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Department for
**Regional
Development**
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A24 Ballynahinch Bypass

Environmental Statement Non-Technical Summary

March 2015



 **INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**

INTRODUCTION

The Department for Regional Development (DRD) Transport NI proposes to construct a 3.14km bypass of Ballynahinch (‘the Proposed Scheme’) as a long-term Strategic Road Improvement in order to improve journey times, journey time reliability and safety on the A24 Belfast to Newcastle Trunk Road. The provision of this bypass is also expected to improve traffic conditions in the town centre.

The bypass would be aligned to the east of the town, commencing with a roundabout at the existing A24 Belfast Road / A21 Saintfield Road junction and terminating with a roundabout at the existing A24 Drumanness Road / B2 Downpatrick Road junction. It would also include a compact grade-separated junction with the B7 Crossgar Road.

It would comprise a single 2-lane carriageway bypass with widening to a Wide Single (2+1) carriageway to provide overtaking opportunities for northbound traffic exiting the new roundabout at the southern extent of the scheme, and a Differential Acceleration Lane to provide overtaking opportunities for southbound traffic exiting the new roundabout at the northern end of the scheme.

WHAT IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT?

An Environmental Statement is a detailed report of the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment process. In particular, it predicts the environmental effects that the Proposed Scheme would have, and details the measures proposed to reduce or eliminate those effects.

It informs the final decision on whether the Proposed Scheme should be allowed to proceed. Its function is to give stakeholders, including the public and statutory environmental bodies, an opportunity to express an opinion before the scheme is initiated.

It identifies, describes and assesses, in an appropriate manner and in light of each individual case, the significant environmental effects of the Proposed Scheme. It contains information that is relevant to the specific characteristics of the project and the environmental features likely to be affected by it.

The Environmental Statement is issued in accordance with the EIA Directive and required by Part V of The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 as substituted by The Roads (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999

and amended by The Roads (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007.

WHY THE SCHEME IS NEEDED

Ballynahinch is a market town, situated approximately 24km (15 miles) from Belfast, 16km (10 miles) from both Downpatrick and Lisburn, and 24km (15 miles) from Newcastle. The town is strategically-located on the A24, with the road forming part of the A24 / A2 Belfast – Newcastle Trunk Road Network, linking the Belfast Metropolitan Area to South Down and passing through the heart of the town in a general north/south orientation.



The A24 Trunk Road essentially extends from Belfast, to Clough, west of Downpatrick and from there the route continues on to Newcastle and the Mourne as the A2.

For some time there have been plans to provide a bypass to relieve the traffic congestion in Ballynahinch, which often occurs on the road network in the centre of the town at times of peak traffic flow and when day-trippers are travelling to and returning from the south County Down coast.

The A24 from Belfast to Clough forms part of the Regional Strategic Transport Network within Northern Ireland.

The Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan 2015 includes a programme for the implementation of Strategic Road Improvements to remove bottlenecks on the network where lack of capacity is causing serious congestion, and to improve the environment by providing bypasses of towns situated on the Regional Strategic Transport Network, thus relieving the effects of heavy through traffic. As part of this programme, the A24 Ballynahinch Bypass scheme has been identified as an additional major highway scheme which should commence later in the plan period, and is now in the Preparation Pool. Progress to construction is subject to clearing statutory procedures, having a satisfactory economic appraisal, and the availability of funding.

Improvements to the strategic road network have been established in Northern Ireland policy through the publication of the Regional Development Strategy and the Regional Transportation Strategy. These strategies are implemented through the Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan, the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, the Sub-Regional Transport Plan, and the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland. These regional strategies, together with the local policy publications, were based on the Guidance on the Methodology for Multi-Modal Studies, an objective-led approach to seeking solutions to transport-related problems, and were prepared in consultation with and informed by stakeholders. As stated in the Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan, these high-level objectives are:

- Environment – to protect the natural and built environment;
- Safety – to improve safety;
- Economy – to improve sustainable economic activity and get good value for money;
- Accessibility – to improve access to facilities for people with disabilities and those without a car and to reduce severance; and
- Integration – to ensure that all decisions are taken in the context of the Government's integrated transport policy.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The study of alternatives for major road schemes is undertaken through a three-stage procedure; the level of detail and coverage of the assessment report is appropriate to the type of decision that can reasonably be taken at each stage:

Stage 1 Scheme Assessment – required the identification of a number of broad improvement strategies. Transport NI examined strategies for future improvement of the A24 Trunk Road corridor around Ballynahinch. Three preliminary corridors were identified; one to the west and two to the east of the town. Based on the assessment findings, Transport NI identified the shorter of the two eastern corridor options as being preferable. It also followed (in principle) the route of the bypass as indicated in the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 (which was in draft at that time).

It was further recommended that the provision of a link road from the A24 Belfast Road to the A49 Magheraknock Road and a number of additional road widening schemes be given consideration. An appraisal of a further corridor option to the east of Ballynahinch was also considered to avoid a substantial cutting through a large drumlin south of Crossgar Road, and to potentially avoid loss of some properties. However, the initial recommendations from the Stage 1 Scheme Assessment remained unchanged.

Stage 2 Scheme Assessment – further to the recommendations arising from the Stage 1 Scheme Assessment, three preliminary route options for the proposed bypass were subsequently identified by Transport NI within the preferred corridor to the east of Ballynahinch. The three options (the Red Route, Blue Route and Yellow Route) were developed, environmental impacts assessed, costs evaluated, traffic volumes predicted and economic cost benefit analysis carried out.

The engineering designs of the options were developed in more detail through consultations with various statutory and non-statutory bodies, and were then presented to the local elected representatives and the general public during a Public Exhibition event held on 12th November 2009 in the Market House, Ballynahinch.

Based on assessment, Transport NI identified the Red Route as being preferable and the Minister for Regional Development (Mr Danny Kennedy MLA) announced the Preferred Route on 24th January

2012.

Stage 3 Scheme Assessment – following the announcement of the Preferred Route, a preliminary design of the scheme was developed (now termed the Proposed Scheme) to facilitate a subsequent Stage 3 Scheme Assessment and to inform the preparation of a draft Direction Order, draft Vesting Order and the Environmental Statement.

In developing the Proposed Scheme, all aspects of the engineering design were reviewed in conjunction with Transport NI and other statutory bodies. The findings from the public consultation at Stage 2 were also reviewed.

Further to the review of the design, a number of potential changes in the layout were proposed that were considered to provide benefit to the scheme.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Ballynahinch forms a local hub, functioning as a service centre, commuter settlement, manufacturing location and market town.



The Market House (Ballynahinch Town Centre), adjacent to the existing A24 trunk route

There are two distinct landscape character areas within the study area around the north and east of Ballynahinch; these are the Ravarnet Valley and the Quoile Valley Lowlands. It is quite an attractive landscape, with a number of distinctive features characterising the local area. The drumlin landform, common in County Down, forms the basic setting of this landscape, with Ballynahinch nestling in a clustered form amongst the hollows of a series of undeveloped drumlins, within the Ballynahinch River valley. These drumlin features are particularly prominent to the east of the town. Montalto Estate, located on the south-western fringe of Ballynahinch, contributes to the appearance of a fairly well wooded landscape, giving a wooded backdrop to the town

and along with high ground in the west, forming a natural development limit.

There are numerous watercourses meandering between the drumlins, coupled with Montgomery’s Lough and marshy areas, which have formed in the hollows and are well scattered around the periphery of the town. A number of quarries and associated plant/infrastructure to the north-west of the town form prominent features on this landscape and can be viewed in the west of Ballynahinch, where the landscape is less undulating, more open and rises to the south.

Modern day Ballynahinch is a vibrant and compact town, which has a wide range of shops and services concentrated along Main Street, High Street and Dromore Street. The development of Ballynahinch over time has been greatly influenced by the layout of the existing A-Class and B-Class road network (which essentially radiates out from the town centre) and surrounding topographical constraints. The topography of the area can be termed as reasonably difficult, since drumlin hills and valleys surround the town and are characteristic of this part of County Down.

There is a wide range of facilities which service the needs of the local community including sporting, educational and religious buildings. The town centre naturally consists of mixed developments, comprising leisure and cultural facilities (including arts, entertainment and built sport facilities), community centres and meeting places (including places of worship, libraries), facilities for children, education facilities, healthcare facilities, service-orientated businesses (i.e. locally based shops), and public transport facilities. The Millbrook Lodge Hotel is located to the south of the town, adjacent to the historic Montalto Estate. As the A24 forms the main arterial route through the centre of the town, the majority of these facilities are either located along or close to this main thoroughfare. Public Realm works have recently been undertaken to upgrade footways, street furniture, planting and lighting throughout Ballynahinch.

Residential developments predominantly contain the road corridors which radiate out from the town, with more suitable areas of land between these roads giving way to large parcels/clusters of residential development. As would naturally be expected, from the town centre eastwards, existing development transitions from mixed urban to suburban residential, the extent of which has been particularly constrained by drumlin topography, especially north of the B7

Crossgar Road. In essence, development has ribboned along the B7 Crossgar Road, with residential areas developed on suitable parcels of land off this road (particularly to the south) and off side roads which connect to it.

In terms of the rural built environment, large, white-finished farmhouses and small traditional stone dwellings are both present, as well as scattered modern housing in the hinterland surrounding Ballynahinch; they are connected by a network of roads and lanes radiating out in all directions from the town.

THE PROPOSED SCHEME

The following scheme-specific objectives have been identified:

- To reduce journey times for strategic A24 traffic in the opening year;
- To improve journey time reliability for strategic A24 traffic in the opening year;
- To contribute positively to transport economic efficiency;
- To contribute positively to road safety;
- To minimise the impact of the scheme on the environment; and
- To achieve value for money.

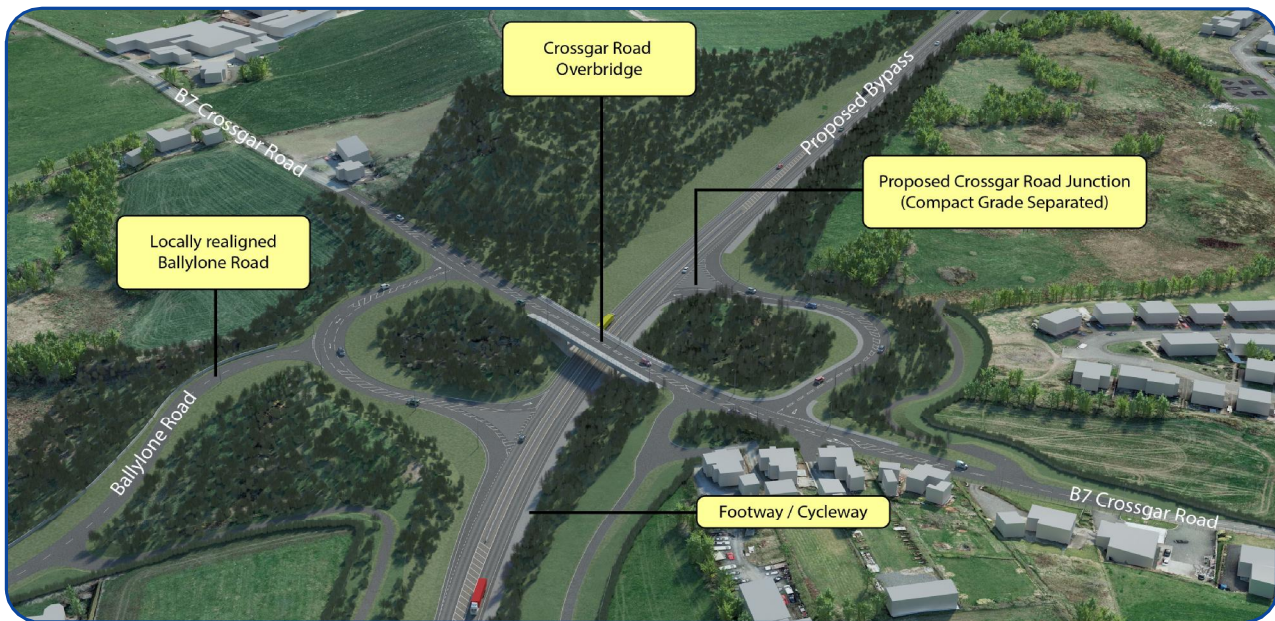
The Bypass mainline - would tie into the existing road network at the northern extent of the scheme via a new 4-arm at-grade roundabout at the existing A24 Belfast Road / A21 Saintfield Road junction. Travelling in a southbound direction, the bypass would split away from the A24 Belfast Road before passing over agricultural ground on a shallow embankment, increasing in height towards a new underpass constructed over Moss Road.

A Differential Acceleration Lane would be provided for southbound traffic exiting the new roundabout onto the bypass, providing overtaking opportunity for approximately 660m before tapering into single carriageway.

The bypass would continue to the south-east following the general course of and crossing the Glasdrumman River a number of times before severing Ballylone Road and entering a significant section of cutting where the bypass would pass under the B7 Crossgar Road.

The bypass would then head in a south-west direction crossing over Windmill Stream before rising onto an embankment above adjacent agricultural land and floodplain on approach to the crossing of the Ballynahinch River. The proposed bridge crossing of the Ballynahinch River and its associated floodplain would be approximately 90m long. The bridge would also span access tracks, allowing landowners to maintain connectivity to land severed by the bypass.





The bypass would tie into the existing road network at the southern extent of the scheme via a 4-arm at-grade roundabout located at the existing A24 Drumaness Road/B2 Downpatrick Road junction. An Overtaking opportunity (approximately 880m in length) would be provided for northbound traffic by way of a Wide Single 2+1 carriageway from the proposed Downpatrick Road Roundabout before tapering into single carriageway.

Due to the strategic nature of the bypass, there would be no provision for direct access to adjacent agricultural land.

Saintfield Road Roundabout - would connect the A24 Belfast Road and A21 Saintfield Road to the bypass, however the old Saintfield Road would be stopped-up at its northern end where it would be crossed by the new bypass. A new access to existing properties would be provided.

Downpatrick Road Roundabout – would connect the A24 Drumaness Road and B2 Downpatrick Road to the bypass, however Crabtree Road would be stopped-up to vehicular traffic (with pedestrian access retained) at its northern end where it would be crossed by the new roundabout. A new Crabtree Link road some 100m to the south of the new roundabout would provide access to properties and the retained portion of Crabtree Road from the A24 Drumaness Road.

Moss Road - an underpass would be provided to maintain Moss Road as a through route with minimal change to the alignment of this road.

B7 Crossgar Road and Ballylone Road - it is proposed that a compact grade-separated junction

would connect the B7 Crossgar Road with the proposed mainline. The junction would include connector loops providing access to and from the northbound and southbound carriageways.

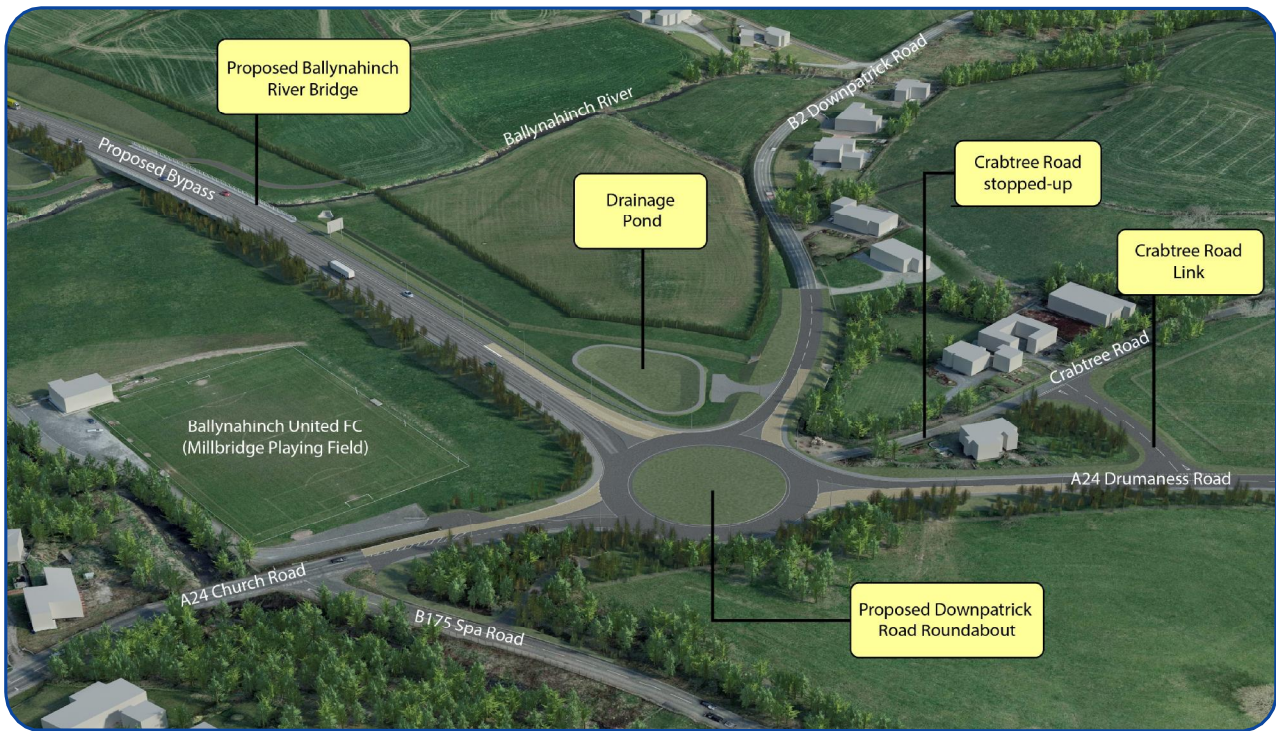
The existing Ballylone Road would be severed by the proposed bypass mainline. In order to maintain connectivity with the B7 Crossgar Road, it would be partially realigned to a priority junction with the connector loop to the southbound carriageway.

Crabtree Road - site constraints preclude provision of a fifth arm on the proposed Downpatrick Road Roundabout at the southern end of the bypass to accommodate Crabtree Road. The existing junction would be stopped-up and a new link road provided with a new priority junction onto the existing A24 Drumaness Road.

Shared footway / cycleway - the Proposed Scheme would incorporate a dedicated shared footway/cycleway on the Ballynahinch (western) side of the bypass, with pedestrian linkages to the existing footway network (where available) at the three proposed bypass junctions.

This would be an attractive recreational facility, providing an opportunity for walks along the bypass and into the town for the residents of Ballynahinch. However, due to the rural nature of the route, it is not proposed that the footway/cycleway be lit, though there would be lighting at each of the junctions associated with the scheme.

Standard crossings would be provided at the roundabout islands at either end of the proposed bypass. Where the old Saintfield Road would be



stopped-up, a connection from the shared footway/cycleway would also be provided.

Park & Share facility – a site has been identified on the northern side of the proposed Saintfield Road Roundabout, between the A24 Belfast Road and A21 Saintfield Road, to accommodate a Park & Share facility consisting of 27 parking bays (including 3no. disabled bays).

MITIGATION MEASURES

The Proposed Scheme has been designed to reduce, as far as possible, damage to the environment whilst taking account of other factors, such as road safety, engineering design and cost. The route avoids, as far as possible, areas most sensitive to changes in the environment. Measures proposed to limit the adverse environmental effects of the scheme include:

- Extensive planting of native trees and shrubs at key locations to help assimilate the scheme into the existing landscape setting;
- Re-use of topsoil on the new verges to ensure conservation of residual seedbanks of locally occurring species;
- Provision of pollution control measures such as Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) detention basins (drainage ponds);

- The route would only be lit at junctions. The lighting units would be designed to minimise the spread of light to nearby properties;
- Use of low noise surfacing to reduce the level of traffic noise when compared to traditional forms of road surface; and
- Slopes would be in keeping with the local landform and be either grassed or planted with a woodland mix.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The Proposed Scheme and associated mitigation measures have been designed to minimise adverse environmental effects. Nevertheless, some impacts would arise from the proposals. The following summarises the key issues associated with each environmental topic assessed.

Air Quality

There would be no significant effect on either local or regional air quality as a result of the Proposed Scheme. Local air quality pollutant concentrations would remain well below the relevant National Air Quality Standards and are forecasted to marginally decrease from existing levels at the majority of locations. With a proportion of the existing trunk road traffic moving to the new bypass, there would be a net benefit with slightly improved air quality for the majority of properties located along the existing route through Ballynahinch. In terms of regional air

quality, there would be a slight improvement, however these changes would not be significant.

During construction, there would be a risk of potential nuisance, and health & safety impacts associated with the possible generation of excessive dust; however, these impacts would be minimised with effective implementation of the Contractor's Dust Minimisation Plan.

Cultural Heritage

The Proposed Scheme would traverse a rural landscape characterised by scattered evidence of prehistoric burial, Early Christian and medieval settlement, churches and defended sites. Of the archaeological assets, historic buildings, and historic landscape elements identified throughout the study area, the assessment has indicated that several of these would be impacted by the Proposed Scheme. The Scheme design has avoided impacts where possible and minimised adverse effects. The Proposed Scheme would have beneficial effects on the setting of a number of designated historic buildings that are in the centre of Ballynahinch and one non-designated historic building that is on the southern approaches to the town. Where archaeological sites, historic buildings and historic landscape elements are adversely impacted by the Proposed Scheme, appropriate archaeological mitigation is proposed in advance of and during construction. This would preserve by record these heritage assets prior to their modification/removal. The overall significance of effect on the cultural heritage assets of the study area is assessed as Minor Adverse.

Ecology and Nature Conservation

There would be a relatively low effect on the ecological value and conservation status of the area, its habitats and its species. The landscape and associated species that would be impacted upon are not considered to be particularly sensitive to the Proposed Scheme. The predicted impact would be such that coherence of ecological structure and function would be preserved and the populations of species would be maintained to pre-development conditions.

Landscape & Visual Effects

No Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) would be directly affected by the Proposed Scheme, though a number of Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPA) would be directly and indirectly affected. The Proposed Scheme would introduce new roads into a tranquil rural drumlin landscape east of Ballynahinch town, in close proximity to residential developments.

Sensitive design and landscaping would gradually integrate the road into the surrounding landscape.



Existing view north towards A24 Belfast Road

Views from receptors in close proximity to the Proposed Scheme would change. Mitigation of these impacts has been considered through the arrangement of the Crossgar Road junction, Saintfield Road Roundabout, Downpatrick Road Roundabout and the design of structures and planting to address residual effects. Construction of the Crossgar Road junction, with associated lighting and embankments and cuttings, would be the most visually significant feature of the Proposed Scheme.

Land Use

A total of four properties would be demolished (with associated land take). These include two Residential, and two Commercial (agricultural). A total of seven private properties/areas would also experience private land loss/impacts in order to accommodate various elements of the Proposed Scheme.

A number of planning applications would be directly affected, but in the majority of cases, the effects would not be significant. The scheme would also encroach into three areas zoned for future housing development along the western fringe of the bypass, with varying degrees of impact.

A significant number of agricultural landowners would be affected by the scheme, resulting in loss of land and farm severance. Accommodation works and alternative means of access would, as far as possible, allow continued farming activity on retained lands.

Noise and Vibration

There would be fewer properties in proximity to the Proposed Scheme than along the existing route. Hence, there would be a net benefit with decreased noise levels for the majority of properties close to the existing route. However, traffic noise from the new

bypass would impact properties that currently do not experience significant noise from traffic, due to their existing rural location and low existing ambient noise levels.

Pedestrians, Cyclists, Equestrians and Community Effects

With the Proposed Scheme, traffic through the town would become more regulated, less congested and local traffic wishing to access facilities in the town centre should benefit significantly with the reduction in traffic flows, easier access onto and across the existing A24, and it may result in marginally shorter journey times. This would improve access to the majority of community facilities, for the town’s residents, with a significant reduction in town centre vehicular/pedestrian conflict. This would result in a reduction in existing severance and improved amenity. Pedestrians and cyclists would also benefit from the creation of a new footway/cycleway route adjacent to the bypass.

No community facilities would be lost in their entirety. However, a number would experience direct or indirect impacts as a result of the Proposed Scheme. In most cases, it is unlikely that continued community usage at these facilities would be significantly affected during the operational phase.

Vehicle Travellers

The new bypass would ensure more reliable and consistent journey times for strategic traffic. Local traffic would benefit greatly from reduced traffic levels through Ballynahinch. New views would be opened-up to the vehicle traveller, which would afford panoramic views of the surrounding rural drumlin landscape to the east of Ballynahinch and introduce views that are currently not experienced by the vehicle traveller.

Road Drainage and the Water Environment

As the impacts of a specific component or activities associated with the Proposed Scheme would have minimal impact upon the water environment (from a water quality, hydromorphology, fisheries or spillage risk perspective), it is unlikely that the Proposed Scheme would cause deterioration in the Ballynahinch water body, or prevent it from meeting its Water Framework Directive (WFD) objectives.

The Proposed Scheme would drain into a segregated system of Sustainable Drainage detention basins. These would attenuate flow, and limit discharge rates from outfalls (to increase in-river dilution), reducing the pollutant concentration through in-basin treatment and the risk of a spillage causing a serious pollution incident.

There would be loss of floodplain capacity adjacent to both the Glasdrumman River and Ballynahinch River, though Flood Compensation Areas (FCAs)



would be provided at a level similar to that lost.

Geology and Soils

There would be no designated or non-designated sites of geological or geomorphological interest affected by the Proposed Scheme. From a geology and soils perspective, there would be relatively few key issues.

Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects are environmental effects associated with the Proposed Scheme considered in combination with other projects, with the resulting effect potentially being significant. The assessment has concluded that there would be no significant cumulative effects.

CONSTRUCTION EFFECTS

It would take approximately 18 months to 2 years to construct the entire A24 Ballynahinch Bypass scheme as a single contract. The detailed construction sequence would be a matter for the appointed Contractor, but certain guiding principles would be stipulated where necessary, based on consultation with Transport NI, emergency services and other stakeholders. Such measures would include limiting disruption to existing patterns of movement and limiting the routes for construction traffic use. The construction contract would include provisions to minimise the effects of construction noise, temporary diversions, works access and working hours.

In general, it is envisaged that construction work would take place during normal working hours (7.00am to 7.00pm Monday to Friday, 7.00am to 1.00pm on Saturdays). However, the Contractor

may need to work outside these hours, particularly for setting up traffic management arrangements.

Temporary and permanent effects from construction and associated mitigation measures are considered in each technical chapter of the Environmental Statement. In addition, there are also many mandatory and good practice requirements and guidelines related to protection of the environment, which the Contractor would need to consider during construction. As part of the construction contract, the appointed Contractor would be required to implement all committed mitigation measures including those set out in the Environmental Statement, and incorporate these into their methods of working. The Contractor would have to demonstrate formal adoption of these commitments, requirements and measures and include them in their Construction Environmental Management Plan. The commitments, requirements and measures, contained therein would require approval from the relevant statutory bodies and also be audited during the construction phase by on-site environmental representative(s) appointed by Transport NI.

VIEWING THE SCHEME DRAFT ORDERS AND ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

An exhibition of the Proposed Scheme ('The Orders Exhibition') will be held in The Market House, Market House Square, Ballynahinch on:

- **Tuesday 14th April 2015 (12.30pm – 9pm)**
- **Wednesday 15th April 2015 (10am – 9pm).**

Representatives of Transport NI and the project team will be available to explain the proposals and answer questions. Copies of the Environmental Statement may also be inspected during the exhibition and free of charge during office hours at the following deposit locations from **25th March to 19th May 2015**:

- Transport NI – Headquarters, Room 2-13, Clarence Court, 10-18 Adelaide Street, Belfast, BT2 8GB;
- Transport NI – Southern Division Headquarters, Marlborough House, Central Way, Craigavon, BT64 1AD;
- Transport NI – Divisional Office, Rathkeltair House, Market Street, Downpatrick, BT30 6EA;

- Down District Council - Downshire Civic Centre, Downshire Estate, Ardglass Road, Downpatrick, BT30 6GQ; and
- Ballynahinch Library, Main Street, Ballynahinch, BT24 8DN.

The Environmental Statement can also be viewed on the Transport NI website at:

www.drdni.gov.uk/a24_ballynahinch_bypass

A bound paper copy of the Environmental Statement may be purchased at a cost of £185; and is also available on DVD free of charge, by writing to the Strategic Roads Improvement Team, Transport NI – Southern Division Headquarters, Marlborough House, Central Way, Craigavon, BT64 1AD. The Non-Technical Summary is available free of charge from the same address.

YOUR VIEWS

Your views are important to us. If you wish to support, comment on, or object to the draft Orders, you should write to:

The Divisional Manager
 Transport NI – Southern Division Headquarters
 Marlborough House
 Central Way
 Craigavon
 BT64 1AD

Or email roads.southern@drdni.gov.uk
 by no later than **19th May 2015**.

Information you provide in response, including personal information, could be published or disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. For further information on confidentiality and this Act, please refer to www.ico.gov.uk

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Depending on the nature and number of objections received, a Public Inquiry may be convened before an Independent Inspector. If an inquiry is to be held, all those who have responded will be notified of the date and the venue at least six weeks beforehand. Notices will also be placed in the local press.

All comments received will be made available to the Inspector, who may decide to make them public.

