

National Transport Authority

Blanchardstown to City Centre Core Bus Corridor Scheme

Appropriate Assessment Screening Determination

The National Transport Authority (the “NTA”) is proposing to carry out the Blanchardstown to City Centre Core Bus Corridor Scheme (the “**Proposed Scheme**”).

The Proposed Scheme has an overall length of approximately 10.9km and will commence at Junction 3 (Blanchardstown / Mulhuddart) southbound off-slip from the N3. The Proposed Scheme proceeds along the R121 Blanchardstown Road South into the Blanchardstown Shopping Centre. From a new terminus to the north-west of Blanchardstown Shopping Centre the Proposed Scheme is routed onto the N3 Navan Road via the Snugborough Road junction and will follow the N3 and Navan Road as far as the junction with the Old Cabra Road. From here, the Proposed Scheme will be routed along Old Cabra Road, Prussia Street, Manor Street and Stoneybatter to the junction with King Street North. The Proposed Scheme will proceed via Blackhall Place as far as the junction with Ellis Quay, where it will join the prevailing traffic management regime on the North Quays. At the Stoneybatter / Brunswick Street North junction, cyclists proceed along Brunswick Street North, George’s Lane and Queen Street as far as Ellis Quay/ Arran Quay.

The Proposed Scheme, which will provide segregated cycling facilities, bus priority infrastructure and improvement pedestrian facilities, is within the Dublin City Council (DCC) and Fingal County Council (FCC) administrative areas.

The NTA appointed Scott Cawley Ltd. to prepare an Appropriate Assessment Screening Report for the Proposed Scheme to consider, analyse and assess whether in view of best scientific knowledge and objective information and the conservation objectives of the European site(s) (which are discussed further below), if the Proposed Scheme individually or in combination with other plans or projects is likely to have a significant effect on a European Site(s).

The NTA has received and read the Appropriate Assessment Screening Report and has considered its content and its conclusions and recommendation set out therein. Having done this, the NTA agrees with the conclusions and recommendation set out in the Appropriate Assessment Screening Report.

AA Screening Determination

The NTA has determined that an Appropriate Assessment of the Proposed Scheme is required as it cannot exclude, in view of best scientific knowledge and on the basis of objective scientific information, following the screening that the NTA has carried out, that the Proposed Scheme, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, in the absence of mitigation, will have a significant effect on the following 17 European Site(s) (5 SACs and 12 SPAs) in view of the conservation objectives of those site(s):-

1. North Dublin Bay SAC,

2. South Dublin Bay SAC,
3. Howth Head SAC,
4. Rockabill to Dalkey Island SAC,
5. Lambay Island SAC,
6. Skerries Islands SPA,
7. Lambay Island SPA,
8. Howth Head Coast SPA,
9. Ireland's Eye SPA,
10. North Bull Island SPA,
11. South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA,
12. Dalkey Islands SPA,
13. Malahide Estuary SPA,
14. Rockabill SPA,
15. Baldoyle Bay SPA,
16. Rogerstown Estuary SPA and
17. The Murrough SPA.

The NTA has made this determination on the basis of having considered the baseline ecological environment; the extent and characteristics of the Proposed Scheme and having identified the following potential impacts:

- Habitat degradation/effects on Qualifying Interests (QI) / Special Conservation Interest (SCI) species as a result of hydrological impacts;
- Habitat degradation as a result of introducing/spreading non-native invasive species; and
- Disturbance and displacement impacts.

Further detail is provided below on each of the potential impacts identified.

Habitat degradation / effects on QI / SCI species as a result of hydrological impacts

The Proposed Scheme is hydrologically connected to Dublin Bay via the River Tolka, Liffey Estuary Upper and the Royal Canal, as well as a network of interconnecting and established surface or combined sewer/surface water pipes. The general proposed construction works within the footprint of the Proposed Scheme largely include works to existing pavements and road surfaces, and proposed drainage works. The construction of the culvert extension at the Tolka Bridge, Road widening of the N3 with an extension of the existing Mill Road Bridge, and the construction of pedestrian ramps accessing the N3 from Mill Road will include vegetation clearance, excavations, structural works, and the operation of machinery. The potential release of contaminated surface water runoff and / or an accidental spillage or pollution event into any surface water features during construction, or operation, has the potential to affect water quality in the receiving aquatic environment.

In a potential worst case scenario, in the absence of mitigation measures, the release of contaminated surface water runoff and/or an accidental spillage or pollution event into any surface water features during construction, or operation, also has the potential to affect mobile SCI bird species and QI mammal species that commute, forage and loaf in Dublin Bay i.e., birds associated with Skerries Islands SPA, Rockabill SPA and Lambay Island SPA, Baldoyle Bay SPA, Ireland's Eye SPA, North Dublin Bay SPA, South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA, Malahide Estuary SPA, Rogerstown Estuary SPA, Howth Head Coast SPA, Dalkey Islands SPA, The Murrough SPA and, marine mammals associated with Rockabill to Dalkey Island SAC and Lambay Island SAC. This potential reduction in water quality (either alone or in combination with other pressures on water quality) could result in the degradation of sensitive habitats present within downstream European sites, which in turn would negatively affect the SCI bird species that rely upon these habitats as foraging and/or roosting habitat. It could also negatively affect the quantity and quality of prey available to SCI and QI populations. In a worst case scenario these potential impacts could occur to such a degree that the conservation objectives of the Skerries Islands SPA, Rockabill SPA and Lambay Island SPA, Ireland's Eye SPA, North Dublin Bay SPA, South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA, Baldoyle Bay SPA, Malahide Estuary SPA, Rogerstown SPA, Dalkey Islands SPA, Murrough SPA, Rockabill to Dalkey Island SAC and Lambay Island SAC are undermined.

As the Proposed Scheme has the potential to result in habitat degradation and effects on the qualifying/special conservation interest species of European sites as the result of hydrological impacts, there is the potential for in combination effects to occur.

Habitat degradation as a result of introducing/spreading non-native invasive species

There are five areas of Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*, a species listed on the Third Schedule of the (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations present in close proximity to, the Proposed Scheme. The desktop review returned records of seven species listed on the Third Schedule of the Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, in the vicinity of the Proposed Scheme. Therefore, there is potential for invasive species to spread or be introduced, during construction and/or routine maintenance / management works, to terrestrial habitat areas in European sites downstream in Dublin Bay via watercourses (i.e. North Dublin Bay SAC, South Dublin Bay SAC, North Bull Island SPA and South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA). The introduction and/or spread of these invasive species to downstream European sites could potentially result in the degradation of existing habitats present, in particular, coastal habitats not permanently or regularly inundated by seawater. These species may outcompete other native species present, negatively impacting the species composition, diversity and abundance and the physical structural integrity of the habitat. This in turn could undermine the conservation objectives of these European sites.

Disturbance and displacement impacts

A temporary and/or permanent increase in noise, vibration and / or human activity levels during the construction of the Proposed Scheme could result in the disturbance to and / or displacement of fauna species present within the vicinity of the Proposed Scheme. For mammal species such as otter, disturbance effects would not be expected to extend beyond 150m. For wintering birds, disturbance effects would not be expected to extend beyond a distance of approximately 300m, as noise levels associated with general construction activities would attenuate to close to background levels at that distance. There are no European sites within the disturbance zone of influence of the Proposed Scheme.

There are a number of SPAs which are designated for SCI species that are known to forage and / or roost at inland sites across Dublin, such as amenity grassland playing pitches (i.e. Malahide Estuary SPA, Baldoyle Bay SPA, North Bull Island SPA, South Dublin Bay and River Tolka SPA and Rogerstown Estuary SPA, Skerries Islands SPA, Ireland's Eye SPA and Lambay Island SPA). These species included include light-bellied brent goose, lapwing, oystercatcher, black-headed gull, herring gull and lesser black-backed gull. Suitable inland foraging / roosting sites, which these bird species utilise, are located within the

potential zone of influence of the Proposed Scheme. Therefore, there is potential for the Proposed Scheme to result in the disturbance/displacement of SCI bird species associated with SPA populations.

Summary

The hydrological, non-native invasive species and disturbance and displacement impacts associated with the Proposed Scheme have the potential to affect the receiving environment and, consequently, have the potential to affect the conservation objectives supporting the QI /SCI of a European site(s). Therefore, the potential for the Proposed Scheme to have likely significant effects on a European site(s) cannot be excluded.

In-combination effects

There is the potential for developments planned or granted, or those implemented under a range of land use and other plans, to lie either within European sites, or be situated in a location where they may be within the zone of influence of the European sites which also fall within the zone of influence of the Proposed Scheme.

Key development projects with potential for in-combination effects due to their size, nature and/or location include other Core Bus Corridor Schemes, MetroLink, upgrades to or new rail infrastructure, utility infrastructure including proposed or consented water utility improvement.

The potential for in combination effects between these plans and projects and the Proposed Scheme arises via the same pathways for potential effects as identified for the Proposed Scheme (i.e. hydrological, invasive species, air quality, and disturbance and displacement effects) which could act in combination with similar effects and pathways arising from the various plans.

Therefore, the potential for the following in combination effects arising from plans and projects cannot be ruled out:

- Habitat degradation/effects on QI/SCI species as a result of hydrological impacts (for example reduction in water quality in catchments draining to Dublin Bay affecting the conservation objectives supporting aquatic habitats and species in North Dublin Bay SAC, South Dublin Bay SAC, Howth Head SAC, Howth Head Coast SPA, Rockabill to Dalkey Island SAC, Lambay Island SAC, North Bull Island SPA, South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA, Dalkey Islands SPA,, Baldoyle Bay SPA, Ireland's Eye SPA, Skerries Islands SPA, Rockabill SPA, Lambay Island SPA, Malahide Estuary SPA, Rogerstown Estuary SPA, and The Murrrough SPA);
- Habitat degradation as a result of introducing/spreading non-native invasive species; and,
- Disturbance and displacement impacts (for example *ex-situ* inland feeding sites which are utilised by SCI wintering bird species within the potential disturbance ZoI of the Proposed Scheme for Malahide Estuary SPA, Baldoyle Bay SPA, Rogerstown Estuary SPA, North Bull Island SPA and South Dublin Bay and River Tolka SPA, Skerries Islands SPA, Lambay Island SPA, Ireland's Eye SPA, Rockabill SPA and The Murrrough SPA.

Conclusions of Screening Assessment Process

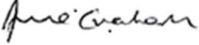
Following an examination, analysis and evaluation of all the relevant information and in view of best scientific knowledge, and applying the precautionary principle, it can be concluded that there is the possibility for significant effects on the following European sites, in the absence of mitigation, either arising from the project alone or in combination with other plans and projects, as a result of hydrological impacts, invasive species and disturbance and displacement impacts: North Dublin Bay SAC, South Dublin Bay SAC, Howth Head SAC, Lambay Island SAC, Rockabill to Dalkey Island SAC, North Bull Island SPA,

South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA, Howth Head Coast SPA, Dalkey Islands SPA, Malahide Estuary SPA, Baldoyle Bay SPA, Rogerstown Estuary SPA, Skerries Islands SPA, Lambay Island SPA, Rockabill SPA, Ireland's Eye SPA and The Murrough SPA.

In reaching this conclusion, the nature of the project and its potential relationship with all European sites within the zone of influence, and their conservation objectives, have been fully considered.

The NTA has requested that Scott Cawley Ltd. prepare and finalise a Natura Impact Statement which will be submitted to An Bord Pleanála with an application for approval for the Proposed Scheme.

This determination is available for inspection at the National Transport Authority Offices, Dún Scéine, Harcourt Lane, Dublin 2, D02 WT20 and on its website at www.busconnects.ie.

Signed:  _____

For and on behalf of the BusConnects Programme Board of the NTA

Dated:- 20.04.2022