



Letterkenny
Chamber
Advancing business together

SUBMISSION

Active Travel Project – R940 Ballyraine Road

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Active Travel Routes R940 Ballyraine

General Observations

Letterkenny Chamber in principle supports the objectives of Active Travel and indeed developing Active Travel routes that bring people into, around and out of Letterkenny are something we should be striving for. This type of project will go some way in achieving sustainability goals and could help with reducing reliance on the car.

However, we have a number of concerns not least the timing of these Active Travel projects that are being planned before the new Town Bus becomes operational and with no timeline on the Ten-T.

Currently we are all aware that Letterkenny is at capacity and the only solution that would actually act as some relief is to have the Ten-T project delivered, specifically the link between the Dual Carriageway and the Business Park Road. The actual timeline of this project is still very unclear and people who travel into and out of Letterkenny for work, leisure and services are increasingly frustrated.

The extremely negative narrative about the traffic is causing severe reputational damage to Letterkenny and the resultant reduction in footfall is clearly evident. Therefore the discussion around active travel routes that will narrow carriageways is adding to the negativity.

In our discussions with the project team were very clear that projects would not add to capacity, but on surveying the plans it seems that capacity would be reduced even further. It would seem much more sensible to have other road projects started before capacity is reduced even further.

We have emailed our members (310) to encourage them to make submissions individually and we would hope that the businesses directly and indirectly affected will do so. It should be noted that not all businesses are Chamber members and project planners need to be aware of this.

However, we do understand that this is funding that we may not attract again or that is not accepted will be diverted to other counties, so we need to strike a balance between Active Travel and making getting around the town better for vehicles and pedestrians.

We are here to work proactively with the stakeholders for the benefit of Letterkenny and the wider area but as the largest lobby group in Letterkenny representing 310 rate paying members our concerns have to be taken seriously. If the Active Travel Plan projects result in a negative impact on Letterkenny during construction phase and after businesses will close and jobs could be lost.

Observation 1 Bus Stops In line

We have been advised by the project team that bus stops along this route will be online. It was explained that the time estimate for drop off or pick up averages out at 30 seconds. Our opinion would be that while this might be appropriate for Local link bus service at normal times it is not suitable for peak times, places such as ATU and for other services.

The long distance student buses heading to Belfast, Dublin, Sligo, Galway etc take on average 8-10 minutes for passengers to get on and there can be a number of these at peak times.

To that end it is critical that the new bus stops at the rear of the ATU are Off Line. The current online bus stops will block traffic all the way back to the station roundabout if they are online at peak times adding to Letterkenny's traffic problems.

Observation 2 Oatfield Junction

Removing the roundabout at Oatfield Junction will prove to be problematic. At present coaches use the Roundabout to turn to return to their first contracted stop at the front of ATU. Ordinary vehicles and taxis leaving the Station Roundabout Car Park (where no right turn is allowed) use this roundabout to turn back on to their route if they want to access the town centre, or shopping areas.

It is also used by vehicles exiting Aldi (left turn only) that use the roundabout to return to Ballyraine Road.

It is not feasible that they have to divert to a wider route thus causing more congestion on already busy routes.

In terms of coaches who have to return to their first contracted bus stop at the front of the ATU how will this be possible? It clearly does not make sense for them to go our by Ballyraine, around polestar roundabout and round station roundabout just to get back there.

The Active Travel Project team must ensure that these particular users are taken into account. We must not add to the already congested areas.

The plan for the Ballyraine Road is to narrow the road to 6m but the same plan if adopted this way will result in sending more larger vehicles out through this mainly residential area. This seems to directly contradict what the Active Travel plan is trying to achieve.

Observation 3 Traffic flows & Station Roundabout

By removing the Oatfield roundabout this always creates two other major traffic problems in that it removes the successful left turn only exits from both The Old Aldi and Station Roundabout car park. The Active Travel plan should not and cannot ignore these measures that were introduced to improve traffic flow and keep traffic off the already heavily congested Station Roundabout. There is a reason these were introduced and have lasted the test of time.

We cannot ignore the Station Roundabout. This piece of infrastructure has been at capacity for many years. It is not fit for purpose and it would seem that adjusting Ballyraine would add to the congestion at this roundabout.

Observation 4 Pedestrian Entrance

The Active Travel plan suggests a new pedestrian entrance opposite the Oatfield Roundabout into the Letterkenny Shopping Centre. After talking with the stakeholders in the area, we along with them, would suggest adding a vehicular “entrance only” beside the pedestrian entrance.

Over many years the shopping centre management have had to put on extra staff at Christmas peak times to ensure traffic moves further into the car park so alleviating the queue back on to the Station Roundabout. Another entrance would reduce this need and be a real game changer for the Station Roundabout by taking massive pressure off the Station Roundabout at peak times entering the Letterkenny Shopping Centre.

We would urge the Council buy land between Aldi Railway House to put a new “entrance only” alongside the proposed cycle path.

Observation 5 Taxi Rank

The project team need to directly communicate with taxi providers who use this very busy taxi rank. We cannot see with a new exit how the taxis will be able to operate. They cannot be expected to make a U turn in this high volume pedestrian area.

They are the experts in how they use the rank now, do not miss this opportunity to consult with them directly and transparently.

Observation 6 Bus stop

The current bus stop at the Station Roundabout Car Park is the main link for the rest of the County and for the many workers who come to Letterkenny every day. The volume

of people using this stop has grown substantially and the current stand is not fit for purpose. As we await a new transport Hub (Letterkenny 2040) the Council and all stakeholders need to provide a new bus drop off and pick up area that allows for the volume of people using these services. If we are serious about active travel we need a bus /coach stop that is user friendly, safe and more suitable for our changeable weather. People travel through Letterkenny for work and services yet the only bus stop is this wholly inadequate layby.

Creating this temporary hub in liaison with the operators would change the nature of this area for all users from a dangerous traffic congested area to one that encourages walking and is much safer for all users.

The Active Travel project team must be in discussion with the Regeneration Team and all others involved in trying to create a new transport hub even on a temporary basis.

Observation 7 Construction Phase

Should this project go ahead, the project team must make every effort to minimise disruption during business hours and at peak traffic times.

We have seen from past projects that good communication and liaison with the businesses affected leads to a better outcome at all times. This means that those affected on a daily basis know what to expect each and every day so that they can make staffing decisions and keep their customers informed. In addition, they must have a direct point of contact on the ground should things go wrong.

Prior to the project starting it is important to outline each stage of the project, including detailed traffic management plans, how work over entrances is to be handled, etc. On paper these works always look easier than they actually turn out in the long run so planning and preparation are key.

The contractor also needs to take into account the busy times and react accordingly. We all know how quickly traffic can lock in Letterkenny and with current bad press this needs to be avoided at all costs. The contractors and Traffic Management teams must be able to react quickly when things go wrong.

A clear line of communication must be in place between this project team and others carrying out work. It defies belief that information on roadworks is not shared between parts of the same organisation and others. This includes utility works as well as routine road repairs. We simply cannot have major works happening at the same time.

We strongly urge and advise that no works should take place on Friday - Monday of both **Irish and UK bank holidays**. Letterkenny is the access for Dunfanaghy, Downings and Glenveagh National Park and anyone who is moving round Letterkenny at these times

knows the reality of the traffic congestion. Any roadworks will have a very serious impact on this already congested traffic as we have learned to our cost on countless occasions.

There is no doubt that the businesses in the area will be adversely affected when work is taking place, so it is the responsibility of the project team and contractor to be in regular contact. We have to learn from past mistakes and make communication of disruption during the construction phase a priority for the project team and contractor.

Observation 8 Maintenance

These active travel projects must have maintenance built in. Once the project is complete it needs to be maintained to the highest level. That includes regular cleaning, surface maintenance and a plan for any planting or landscaping. As we have seen with previous projects without maintenance it will start to look old and neglected very quickly.

We also believe the project team must take into account the type of landscaping /planting that will happen on the project. It must be suitable for its environment and be easily maintained.

As clear statement of maintenance and responsibility for it should be included in the project plan.

Observation 9 Benefitting from Active Travel

As we have pointed out the principles of Active Travel are valid. However, movement around and into Letterkenny is overly reliant on the car. Just introducing Active Travel routes as planned will not in themselves encourage people to stop using the car for all journeys.

There will need to be an activation programme within communities, schools and neighbourhoods. If children can be encouraged to cycle or walk to school safely through such an activation programme, it might encourage others to change car use.

The new Town Bus that is due in 2025 will need to be up and running.

The much talked of bike scheme would also need to be in place.

A full communication and activation programme will be needed as soon as plans are agreed to encourage the community to support the routes and if they are to benefit from them.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the above points we strongly urge the design team to completely re-think the section of the Active Travel Plan between the Oatfield Site and Station Roundabout.

We strongly advise that the proposed Active Travel plan works do not start in this area until a new bus station is operational and the buses are removed from the area and that any new bus stops servicing the ATU are off line.

As stated at the start of this submission Letterkenny Chamber in principle supports the objectives of Active Travel and indeed developing Active Travel routes that bring people into, around and out of Letterkenny are something we should be striving for.

We are here to work proactively with the stakeholders for the benefit of Letterkenny and the wider area but as the largest lobby group in Letterkenny representing 310 rate paying members our concerns have to be taken seriously. Be under no illusion if the Active Travel Plan results in a negative impact on Letterkenny businesses will close and jobs would be lost.

We trust that you will take the views of our organisation and our members into serious consideration when deciding the future of this project.