

## Brief of Evidence – Socio-Economics

### 1. Introduction and experience

This is the Brief of Evidence for the socio-economic assessment of the N4 Collooney to Castlebaldwin proposed road development. My name is Craig Bullock. I have 13 years experience of working on socio-economic impact assessments, mostly on road developments. My formal qualifications are a PhD in environmental economics and a diploma in environmental impact assessment.

### 2. Scope of Evidence

The purpose of the socio-economic assessment is to examine the impact of the proposed road development on the social and economic functioning of the local community. Specifically the assessment examines:

- Journey characteristics, including journey patterns, journey time, journey time reliability and accessibility.
- Severance or barriers to the accessibility of community facilities, especially as it affects vulnerable population subsets.
- Journey amenity, namely the pleasantness or ease of journeys due to factors such as comfort, minimal congestion, perceived safety and spatial legibility for all road users.
- General amenity, namely impacts on local community wellbeing and amenities.
- Economic impacts including any potential stimulus to business and employment as well as adverse impacts for specific businesses.

Several of these impacts involve interaction with other disciplines. Interactions commonly arise in relation to vehicle traffic volumes, pedestrian activity and residential amenity.

Information for the assessment of the project has been collected by means of a desk review of the planning context, of demographic data, and of drawings provided by the design team and with reference to other chapters of the EIS. Information has also been collected by site visits at various times in 2006 and from 2011-13 and has included direct consultation with businesses, school bus drivers, community associations and others that could potentially be affected by the proposed road development as well as with statutory consultees such as Failte Ireland.

### 3. Assessment methodology

Guidance on impact assessment is provided by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Guidelines on the Information to be contained in Environmental Impact Statements (2002) and Advice Notes on Current Practice in the Preparation of Environmental Impact Statements (2003). In addition, reference is made to the Environmental Impact Assessment of National Road Schemes - A Practical Guide (NRA, 2006) and to the more quantitative guidelines provided on Community Effects in Part 8, Section 3 of the UK Highways Agency's publication Design Manual for Roads and Bridges Volume 11 (updated 2009).

The assessment of the proposed road development is structured into sections dealing with the

- Receiving environment
- Predicted impacts and their significance

- Proposed mitigation
- Cumulative impacts.

The assessment of impacts requires a comparison between the Do-Something Scenario for both the Opening Year of 2017 and the Design Year of 2032 with a Do-Minimum Scenario for the same years in the event that the Road development does not go ahead.

Impacts will occur during construction and operation. Positive and negative impacts are assessed as being “imperceptible, slight, moderate, major or profound”. Definitions for each impact type are provided at the outset of the chapter. Significance depends, among other considerations, on the nature of the environment affected, the duration of an impact, and the probability of its occurrence. It often follows that impacts of a socio-economic nature are a function of the scale of the impact itself or the impact on vulnerable or sensitive groups.

Socio-economic impacts are addressed at the community level, although impacts for individual non-farm businesses beside the proposed road development are discussed. The significance of impacts as they would affect the worst hit subset of the population are summarised in Appendix 6.1. of volume 4 of the EIS. The table also includes information on magnitude of an impact, i.e. the number of people (or businesses) likely to be affected, and is assessed as being very high, high, medium or low.

#### 4. Receiving environment

The main communities in the study area are Collooney, Riverstown and Castlebaldwn. Most of the study area is lightly populated and agricultural. However, tax incentives available under the former Rural Renewal Scheme contributed to significant expansion of Collooney as a satellite town to Sligo. In addition, there has been a significant amount of single house residential development in the last ten years especially in the picturesque area to the east of the existing N4. There has been much less development on the low lying and wetter ground to the immediate west of the existing N4.

Areas of the receiving environment are of tourism, amenity and heritage value. The Carrowkeel passage tomb cemetery is located in the south-west of the study area. Indeed, a variety of archaeological features, together with lakes and hills, contribute to the attraction of the area. There are also a few hotels and restaurants in the study area. Community facilities include primary schools, churches, equestrian centres, play centres, the Riverstown Folk Park and a HSE centre for learning disability.

The N4 is a national primary route, but journey amenity on the existing road is poor for all road users. The narrowness of the road along with soft ground at the side, and combined with restricted sightlines and the presence of numerous side roads, provides limited opportunity for safe overtaking. There is no satisfactory nearby alternative north-south route and journey amenity is especially poor for local trips that involve turns off or onto the N4. The road conditions and high volume of traffic also act as a barrier to the use of the road by cyclists.

There are no community facilities directly along the existing N4 or along the proposed road. However, traffic and road conditions significantly reduce the level of neighbourhood interaction for householders living beside or near the existing road. In

addition, national schools in the study area are served by school buses and require school runs, a proportion of which involve use or crossing of the existing N4. National bus services run along the N4, but pick-up points are restricted to Castlebaldwin and Drumfin and local car dependency is high.

## 5. Impact assessment

### Construction

Site access for construction traffic will be provided to the offline section from the existing N4 at Doorly, Ardloy and Castlebaldwin. Use of local roads will be restricted to necessary activities. Overall, the impact of construction traffic on residential properties is reduced by the fact that rather few properties are located along the route of the proposed road. Nevertheless, 15 properties will be acquired for the proposed road development and 12 will be demolished, although seven of these properties are uninhabited. Demolition of inhabited properties will have significant impacts on the owners of these properties. Some of the occupants are elderly or have family living nearby, although there are vacant properties available in the study area and impacts at a community level will be slight. Impacts on general amenity in the vicinity of overbridge construction are specifically addressed in the relevant chapters. Slight impacts on journey amenity are likely where short diversions or temporary road closures are necessary. The temporary closure of the L5502-0 will require diversions via the local road network, although with the exception of a minority of journeys to Riverstown this impact is slight. To minimise disruption, a traffic management plan will be prepared.

### Journey characteristics

On operation, the proposed road development will have a slight positive impact on regional journey times and journey time reliability, but a greater impact on connectivity for the North-west due to the replacement of the current sub-standard length of road. Local traffic will be able to join the proposed road at the northern or southern tie-ins and at the junction with the L1502-32 (Ballymote road). Local people will also be able to continue to use the existing N4 road for journeys north and south. Northbound road users from Riverstown will have the choice of continuing north to the existing N4/N17 roundabout at Collooney or making a detour south to the junction with the L1502-32. In either case, this involves a slight lengthening of journey compared with a Do-minimum scenario, but a significant improvement in journey amenity.

### Severance

No new significant severance will occur for community facilities due to the proposed road development. Due to the connection with the junction at Drumfin, traffic on the L1502-32 (Ballymote road) will be increased by 23.5%, but from a low base. This will not be sufficient to cause significant new severance for Knockminna National School, St. Joseph's Church or the Kilmorgan Cemetery. Elsewhere, one minor road will be severed, the L54014-0 north of Castlebaldwin, although the L7612-0 at Mullaghnabreena will be closed where it meets the N4 and the L3606-9 will be realigned to a parallel road south to an underbridge at Doorly to join the Eastern Parallel Link. The L7611-0 will cross the proposed road development directly to join the Eastern Parallel Link. The L1404-0 at Castlebaldwin, which also carries the Beara-Breifne Historical Trail, will be served but replaced by a link road connecting to a junction with the proposed road development. Overall, the proposed road will

provide net relief from severance, particularly in that the reduction of traffic on the existing N4 will permit more neighbourhood interaction.

#### Journey amenity and general amenity

Regional journey amenity will be significantly enhanced by the safer driving conditions. The transference of the majority of traffic to the proposed road will have a major positive impact on vehicle journey amenity along most of the existing road. There will also be a positive impact on cycling. While the magnitude of this impact will be low in the short-term, additional journeys should occur with time, especially as signage is proposed for the northern and southern tie-ins to encourage such use.

A slight negative general amenity impact will apply to the Historical Trail as walkers will need to cross the proposed road at the Castlebaldwin junction, but this is mitigated by the presence of a road island at the junction, much reduced traffic at the crossing with the existing N4, and the removal of general traffic from the minor L1404-0. For tourism, there is the potential for the existing N4 to become a leisure route for tourists and cyclists.

#### Economic

The improved regional connectivity provided by the proposed road development is a major positive impact. At the local level, transference of traffic from the existing N4 will have an adverse impact on several businesses. This loss of passing trade represents a major negative impact for a service station and convenience restaurant at Castlebaldwin, a pub/restaurant at this same location, an art gallery at Tawnagh and a bed and breakfast near Lackagh. In addition, there is a slight potential for a loss of familiarity for some local businesses located beside the existing N4. there will be an adverse impact on an equestrian business at Mullaghnabreena for a short period during construction.

### 6. Mitigation

Various mitigation measures have been proposed by the socio-economist during the period of the road design and are listed in Chapter 6. These include signage to encourage cycle use of the existing N4, a segregated footpath/cycle path at the Castlebaldwin junction and link road, services and tourism signage at Castlebaldwin junction including for the Carrowkeel complex. Tourism information signage is also proposed in Castlebaldwin where a wedge of land between the existing N4 and proposed road will be landscaped and public access permitted.

### 7. Summary

The proposed road development will provide an economic benefit for the Northwest by improving connectivity for regional traffic. Journey amenity represents the main positive impact and will be significantly improved for regional traffic, but especially for local traffic. There is the potential for more neighbourhood interaction along the existing N4 and for use of this road by cyclists, tourists and local traffic. There will, however, be adverse impacts for businesses dependent on passing trade that cannot be entirely resolved through permitted mitigation.

### 8. Response to submissions

## Taylor's Driving School

Sydney and Olive Taylor argue that due to the proposed road development fewer drivers will see the sign for their Driving School. It is correct that most traffic will transfer to the proposed road development. The nature of the business is of most relevance to the local catchment. Much local traffic will continue to use the existing road, but a proportion of traffic travelling south from Collooney, or north from the vicinity of Boyle or Castlebaldwin, is likely to use the proposed development much of the time. However, it is likely that most local residents will at times use the existing N4 and so familiarity with the business should be maintained.

## Closure of the L54041 and L7611-0

Submissions (Robert Craig, Adrian Dodd, Michael and Annie Clarke and Michael Breheny) refer to the impact of the closure of these roads. From a socio-economic perspective, the closure of the L54041 will not impact on access to community facilities the nearest of which are located in Castlebaldwin and will continue to be accessible via the L1404 without significant diversion. Access to the N4 from the L7611 will be severed for reasons of engineering and safety, but the road itself will cross the proposed road development via an overbridge providing access to the N4 with detours of approximately 0.5 km and 1 km for journeys north and south respectively.