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P8/13007 and P8/13008 – Construction of a Shared Pedestrian and Cycle Greenway Navan to Kingscourt Rail Line

Dear Mr. Connaughton,

Thank you for referring the above application to An Taisce for comment.

1. Introduction

This submission is being made as part of the work of the Cycling Coordinator position on behalf of An Taisce and Cyclist.ie, a new position funded under the European Cyclists' Federation Leadership Programme 2013-14.

An Taisce warmly welcomes the proposed construction of high quality cycle routes by Local Authorities, where their impact on the built and natural environment has been properly assessed, and where they have been designed and constructed in a manner sensitive to those environmental considerations.

In line with the aims of the National Cycle Policy Framework (Department of Transport 2009), the proposed cycle greenway should be designed and ultimately promoted so as to help prompt a wider increase in cycling and walking in Navan, Kingscourt and within / around the towns along the route of the greenway.

This submission is structured by commenting first on the wider / planning / more general points and then focusing on more route-specific points.

2. Target Users

The Navan to Kingscourt greenway route should appeal to two main types of users:

(i) local recreational riders, including families with young children, who may be less experienced and who may wish to avoid the busier, more heavily trafficked roads such as the R162. 30km, the approximate length of the route, is a very cycle-able distance over the course of a few hours - even for those with moderate levels of fitness.

(ii) cycling commuters and utility cyclists travelling to and from Navan town (or other towns along the route) wishing to access a range of amenities, such as shops, leisure facilities, schools, places of employment etc., via quieter and safer routes.

It is noted that the NTA's (2013) Greater Dublin Area Draft Cycle Network Plan mentions the Navan to Kingscourt disused rail line (Section 4.2.4, page 51 and Sheet RN2 "Inter-urban Cycle Routes, East Meath). However it is unclear how the proposed route will tie in with wider, strategic plans of developing a National Cycle Network: the Navan to Kingscourt route was not identified in Fáilte Ireland's (2007) Strategy for the Development of Irish Cycle Tourism or the National Roads Authority's (2010) National Cycle Network Scoping Study. Therefore there may well be wider opportunities for dovetailing this route with National, strategic, cycling priorities but these should be further clarified.

3. Retaining the Rail Corridor

We understand that there may be some concerns that the development of the cycleway would jeopardise the chances of the Navan to Kingscourt rail-line ever opening in the (longer) term future. We feel however that these concerns are unfounded since, based on experiences in the UK, the retention of the route as a cycleway / pedestrian route is the best way to prevent other developments taking place on the line itself which would, effectively, *permanently* ruin the chances of this ever happening.

4. Greenways and the Need to Make All Roads Safe for Cycling

One concern we do have with cycleways is that they can sometimes generate the idea that cyclists have no place on the ordinary roads. We are continually being told that "the roads are too dangerous for cyclists". However there is insufficient attention being paid to improving driving and / cycling standards. Standards on both sides of the divide can be equally dismal and unfortunately enforcement is still laughable. Whilst some resources have been put in place to deal with one aspect of driving, namely speeding, motorists in many cases still appear to be free to conduct themselves as they please, as long as they don't break the assigned limit for the piece of road they are on.

Consequently, we are now seeing a new generation of cyclists who, whether from parental pressure or their own lack of confidence, will only cycle on traffic-free paths. We see teenagers in some estates – even those without through-traffic or much traffic - where cycling within the estates is confined to the footpath only (i.e. illegally and potentially endangering pedestrians). One also sees the ridiculous situation where people now drive to somewhere (e.g. Phoenix Park in Dublin) to cycle. It would be far better if we could encourage these cyclists to use the present road network and, by increasing the numbers of cyclists on the roads, the safer they will be not just for cyclists but for pedestrians too.

5. Specific Comments on the Route Itself

5.1 Extend Greenway to Kells Road

The greenway needs to be extended south so as to further utilise the disused railway reservation between the Ratholdran Road and the Kells Road. This would provide a better connection to the town of Navan and to the existing road network. The present proposal for a terminus at the Ratholdran Road is rather remote and is on a minor road serving a primarily suburban area and will be invisible to out-of-town users especially to those coming from the Dublin, Trim and Athboy directions. The Kells Road, on the other hand, is a relatively major traffic route (the old N3) and would provide a more prominent and convenient siting for the start of the greenway.

It would also provide an opportunity to cross the Blackwater River at a popular viewing spot. Furthermore, the Kells Road link would provide a triangular route around the western side of the

town which would be popular with walkers. We have to remember that the greenway is also intended as a walking route.

5.2 Maximising the number of access points to Greenway / improving connectivity

We commend the efforts made to provide formal access points to the greenway over its length from Navan to Kingscourt. This is essential so as to maximise the use of the facility. However, we recommend that improved connections / linkages and appropriate signage are provided at the following locations (with drawing numbers as per those in the Part VIII application):

PL-002A

Would it be possible to provide a direct link from the Dunloe Drive / Court estate onto the greenway – rather than having Dunloe estate residents and those of Céide Thailteann needing to walk/cycle as far as the Ratholdren Road in order to access the greenway?

It would also enhance connectivity and the potential attraction of the facility if it was easy to walk/cycle directly from the greenway to the Proudstown Racecourse / golf course via Simonstown Lane without (or with minimal) need to use the R162. This should be investigated further as the plans advance and as opportunities emerge.

PL-006B

Is there any way to provide a direct access to the Nobber GAA pitch to / from the greenway? If there was, then GAA players and fans might be more easily persuaded to walk and cycle to the grounds.

5.3 - Standard Details: Narrow Embankments

The 2nd figure on page 1 of the “Standard Details” pdf shows the typical cross section for a narrow embankment (2.0 to 2.5m wide). It must be noted that a width of 2.0m between rail fences *is far too narrow for cyclists* - especially for those moving in opposite directions to pass each other. The National Transport Authority’s (2012) National Cycle Manual indicates a width of 0.75m for each cyclist plus there needs to be a clearance of 0.65m between the cyclist and a wall or fence (<http://www.cyclemanual.ie/manual/thebasics/width/>). Therefore, every effort needs to be made to create 2.8m+ wide space between the rail fences along the embankment stretches (of which there are a number on the route). Otherwise the greenway will have a very poor quality of service.

5.4 - Standard Details: Narrow Cuts

A similar logic applies to the ‘narrow cuts’ – the second figure on page 2 of the “Standard Details”: the minimum widths are too narrow (while there is more space for cyclists along these stretches than along the embankments as per 5.3 above since there is fence directly adjacent to the rail track). Again, referring to the NTA guidance, a greater effort needs to be made to ensure there is adequate width for cyclists passing other cyclists (and walkers) along these stretches.

5.5 – Surfacing

The first figure on page 1 of the “Standard Details” mentions “Approved top soil and grass seed along path (Optional)”. Such a surface would be totally unsuitable for a cycleway. A hard surface – rather than a limestone dust – would be preferable from a cycling perspective. I.e. from the point of view of minimizing rolling resistance (less effort to move at a given speed) and the durability of surfaces, a hard surface is far superior.

5.6 – Road Crossings: Typical Details

It is noted in the “Standard Drawings” that ‘approved gates’ will be provided but it is unclear what type of opening/closing mechanism will be used. I.e. is it like those on the Great Western Greenway (GWG) in Mayo where a nudge from the front wheel of a bicycle will start the opening process and then it is self-closing once through? More generally, is it possible to have stock-proof bypasses for bikes to avoid gate opening/closing operations (just like done with the GWG)?

6 – Further Comments

6.1 The need for 30km/h Speed Limits for Roads in Adjacent Urban Areas

There is an increasing trend to provide 30km/h speed limit zones in built-up areas so as to improve safety and enhance the environment especially from pedestrians' and cyclists' perspectives. The recently published revision of the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) strongly supports the introduction of 30km/h zones in urban areas, and outlines the safety differences of different speed levels. See the copy (of Figure 4.2) from DMURS in Figure 1 below (Department of Transport 2012: 63).

Given the likelihood of increased numbers of cyclists and pedestrians accessing the cycle greenway at various points along its length, it is strongly recommended that the Councils introduce a 30km/h speed limit in these adjacent zones especially in the vicinity of the residential areas, schools, sports grounds and other locations such as between the Kingscourt rail station and Dún an Rí Forest Park (if not already in place).

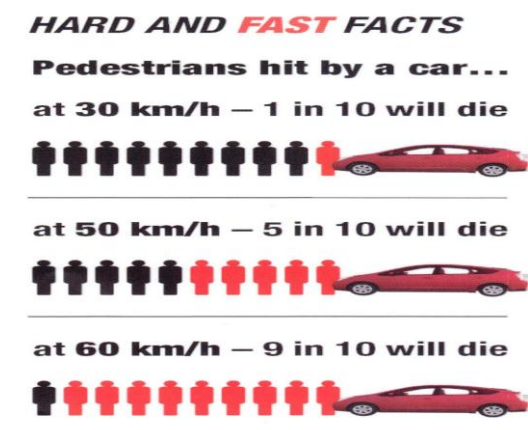


Figure 1 – Outcomes from Car Impacts with Pedestrians as a function of speed

6.2 Cycle Stands

It is strongly recommended that the opportunity is seized by the Local Authority to introduce plenty of (attractive and sheltered!) bicycle parking stands at amenities and in built-up areas along and next to the proposed facility. Such cycle parking stands will be well received by cycling tourists and by locals, and encourage visitors, in particular, to stop off and visit. For details of cycle parking planning and design, see Chapter 5 of the National Cycle Manual (National Transport Authority 2012).

6.3 Public Art

An Taisce acknowledges that very long stretches of cycle route through largely unchanging surroundings can create a less than ideally stimulating environment. Canal-side and railway line cycle and walking routes can suffer particularly from this weakness.

It is for this reason that public art is an essential element of the UK National Cycle Network. It is strongly recommended that the design consultants and the Council reflect on the great potential for enhancing the visual interest and place-making dimensions of the route by incorporating quality public art and other design features into the scheme. (See, for example, the website of Sustrans as per the list of references).

6.4 Biodiversity and route maintenance.

At this point we wish to note that the designers of the scheme need to plan a maintenance regime for the route. It may be inappropriate to use tractor mounted cutters or to apply herbicides along this corridor, so the regime needs to account for how vegetation such as briars will be trimmed back so as to maintain an accessible route for all users while retaining the biodiversity.

6.5 Invasive Species

The Part VIII proposal does not mention invasive species - such as Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*). Should this be present, there is the danger of it spreading quickly and causing serious damage to the greenway in terms of cracking the surfaces and leading to their rapid deterioration. This could ultimately discourage the public from using the greenway and throw a question mark over the investment. It is recommended that a survey is carried out to check for invasive species and, should any be found, that a containment plan is put in place to stop them spreading.

7. Conclusion

An Taisce warmly welcomes the construction of a high quality cycling route from Navan to Kingscourt. We believe that the facility has great potential to help create a wonderful tourism and recreational product especially for those based in Counties Meath and Cavan. If carefully linked to local amenities, it could also become a terrific utility cycling route.

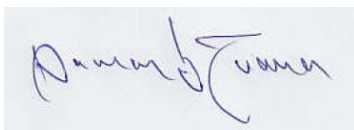
We would however emphasise the following points:

- There needs to be high quality connections to *the cycleway* to encourage both local utility cycling and enhance the visitor experience
- The greenway needs to be widened along certain stretches of the route. In particular, a 2.0m wide space between fences along the narrow embankments *is far too narrow*. Such a confined space will cause problems for users and lower the quality of the experience.
- There is a great need for widespread 30km/h zones in the built-up areas alongside the greenway so as to complement the proposed facility, improve general safety for pedestrians and cyclists, and encourage visiting cyclists to explore the adjacent towns.
- The use of public art to adorn the route would enhance the visitor experience

An Taisce trusts that our commentary will assist Meath County Council – and Cavan County Council - with the planning of the greenway.

I would be grateful if you could acknowledge receipt of this submission and advise us of any further decisions made in regard to this application.

Yours sincerely,



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