting on Proposed Improvements to Buncrana Road

A Report for Roads Service

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I. Introduction

Roads Service is in the process of developing a proposal for a new road scheme to improve traffic flows on the Buncrana Road, Derry/Londonderry between Pennyburn Roundabout and the border. As part of this process it is examining a number of possible options. It is now at stage two of its assessment of the road proposal. Stage two involves the identification of factors to be taken into account in choosing alternative route options and identification of advantages, disadvantages and constraints. As part of stage two, Roads Service is interested in the views of people affected by the scheme. A consultation event was held at the Ramada Da Vinci's Hotel in the city. This event ran over three days. The scheduling of the consultation event allowed people to come at different times of the day – morning, afternoon and evening. The event provided information on the alternative route options for the road improvements. It consisted of a number of display boards giving details of the possible route options. Members of Roads Service staff and Faber Munsel consultants (employed by Roads Service) were on hand to discuss the route options and answer any questions from those who attended. In addition, comments cards and question cards were distributed and collected at the event.

At the end of this event, a public meeting was held on 3 April 2008 at 7.00 pm. This meeting was open to all interested parties and was intended to give the public an opportunity to express their views in relation to the proposals. This meeting was independently chaired by Community Places. Community Places is a voluntary organisation that provides advice on planning issues, supports community planning, carries out community consultation and research and assists with building projects. The public meeting was tape-recorded by Community Places and flip chart notes were taken for the purpose of completing this report. This is our independent report which records the views that were put forward at the public meeting.

Our report summarises the general comments made on a number of issues associated with all of the possible route options for the proposed scheme. This is followed by the points made on each of the three route options presented by Roads Service.

2. Road Improvement Route Options

At the Consultation Event, Roads Service presented three alternative route options that could be used to widen the Buncrana Road. All three route options provide two lanes of traffic in each direction, i.e. two lanes heading towards the city and two lanes travelling away from the city. These route options differ at the section of the road between the Pennyburn Roundabout and the Springtown Road. Each alternative route option is identified by a different colour, red, blue and purple.

2.1 Red Route

This route option is described by Roads Service as "on-line" widening (i.e. widening the existing road line). The improvement scheme would follow the existing line of the road and widen it so that four lanes of traffic could be accommodated, two in each direction. This would involve the demolition of the houses on Collon Terrace.

2.2 Blue Route

This route option is "on-line" widening from Pennyburn Roundabout to Collon Terrace. It would then veer "off-line" behind the houses of Collon Terrace, and through the mainly industrial area to the south of Buncrana Road. It would rejoin the line of the existing road just past the Springtown Road. Traffic using the "off-line" section of the road would travel in a country bound direction i.e. away from the city. Traffic heading into the city would use the existing Buncrana Road.

2.3 Purple Route

Like the blue route option, this route option involves "on-line" widening from Pennyburn Roundabout to Collon Terrace. It would then veer "off-line" behind the houses of Collon Terrace, and through the mainly industrial area to the south of Buncrana Road. In this case, four lanes of traffic would be created and traffic in both directions – city bound and country bound would use the off-line section of the road. A section of the existing Buncrana Road, from just before Collon Terrace to the Springtown Road, would only be used for local traffic. A new junction would be created at the Racecourse Road.

2.4 Other Changes

Other changes proposed as part of the improvement scheme include:

- Pennyburn Roundabout to just before Collon Terrace - This would be widened "on-line" to provide two lanes of traffic in each direction as part of all three route options.
- Springtown road to Skeoge Roundabout - This would be widened "on-line" to provide two lanes of traffic in each direction. No decision has been taken as to which side of the road that the widening will take place on.
- Skeoge Roundabout to the border - This would be widened "on-line" to dual carriageway standard i.e. two lanes of traffic in each direction with a central reserve.

- A substantial new roundabout at Elagh Business Park, with a connection to Coshquinn Road is also proposed.

Other aspects of the proposed improvement scheme were also for discussion. These included whether bus and cycle lanes should be provided which would require additional land to be taken.

Revised junction layouts and traffic signals may also form part of the scheme. Each route option would have implications for turning onto the road from side roads.

3. Public Meeting Responses - General Issues

The public meeting began with a presentation by Roads Service and its consultants Faber Munsel. This outlined Roads Service's process for making a decision about improvements to the Buncrana Road and eventually implementing a scheme. It also gave an outline of the three alternative route options, with the aid of a computer simulation.

The Community Places facilitator then began the discussion which focused initially on Pennyburn Roundabout and moved along the road towards the border. Each of the three route options was discussed. Participants were asked to raise any issues they had for each point on the road. This also provided an opportunity for them to raise questions about the three possible route options. Members of Roads Service and Faber Munsel Consultants were on hand to answer these questions.

Discussion focused around locational issues, including safety, the volume of traffic that would be generated, community impact, turning and access issues and access to St Patrick's Church. More general issues concerning the new road were also discussed. These included bus and cycle lanes, the construction phase of the scheme and the decision making process, in particular the relevance of cost in making a decision. The level of information provided and the need for accurate timescales were also discussed.

3.1 General Transportation Issues

Some comments were made about the general condition of roads in the city. These included expressing concern about the adequacy of the existing Pennyburn Roundabout and Branch Roundabout. The view was expressed that there should be more road markings and smaller roundabouts. Others said that the Pennyburn Roundabout should be made bigger. In response the Roads Service representatives said that the proposed improvements related only to the Buncrana Road and they were not in a position to comment on other or wider roads and transportation issues.

3.2 Safety

Safety issues at the Pennyburn Roundabout were mentioned at the meeting. Some expressed the view that crossing the road close to the roundabout is dangerous and that the zebra crossing is located too close to the roundabout. It was also stated that the safety of pedestrians crossing the road to get to the sports complex must be carefully considered.

Roads Service representatives responded by saying that this scheme deals with the Pennyburn Roundabout onwards, and not with the roundabout itself.

3.3 Community Impact

It was said that all three of the proposed road schemes will affect many people through loss of land.

3.4 Local Access Issues

Access to the Pennyburn Industrial Estate was discussed. Some participants said that the current access is inadequate and cannot cope with the volume of traffic that uses it.

Roads Service representatives responded by saying that they are looking at possibilities for this area.

Roads issues affecting the Templegrove area were raised. It was pointed out that at present, residents of the Templegrove area have difficulty accessing the Buncrana Road. It was stated that the new Skeoge link road has done little to alleviate this problem. The residents present from this area said that traffic lights are needed at this junction and that Tesco, as part of a current planning application, has offered to provide these. Residents attending the meeting wanted to know if Roads Service would have any objection to these lights. They said that it would be unfair of Roads Service to accept a contribution from Tesco towards a new roundabout further along the road but not to accept its offer to supply new traffic lights at Templegrove. They also wanted to know if there would be a right turn at Templegrove.

Roads Service said that it would have to carry out an assessment of the viability of putting traffic lights at Templegrove and that there will be a right turn at this junction.

Residents at the meeting sought clarity on whether there would be an access road through the Farren Park/ Ardnashee area. They said that this would not work as the area is used for parking and is too tight for cars to pass safely. In response, Roads Service said that there were no plans for an access road at present.

Some of those who attended the meeting had heard that the Gorty Road in the Woodbrook junction area was to be closed off. They wanted confirmation of this from Roads Service. Roads Service representatives present at the meeting said that there are no plans to close this junction.

Some of those who attended argued that a roundabout should be installed at the junction of Whitehouse Park and the Buncrana Road. They said that they did not agree with Roads Service's opinion that a roundabout would not be feasible, and compared it with a roundabout at Trench Road which they argued was similar. They also stated that the suggestion from Roads Service to stagger this junction would only move problems further down the road and would not make it any easier to turn onto and off the road.

3.5 Information Provided by Roads Service

Some people at the meeting expressed disappointment that Roads Service could not give exact details of how much land would be required for each route option or how wide the road would be until the final stages of the project. They argued that it was difficult to choose a preferred route for the scheme given the level of detail that was available and that more detailed information should have been made available at the consultation event. They said that Roads Service could not give any answers or provide any confidence. This comment was applauded.

Roads Service representatives' response was that it is not possible to develop a full scale design for each route option. They said that the aim of the public meeting was to allow people to influence the final decision.

3.6 Cost

There was some discussion of how relevant cost would be in determining the preferred route. The opinion was expressed that the public meeting was a wasted exercise as cost is fundamental to choosing the preferred route for the road improvements and that the comments made at the public meeting could not change the cost of each route. It was said that the cost of each route should have been made available at the public meeting. Some people at the meeting also wished to know if both land costs and construction costs would be considered. Questions relating to the amount of compensation that would be received and what factors would be taken into account when calculating the amount of compensation were also raised.

Roads Service stated that the economic benefit of each route is considered, not just cost. This involves looking at things such as costs caused by accidents and delays as well as building costs. Roads Service representatives said that the five criteria used to reach a decision are: environment; safety; economy; accessibility; and integration with other policies. They explained that the cost benefit analysis must also be positive and that they cannot give costs for each scheme as they have not yet entered into negotiations to buy the land.

3.7 Bus and Cycle Lanes

There was general agreement at the meeting that it was important to accommodate buses along any new road scheme, even if this meant creating bus lanes. It was said that improvements should be made to facilitate a better bus service. People at the meeting argued that buses were important for school children, those travelling to the sports complex, older people and teenagers and that people should be encouraged to use buses more often. Improvements suggested included better bus stops on both sides of the road and better bus services. The opinion that bus services in general in Derry/Londonderry are not good enough was expressed. The fact that Ulsterbus will provide a new bus service that goes as far as the border and will serve new housing developments further out the road was welcomed.

Questions were raised about what assurances Roads Service could give about bus and cycle paths and what priority was given to these. The question of whether European funding would be available towards bus and cycle paths was also raised as well as whether Roads Service would accept this.

Roads Service representatives said that it is an aspiration to provide bus and cycle lanes but that this will require more land which must be justified. They said that they cannot give any assurances at this stage. They also said that they would not assume at this stage that they will receive European funding.

3.8 Timescale

The fact that this scheme will not be implemented for five to ten years was criticised. Participants at the meeting asked how the problems that currently exist on the road would be dealt with in the meantime. Others pointed out that a section of the improved road will form part of the new ring road for the city. They asked if improvements to this part of the road would be prioritised. The need to provide an accurate time frame for owner-occupiers who wish to sell their homes was also mentioned.

One participant at the meeting expressed annoyance that plans had been made 30 years ago to improve the Buncrana Road and said that these improvements have still not been carried out whereas recent improvements in the Waterside took only two years.

Roads Service representatives said that part of the road may be prioritised. They also stated that the preferred route will be announced in autumn 2008.

3.9 Construction

Some questions about the construction of any new scheme were raised. Participants raised concern that the work might take place at the same time as a new development at Pennyburn Roundabout and that there would not be room to accommodate all this work. Others wanted to know if the new scheme would involve digging up the existing roadway or just extending it. They said that this should be determined at an earlier stage.

Roads Service replied by saying that an evaluation of the current road must be carried out to determine how improvements are carried out

3.10 Decision Making Process

Some questions were asked about how Roads Service would now make its decision. Participants wanted to know if this was the last consultation meeting that would be held. They also asked questions about the powers of a Public Inquiry. The point was made that Roads Service must adhere to government public consultation processes and so had to hold the public meeting.

Roads Service responded that this would be the last public consultation meeting. A brief explanation of the Public Inquiry process was also given.

4. Public Meeting Responses - Route Option Issues

Issues specific to each alternative route option were discussed and are outlined below.

4.1 Red Route

Safety

Some people said that crossing the road would be difficult if the red route option was adopted. It was argued that many primary and post primary children walk along the Racecourse Road and the Buncrana Road, crossing at Pennyburn Pass to get to and from school. Their safety must be taken into consideration, especially as there are not enough crossing patrol operatives to man the whole route.

Roads Service representatives responded by saying that a pedestrian study will be carried out in stage three of the decision making process. This will help to determine where pedestrian crossings are located.

Volume of Traffic

It was argued that the large volume of traffic that would be generated by the red route option would cause structural damage to the houses at St Patrick's Terrace and an increase in noise pollution in this area. As a result residents of St Patrick's Terrace would have limited use of their front rooms and would have to install double glazing.

Collon Terrace

The red route option would require the demolition of houses on Collon Terrace. The point was raised that this would have a significant negative impact on residents of these properties.

Turning and Access Issues

It was argued that turning off and onto the Buncrana Road from side roads would be difficult if this route option was adopted. It was suggested that it would become more difficult for residents in the Maybrook Area to turn onto the Buncrana Road. The community centre at the bottom of this road generates a lot of traffic which, it was said, would add to this problem.

It was also mentioned that using the roundabout to turn right, rather than turning directly onto the road at Farren Park was not a significant issue.

Roads Service representatives responded by saying that this junction will be left turn only for safety reasons. Traffic lights further up the road at the Racecourse Road/Buncrana Road junction would give cars an opportunity to get onto the road.

Access to St Patrick's Church

There was concern that cars and pedestrians would find it difficult to access the church across four lanes of traffic. Some commented that the traffic lights where pedestrians can cross safely are too far from the church. In addition, the land currently used by the church for parking would be taken and it was argued that this would result in insufficient parking. It was pointed out that services can generate a large volume of traffic and therefore cause congestion.

Roads Service representatives responded by saying that a 'ghost' island facility could be created to assist cars turning into the church and that cars would have to cross a maximum of two lanes. They said there is also the possibility of creating a pedestrian 'refuge' for crossing and that congestion in the area would be taken into account.

General Issues

The question of cost and compensation was raised. Some of those attending the meeting asked if the red route option was cheaper than other route options, taking into account land costs. Others wanted information regarding how much compensation would be paid for the demolition of properties.

Roads Service representatives confirmed that the red route would be the cheapest option. They also said it was not possible to give details of compensation amounts at this stage.

General comments made about the red route were that it was the worst route possible, there was no point talking about it and that it should be got rid of. The view expressed by many at the meeting was that the red route was not favoured by anyone in the area and that the purple route option was more acceptable because it would have the least negative impact on the area and restore much of the Buncrana Road to the local community.

In response to these comments, the facilitator suggested that the discussion should move to the purple route option. This suggestion was greeted with applause.

4.2 Purple Route

Safety

A number of people said that this route would be the safest for children walking to school.

Volume of Traffic

This option was welcomed by many on the basis that only local traffic would use much of the road.

Community Impact

This was seen by many as the route option that would be best for the majority of people living along the road as it would become a local road that would give the

community back an area that it had lost to traffic. It was argued that this route would have the most positive social, economic and environmental impact on the community. It was viewed as positive that this option would not involve the demolition of homes on Collon Terrace and therefore no one would have to relocate. The need to provide a planting scheme to mitigate the effects of the new road that would run behind Collon Terrace was highlighted. The fact that Collon Terrace would effectively be on an island between the two roads was also discussed.

Roads Service said that it was not able to go into detail about planting schemes at this stage.

Turning and Access Issues

As this option would result in less traffic on a section of the Buncrana Road, people at the meeting said that access onto and off the road would be easier and safer.

Access to St Patrick's Church

The view was expressed that this route option would allow easier access to the church, especially as the new controlled junction would allow people to cross closer to it.

Roads Service said that the controlled junction would be no better in this respect than with other route options.

General Issues

Other benefits of this route option were put forward by those who attended the meeting. It was said that this route would cause less inconvenience for residents during the construction phase. It was also argued that it would be the easier to accommodate buses along this route. The view generally expressed was that this was obviously the most acceptable route. All attending the meeting who spoke on the issue said they could see few difficulties with this route and that it would satisfy more people – socially and economically. Some went as far as to say that Roads Service should vest the land needed for this route option now before it becomes more expensive.

4.3 Blue Route

The facilitator then moved the discussion on to the blue route. There was an unwillingness expressed by many to discuss this route in any detail. They reasoned that the majority of people in the local community preferred the purple route as the only viable option. However, the meeting was encouraged by the facilitator to discuss this option.

Safety

It was argued that the safety of children walking to school and crossing the road must be considered. In the view of some of those who attended the meeting this route would not be the safest for them.

Volume of Traffic

There was opposition to this route as it would increase the volume of traffic using the road.

It was said that the volume of traffic would cause structural damage and increased noise pollution to both St Patrick's Terrace and Collon Terrace. This would mean fewer useable rooms for residents of these properties and additional expense to install double glazing.

Community Impact

It was pointed out by a few that this would bring the road behind Collon Terrace, which would have benefits. However, it would require some front gardens along Buncrana Road to be taken and would not return the road to the community which some people viewed as negative community impacts. These negative impacts contributed to many supporting the purple route option.

Turning and Access Issues

Some people said that this option would be inconvenient as turning movements along the road would be restricted and people would have to travel to roundabouts because they would not be able to make right hand turns directly onto the road.

5. Close of Meeting

The facilitator closed the meeting at 9.45 pm with the consent of all the participants. He thanked everyone for attending and for their contributions to the discussions.

**Community
Places**



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