

## Record of Determination Annex II relevant projects

Name of project:

A1 Junctions Phase 2 (A1J2) road improvement scheme.

Location (including national grid reference):

Start – Hillsborough (324660, 359966)  
End – Loughbrickland (310720, 341760)

Qualifying criteria for Annex II relevant project:

Improvement element of project is >1ha	✓	Project is located within or partially within 'sensitive' area		Other with potential for significant effect (e.g. adjacent to sensitive site)	✓
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### A. Description of project:

The A1 Dual Carriageway forms part of a strategically important north-south arterial route connecting the major cities and ports of Belfast and Dublin. It forms part of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Priority Project 13 and is classified as a Key Transport Corridor (KTC) within the Regional Strategic Transport Network. It also acts as the key transport link between the communities in the area and provides a strategic link to Belfast from the South-East of the Province. In this regard, it is considered to have national, regional and local significance both economically and socially.

The section of the A1 under consideration is an approximate 25km long stretch of all-purpose dual carriageway, extending from the Hillsborough Roundabout in the north (approximately 40,000 vehicles/day), to Loughbrickland in the south (approximately 22,000 vehicles/day). It is noted that this stretch of carriageway was designed and constructed to older highway standards, some sections up to forty years ago. As such, it has characteristics that would no longer be considered desirable and are presenting safety issues. These issues, particularly associated with the significant number of at-grade crossings and access points onto the carriageway, which are coupled with sections of poor horizontal alignment, vertical alignment, visibility and narrow central reserves.

Over the years, the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) have recognised the need to upgrade this section of carriageway to reflect current standards and enhance the overall safety of the route. In doing so, they have already completed an initial stage of works (A1J1), which involved the construction of four Compact Grade Separated Junctions (CGSJ) at Hillsborough, Dromore, Banbridge and Loughbrickland. The construction of these junctions provided grade separated access from both sides of the carriageway, thereby enabling the central reserve cross-over points to be closed and central reserve safety barrier provided along the extents of each localised junction.

Stages 1 and 2 of the scheme assessment were completed in 2012 and 2014 respectively in accordance with TD37/93 Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB). DfI have now moved to Stage 3 of this overall project which involves producing a Stage 3 Scheme Assessment Report, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report and Draft Statutory Orders.

The principal physical aspects of the proposed A1J2 scheme are:

- closure of all gaps in the central median between Hillsborough Roundabout and Loughbrickland;
- provision of a continuous central safety barrier between Hillsborough Roundabout and Loughbrickland;
- the provision of grade separated junctions at four locations: Listullycurran Road, Gowdystown Road, Skeltons Road / Drumreath Road and Waringsford Road and the creation of a northbound on-slip

to the A1 from Castlewellan Road, Banbridge;

- modifications to minor road junctions. Where possible selected minor road junctions will either be closed or be incorporated into the proposed compact grade separated junctions (CGSJ). The remaining road junctions will operate as left-in/left-out only.
- a link road is to be provided between Milebush Road and the Hillsborough Road CGSJ, Dromore.

#### B. Description of local environment, including statutory and non-statutory designations:

The surrounding environment is rural with primarily agricultural land, apart from the settlement areas of Hillsborough, Dromore, Banbridge and Loughbrickland. Commercial facilities are located at various locations along or close to the existing A1 route, including two quarry sites. The existing A1 route crosses the Bann and Lagan Rivers and a number of more minor watercourses. There are 1 in 100 year fluvial flood plain areas identified in the vicinity of the existing road, particularly at Warringsford Road Junction and the Milebush Road Link.

The nearest SPA to the project is Lough Neagh and Lough Beg SPA (approximately 34km), while the nearest SAC to the project is Peatlands Park SAC (approximately 47km). Ecological surveys undertaken in the vicinity of the existing A1 route indicate that there is extensive bat activity in the vicinity of the existing route. Badger activity and setts have been observed in relative close proximity to the existing road, with particular concentration observed in the general vicinity of existing junctions with Gowdystown Road and Skeltons Road.

There are no particular landscapes of historical or cultural value adjacent to the existing A1 route. There are sensitive archaeological features on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) in close proximity to the A1 junction with Gowdystown Road (rath), Skeltons Road (rath & enclosure) and Warringsford Road (enclosure). The existing A1 route is located within two Regional Landscape Character Areas (1. Down Drumlins & Holywood Hills and 2. Newry Valley and Upper Bann) and within or adjacent to six Local Landscape Character Areas (1. Kilwarlin Plateau, 2. Hillsborough Slopes, 3. Dromore Lowlands, 4. North Banbridge Hills, 5. Armagh/Banbridge Hills and 6. Iveagh Slopes).

#### C. Summary of main environmental effects of the project:

Potential adverse impacts include:

**Heritage** - There are no particular landscapes of historical or cultural value that are likely to be impacted by the proposed A1J2 scheme. There are sensitive archaeological features on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) in close proximity to Gowdystown Road Junction (rath), Skeltons Road Junction (rath & enclosure) and Warringsford Road Junction (enclosure). With the appropriate mitigation measures in place, there will be no significant impacts on these features.

**Biodiversity** - Some of the minor watercourses link into rivers, which ultimately flow into designated sites of ecological interest as described under directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC. A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Test of Likely Significance (ToLS) is being prepared for the proposed A1J2 scheme which will describe in detail all of the likely impacts from the proposed A1J2 scheme at all relevant designated sites in the wider study area. The nearest SPA to the project is Lough Neagh and Lough Beg SPA (approximately 34km), while the nearest SAC to the project is Peatlands Park SAC (approximately 47km).

The proposed A1J2 scheme will not impact directly on any priority habitats as described in the habitats directive, however the proposed scheme has the potential to impact significantly on priority species. The most significant likely impact on ecological species is on existing badger setts, particularly in the vicinity of Gowdystown Road and Skeltons Road junctions. Bat activity has been identified in the vicinity of all of the proposed junctions and the proposed scheme has the potential to impact on bat foraging habitat and bat roost locations. Extensive habitat and species surveys have been undertaken and are on-going in the vicinity of all of the proposed A1J2 scheme and this information will be used as part of a detailed assessment

of the potential impacts on the local biodiversity, which will be included in the EIA Report. Some of these impacts will be permanent and irreversible, however the EIA Report will include mitigation measures to reduce and compensate for any such impacts.

**Water Environment** – The works associated with the proposed A1J2 scheme do not directly impact on any significant watercourses in the study area, however there are a number of minor watercourses that will be directly impacted and will require some culverting. Minor watercourses are located in the vicinity of all of the junction locations except for the Castlewellan Rd junction. The design and drainage of the scheme in the vicinity of these watercourses is still being developed and the potential impact from these works will be assessed in full in the water quality section of the EIA Report. The existing A1 route crosses the River Bann and River Lagan but no works from the proposed A1J2 scheme will take place in close proximity to these rivers.

There are existing 1:100yr flood areas in the vicinity of the proposed A1J2 scheme, particularly at Warringsford Road Junction and the Milebush Road Link. Detailed flood modelling as part of the EIA will determine the potential for flood impacts as a result of the proposed A1J2 scheme, which will feed into the appropriate mitigation measures for the project.

**Noise & Air Quality** – There is potential for significant noise and air quality / dust impacts from construction works associated with all of the junction locations. In particular, the proposed works at the Castlewellan Road junction are adjacent to a densely populated residential area. Construction phase impacts will be short-term and with the appropriate mitigation measures in place as outlined in the EIA Report, will be reduced to within acceptable levels as outlined in the relevant guidance documents.

During the operational phase, there is the potential for noise and air quality impacts from the updated junctions and any associated link roads, especially where new portions of road are in relative close proximity to existing properties. However, any potential impact on residents adjacent to this junction will be reduced with the appropriate mitigation measures (e.g. noise barriers etc.) where the relevant standard guidance documentation dictate that this is required.

**Landscape & Visual** – The proposed A1J2 scheme is located within two Regional Landscape Character Areas (1. Down Drumlins & Holywood Hills and 2. Newry Valley and Upper Bann) and within or adjacent to six Local Landscape Character Areas (1. Kilwarlin Plateau, 2. Hillsborough Slopes, 3. Dromore Lowlands, 4. North Banbridge Hills, 5. Armagh/Banbridge Hills and 6. Iveagh Slopes). The most significant potential impact on these landscape character areas will be from the construction of the new junctions and link roads. More localised visual impacts will be experienced at residential properties that are located in close proximity to the new junctions and link roads.

**Human Environment** – As the proposed A1J2 scheme will result in the closure of gaps in the central median and the closure/alteration to selected minor road junctions, some residents and businesses will experience alterations to travel times and the need for detours as a result of the proposed scheme.

D. Details of extent of environmental impact assessment work undertaken and summary of any consultation undertaken with the statutory consultation bodies:

DMRB Vol 11 Stage 1 and Stage 2 Environmental Assessments have been undertaken by AECOM. The Stage 1 assessment outlined the proposed study area, possible corridors and highlighted topic-specific methodologies to be used for future assessment. The Stage 1 Assessment concluded that further assessment would be required to determine the nature and scale of any environmental impacts. The stage 2 Assessments included:

- Heritage walkover surveys;
- Review of the NIEA online archaeological and heritage assets database;

- Review of historic mapping;
- Phase 1 ecological surveys
- Bat surveys;

Consultation and detailed assessments will be undertaken as part of the Stage 3 detailed design.

**E. Determination decision, statement of case in support if this decision:**

This project is an Annex II project under Directive 2011/92/EU as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU. The area of the proposed works is expected to be greater than 50ha and therefore the project has been determined to be a 'Relevant Project' in accordance with Part V of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993. Having considered the selection criteria in Annex III of the Directive, the project will be made subject to an EIA due to the following:

1. Characteristics of the Project: (a) size and design of whole project; (c) use of natural resources; (d) production of waste; (e) pollution and nuisances; (g) risks to human health;
2. Location of Project: (a) existing and approved land use; (b) the relative abundance, availability, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources in the area and its underground; (c) the absorption capacity of the natural environment;
3. Type and characteristics of the project: (a) magnitude and spatial extent of the impact; (b) nature of the impact; (d) intensity and complexity of the impact; (e) probability of the impact; (f) expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact; (h) the possibility of effectively reducing the impact.

It has therefore been determined that a statutory Environmental Impact Assessment Report will be carried out in line with the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Volume 11 and all other relevant specialist guidance documents to inform the design process.

**File references of supporting documentation for future reference:**

A1 Junctions Phase 2 Stage 1 Scheme Assessment Report (AECOM, October 2011)

A1 Junctions Phase 2 Stage 2 Scheme Assessment Report (AECOM, March 2014)

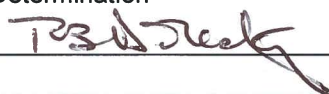
I have determined that a statutory Environmental Impact Assessment Report is required for this project.

Signature / Project Sponsor: Liam McEvoy

Dated: 11 January 2018

Authorisation to publish Notice of Determination

Signature Director of Engineering:



Dated: 22-1-2018