

## Sutton to Sandycove Promenade and Cycleway.

### Information Paper

April 25<sup>th</sup> 2019

#### 1.0: Background:

The idea of joining up all the existing bits and pieces of seafront walkway and cycleway to create a continuous walkway and cycleway between Sandycove and Sandymount was first proposed in 1998. In 2001 it was extended to Sutton and it has since been referred to as the Sutton to Sandycove Promenade and Cycleway (S2S). The purpose was to provide a segregated, off-road, traffic free cycleway and walkway around the Bay from the suburbs to the city centre. It was adopted and remains in all national and local development plans. The route is substantially complete in the North Dublin Bay but the South Bay remains unresolved.

More recent proposals for the **East Coast Greenway** (including most of the S2S), the **Coastal Protection of the Railway** and, most recently, the **Bus Connects** project all relate in some way or another to the S2S but there has been little attempt to coordinate between them. All of these proposals are laudable in themselves and deserve support. The failure to agree on a common approach however is resulting in a failure to achieve the most efficient use of resources and will result in poor outcomes for all of the projects. This is not in accordance with the NPWS guidance in relation to Appropriate Assessments which states:

*“A key protection mechanism, and the subject of this guidance, is the requirement to consider the possible nature conservation implications of any **plan or project** on the Natura 2000 site network **before any decision is made** to allow that plan or project to proceed. Not only is every new plan or project captured by this requirement but each plan or project, when being considered for approval at any stage, must take into consideration the possible effects it may have in combination with other plans and projects when going through the process known as **appropriate assessment**...”*

Such a holistic approach is also an integral part of environmental impact assessment, which is likely to be required for each of the three projects.

#### 2.0: The Issues

At the core of this is the current intention to put the section of the S2S between Merrion Gates and Blackrock inland, partly on the Merrion Road and partly through Blackrock Park as part of the Greenway/Bus Connects projects. It is more logical to combine the S2S (which was always intended to be on the seafront) with the Coastal Protection of the Railway, which must be on the seafront. There are significant benefits in combining these two projects:

##### 2.1: For the Coastal Protection of the Railway:

- (a) It provides improved protection of the rail line by increasing the distance between the actual barrier and the railway line by about 6m, reducing windblown spray getting onto the O/H lines and the track.
- (b) It provides the space in which a drainage cistern can be accommodated which will allow the overtopping seawater to be drained back into the sea without affecting the railway.
- (c) It does not require the sea wall (which is a protected structure in the DCC area) to be damaged, while accepting that it would be covered up, which is arguably a valid approach given all the circumstances.



c/o 7 Mount Merrion Avenue  
Blackrock  
Co Dublin  
Ireland

- (d) It does not require the height of the sea wall to be significantly raised - preserving the existing view of the Bay for the train passengers, which will certainly be an issue with some other options.
- (e) The configuration has the potential to provide high tide roosts at any number of locations that will not be overlooked by walkers or cyclists on the S2S.
- (f) Dogs on the walkway will not be seen by the birds on the strand or the higher roosts while people and their dogs that currently walk on the top of the sea wall will be prevented from doing so.
- (g) Combining the protection of the railway line with the S2S will be seen as not just the protection of a vital piece of transport infrastructure but also a very significant new amenity for the local community and visitors to Dublin and a vital car-free cycleway. It would have the strong support of the politicians across the political spectrum as well as the local communities, tourism and commercial interests.
- (h) Sharing the cost of design and construction between the two projects will result in a significantly lower overall cost for the individual projects.

## **2.2 For the Greenway/Bus Connects**

- (a) Constructing this section of the Greenway/S2S on the seafront will significantly simplify the challenge of having an unsatisfactory contraflow cycleway, on the east side of the Merrion Road.
- (b) Reverting to a single (south bound) cycleway on the east side of the Merrion Rd will reduce the required overall width of the road such that it will not be necessary to compulsorily purchase the strip of land currently proposed between Merrion House and the Ashcastle site.
- (c) Relocating the northbound cycleway currently proposed on the east side of the Merrion Road to the coast, will avoid the risks associated with contraflow cycleway at the seven major uncontrolled vehicular traffic access points that occur in close succession near the Merrion Gates.
- (d) The relocation of the two-way cycleway to the seafront (as originally intended) will also reduce the pressure to provide a significantly greater cycleway in Blackrock Park and land purchase at the rear of "Deepwell".
- (e) The overall cost of the Bus Connects project will be decreased by the reduction of the works necessary in Blackrock Park, the need to compulsorily purchase land on the east side of the Merrion Road and the simplification of the underpass issues at Merrion Gates.

## **2.3 For the S2S**

- (a) It would allow the original concept of a continuous off-road traffic-free cycleway and walkway from Dun Laoghaire to the city centre to be completed on the seafront, with all the advantages to the citizens, visitors and the environment that this would bring.
- (b) The combination of the assessment and design stages of the S2S with the coastal protection of the Railway, would allow these to be undertaken in a completely different and more thorough way than would otherwise be possible.
- (c) The proximity of the railway to the S2S would provide casual supervision of the S2S, improving safety and security for users.

(d) The combination of the two projects in in the assessment and design stages will ensure compliance with the requirement to adopt a holistic assessment of the cumulative impacts of both projects.

(e) The costs of assessment, design and construction and will be reduced by combining the projects.

### 3.0 Risks

The decision to proceed with the assessment and design stages of these projects in an uncoordinated way carries a number of significant risks:

(a) The processes may be open to challenge on the grounds of failure to follow the legislation requiring promoters to take account of related projects.

(b) If the coastal protection of the railway is to proceed in isolation, there is a high risk that a vital section of the S2S will end up on the Merrion Road whereas it was always envisaged as being a traffic free commuter/leisure facility on the seafront. The opportunity to create a continuous 11km seafront walkway and cycleway in South Dublin Bay may be lost forever.

(c) The essential commuter cycleway on the Merrion Road is at risk of being compromised by the contraflow system and the difficulty of connecting it back to seafront in Sandymount. It would remove the need for the underpass which was an issue with the previous study of the S2S.

### 4.0 Proposal

None of these projects has gone beyond the early stages of assessment and design. It makes sense to include all of the options, including the combination of the Coastal Protection of the Railway with the S2S on the seafront. Such a proposal will be seen as, not just enhancing the protection of a vital piece of transport infrastructure, but also a very significant new amenity for the local community and visitors to Dublin and a much needed traffic-free cycleway. It would enhance the coastal protection of the railway and simplify the design of the Bus connects project. It is an environmental solution that would conform to all national and regional policies on health and sustainable transport. It would have the support of national and local political representatives as well as the local communities, public health, tourism and commercial interests.

The authorities responsible for the delivery of these projects - the National Transport Authority, Dublin City Council, Dun-Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and Irish Rail -should come together to agree that the projects are co-ordinated for the assessment and design stages with the objective of achieving the successful completion of all of them in the most practical, economic and sustainable way.

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for

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