

Rec by email
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UM

RESPONSE BY CRAIGAVON BOROUGH COUNCIL TO THE DRD "DRAFT SUB-REGIONAL TRANSPORT PLAN 2015"

1. GENERAL

In general, Craigavon Borough Council welcomes the fact that the Department for Regional Development is preparing the Sub-Regional Transport Plan (SRTP) together with the generous funding promised by the Minister to implement the Plan.

2. CONCERN

There are however a number of issues which give cause for concern. Craigavon Borough Council would wish to raise the issue of a distinct lack of consultation with the corporate voice of Local Government i.e. NILGA, in general and local representative bodies including Council itself, in particular, together with an absence of cognisance given to major local concerns previously expressed to DRD Road Service on numerous occasions. This Council is of the opinion that the Consultants and through them the Department itself would have been much better informed of Council, as the locally elected body, together with the Town Companies of Portadown 2000 and Lurgan Forward, which after all were established with a view to regenerating the towns and improve the lives of their inhabitants, had been consulted.

There are a number of glaring inaccuracies contained in the Draft SRTP 2015 Technical Supplement for the Craigavon Borough Council area which typify the lack of local knowledge displayed by the consultants, e.g. "the Castle Place gyratory" is referred to whereas this is in fact "Castle Street".

Both towns have in recent years and at considerable expense to the public purse, completed Development Framework documents which would have proved useful in not only identifying existing development proposals but also areas for which development potential existed. Indeed, DRD Roads Service was represented at senior level on the Development Framework Steering Groups yet there is no reference in the Draft SRTP to this whole process.

It is understood from a meeting held with DRD Road Service representatives that the only bodies consulted were:- various offices of DRD Roads Service, Planning Service, Translink and the PSNI, in terms of accident statistics.

At the same meeting, DRD representatives could not advise as to how traffic models in terms of trips and car parking could have taken cognisance of Town Centre Boundaries in the Craigavon Borough as these have not yet been

adapted as part of the Craigavon Area Plan 2010. This is significant especially in the case of Portadown where approximately 30 acres would either be included within the Town Centre Boundary or not.

3. COUNCIL CONSULTATIONS

Council has consulted with a number of bodies and their comments, together with Council observations, are included below:-

3.1 LURGAN FORWARD

5.4 of the Draft SRTP Technical Supplement cites three issues under the heading of "Current Principal Problems":

- Town Centre congestion at peak hours around the Church Place gyratory and Queen Street/Avenue Road signals,
- Significant levels of illegal parking, particularly in core town centre area which is adding to town centre congestion,
- Poor town centre environment for walking and cycling.

However, Council is in possession of an extract from a report prepared by Atkins who, it is understood, were the consultants responsible for the analysis of the Craigavon Borough Technical Supplement. This extract would indicate that six areas of Lurgan town centre highway network, were identified as having congestion problems including the Church Place gyratory and William Street level crossing. However, it would appear that despite fairly extensive reports on potential solutions, financial implications of dealing with the level crossing resulted in its being dropped from the Draft SRTP Technical Supplement.

Council has consistently raised the issue of the William Street level crossing with a number of statutory bodies including DRD Road Service over many years and is dismayed at the fact that the problem has once again been set aside.

Even though the Church Place gyratory is identified and manages to be included in the Technical Supplement, the problem is not dealt with. Instead only a proposed highway scheme i.e. the extension of Millennium Way, which has been promised for many years now, has been identified together with a small number of junction improvements.

In terms of Public Transport, it is considered that the size of the town merits a bus station which would greatly alleviate the traffic congestion in the town centre with buses "stopping over" at locations which should simply be pick up and drop off points.

3.2 PORTADOWN 2000

9.4 of the draft SRTP Technical Supplement cites three 'Current Principal Problems', i.e.:

- Town Centre congestion at peak hours due to substantial through traffic movements from Northway/Corcrain Road junction and Castle Place gyratory,
- Significant levels of illegal parking, particularly in core town centre area which is adding to town centre congestion,
- Poor town centre environment for walking and cycling.

Apart from the fact that the reference to "Castle Place" should read "Castle Street", once again, while this problem has been identified, the proposals do not deal with it.

It is believed that the proposed works will not deal effectively with the through traffic problems in Portadown town centre - only with roads which by-pass the town i.e. in terms of the Mahon Road/Armagh Road connector and the stretch of Northway leading to the M12 link.

What is needed is a strategic overview in light of the Portadown Development Framework to deal with existing and potential traffic flow issues into and out of Portadown Town Centre including: - West Street, Church Street, Gilford Road, Carrickblacker Road, Bridge Street, Castle Street, Obins Street, Woodhouse Street and Tandragee Road/Thomas Street.

Council is on record in respect of the need for a third bridge across the River Bann in Portadown. As a result of the Development Framework, this project may in fact be facilitated by the provision of a road, funded by the private sector, to the banks of the River Bann. While this road and bridge actually appears in the Craigavon Area Plan 2010 as a 'Protected Road Line' and is listed in the Area Plan as being part of a 'Major Roads Planning Schedule', no mention is made of it in the Draft SRTP.

The proposals, as currently identified, are considered to be inadequate to deal with the problems identified by the consultants and included in the Technical Supplement. It is considered imperative, given the level of expenditure proposed, that a further period be granted to permit a review of the Draft Plan and consultation with Craigavon Borough Council together with Portadown 2000 to ensure that the monies expended will have an actual impact on this town.

Page 84 of the Draft Sub-Regional Transport Plan 2015 includes an objective of “Major refurbishment of bus stations atPortadown.....”. It would appear from this that the consultants were not aware of the fact that Portadown, despite its size and population does not have a bus station nor a bus/rail station but rather a few spaces along the Northway for buses to park in, adjacent to the railway station. Should a bus station be provided, this would in turn alleviate some of the congestion in the town centre where, as in the case of Lurgan, buses tend to ‘stop over’ at drop off and pick up points.

3.3 RECREATION DEVELOPMENT UNIT – LEISURE DEVELOPMENT SECTION, CRAIGAVON BOROUGH COUNCIL

At present this unit comments on planning applications for all housing and related commercial developments with regard to green space, transport corridors for encouraging alternatives to the car, conservation and formal play areas.

The purpose of this is to contribute to delivering the Council's Corporate Aim to create a healthy and sustainable Craigavon. This can be furthered through the SRTP. Provision for walking, cycling and public transport is important so that a comprehensive network of safe and well managed routes are developed to encourage people to take physical exercise, to improve the environment and to contribute to quality of life.

The Craigavon Cycle Forum is a multi-agency body representing all interests in cycling and is developing a Craigavon Cycling Strategy for launch in September 2006. The comments below have been raised at the Forum. One major point is that it is important to get the right blueprints for Craigavon so that the legacy of cycle/pedestrian network can be consolidated and further developed through the wider Borough.

Specific Comments

The survey work has missed a number of existing routes in the cycling blueprint such as along the south perimeter of the Craigavon City Park – a key Portadown to Lurgan transport route. It also fails to show a cycle route that should be created as part of the extension to the Millennium Way in Lurgan. There are additional routes that could be included in the walking blueprint such as along the main roads through Brownlow where many people walk, particularly because the bus stops are located on the main roads.

The SRTP refers to opportunities for planning gain and it is important that this intention is reflected in the SRTP blueprints, and also in the

Planning Process through the careful implementation of Planning Policy Statements. However, there are questions over the shortcomings of the blueprints in that they fail to indicate routes to key areas of housing, particularly to the sub-urban areas and to areas of large development identified in the Area Plan.

Although DRD are only indicating routes against which DRD budgets can be set, there is a need to indicate strategic transport routes. For example, there is considerable development underway and planned for the Loughgall Road and Northway in Portadown. These will be major transport generators and walking/cycling together with bus routes need to be indicated on the blueprints. A clause should be inserted stating that these are additional routes outside of the DRD funding regime, but that they should be developed as and when funds become available by whatever means available such as through planning gain.

The problem is that if these routes are not shown then there are no other strategic documents or blueprints indicating these routes and the likelihood is that they would not be built as development proceeds.

The Forum has stated that more detail should be available about the principals behind the plan and the research that was carried out to inform the plan, e.g. what research was carried out in the Craigavon area to decide the walking routes. Also, exactly what does a walking route or a cycling route through the centre of Portadown constitute? The Forum would welcome an opportunity for Officers to meet with the DRD and its consultants.

3.4 MONBRIEF COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION – ROSMOYLE ACTION GROUP AND DRUMBEG RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

The following is the response from the above groups:-

“General comments

- It was noted the Draft Sub Regional Transport Plan does not show evidence regarding road transport and traffic transport in the Brownlow area,
- The cycle paths are focused on shopping areas,
- It would appear new housing developments are not linked to cycle routes and footpaths,
- There is a perception that new housing developments are being built very close to the road network thereby preventing pathways from being built adjacent to them.

The above residents groups believe there should be a review of the path network in the Brownlow area, in order to ascertain use and condition.

Given the considerable growth in the housing market there was a desire that the transport plan for the next 10 years should have some degree of fluidity in order to allow for adaptations to be made.

There was a belief that in the case of recent small housing developments, there are not adequate path linkages connecting small phase developments. Similarly there is a perception that older developments are also experiencing a lack of path linkages as a result of new developments. This results in residents experiencing difficulty in moving around the neighbourhood by foot. In addition there is a perception that this has a knock on effect on the economy of the local shops, with residents finding it easier to drive to shopping outlets as opposed to walking to their local shop."

4. CONCLUSIONS

1. The proposals would have been greatly enhanced had there been better local consultation and cognisance taken of concerns raised previously on numerous occasions with DRD;
2. There appears to have been a clear lack of co-ordination in evidence that has been gathered and that which is contained in existing recent studies;
3. While problems have been identified, the proposals for expenditure included in the Draft do not provide solutions;
4. The peculiarities of the Craigavon Area Plan 2010 in terms of the non-adoption of Town Centre Boundaries have not been addressed;
5. Despite the fact that within 15 miles of Lurgan, a number of flyovers are planned and Vesting Orders already commenced to provide for these, nothing has been done to solve the problem of the William Street, Lurgan level crossing and no mention made of the third bridge across the River Bann in Portadown;
6. There should be a clear commitment that any savings accrued from private development funding being spent on infrastructural improvements in Craigavon, which would otherwise have to be spent from the public sector budget, should be "ring-fenced" for expenditure in Craigavon;

7. The whole role of public transport within the Borough and in particular the accessibility of public transport facilities requires close scrutiny especially given the absence of any bus station in the entire Borough. Given the strategic location of Craigavon on the Belfast/Dublin railway link, it is considered that greater emphasis should be placed on car parking facilities at the stations; the need for improvements in station facilities especially in relation to the disabled; and a better correlation between bus and train timetables to enable passengers to make requisite connections. The need for these issues to be examined thoroughly and urgently cannot be over emphasised in the view of Council.
8. Given the increase in population in the Craigavon Borough and the ongoing housing and retail development, especially in the Central Area, it is considered that a new Halt should be established in the Central Area. Whilst suggested sites for such a halt are identified in the Craigavon Area Plan, no reference is made to this in the Draft SRTP.
9. Consideration should be given to identifying a means of counteracting the attraction of free car parking at privately owned edge-of-town centres to ensure that these do not operate at an advantage to Town Centres.
10. Accordingly, Council would seek a further consultation based on the locally identified issues which have been referred to above.