

# Cross-border dual-carriageway plan rubbished

By Anton McCabe

**T**here is no justified case for the North's largest-ever proposed road project, according to the report of a public inquiry. The A5 dual carriageway was to run for 51 miles from Newbuildings, south of Derry, to the Tyrone-Monaghan Border at Aughnacloy.

So far 83.4million (€95.9million) has been spent on the project. Not a single sod has been turned.

The Planning Commissioner who reported from the public inquiry was scathing of the Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure's plans. He found they fell short on 30 grounds.

The most important grounds for rejecting the plan were a failure to factor in the impact on climate change, examine flood risk, or consider alternatives.

The Commissioner believed climate change was not properly considered: "The Department, should it decide to proceed with the scheme, must explain how it has taken account of the UK's climate change commitments, including those set out in the Paris Agreement....There is no description in the updated (Environmental Statement) of measures to avoid, reduce or remedy the impact of the scheme on climate. The increased greenhouse gas emissions can only be regarded as a large adverse effect on the environment".

The proposed road has a cross-Border dimension, being designed to connect Derry and Donegal with Dublin. Thus it would lead to increased emissions in the Republic. However, the Environmental Statement also failed to take these into account. As an aside this may be a precursor of systemic failures to maintain EU environmental standards post-Brexit. In this case it was picked up by a public inquiry but it won't always be.

The Commissioner also found the plan failed to consider the alternatives (another EU EIS requirement) of bypasses around several towns, and a '2+1' design. That is a three-lane road, consisting of two lanes in one direction and one lane in the other, alternating every few kilometres. The main objectors, the Alternative A5 Alliance, had proposed this at the public inquiry.

The Commissioner instructed the Department

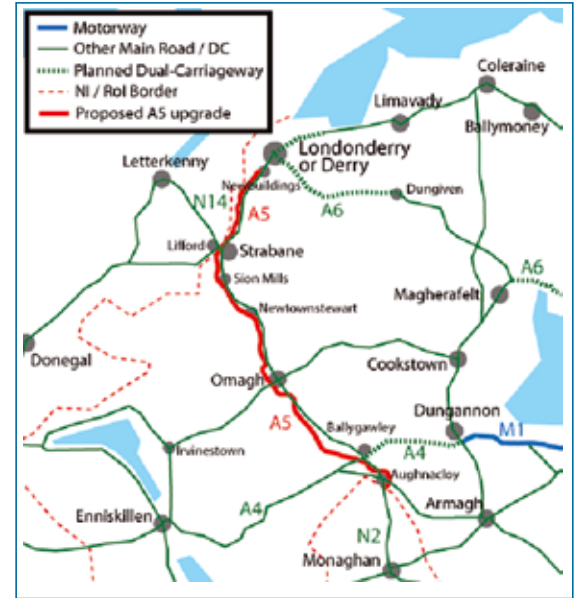
*No justification for under-assessed road, says NI inquiry, while Irish Greens remain mute*

to "update and finalise the draft Flood Risk Assessment" before presenting further plans. During last year's Public Inquiry, objectors had pointed out the road would run on an embankment

through a flood plain at Strabane. Construction work would compact the soil there, making it less able to absorb rainwater. Witnesses presented evidence that the Strabane area has suffered several serious floods in recent years.

As well as generating greenhouse gases, emissions from traffic have a detrimental impact on air quality. The Commissioner said this was not properly considered. He accused the Department of using "sophisticated analytical techniques to construct a substantial numerical edifice on a relatively weak base of increasingly old site-specific data".

The dual carriageway is proposed to run through or near a number of Special Areas of Conservation, both rivers and bogs. The Commissioner instructed the Department to produce a separate Environmental Assessment for each Special Protection Area. He instructed



it not to proceed unless there is no reasonable doubt the proposed road would not affect Tully Bog Special Area of Conservation, a lowland raised bog, north of Omagh.

The Commissioner took issue with some of the language the Department used. The Department said there would be a "large adverse effect" on Castletown House, a listed building on the outskirts of Strabane. He pointed out complete demolition was in fact planned.

The Department has rejected the recommendation to remove the 5.5 mile stretch between Ballygawley in Co Tyrone and the Border. At present there are no plans to dual the N2 from north of Monaghan to connect with the A5.

The project has strong political support. The Programme for Government between the Green Party and Fianna Fáil commits the Government, perhaps remarkably, to "Work with the Northern Ireland Executive to deliver key cross-border infrastructure initiatives, including the A5...". The Government has promised €500million for the A5 and other projects.

West Tyrone SDLP Assembly member Daniel McCrossan has been strident. He wrote on his Facebook page on March 16: "I am calling on the public to join me in challenging the Alternative/ Anti A5 Alliance and their short-sighted, self-interested and reckless campaign."

Maybe it's time we name and shame those involved so the people of this area know who is holding back this vital, necessary and life-saving investment".

The ANTI A5 Alliance have got away with this messing for long enough. I'm calling on the public to take a stand".

A reconvened public inquiry is to begin next year. And Irish Greens remain mute. **L**



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