

Dublin Port and the Sutton to Sandycove Walkway and Cycleway (S2S)

Introduction

To complete the 22kms of the S2S around the coast of Dublin Bay it must go through or around Dublin Port to get from Clontarf on the northside to Ringsend and Sandymount on the southside. This poses a huge problem. It is helpful to have some understanding of the Port's operations and its relationship to the city and the road network to appreciate the challenge. The following sets out some of those complexities and how it is planned to deal with them.



Dublin Port – the Challenges

Dublin Port handles almost 50% of all trade in the Republic of Ireland. Located in the heart of Dublin City, at the hub of the national road and rail network, the Port is a key strategic access point for Ireland and in particular the Dublin area. The major part of the Port facilities is located on the north side of the river Liffey and a smaller section is on the south. The two parts are currently linked by the Thomas Clarke Bridge (East Link Bridge). East Wall Road forms the boundary between the Port on the north side of the river and the City Centre. It is along this road that a large amount of the traffic between the two sections of the port and between the Port itself and the Port Tunnel travels. There is also a direct link at Promenade Rd between Dublin Port and the Port Tunnel. These roads have the largest concentration of heavy goods vehicles (HGV) anywhere in the country. To make the challenge even more difficult, any realistic plan must take account of the future expansion of the Port, which is expected to double by 2040. In addition to updating and rationalizing the basic infrastructure, the Port Company has made it a requirement that the port should be better integrated with the city and be more user friendly for pedestrians and cyclists.



Fig 1. East Wall Road looking South from near the entrance to the Port Tunnel. The main port lands are on the left.

Dublin Port Masterplan 2012-2040 Starting in 2012, the Port Company published a Master Plan for the development of the Port up to 2040. The plan, which was updated in 2018, proposes bold and imaginative solutions to address the objectives. At the core of the plan are several critical infrastructural proposals that make it possible to meet the objectives.

A New Bridge across the Liffey: Dublin Port is proposing to build a new bridge east of the existing East Link Bridge. This new bridge will link the port facilities on the south side of the river directly to those on the north side and is referred to as the **Southern Port Access Route (SPAR)**. It will be used almost exclusively by internal Port traffic and remove all HGVs from the existing East Link Bridge and East Wall Road. The effect of this will be significant.

Rationalizing Internal Circulation: Much of the traffic in and out of the Port uses East Wall Road to get to different facilities within the Port. By altering the internal road network, it will provide better circulation and allow access to almost all parts of the Port, including the facilities south of the river, on the internal roads. This makes it possible to concentrate the vast majority of all the traffic into **one major access point for the entire Port at Promenade Road**, which is at the north-west corner of the lands, with links directly to and from the **Dublin Port Tunnel**.

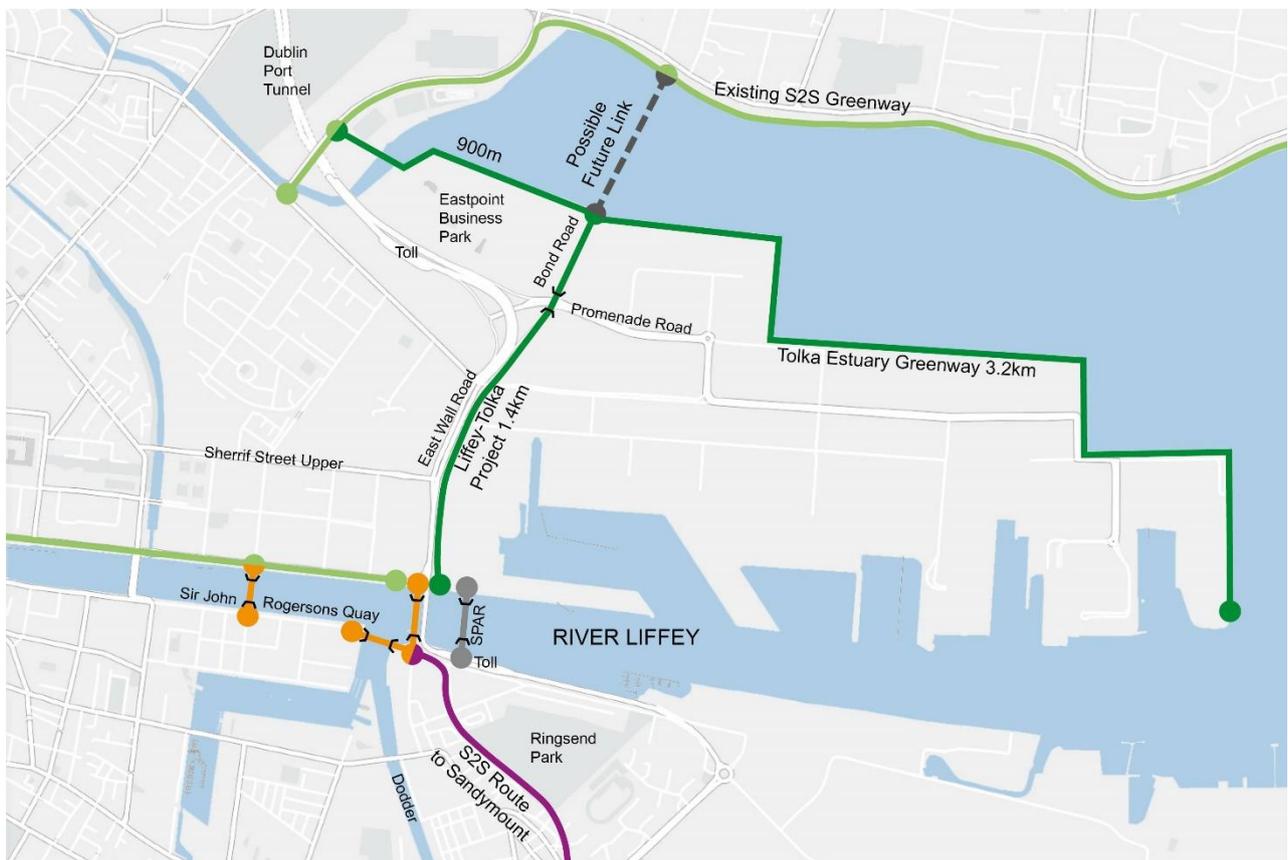


Fig 2. Map shows main elements of the Port Masterplan greenways and related proposals outside the Port

Calming of East Wall Road: As a result of the proposals mentioned above it will be possible to eliminate almost all of the existing Port related HGVs on East Wall Road. Some of the existing access gates to the Port from East Wall will be closed and others will have significantly reduced traffic.

Better Access for Pedestrians and Cyclists: The master plan proposed a network of segregated walkways/cycleways within the port area. The **Liffey-Tolka Project** is a segregated cycle and pedestrian greenway that goes 1.4kms from the **East Link Bridge** along the east side of East Wall Road and Bond Road to the Tolka Estuary.

The Tolka Estuary Greenway will run 3.2 kms from the existing Ferry Terminal at the East end of the Port, along the shore of the Tolka Estuary to **Bond Road**. In co-operation with the East Point Business Park, it could be extended westwards by approx. 900m along the shore of the Estuary to Alfie Byrne Road. A considerable length of this section is already in place, which will require some upgrading/widening. Access will also be provided to visitor attractions in various parts of the Port, including historic buildings and features in Poolbeg, in the southern part of the Port.

Integrating the S2S: The most challenging section of the 22kms between Sutton and Sandycove is, by far, the 1.4 km section along the Port boundary at East Wall Road. The removal of internal port traffic from East Link Bridge and East Wall Rd and the replacement of the multiple port access points along that part of the road and their replacement with a single access at Promenade Rd will create the general conditions in which the S2S can be safely integrated. The appointment of **Grafton Architects** to develop the general architectural approach to the detailed design has given a clearer indication of how it is intended to carry the project forward ([here](#)). The proposal for the S2S is the **Liffey-Tolka Project**. The Port Company intends to make available a strip of land, 10-12m wide, running along the east side of East Wall Road from the **East Link Bridge** to the **Tolka Estuary** via Bond Road at the East Point Business Park. The preliminary design envisages a wide cycleway and walkway flanked by soft landscaping and trees on both sides. A new free flowing pedestrian/cyclist bridge will be constructed over Promenade Road which will eliminate the serious conflict that would otherwise occur at this critical point. Of necessity, some controlled access points across the greenway will remain to give access for cars taxis and local delivery vans to the Port Company Offices.

In the words of the architects: *“The currently hostile East Wall Road will become a linear Civic Space. This will form a new sense of entry to the City when travelling from the North and from the Dublin Port Tunnel. The drama, scale and animation of the Port will be revealed, joining up with the life of the City. The visual barrier which currently separates these two interdependent worlds will disappear. The pavement area will increase from a two-metre width to twelve metres, offering a safe pleasurable landscaped space for people to walk or cycle.”*



Fig 3. A graphic aerial view of the Liffey-Tolka Project joining the north and south section of the S2S.

Other S2S Links are possible with this arrangement in addition to the links to Alfie Byrne Road and the South Quays. A proposal by architect **David Wright** in 2010 ([here](#)) envisaged the same route for the S2S along East Wall Road to the Tolka Estuary but also extended it with a lightweight pedestrian/cycleway

bridge across the Tolka Estuary to link directly to the Clontarf promenade near the junction with the Stiles Road. For users coming from and going to the North East of the City this would be an **off-road** route providing a different experience of Dublin Bay and reduce the travel distance to the South City by more than a kilometre. Another feature of the proposals is to provide safe routes to other places of interest within and around Dublin Port.

Dublin City Council are proposing a new cycle/pedestrian bridge across the Liffey on the city side of the East Link Bridge which will require a controlled crossing to link to the new Liffey-Tolka Project. They are also proposing a public transport bridge (including cycle and pedestrian lanes) over the Dodder/Grand Canal outlet to link to **Sir John Rogerson's Quay** and to **Poolbeg and the S2S in the South Bay** via **Ringsend Park** as envisaged in the Dublin Cycle Network. The Council have recently sought proposals from multi-disciplinary teams to undertake both of these new bridges.

When will all of this happen? Speaking at the recent launch of the next phase of the launch of the masterplan, **Eamonn O'Reilly, Chief Executive of Dublin Port Company** said: **"Within two years, we will have completed a dedicated cycle network throughout Dublin Port and along most of the Port's perimeter."**

Summary: This is a bold and imaginative plan that will deliver a crucial section of the S2S in a manner that will be safe, properly segregated with no uncontrolled junctions or crossovers and attractive to walkers and cyclists. It is even more remarkable considering the enormous challenges. All of this will be very much welcomed by supporters of the S2S. It is a credit to the Dublin Port Company.

MMC December 2020