

S2S Sandymount- Blackrock Corridor Study

By

National Transport Authority

Initial Comments by the S2S Support Group

1: Introduction

This long awaited report on the last missing seafront section of the Sutton to Sandycove Promenade and Cycleway (S2S) has been published by the National Transport Authority (NTA) for public consultation. To quote the introduction to the report:

“The purpose of the Sandymount /Merrion to Blackrock Corridor Study is to provide a fresh assessment of the possible layouts for a cycleway and walking route around Dublin Bay south, and to re-evaluate the environmental issues and cost factors.

Because the route parallels closely, and effectively overlaps, the Rock Road and Merrion Road corridor between Blackrock and Merrion, this study also considers the transport needs along this road corridor – walking, cycling, public transport and traffic – in order to ensure a holistic approach to the development of an integrated transport proposal.”

The study therefore looks at how the S2S can be achieved along the coast and at the same time, it looks at the facilities for cyclists and pedestrians on the Merrion/ Rock Road, which is a major commuter route in Dublin. Both of these routes come together at the Merrion Gates where the link from the Merrion Road to the Strand Road crosses the railway line. All of these existing roads and junctions will be very familiar to listeners of the morning and evening traffic reports due to the constant delays to commuter traffic on the Merrion and Strand roads. There are also delays occasionally to the rail services, caused by incidents involving the gates at the level crossing. All of these problems are inter-related and the decision by the NTA to look at all of them at the same time makes sense.

As this group exists primarily to promote the S2S Project it is not intended to comment on the proposals for the Merrion and Rock Roads.

2: The Proposals:

The study area covers approximately 6.5 Kms of the S2S route from Irishtown to Seapoint. The report breaks this down into 6 sections and the proposals in respect of each of these sections is set out below:

2.1 IRISHTOWN TO SANDYMOUNT PROMENADE (1.5 km)

Part 1: Sean Moore Park

Existing: A 3.2m wide footpath through Sean Moore Park. No cycleway.

Proposed: A new 3.5m two-way cycleway segregated from the footpath by a grass strip.

Comment: This is a practical solution which will provide a traffic free cycleway except where it must cross Sean Moore Rd, which is a controlled junction. No land acquisition is required.

Part 2: Strand Rd from Marine Drive to Newgrove Avenue

Existing: Footpath of variable width beside the road, no cycleway.

Proposed: New 2.5m wide footpath and a 3.5m two-way cycleway with a raised kerb to separate it from the road traffic.

Comment This is accommodated within the existing road except for a 100m strip at Roslyn Park which will have to be acquired.

Part 3: Strand Road from Newgrove Avenue to Gilford Road.

Existing: A variable width pathway beside the road with no cycleway.

Proposed: A new 4.0m boardwalk outside the existing sea wall with a 3m wide two-way cycleway segregated with a raised kerb to separate it from the road.

Comment: This is a practical solution which will provide a traffic free cycleway and boardwalk along the seafront.

2.2: SANDYMOUNT PROMENADE (1.1 kms)

Existing: A 3,7m wide walkway in the linear park, no cycleway.

Proposed: Existing walkway retained. A new 3.5m two-way cycle inside the walkway with a 1.5m buffer zone between the two. No change to the road layout.

Comment: There is a small part of about 100m at the south end of this section where the linear park ends that has to be accommodated on the existing road and the widths of the walkway and the cycleway are constrained. A modest boardwalk for this section should be considered for this section. Aside from that, it is a very good solution overall.

2.3: MERRION GATES (300m)

Existing: A path of variable width alongside the road from the end of the promenade to the Merrion Gates. There is no cycleway. There are approximately 20 private houses on

the sea side of the road. The pedestrian, cycle road traffic and train movements in the area are dominated by the effects of the automated level crossing resulting in traffic backing up on both the Merrion and Strand Roads.

Proposed: A new link road is proposed through the grounds of the Merrion Hall office building on Strand Road and the car park of Our Lady Queen of Peace Church on the Merrion Road. This would cross over the railway line and would be unaffected by train movements. The level crossing at Merrion Gates would then be removed and the south end of Strand Road would become a shared cul-de-sac. This would provide vehicular access for the existing residents while cyclists and pedestrians would be able to access a new underpass to Merrion Road under the railway line at the location of the level crossing.

Comment: This is a bold solution that goes a long way to solve most of the problems created by the level crossing. While it does require the acquisition of some private property it is to be expected that the owners will be properly compensated for any loss. The choice of the layout of the underpass at this location requires further consideration. Overall, the proposal provides a clever solution to a number of difficult obstacles for the S2S.

2.4 MERRION GATES to BOOTERSTOWN (1 km)

Existing: No cycleway nor walkway on the seafront. There is a 2.0m footpath and a cycleway shared with the bus lane on the Merrion Road.

Proposed: The study has taken the view that the current designations of the South Dublin Bay as an SAC and an SPA under the Habitats Directives make it very difficult if not impossible to construct a promenade and cycleway outside the seafront for the section of the route from Merrion Gates to Blackrock as originally planned by the S2S group and as incorporated in most local and national development plans. For that reason the proposal is to relocate it inside the railway line. For this reason it is to accommodate the route on the side of the Merrion Road. It will provide a 3.5m wide two-way cycleway and a 2m footpath segregated from the bus lane and other traffic by a raised kerb.

Comment: The proposal provides much improved facility of cyclists, particularly those who choose to cycle on the remainder of the S2S route. It is however a significant departure from the vision of a continuous seafront, traffic free cycleway and promenade around Dublin Bay. Having regard to the difficulties posed by the Habitats Directives however, it is a tolerable alternative without which other sections of the route could not be complete.

2.5: BOOTERSTOWN TO BLACKROCK (1.4 kms)

Existing: There is no cycleway nor walkway on the seafront between Booterstown and Blackrock. There is a narrow cycleway/walkway through Blackrock Park that further reduces to approximately 1.0m width at Blackrock Station

Proposed: For the same reasons as the previous section the cycleway and walkway are proposed to be located inside the railway line within Blackrock Park, in the location where a narrow cycleway and walkway with a total width of 3m currently exists. The proposal is for a 3.5m cycleway nearest to the railway, a 1.5m wide buffer strip and a 3m wide walkway on the side of the park. It is proposed to acquire a strip of privately owned land at the Blackrock Dart Station to enable the walkway and cycleway to be continued through to Blackrock Village.

Comment: As with the previous section, it is disappointing that it was not found possible to accommodate the route on the seafront. The proposal will however provide a traffic free, full width walkway and cycleway between Booterstown and Blackrock, which is to be welcomed.

2.6 BLACKROCK to SEAPOINT (1.1kms)

Existing: There is no walkway nor cycleway on the seafront between Blackrock and Seapoint.

Proposed: It is proposed to provide a walkway of variable width on the seafront from Blackrock and Brighton Vale to the Martello Tower at Seapoint. Part of the walkway will be inside the sea wall and part will be outside.

The cycleway will not be on the seafront but will be accommodated partly on shared and partly on segregated cycleways through Idrone Terrace, Newtown Avenue and Seapoint Avenue. It is proposed that Seapoint Avenue will become one way for traffic so as to provide a full width two way cycleway.

Comment: The decision to put the cycleway inland and away from the seafront is also disappointing. On the other hand, the proposal to put the walkway on the seafront is a significant gain for the S2S project, which is to be very much welcomed.

3.0 Why not all on the Seafront?

Under the relevant EU Directives agreed by the Irish Government, South Dublin Bay has been designated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) as a Special Area of

Conservation (SAC), which is a general protection for habitats and a Special Protection Area (SPA) which is a habitat for birds. These designations make it difficult to make any changes to the designated areas that might have a risk of damage to the habitat. The present state of knowledge of Dublin Bay is not sufficiently thorough to give confidence to the NPWS that damage would not be caused by allowing the construction and use of a seafront walkway and cycleway in the section between Merrion Gates and Blackrock. It is an extremely complex issue which can take time to resolve.

It must be remembered however that the S2S is also a project with serious environmental objectives and gains. The potential benefits of an 11 km traffic free cycleway from Sandycove to the City Centre for the environment is enormous. It's value as an urban cycle way that could be safely used by children to learn to cycle and to get to the numerous schools along the route is also well recognised. The combination of the two would help to bring about the modal shift that is needed in Dublin to get more people out of cars and onto bicycles and walking which would make a significant contribution to the reduction in the use of fossil fuels and carbon emissions.

Many would also argue that, with imaginative design, the S2S on the seafront could also have significant benefits for the habitats by allowing the citizens and visitors to discreetly observe and enjoy the seafront and the spectacle of the birds feeding on the mudflats, without intruding into the habitat. It would increase public awareness of the habitat and provide the authorities with the opportunity to improve the measures to reduce disturbance of the birds with improved information and supervision.

Aside from those environmental benefits, the general health of the community would be promoted by the availability of a continuous seafront walkway.

4.0 Overall Assessment of the proposals:

It is informative to compare what is proposed in this study with the original concept for this 6.5 km section of the S2S:

Consistent with the original proposal for S2S are:

- A combined high quality walkway and cycleway for a distance of 2.9kms from Irishtown to Merrion Gates where no cycleway currently exists and the walkway is of variable quality.

- A possible solution for the Merrion Gates which up to now, posed an intractable problem for the S2S.
- A seafront walkway for a distance of 1.1km between Blackrock and Seapoint.

Not Consistent with the original proposal for S2S

- A walkway that is not on the seafront for 2.4 kms from Merrion Gates to Blackrock.
- A cycleway which is not on the seafront for 3.5 kms from Merrion Gates to Seapoint

Summary and Conclusion

This 6.5 km of the S2S contains some of the biggest challenges to the completion of the overall 22km route from Sutton to Sandycove. The study proposes a solutions on the seafront which fully achieve the objectives for about half of the 6.5 kms. The other half is inland on upgraded and segregated cycleways and walkways. What is proposed is practical and achievable. It does not preclude the completion of the remaining sections of the S2S on the seafront- if and when solutions can be found to the environmental issues. While it is not the complete solution that supporters of the S2S project would have hoped for, it is a very significant step forward and provides an alternative solution for those sections where it is not currently possible to construct the project on the seafront. It is our hope that with further study and discussion with the relevant bodies a solution can be found that will allow the project to be completed as originally envisaged at some time in the future.

S2S Admin

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