Department for
Infrastructure
An Roinn
Bonneagair
Depairtment fur
Infrastructure
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PART 1

Minister's First Day Brief

FUNCTIONAL BREAKDOWN

February 2025

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1. DEPARTMENTAL ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

Departmental Overview

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is a large and complex department, comprising around 3000 staff, most of whom are in customer facing roles or delivering core front line services.

Its responsibilities are wide-ranging and include:

- Responsibility for **planning policy, legislation and promoting good place-making**, including acting as the planning authority for regionally significant planning applications and overseeing the effectiveness of the two-tier planning process that came into effect in 2015.
- Policy and legislation for **water, reservoirs and sewerage** including discharging the Department's responsibilities, including as Shareholder, for oversight of NI Water.
- Responsibility for **rivers and drainage** policy and legislation and for supporting the work of the Drainage Council.
- The assessment and management of flood risk and lead Department responsibilities for the strategic co-ordination of the emergency response to flooding and other severe weather incidents.
- Almost all aspects of **transport policy** including public transport, promotion of active and sustainable travel, the development and implementation of a transport strategy and the provision, management and maintenance of all public roads.
- **Road safety and vehicle regulation** including through the licensing, testing and enforcement activities carried out by the **Driver and Vehicle Agency.**
- Oversight of the **NI Transport Holding Company (Translink).**
- Delivery of a range of (often major) **transport-related projects** including the flagship A5 and A6 roads schemes and Belfast Grand Central Station.
- Responsibility for developing the recreational and navigational potential of specific **inland waterways** and oversight, along with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in Dublin, of Waterways Ireland, a North South Implementation Body.
- Some responsibilities for policy development and regulatory oversight of the activities of our **Trust Ports** and some limited responsibilities in relation to **Airports** (maritime and aviation policy is however reserved).
- Management and development of the **Crumlin Road Gaol** and management of the **St Lucia Barracks** in Omagh.

- Oversight, along with the Department of the Taoiseach in Dublin, of progress in delivering the **Fresh Start** infrastructure commitments.
- The Department is responsible for £37.5bn of Assets (as of March 2023), which includes the Road Network at £36bn, and flood risk management infrastructure which aims to alleviate the risk of flooding from rivers and the sea valued at nearly £1bn.

In addition, the Department has a role in the development and delivery of a number of infrastructure related projects, contained within the **City and Growth Deals** and has a role along with other NI departments in ensuring the implementation of appropriate governance arrangements.

Permanent Secretary

Your principal adviser is **Denis McMahon**. Denis is the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure and its Accounting Officer. He is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Department and oversight of its agencies and arm's length bodies. The Permanent Secretary works to ensure that the Department is able to deliver your objectives. As Accounting Officer Denis is personally responsible for ensuring that public money is being spent and accounted for properly in line with Managing Public Money NI (MPMNI).

While Permanent Secretaries work under the direction and control of their Minister, they are also personally answerable to the Public Accounts Committee of the Assembly on their responsibilities as Accounting Officers.

Departmental Groups

The Department is organised administratively into three Groups, each headed by a Deputy Secretary.

Water & Departmental Delivery

Headed by **Declan McGeown** (Deputy Secretary)

This group has responsibility for NI Water (delivery plan and oversight), Departmental Flood Risk Management, Living With Water Programme, Power of Water Decarbonisation Projects, DfI Strategic Plan and Business Plan, Financial Performance, Budget, Communications, Resource Management, and the DfI Legislative Programme including EU Exit Data and Learning Programme.

The group also oversees the Minister's Office and Assembly Business and delivers digital services, statistics, and research and information management in support of business areas across the Department and provides facilities management for James House.

Climate, Planning & Public Transport

Headed by **Judith Andrews** (Acting Deputy Secretary)

This group brings together functions that integrate infrastructure and spatial planning to shape the region and support growth. Key responsibilities include the Department's response to climate change, transport regulation and public transport policy; sponsorship of Translink; community transport; planning policy and legislation; driver and vehicle policy; the Regional Development Strategy; regionally significant planning applications; operation of the Strangford ferry and management of the Rathlin ferry contract. Judith is also responsible for the oversight of the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA).

Day to day responsibility for the management and operation of the DVA sits with the Chief Executive (**Jeremy Logan**). In addition, the Chief Executive has been appointed by the Department of Finance as Agency Accounting Officer with responsibilities set out in their letter of appointment and an Agency Framework Document.

Transport & Road Asset Management

Headed by **Colin Woods** (Deputy Secretary)

This group delivers many operational aspects of the Department's responsibilities as the Roads Authority for Northern Ireland. The Group is responsible for the day-to-day management, maintenance and development of the road network asset which accounts for the vast majority of its staff and budget. This includes all road maintenance activities, road network safety and efficiency improvements, the facilitation of utilities' work on the network, the inspection and adoption of Private Streets, the Department's statutory planning consultee role on roads matters, Active Travel policy and infrastructure and the development and construction of strategic road improvement (major capital) projects.

Key responsibilities also include the Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland and transport policy including for the decarbonisation of transport, ports policy, electric vehicle policy, parking policy and

enforcement, transport modelling and the production of Transport plans to support Councils' Local Development Plans.

People Development and Workforce Planning

Headed by **Patricia McIntyre** (Grade 5)

This Directorate lead on the development and implementation of a DfI People Strategy with a clear emphasis on people related interventions, which focus on three key drivers: Building Capacity, Supporting Capability and Strengthening the Departmental Culture. There are a significant range of interventions now in place to support the capability, skills and expertise of the staff within DfI, which aim to promote the proactive learning culture of DfI with clear career pathways and where people are valued and want to come to work.

Given the strategic significance of the Directorate, they work directly to the Permanent Secretary and are also responsible for the day-to-day management of the Permanent Secretary's office.

Arm's Length Bodies

The Department is responsible and accountable for the work of four 'Arm's Length Bodies' (ALBs) and has a stewardship responsibility for Ports and Airports.

NI Water

NI Water is both a Government Owned Company (GOCO) and an executive non-departmental public body (NDPB). It is the statutory water and sewerage undertaker operating at arm's length from central government. NI Water abstracts, treats and distributes around 605 million litres of drinking water every day to over 900,000 households and businesses using a water and wastewater network of 23 treatment works, 366 service reservoirs and around 27,000 km of water mains. It also collects and treats 368 million litres of wastewater every day from over 750,000 households and businesses. This involves the maintenance and operation of 1,029 waste treatment works, 66 sludge management centres, 1300 pumping stations and the maintenance of 16,000 km of sewers.

You are responsible for funding NI Water and overall policy and legislation and the Department sets strategic objectives through Social and Environmental guidance for water and sewerage services.

The actual delivery of water and sewerage services is, however, the responsibility of the Company, subject to regulatory oversight by the Utility Regulator (UR) and environmental regulators.

The Department monitors NI Water's business performance and engages with the Company Board, Chair and Executive Team on strategic and shareholder matters including making loans for investment and agreeing the Company's annual budget and operating plan. The Department currently pays NI Water a subsidy in lieu of domestic charging. The subsidy payment also contains elements of what is, in effect, a part subsidy for the non-domestic sector. The subsidy requirement for 2024/25 is £424.5m.

The UR has determined, through a price control process (known as PC21), the outputs and tariffs for NI Water during the six-year period from April 2021 to March 2027. This will require revenue of £2.7bn (£2.1 bn capital and £0.7bn operating costs) over the PC21 period. The price control protects the interest of Northern Ireland consumers by challenging NI Water to deliver high quality, value for money water and sewerage services. The recent mid-term review final determination recommended that the capital allowance across the price control period had increased to £2.4bn.

You are also responsible for making non-executive appointments to the Board of NI Water. The Chair post is currently held by Mrs Josephine Aston and the Chief Executive (and Accounting Officer) is Dr Sara Venning. The Chair's (and one non-executive director who as appointed at the same time) term expires on 31 March 28. The other 4 non-executive Directors were reappointed for a second 4-year term on 6 December 2023.

Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHC)

NITHC is a public corporation and the parent company of the publicly owned bus and rail companies in the region. These companies, Northern Ireland Railways, Ulsterbus and Citybus (trading as Metro) operate under the brand name of Translink. NITHC's statutory duties are to manage public transport properties and to oversee the activities of Translink which, prior to COVID, delivered some 80 million passenger journeys by bus and rail per annum.

You are responsible for appointing the Chair and members of the NITHC Board. The Board consists of a Chair, five non-executive directors and three executive directors. The current Chair is Dr Michael Wardlow, and his tenure ceases this month. Interviews to appoint a new chair have been completed and a submission is with you as Minister for a decision on the appointment of a chair from 1st March 2025. The Group Chief Executive (and Accounting Officer) is Chris Conway.

Information on the financial issues that Translink faces is outlined within Part 2.

The Department is also responsible for setting specific targets for NITHC and monitoring the extent to which these targets are achieved as well as being responsible for ensuring that appropriate financial and management controls are in place and that compliance with those controls is effectively monitored.

Drainage Council for Northern Ireland

The Drainage Council is an advisory NDPB which has a statutory duty to ensure uniformity of treatment of drainage throughout Northern Ireland and to scrutinise associated environmental impact assessments. It is the Drainage Council's responsibility to decide which watercourses and sea defences should be maintained by the Department at public expense. It also carries out a general scrutiny role on the drainage functions of the Department.

The Council's membership is set out in legislation (Schedule 1 of the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973) which provides for it to comprise ten representatives from Local District Councils; two ex-officio members from the Department for Infrastructure, one with Planning experience and the other with drainage skills; and six specialist members, one each from the drainage, agriculture, fishery, industry, conservation and tourism sectors.

The Drainage Council was reconstituted in November 2024 with the terms of appointment running until 31 October 2028 for five of the ten local government members. There are still currently 5 non-executive councillor members vacancies. The current term for specialist representatives will run until 30 June 2025. There is also currently one specialist role vacancy for industry

Waterways Ireland

Waterways Ireland is a North South Implementation Body. It is co-sponsored by the Department for Infrastructure and by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in Ireland. It is responsible for the management, maintenance, development and restoration of 1100km navigable waterways throughout the island of Ireland principally for recreational purposes. The waterways under its remit are the: Barrow Navigation; Lower Bann Navigation; Royal Canal; Erne System; Shannon-Erne Waterway; Grand Canal; Shannon Navigation; and the Ulster Canal.

The North/South Ministerial Council takes the form of meetings between ministers from the North and South of Ireland. The Council sets the policy direction for the six North/South Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland.

Trust Ports

The Department is responsible for ports policy and the legislative framework within which ports operate in Northern Ireland. There are five commercial ports in Northern Ireland – four Public Trust Ports (Belfast, Foyle, Warrenpoint and Coleraine) and one in private ownership (Larne).

Public Trust Ports are autonomous, self-financing statutory bodies whose constitutions are set out in legislation. They operate on a commercial basis with the profit generated by their activities re-invested to improve their facilities. You appoint the Chair and members to the boards of the Trust Ports at Belfast, Foyle and Warrenpoint.

The Department is also responsible for providing grants and loans to Harbour authorities under the Harbours Act 1970. Trust Ports are currently classified by the Office for National Statistics as public corporations. Accordingly, all borrowings whether from Government or commercial lenders counts as public sector debt. These borrowings count against the Department's Delegated Expenditure Limit.

NI ports play a crucial role in the local economy, handling the vast majority of external trade for the North. The estimated total tonnage through NI ports in 2022 was 27.9 million tonnes. They serve as vital global gateways, not only for trade between Ireland and Britain, mainland Europe and elsewhere across the world, but for passenger and tourist traffic as well, with over 2.5 million passengers passing through NI ports. In 2022 a total of 583,331 non-freight vehicles passed through Northern Ireland ports.

Airports

Whilst aviation is primarily a reserved matter, the Department does have powers, as set out in the Airports (NI) Order 1994, to direct airports in certain matters regarding the control of noise at airports and the provision of grants towards the cost of soundproofing buildings. Other powers under the 1994 Order include the making of Control Over Land Orders (to ensure the safe operation of Airports), the making of byelaws, providing for consultative committees and airport constabularies, and providing grants to assist capital expenditure.

The Department also has certain powers in relation to a 'special share' it holds in respect of Belfast International Airport.

2. WATER AND DEPARTMENTAL DELIVERY GROUP

This section sets out the main functions of the Water and Departmental Delivery Group.

Finance

Susan Anderson, Director

This Directorate has responsibility for Departmental finance including planning and management of the Department's budget and preparation of the Departmental Resource Accounts and DVA Annual Accounts. Finance also provides guidance on economic appraisals, financial governance and procurement policies. It supports and maintains financial systems for the Departmental elements of the Account NI system, provides compliance and assurance checks and carries out a financial/budget management support function across the Department. The Directorate is also responsible for the departmental sponsorship of Waterways Ireland, a North South body.

Strategic Communications, Public Affairs & Engagement

Karen Fullerton, Director

Strategic Communications, Public Affairs and Engagement Directorate is responsible for setting the strategic direction of communications for the department with a view to increasing awareness of DfI's delivery of essential services and highlighting the importance of the work we do in the public, political and societal narrative.

The Directorate also includes the Communications Team comprising of Press Office, Internal Communications, Website Management and Graphic Design Team and Road Safety Promotion Team.

Governance, EU, Facilities & Ministerial Support (GEUFMS)

Donal Moran, Director

Donal is responsible for your Private Office and Assembly Business Unit.

GEUFMS Directorate is also responsible for the following functions: Corporate Governance and Emergency Planning, EU Exit and EU Funding Programmes, the Covid-19 Inquiry, the Raising a Concern Policy Framework, and Facilities Management in James House.

The Directorate is responsible for the co-ordination of the Department's input in respect of EU Future Relations issues and the implementation of international agreements with the EU and carries out the Accountable Department role in respect of the Sustainable Transport elements of the INTERREG VA and PEACE PLUS EU funding programmes.

Water & Drainage Policy

Alison Clydesdale, Director

This Directorate has responsibility for developing water and drainage policies and legislation to protect and improve the operation of the water and sewerage network, drainage, reservoirs and coastal management. It also currently has responsibility for the implementation of the Water Environment (Floods Directive) Regulations (NI) 2009.

The Directorate acts as shareholder for NI Water and pays out the subsidy in lieu of domestic water charges.

Rivers

Jonathan McKee, Director of Rivers – Development

Gary Quinn, Director of Rivers – Operations

The Department is the statutory drainage authority for Northern Ireland with both Directorates delivering day-to-day operational functions and fulfilling a key role in the implementation of the Water Environment (Floods Directive) Regulations (NI) 2009 which provides the strategic framework for taking forward Flood Risk Management. DfI, Rivers Directorate Headquarters is located at Loughry Campus in Cookstown, with regional offices in Omagh and Lisburn and sub-regional offices at Coleraine, Craigavon and Ballinamallard, outside Enniskillen.

Rivers Development Directorate is responsible for the development of flood alleviation projects, asset management, flood mapping, modelling and providing flood risk advice to Planning Authorities. Rivers Operations Directorate undertakes the day-to-day maintenance of flood risk management infrastructure and provides secretariat and administrative support to the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland.

The Department is the Lead Government Department for the strategic coordination of severe weather emergencies. As part of our responsibilities in this area, Rivers Operations Directorate provides expert guidance and information to other organisations, Councils and Departments who are involved in the emergency response to flooding. Rivers also has a key leadership role in the multi-agency Regional Community Resilience Group (RCRG). This Group supports, in a prioritised manner, communities who are vulnerable to the effects of severe weather. This enables them to be more resilient to the effects of severe weather emergencies. Presently we engage with over 40 communities.

Rivers Operations Directorate will also be responsible for administering the Reservoirs (Northern Ireland) Act 2015 if this legislation is fully commenced.

Living With Water

Simon Richardson, Director

This Directorate is responsible for developing the Living With Water in Derry Plan, an integrated Plan for Drainage and Wastewater Management, which aims to help protect against flood risk, enhance the environment and support economic growth by providing increased drainage and wastewater treatment capacity. A Living With Water in Belfast Plan was published in 2021.

The Directorate is also responsible for progressing development and delivery of the nature-based drainage and flood management solutions that are identified in the two Living With Water Plans. This will involve developing new policy and legislation in relation to sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and natural flood management (NFM).

Corporate Strategy & Performance

Kiera Lloyd, Director

The Directorate has responsibility for shaping and articulating DfI's corporate ambitions and its business planning process, Programme for Government coordination, the Digital Strategy and the consultation on Developers Contributions.

The Directorate also delivers a range of corporate functions: Corporate Strategy and Impact; Performance and Reporting; Equality; Public Appointments; Honours; ICT operational support across the Department; Information Management including FoI and UKGDPR; and Statistics & Research.

3. CLIMATE, PLANNING AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

This section sets out the main functions of the Planning, Climate Change, Safety and Transport Policy Group.

Driving and Vehicle Policy Division

Chris Hughes, Director

Driving, Vehicle & Road Safety Policy Division has responsibility for the safe movement of people and goods through the regulation of vehicles and drivers (both private and commercial). It contributes to the reduction of road casualties through the monitoring of and oversight of the Road Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2030 and by developing policies to address poor road user behaviours. It is also involved in regulating vehicles and drivers.

Public Transport Operations

Peter Rice, Interim Director

The Public Transport Operations Directorate is responsible for the sponsorship of NITHC including the provision of revenue and capital grants to enable Translink to maintain and improve public transport in line with the Public Service Agreement. This Directorate administers the commercial bus service permit system and leads on the delivery of grant funding for specialist transport to reduce rural and social isolation and the concessionary fares scheme.

The Directorate also holds the role of sponsor to the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (Imtac), which is grant funded by the Department. The Department also grant funds a network of 12 community transport organisations which provide community transport services under the Dial a Lift scheme and the Disability Action Transport Scheme. In addition grant support is provided to 13 Shopmobility schemes in 11 locations offering loans of mobility aids. The Directorate is currently undertaking a review of community transport services funded via the Department.

Finally, the Directorate manages the Rathlin Island Ferry contract and the operation of the Strangford Lough Ferry service which operates between Strangford and Portaferry including the harbour areas and infrastructure associated with this operation.

Transport Regulation and Public Transport Policy

Jackie Robinson, Director

Transport Regulation and Public Transport Policy is responsible for a number of areas in relation to Regulation and policy development. The Directorate has responsibility for the licensing and regulation of goods vehicles operators as well as the regulation of the bus & coach and taxi industries. The Directorate is also responsible for railway safety and technical standards, including regulatory compliance and enforcement of operational rail safety

In relation to development of public transport policy the Directorate works closely with Public Transport Operations. It aims to ensure that our public transport network is a sustainable, efficient, attractive, inclusive and safe service that facilitates healthy and sustainable travel choices over unnecessary private car travel. The team are working with colleagues in the Department of Transport, Dublin, on the All-Island Strategic Rail Review.

The Directorate is also responsible for community transport policy

This Directorate also has responsibility for the leadership and coordination of DfI Climate Response - all Decarbonisation Plans and Climate Mitigations, DfI's input to the Climate Action Plan (and related comms and stakeholder management) and ensuring development and implementation of Climate Change Strategies into every day working practice of the Department's various Business Areas.

Regional Planning Policy & Casework

Alistair Beggs, Chief Planner and Director

The Directorate is responsible for the Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS) and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS) and leads in developing future regional planning policy and advice to support and improve the framework of the two-tier regional planning system.

It has overall responsibility for processing planning applications deemed to be of 'regional significance' or those which may be 'called in' from local councils for Ministerial decision. Where cases warrant an independent public inquiry or hearing before the Planning Appeals Commission

(or other appointed body), the final decision will rest with the Minister following consideration of the PAC report and recommendations.

The Directorate also has responsibility for Plan Oversight in relation to the new local development plan (LDP) system which commenced in April 2015 along with the transfer of planning to Councils. In addition, it has responsibility for the development of the Crumlin Road Gaol, Belfast and management of St Lucia, former military barracks, Omagh.

Regional Planning Governance & Legislation

Rosemary Daly, Director

Regional Planning Governance & Legislation Directorate has responsibility for developing legislation to support and improve the framework of the two-tier regional planning system. It has a strategic oversight role in the system which includes monitoring the operation and performance of council's planning functions in order to secure regional objectives and safeguard against systemic risks. This includes the assessment of statutory notifications for potentially 'calling in' planning applications from councils.

The Directorate also leads the Department's Planning Improvement Work Programme (which is part of a developing joint programme with Councils and key stakeholders to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system) which focuses on key areas including legislation, performance, community engagement, development management and Local Development Plans.

Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA)

Jeremy Logan, Chief Executive

DVA is an Executive Agency of the Department and operates on a trading fund basis. Its key operational responsibilities include: the delivery of driver and vehicle testing; driver licensing; driving and riding instructor registration; passenger transport licensing and regulation; compliance audits and enforcement of licensing, roadworthiness and other legal requirements for goods and passenger carrying operators and their vehicles.

The Agency currently operates from a number of locations across Northern Ireland, including two main administrative centres - one in Belfast and one in Coleraine; 16 driver and vehicle testing centres; one stand-alone centres for driving tests; six theory test centres; and nine weighbridges.

4. TRANSPORT AND ROAD ASSET MANAGEMENT

This section sets out the main functions of Transport and Road Asset Management Group.

Transport Planning & Policy

Sian Kerr, Director

Transport Planning and Policy Directorate is responsible for: transport strategy and policy, transport modelling and planning, transport decarbonisation, gateways (ports and airports) strategy and policy, Blue Badge scheme and parking enforcement.

Road Asset Maintenance

Colin Sykes, Director

Road Asset Maintenance is responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of the road network. Based in four Divisional offices in Belfast, Coleraine, Craigavon and Omagh as well as in James House. Its functional responsibilities are:

- maintenance of the public road network;
- management of emergency incident response on the road network and the delivery of a Winter Service programme;
- management of the two Design Build Finance & Operate (DBFO) contracts;
- management of Streetworks and the work of utility companies on the road network;
- management of the TRAM digital development programme;
- management of the internal operations & maintenance contractor;
- providing the point of contact for road users and elected representatives through 17 local section offices; and four Divisional offices; and
- management of roads related Public and Employer's Liability claims.

Road Asset Development

Liam McEvoy, Director

Road Asset Development is responsible for the management of the road network. Its functional responsibilities are:

- management of the telematics and street lighting systems;
- improvement of the network by delivering road improvement schemes and local transport and safety measures;
- management of the roads related input to planning applications and the adoption of private streets; and
- delivery of primary and subordinate legislative proposals to facilitate implementation of transportation Improvements.

Engineering

David Porter, Director

The Engineering Directorate is responsible for the development our Civil Engineering P&T staff, roads related engineering policies and design standards & approvals and the management of the internal engineering consultant. This Directorate is responsible for the administration of the Dfl Health and Safety Management System.

The Directorate is also responsible for the Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) and procures the vast majority of roads construction, maintenance and non-construction contracts / frameworks used in the delivery of the Group's functions. This part of the Directorate also works closely with CPD in the development of NI Procurement Policy.

A5 WTC & Active Travel

Colin Hutchinson, Director

Colin is responsible for the delivery of the A5 WTC Flagship Project, dualling 85km of the network, and will be concluding the dispute resolution process on the A6 Dungiven to Drumahoe dual carriageway scheme. The Active Travel team is responsible for policy development and delivery of works programmes that makes it easier for people to walk, wheel and cycle for many of their shorter everyday journeys. This includes the delivery of the Belfast Cycling Network Delivery Plan. The team recently published an Active Travel Delivery Plan for consultation, including a full update of the Department's design guidance in this area. These plans will support the delivery of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 statutory requirement on the Department to spend a minimum of 10% of the overall transport budgets on active travel.

Major Projects

Jonathan Saulters, Director

DfI Major Projects is responsible for the delivery of the Strategic Road Improvement schemes. The Directorate includes the delivery of City and Growth deal infrastructure projects on behalf of the deal teams including Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT2), the Lagan Cycle and Pedestrian Bridge and Newry Southern Relief Road within the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD), Enniskillen Southern Bypass and Cookstown Eastern Distributor within the Mid-South West (MSW) Growth Deal and Derry Central Riverfront and Strabane Footbridge within the Derry~Londonderry & Strabane City Region City Deal (DSCRCD).

Jonathan is responsible for the Departments Portfolio, Programme and Project Office (P3O). The role of the P3O is to provide support for governance, oversight and transparency of reporting on DfI's portfolio, programme and project delivery.

ANNEX A - SENIOR STAFF STRUCTURE

Department for Infrastructure
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DfI Senior Management Team

DfI Permanent Secretary - Denis McMahon

Climate, Planning & Public Transport	Transport & Road Asset Management	Water & Departmental Delivery		People Development
Deputy Secretary Judith Andrews (Acting)	**Deputy Secretary** Colin Woods	**Deputy Secretary** Declan McGeown		
Regional Planning Governance, Legislation Rosemary Daly	**Major Projects** Jonathan Saulters	**Finance** Susan Anderson	**Water & Drainage Policy** Alison Clydesdale	Patricia McIntyre
Regional Planning Policy & Casework Alistair Beggs	**Road Engineering, Services & Procurement** David Porter	**Governance, EU, Facilities and Ministerial Support** Donal Moran	**Living With Water** Simon Richardson	
DVA Jeremy Logan	**Road Asset Development** Liam McEvoy	**Corporate Strategy & Performance** Kiera Lloyd	**Rivers Operations** Gary Quinn	
Driving and Vehicle Policy Division Chris Hughes	**Road Asset Maintenance** Colin Sykes	**Communications, Public Affairs & Engagement** Karen Fullerton	**Rivers Development** Jonathan McKee	
Public Transport Operations Peter Rice (Acting)	**Transport Planning & Policy** Sian Kerr			
Transport Regulation and Public Transport Policy Jackie Robinson	**Active Travel** Colin Hutchinson			

ANNEX B - SENIOR STAFF CONTACT DETAILS

Business Area	Name	Contact Number	Email Address	Deputies
Water and Departmental Delivery	Declan McGeown	[redacted]	[redacted]	
Transport and Road Asset Management	Colin Woods	[redacted]	[redacted]	
Climate, Planning, and Public Transport Group	Judith Andrews	[redacted]	[redacted]	
Driver & Vehicle Agency	Jeremy Logan	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
People Development & Workforce Planning	Patricia McIntyre	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Finance	Susan Anderson	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Corporate Strategy and Performance	Kiera Lloyd	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Water & Drainage Policy	Alison Clydesdale	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Rivers - Development	Jonathan McKee	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Rivers - Operations	Gary Quinn	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Living with Water & Power of Water	Simon Richardson	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Governance, EU, Facilities & Ministerial Support	Donal Moran	[redacted]	[redacted]	
Communications, Public Affairs & Engagement	Karen Fullerton	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Transport Planning and Policy	Sian Kerr	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Road Asset Maintenance	Colin Sykes	[redacted]	[redacted]	
Road Asset Development	Liam McEvoy	[redacted]	[redacted]	
Road Engineering	David Porter	[redacted]	[redacted]	
Dfl Active Travel	Colin Hutchinson	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

Business Area	Name	Contact Number	Email Address	Deputies
DFI Major Projects	Jonathan Saulters	[redacted]	[redacted]	
Regional Planning Policy & Casework	Alistair Beggs	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Regional Planning Governance & Legislation	Rosemary Daly	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Driver & Vehicle Policy	Chris Hughes	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Transport Regulation & Public Transport Policy	Jackie Robinson	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Public Transport Operations	Peter Rice	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

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PART 2

Minister's First Day Brief

ISSUES LIKELY TO ARISE WITHIN THE FIRST 4-6 WEEKS

February 2025

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WATER & DEPARTMENTAL DELIVERY GROUP

FINANCE DIRECTORATE

Director: Susan Anderson

2024-25 Resource Budget

The Department's forecast resource requirements for 2024-25 were £676.6m, which, when set against the opening resource budget allocation of £559.5m, required reductions of £117.1m (17.3%).

The reductions applied span across the full range of services that the Department delivers, including limited essential road maintenance and flood risk management, and reduced budgets for public transport and water delivery.

The Department has been successful through in-year monitoring rounds, with additional in-year funding provided of £38.9m towards its submitted bids.

The Department submitted bids totalling £22.6m in response to January Monitoring and received an earmarked resource allocation of £5.2m for [redacted].

The resource budget position after January Monitoring is now £602.8m. In agreeing the outcome of January Monitoring the previous Minister advised NI Water and Translink that they were required to live within the budgets allocated, and that NI Water was to provide an alternative costed plan living within budget.

Since January Monitoring the Department has identified additional resource costs associated with Storm Éowyn in the region of £9.2m, which are high-level estimates at this stage as investigations continue across sites, while NI Water is reporting a resource pressure of between £7-8m.

[redacted]

2024-25 Capital Budget

The Department identified total 2024-25 capital requirements of c£1.4bn, excluding Shared Island funding. Reflective of the overall capital budget available to the Executive being in the region of £2bn, bids of £1.12bn were submitted including £88.5m of funding from the Shared Island Fund for the A5 in 2024-25.

The Department's opening capital budget allocation was £820m, comprising £188.9m of ringfenced funding for specific projects and a general allocation of £631.1m. In line with good financial planning, and previous years, the previous Minister agreed to overplan by £26.2m against the opening capital budget and therefore £846.2m capital allocations were made.

The Department has been successful through in-year monitoring rounds, with additional in-year funding provided of £69.8m towards its submitted bids and declared easements in-year on ring-fenced schemes (A5 - £27.5m, Belfast Rapid Transit 2 £5m and EU Peace Plus £7m).

The Department submitted bids totalling £64.3m in response to January Monitoring and received an earmarked capital allocation of £4m for A5 advanced works and £13.6m general allocation. In addition, there was £2.2m available internally for reallocation, which allowed a total of £19.6m to be allocated across the Department on the outcome of January Monitoring.

The capital budget position after January Monitoring is now £858.4m.

Since January Monitoring the Department has identified additional capital costs associated with Storm Éowyn in the region of £8m, which are high-level estimates at this stage as investigations continue across sites.

2025-2026 Budget

Resource Budget

The Department identified, in response to the Budget 2025-28 Information Gathering Exercise commissioned by DoF, forecast resource requirements of £716.7m (2025-26), £712.7m (2026-27) and £709.5m (2027-28). DoF provided Departments with a 2024-25 rolled forward baseline for this exercise, which for the Department was £559.5m requiring reductions of £157.2m, £153.2m and £150m against forecast requirements. The Department submitted bids equating to the level of reductions identified.

Following further analysis and scrutiny the Department's forecast 2025-26 resource requirements reduced to £688.2m.

The Department's draft resource Budget 2025-26 outcome is £633.3m, which is an increase of £73.8m (13%) from its 2024-25 Opening Budget position and £45.1m (13%) increase from its 2024-25 October Monitoring position.

This is a welcome increase in the Department's draft resource budget allocation and is reflective of the historic underfunded baseline that the Department has faced for many years, however, is still 8% less than total to deliver everything identified and will require prioritisation.

The previous Minister has not taken any decisions on the draft Budget outcome, [redacted]

Capital Budget

The draft capital budget for 2025-26 of £932.7m is the largest capital budget ever proposed for any NICS Department, and DfI has received the third highest combined draft capital and resource budget across all departments. This draft budget is an increase on last year of £112.6m representing an increase of almost 14%.

In response to the Budget 2025-28 information gathering exercise capital bids totalling £1,270m were submitted to DoF for 2025-26. Following adjustments for NI Water and A5 funding being held centrally by DoF the capital requirements for 2025-26 are now £1,430m.

[redacted]

Given the capital requirements identified, prioritisation of capital schemes into future years will be critical to manage within the budget position

[redacted]

Waterways Ireland Business Plans [redacted]

The Inland Waterways sectoral meeting of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC), scheduled in November 2024, was postponed, and a date for the next meeting has yet to be agreed, but is expected

to be in the next 4-8 weeks. Papers and briefing material will be provided for you, however two items to be agreed between NSMC Ministers are: the approval of the Waterways Ireland Business Plan 2025; [redacted] These have been approved by both the previous Ministers for Infrastructure and Finance but now require subsequent approvals at the NSMC.

While funding can be released to Waterways Ireland with DfI and DoF Ministers' approvals to avoid illegal spend, it remains irregular without NSMC approval.

Next Steps

Appropriate approvals will be sought at the next Inland Waterways Sectoral meeting of the NSMC.

GOVERNANCE, EU, FACILITIES & MINISTERIAL SUPPORT DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: Donal Moran

EU Funding: PEACE PLUS

The Department, along with the Department of Transport (DoT) in Dublin, performs the role of Accountable Department for Investment Areas 5.4 and 5.6 of the PEACE PLUS Programme. The PEACE PLUS Programme is designed to support peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, building upon the work of the previous PEACE and INTERREG Programmes. The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is the managing authority for the programme.

The Programme has allocated funding of €197m towards two major cross-border capital projects, namely: the Enterprise Fleet Replacement Programme (€165m), which is a project between Translink and Irish Rail to enhance sustainable travel connectivity on the economic corridor between Belfast and Dublin through replacement of the existing fleet with eight modern train sets; and the Water Enhancements through Sustainable Treatment (WEST) project (€32m), which is a project between NI Water and Uisce Éireann to improve water quality in Lough Erne, Lough Melvin, and Donegal Bay – areas of the North-Western International River Basin District.

Next Steps

To note at this stage.

Storm Éowyn

The Department formally activated its Major Emergency Response Plan (MERP) in response to the 'Red' weather warning issued by the Met Office at 09:42 a.m. on Thursday 23 January in relation to Storm Éowyn.

The MERP outlines the Department's strategic response procedures to all civil contingency incidents.

During the emergency, the Department handled over 3000 reported road incidents and obstructions with NIW reporting up to 10000 homes without water supply at one point.

Any activation of the MERP necessitates a review into the response in order to identify learning that could be helpful in future civil contingency events.

Next Steps

To note at this stage.

Democratic Scrutiny Committee

The Democratic Scrutiny Committee (DSC) provides a mechanism through which the Assembly can consider the potential impact on Northern Ireland of new or replacement EU acts that are in scope of the Windsor Framework (WF). Once notified of a new or replacement EU act in scope, the DSC has five days to determine whether or not to hold an enquiry.

EU legislation within scope relevant to DfI are mainly in the areas of Vehicle Standards and Rail Interoperability, both of which are reserved policy matters and highly technical.

Given the reserved nature of these policy areas, DfI officials rely heavily on DfT colleagues when fulfilling DSC requests for briefing. Whitehall officials do not participate in DSC sittings.

A request for briefing is issued to NICS officials on a Thursday which needs to be cleared by the Minister and returned to the Committee by noon on Monday. Officials are expected to attend the Committee sitting on the Thursday to answer any questions.

DfI officials rarely have advance notice that new or replacement EU acts will be notified to the DSC.

Next Steps

To note at this stage.

WATER AND DRAINAGE POLICY DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: Alison Clydesdale

NI Water - Budget

2024-25 Budget Position and Next Steps

NI Water's 2024 – 25 budget requirement is set out in the company's annual Operating Plan and budget. The company submitted an initial Operating Plan and budget in March 24 with a requirement of c £180m RDEL and £470m CDEL. This was revised in July 2024 to align with indicative 24/25 opening budget allocations £137.7m RDEL and £324.5m CDEL.

Following October monitoring, NI Water's CDEL allocation has increased to £348.94m (from an opening position of £324.54m). This includes additional capital funding of £4.9m from the Department for Economy for Invest to Save schemes, Pump optimisation (£2.4m) and Solar PV (£2.5m).

The additional £19.5m capital funding allocated in October monitoring was specifically to enable housing connections to the sewerage network. NI Water is now progressing investment that will lead to some 2,300 new properties being able to connect to the water and sewerage infrastructure across Antrim, Derry and Tyrone.

NI Water's RDEL allocation has increased to £149.23m (from an opening position of £137.73m), with the company continuing to report a pressure of £10.5m at January monitoring. No further RDEL allocation was available through January monitoring, therefore NI Water is required to live within its budget. The most recent advice from NI Water is that the Board has identified a further £3m-£4m savings, leaving a £7m-£8m pressure. This is expected to increase in the aftermath of Storm Eowyn.

Price Control 21 (PC21) Mid Term Review Determination

The Utility Regulator (UR) published the PC21 Mid Term Review on the 30 September 2024. The purpose of this is to refresh the determination of the revenue NI Water requires to fund the delivery of water and sewerage services as required in the Price Control and the Department's Social and Environmental Guidance.

NI Water had advised the UR of a significant increase in capital costs due to increasing inflation and supply. The UR has uplifted the PC21 funding outlook from an initial £2.1bn to £2.37bn, to adjust for the effect of rising inflation. The UR continues to work with NI Water to assess the impact of rising costs of supply and delivery of resource for Price Control 28 (PC 28).

The UR has recently advised the Department of its decision to extend the current price control (PC21) for one year, to conclude on the 31 March 2028. Planning for the next Price Control (PC28) is under way and the Department is participating in the PC28 planning approach alongside the UR and other water sector stakeholders.

NI Water non-domestic draft Scheme of Charges 2025-26- Tariff increase

NI Water has submitted its' draft 2025/26 non-domestic Scheme of Charges to the Utility Regulator (UR) for approval. Approval by the UR is typically received around the end of February. While the Utility Regulator set a real price limit of 4.5% for 2025/26 in the PC21 Mid-Term Review final determination for revised tariffs, when these are adjusted to take account of 3.6% inflation, NI Water would be permitted to increase tariffs by up to 8.1% on average. The Department continues to subsidise non-domestic customers' charges by providing a domestic allowance for measured consumers and a 50% discount for unmeasured consumers. This process also informs the Roads Drainage charge which the Department also pays.

In addition, the Scheme of Charges is used to inform the calculation of the subsidy in lieu of the domestic water charging which the Department funds. The scheme of charges takes effect from 1 April each year.

Next Steps

The Department will be updated once the Utility Regulator has considered and approved this draft Scheme of Charges and you will be briefed accordingly in early / mid March.

Water, Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Bill

The policy proposals for a Water, Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Bill were approved by the Executive at its meeting on 5 September 2024. The proposals include providing NI Water with a power to implement more widespread hosepipe restrictions; and putting the Homeowner Flood Protection Grant Scheme on a statutory footing.

The new legislation will enable the Department to issue future regulations on the design, maintenance and adoption of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS). The use of SuDS in development areas will help slow the flow of water entering our sewers and will help reduce out of sewer flooding.

The Office of the Legislative Counsel (OLC) has assigned a draftsperson and drafting is almost complete with a view to introducing the Bill to the Assembly by June 25.

Next Steps

An Executive Paper will be required, seeking Executive approval for the Bill to be introduced to the Assembly. Further briefing will be provided in March.

Commencement and Implementation of the Reservoirs Act (NI) 2015

DfI received statutory responsibility for the Reservoirs Act (NI) 2015 in June 2021, which provides for reservoir safety in Northern Ireland.

In the absence of the full commencement of the Act, the Department cannot regulate the safety of reservoir structures in Northern Ireland and a significant public safety risk, with the potential to impact on some significant development opportunities, remains. Legal advice has shown that the powers currently available to the Department are no substitute for the legislative provisions of a fully commenced Reservoirs Act and a clear public safety risk from failure of the infrastructure remains.

The Department proposes to further commence and implement the majority of the Act (which cover the main provisions) through five pieces of secondary legislation.

At its meeting on 17 October 2024, the NI Executive agreed to the progressing of these five pieces of secondary legislation that will establish a reservoir safety framework under the Act. Officials attended the Committee for Infrastructure meeting on 20 Nov 24 to seek approval of the SL1s, however members requested further information which officials have been preparing.

Next Steps

A submission with the further information requested by the Committee was sent to Private Office on 31 January 25. It is expected that the Committee for Infrastructure will call officials again.

RIVERS DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR OF RIVERS - Development: Jonathan McKee

ACTING DIRECTOR OF RIVERS – Operations: Gary Quinn

Both Rivers Directorates undertake a wide range of functions in relation to the management of flood risk. These include providing advice to Planning Authorities in relation to flood risk, watercourse and flood defence maintenance, flood mapping and the delivery of a number of flood alleviation projects.

Belfast Tidal Flood Alleviation Scheme

Belfast is at significant risk of tidal flooding and with climate change the risk of tidal flooding occurring is increasing. The highest tidal surges recorded within Belfast Harbour have occurred within the past 20 years.

The Belfast Tidal Flood Alleviation Scheme (BTFAS) involved the design & construction of approximately 8.5km of flood defences along the River Lagan from Stranmillis Weir to Belfast Lough. There are over 1,500 properties currently at risk during a significant tidal event and with the potential impact of climate change causing sea level rise, these figures are estimated to increase significantly to over 3000 by the year 2080. The scheme has been designed to take into account the latest projections on climate change.

Next Steps

The construction works have been certified complete under the contract and there will be opportunities in the coming weeks for you to visit the site and mark the completion of this critically important scheme.

Newry Flood Alleviation Scheme

Rivers Directorate are continuing to progress a study to review the flood risk in Newry and assess the viability of further flood alleviation measures to reduce this risk. The Newry Flood Alleviation Scheme has been split into a number of phases, with Phase 1 now complete.

A preferred option for Phase 2 has been identified and officials have commissioned consultants to develop an outline business case to confirm economic viability before progressing to the detailed design phase.

Further phases will consider the need for upstream storage and potential measures to reduce tidal flood risk in the area.

Next Steps

The project team are also currently engaging with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council with a view to potentially accelerating a section of the proposed Flood Alleviation works through the Council's Theatre and Conference Facility project.

Flooding Emergencies

Rivers Directorate also respond to emergency flooding incidents and play a key role in discharging the Departments 'Lead Government Department for the strategic co-ordination of severe weather emergencies' responsibilities.

The Review of the South East Flooding, Autumn 2023

The Review of the South East Flooding, Autumn 2023 was compiled by an independent consultant and was made publicly available on 30th July 2024.

The review of the South East Flooding in Autumn 2023 has detailed a number of recommendations for which The Department, and many other multi-agency partners, will be responsible for delivering.

Although The Department is not the lead agency for the delivery of all the recommendations from the review, it will lead on the coordination of all recommendations through the establishment of a Flooding Review Recommendations Group.

The first meeting of this group took place in late November 2024 with the January 2025 meeting deferred due to many of the participants being involved with the recovery phase of Storm Eowyn. The focus at this initial stage is to develop and agree an Action Plan outlining responsibilities and associated timescales needed to meet each recommendation with the anticipation that all recommendations will be addressed within 24 months.

Flood Risk Management Investment

There are huge costs associated with responding to, and recovering from, major flooding incidents.

There is a need to accelerate investment in this area and an annual investment of at least £30 million of capital funding, together with £8 million resource funding for the maintenance of existing flood risk management infrastructure and flood warning systems is necessary. This work will not prevent every major flooding incident but will be able to prevent many of them and mitigate others.

Next Steps

This issue will be addressed through the budget management discussions.

LIVING WITH WATER DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: Simon Richardson

LWWP - Delivery of the Living With Water in Belfast Plan

The Living With Water in Belfast Plan, which was published on 9 November 2021 following NI Executive endorsement, aims to address the increasing demands on the city's drainage and wastewater network caused by population growth along with the more frequent extreme weather events resulting from climate change. In addition to improving the existing piped drainage systems, the Plan identifies the need for nature-based solutions to also be employed and recommends that policy proposals are brought forward to support implementation of sustainable drainage (SuDS) and natural flood management measures.

The published Plan estimated that £1.4bn investment would be required over 12 years to deliver it, with the majority, £1.2bn, required for upgrades to NI Water infrastructure and around £200m identified for blue/green drainage infrastructure. However, an anticipated £700m increase in the estimated costs of the upgrades needed to NI Water's sewerage networks and wastewater treatment works (WwTW) has seen the overall Plan cost move to over £2.1bn.

An Affordability Review carried out by the Department in response to this increase concluded that the Belfast Plan still needs to be delivered but that the original 12-year delivery timeframe is no longer viable, due to increased costs. Projects in the Plan will now be taken forward by the Department and NI Water as normal business at a scale and pace achievable within available budgets, rather than through a structured programme.

The Department remains committed to the Belfast Plan and will continue to make the case for additional funding to expedite its delivery. However, the increase in costs together with the level of available budget means that NI Water has paused development and delivery of the major upgrades needed at the Belfast WwTW, Kinnegar WwTW, Whitehouse WwTW and Sydenham Pumping Station. Delaying these upgrades means there is likely to be limited capacity available to connect new housing, water quality in Belfast Lough may deteriorate further and flood risk could increase.

Next Steps

A more detailed briefing will be provided to you in due course.

LWWP - Development of the Living With Water in Derry Plan

In June 2021, the Department announced that a Strategic Drainage Infrastructure Plan for Derry, similar to the Living With Water in Belfast Plan, would be developed. In May 2023, the Department published 'A Vision for Living With Water in Derry/Londonderry', a pre cursor to the draft Plan, which outlined the Department's approach to developing integrated and sustainable drainage solutions across the city and surrounding area.

Since then, officials have been engaging with key stakeholders during the development of the draft Plan, including Derry City & Strabane District Council, NI Housing Executive, and DAERA. The Belfast Plan Review has been taken into account, and the proposals for delivery of projects within the Derry Plan align with the current Belfast Plan delivery model.

The draft Living With Water in Derry Plan was published for consultation on Monday 13 January 2025 and the consultation will run for 12 weeks. The consultation launch was deferred until January to avoid the Christmas holiday period and ensure a full 12-week unbroken consultation period was provided. The public consultation on the draft Plan will give stakeholders the opportunity to express their views on the wastewater and drainage issues they face and on the Living With Water approach to solving them.

The draft Plan identifies the drainage and wastewater issues in the area and details opportunities for potential solutions to these issues. It does not include an estimated cost for delivery as the scale and scope of the individual opportunities identified have yet to be determined. Implementation of any of the schemes will require detailed appraisal to assess feasibility and cost. It is also anticipated that further opportunities may be identified through the consultation process and following publication of the final Plan. Partner organisations will work within established delivery mechanisms and funding streams to take these projects forward from within their annual budgets.

Next Steps

A detailed briefing on the outcome of the public consultation on the draft Derry Plan will be provided to you in due course.

LWW – Transformation Bid – Natural Solutions – Urban Drainage

The Department submitted a bid to the Transformation Fund to pilot the use of nature-based drainage solutions in urban areas. Blue / green drainage infrastructure is cleaner and greener and can help slow the flow of water entering our sewers, helping to reduce out of sewer flooding. The purpose of

this pilot is to trial and monitor the impact of a range of blue/green interventions to help inform future policy and legislation for SuDS and natural flood management.

[redacted]

Next Steps

[redacted]

CORPORATE STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: Kiera Lloyd

Business Planning and Strategy

As part of the governance responsibilities of the Department, and requirements set out in Managing Public Money (NI), the Department is required to produce an Annual Business Plan. The Department currently has a Business Plan for 2024-25 which identifies 20 keys actions to be taken this year across the three areas of: Water; Transport; and Planning.

Officials are currently in the process of developing options for a new Business Plan for the next business year (April 2025 to March 2026) for your consideration.

Next Steps

As part of the development of a new Business Plan officials will meet with you in the coming weeks to discuss your priorities for the next year.

Consultation on Developers Contributions

As part of the three-pronged approach to address wastewater capacity challenges, officials are currently working on a draft consultation document on the introduction of developer contributions.

Under current legislation, NI Water is precluded from receiving developer contributions to improve wastewater infrastructure. The ongoing wastewater capacity issues are having an impact on the ability of developers to build houses, and the proposed consultation will seek the public's views on whether and how developers might be enabled to contribute towards the costs of upgrading or replacing the current wastewater infrastructure.

Next Steps

The current intention is to publish the consultation in March 2025; a submission containing the draft consultation document and seeking your approval to launch will be provided in advance.

Public Appointments

The Department is responsible for appointing a Chair and Members to the Boards of NI Water, NI Transport Holding Company / Translink, three Trust Ports and the Drainage Council. Your

predecessor agreed a policy that all appointments made by the Department would be held through open competition, with no automatic reappointments to a second term. This approach was consistent with that adopted by successive Ministers for Regional Development and Infrastructure.

Next Steps

A submission will be provided seeking your preferred approach to making public appointments

Social Inclusion and Languages Strategies

On 5 April 2022 representatives from three of the four Co-design Groups, Anti-Poverty, Disability and LGBTQI+ presented their position papers to the Ministerial Steering Group.

Key issues raised from a DfI perspective include the current lack of S75 data, removal of hate language from DfI property, bus design and the lack of space for wheelchair users on buses. The disability Co-design Group welcomed the work and the campaign highlighting pavement parking and have also suggested Senior Leadership training on Disability that incorporates the UN Convention on Rights of People with a Disability (UNRCPD). Officials are currently considering these key issues.

Work is continuing, led by TEO, on the cross departmental Violence against Women and Girls Strategy. DfI is currently contributing to the work on the Strategy. DfI continues to provide a free travel scheme that allows for free public transport to a refuge or emergency housing shelter for those fleeing domestic abuse, including LGBTQI+.

Work is also continuing on the Irish Language Strategy and the Ulster-Scots Language, Heritage and Culture Strategy which are being led by the Department for Communities (DfC) on behalf of the Executive. DfI is an active participant on the Cross-Departmental Working Group on Ulster-Scots and Irish Language.

Next Steps

To note at this stage.

CLIMATE, PLANNING AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT GROUP

DRIVING, VEHICLE AND ROAD SAFETY POLICY DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: Chris Hughes

Road Safety

The Department has lead responsibility for road safety, addressing core elements of road safety in an integrated manner, focusing on safe people, safe roads, and safe vehicles. Provisional figures released by the PSNI regrettably show that in 2024 there were 69 deaths on roads here as a result of road traffic collisions. This compares to 71 recorded in 2023, 55 in 2022 and 50 in 2021. The most vulnerable groups are Drivers, Pedestrians and Motorcyclists, with the largest causation factor being human error.

There is a published Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2030. In support of this work is ongoing on preparing a consultation on updating mobile phone legislation, drink driving legislation, and drug driving legislation.

A consultation on biennial testing has been launched and is due to close on 16 April 2025, after which the responses will be analysed and further advice provided to you.

Next Steps

Further submissions will be provided on this as appropriate.

Rail Safety - Interoperability of the Rail System

Interoperability of the rail system is a reserved matter, and the Department for Transport is bringing forward regulations to implement a Protocol / Windsor Framework obligation regarding EU technical rules on interoperability of the rail system. The DfT consultation may be undertaken during Spring/ Summer 2024.

While reserved, DfI is the Competent Authority covering interoperability issues. A cooperation agreement between the Department as National Safety Authority and the European Rail Agency is being prepared.

Next Steps

Each year the Department is required to publish an annual safety performance report for the NI rail network and an assessment of the achievement of the Common Safety Targets; publication of both documents is scheduled for the first half of 2024.

Policy Divergence from GB & EU

As a result of EU Exit, the impacts of EU law revocation and reform, and the implementation of the Windsor Framework, policy development within Driving, Vehicle and Road Safety Policy Division has been significantly altered. Officials are no longer able to rely on UKG and their lawyers to engage with the EU on proposed EU legislation, or on its development, transposition and initial implementation. Going forward there will be a requirement for NI officials to implement EU requirements specified within the Windsor Framework separately from GB officials who, unlike NI, are free to take a different view. In addition, there is a requirement for NI officials to establish new procedures in relation to the transposition of proposed EU legislation that is non-Framework related. Finally, as GB has been free to take a different view from EU a number of, non-Framework related, UKG initiatives have commenced which have resulted in divergence between the GB and NI position.

Next Steps

There is potential for urgent submissions to be required on divergence issues, seeking your views on how/whether GB or EU requirements should apply in the context of Northern Ireland.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT OPERATIONS DIRECTORATE

Interim Director: Peter Rice

Overview of Translink

The Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company, trading as Translink, was established under the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 1967. This Act outlines that the Holding Company must engage as a commercial enterprise in the formation and promotion of its subsidiary companies (Ulsterbus, Citybus and NI Railways). This Act also provides detail on a range of issues including the provision of railways, powers of the railway undertaking, accounts and auditing.

The Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 also sets out that the Department must secure "most public passenger transport services continue to be provided by the Holding Company and its subsidiaries" (i.e., NITHC/Translink). This Act stipulates that the Department must secure the provision of public passenger transport services with due regard to accessibility, economy, efficiency, safety of operation and sustainability and this is implemented through the Public Service Agreement with Translink.

Translink Funding Position

The opening Resource allocation for 2024-25 was £145.7m (initial resource budget of £143.95m plus £1.75m allocated to cover the Windsor Framework costs). In October Monitoring, an additional £6.85m of Resource funding was provided along with an internal transfer of £300k bringing the budget allocation to £152.85m. [redacted]

Translink are forecasting an operating loss of £23.7m and a closing year-end cash position of £23m. The overall position remains £7m below the Group's recommended minimum cash threshold of £30m which is similar to the 2023/24 closing cash balance.

Pay Award

In the absence of an approved Corporate Plan, the previous Minister approved a proposed 3% pay award that Translink negotiated with staff in Bus Operations. In previous years the level of uplift accepted by Bus Operations staff set the tone for subsequent negotiations with other staff groups.

[redacted]

Next Steps

The latest position is that, despite this additional funding, Translink is still facing a £7m pressure.

Capital Programme and Key Major Projects

Translink's Capital Budget for 2024-25 was originally £239.4m. This has been revised to reflect the outcome of the Monitoring Rounds and is now £249.5m. This includes investment in several major projects such as the new Belfast Grand Central Station and the continuous replacement of older buses with Zero Emission Buses.

Belfast Grand Central Station - Phase 1 of the station opened in autumn 2024 with the remaining aspects of the station to be fully completed by end of the year.

Next Steps

Translink are continuing to manage the overall capital programme within the allocated capital budget.

Community Transport Organisations and Shopmobility Schemes

The Department provides the main source of income for 12 Community Transport Organisations and 13 Shopmobility Schemes. These organisations provide member only door to door type services branded as Dial-a-Lift in rural areas and the Disability Action Transport Scheme in urban areas. Shopmobility schemes provide loans of equipment to help those with specific mobility needs.

Funding for all the schemes in 2024/25 is £4.9m. It is a discretionary payment as there is no statutory obligation placed on the Department to provide this funding.

These organisations provide accessible, affordable transport options to those people who are socially isolated and have difficulty accessing public transport. These transport services provided are highly valued by service users, nearly all of whom are elderly and\or have a disability, i.e. some of the most vulnerable in our local communities.

Next Steps

Phase 2 of a review of community transport is currently underway. A Phase 1 report was completed in late 2024 and is due to be shared with community transport organisations shortly. The overall aim of the review is to consider community transport provision for the longer term to ensure that the Department is maximising both value for money and outcomes through its investment in these key services, and that the role community transport plays in the delivery of public transport aligns with the Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Rathlin Ferry

The Rathlin Ferry Service contract changed provider to Dunaverty Ltd on 11 January 2023 following the liquidation of the previous operator, Rathlin Island Ferry Limited (RIFL).

A Direct Award Contract was awarded to Dunaverty Ltd who were able to recommence a limited service within 3 days of contract award and a full service within 3 weeks. [redacted]

Next Steps

The current contract will end on 10 January 2026, a replacement will be prepared and a submission to advise you will issue in approximately 1 week.

Strangford Ferry

The ferry operation is currently vulnerable due to vacancies and the time taken to fill these. The specialist training of a suitable crew member takes approximately 6 months.

Next Steps

Ongoing staffing recruitment to fill vacancies across the service will create better resilience but will take some time to deliver.

TRANSPORT REGULATION AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT POLICY DIRECTORATE

Jackie Robinson - Director

All-Island Strategic Rail Review (AISRR)

The All-Island Strategic Rail Review is an ambitious piece of work which has the potential to transform our rail network. It offers an opportunity to deliver real and lasting change for people, communities and our island economy through faster speeds, improved frequency, and new routes, particularly across the West and North, improving accessibility and connectivity across the island.

Already, rail services on the island are being developed towards the Report's vision. This includes an increase to an hourly train service between Dublin and Belfast, while procurement has also started on a new, faster, more sustainable "Enterprise" train fleet for the Dublin-Belfast route.

Officials continue to work with our colleagues in the Department of Transport, supported by the European Investment Bank (EIB), to consider the recommendations in the Review and identify those rail interventions which could be well advanced or delivered over the next decade to 2035. Translink also have a number of feasibility studies, linked to recommendations in the Rail Review, which are due to report later this year including: the reopening of Antrim-Lisburn (with a link to Belfast International Airport); Armagh-Portadown; Electrification of Belfast to the Border and Portadown-Derry.

The Review's 32 recommendations are divided into three broad time horizons: short-term to 2030, medium-term between 2030 and 2040, and long-term between 2040 and 2050. Currently the work with the consultant team is focused on identifying those rail interventions which could be well advanced or delivered over the next decade to 2035.

Next Steps

EIB are finalising work in relation to prioritisation of projects and an all island rail decarbonisation strategy. Further details on their work will be provided in the coming weeks.

Climate Response

The Department is working with DAERA to support the development of a multi-decade Green Growth Strategy, its supporting strategies and associated Executive Climate Action Plan which is a requirement of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (the Act). These collaborative

strategies which include Clean Air and Biodiversity plans and actions will help to ensure that we chart the right future pathway to net zero.

In relation to the Climate Action Plan the Department is leading on the Transport Sector and Infrastructure Sector and has worked collaboratively with other Departments to develop policies and proposals as required by the Act. Once finalized and approved the Climate Action Plan will be subject to a formal 16 Week Public Consultation which we currently anticipate happening in Spring/Summer.

The legislation also requires the Department to put in place a transport sectoral plan and an infrastructure sectoral plan for combatting climate change and introduces new statutory responsibilities around how budgets should be used to deliver the net zero 2050 target set out in the legislation. The Plans are being developed as part of a new Transport Strategy (TSNI) which is currently under development.

Climate Change Adaptation

The UK Climate Change Act 2008 requires Northern Ireland Government Departments to prepare an Adaptation Programme which responds to the climate change risks and opportunities for Northern Ireland as identified in the most recent UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (UKCCRA) produced by the Climate Change Committee (the CCC). Sections 48 and 49 of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 relate to the duties placed on the CCC and DAERA, as the lead Department, in relation to climate adaptation.

The Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP) is our climate adaptation programme and contains the NICS Department's responses to the risk and opportunities relevant as identified in the UK Climate Risk Assessments. NICCAP2 which ran from 2019-2024 had just ended. The Department has provided input to the draft third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP3). The input primarily relates to the following areas: (1) flooding, (2) water, (3) Translink and public transport, (4) planning and (5) roads. DAERA is seeking to obtain the Executive's approval to launch a publication consultation on NICCAP3 in February 2025.

Rail Safety

Interoperability of the rail system is a reserved matter, and the Department for Transport is bringing forward regulations to implement a Protocol/ Windsor Framework obligation regarding EU technical

rules on interoperability of the rail system. The DfT consultation may be undertaken during Spring 2025. While reserved, DfI is the Competent Authority covering interoperability issues and will be required to inform Committee of the proposed changes.

The Department is also responsible for publishing the annual Common Safety Target report which assess the safety performance of the NI rail network. This is typically published in February each year.

Rail Safety Branch has undertaken a review of rail safety legislation with a view to preparing a Bill to provide new powers for rail regulation, modernise existing powers, including a power to address areas of divergence as a result of developments in EU legislation. An options paper is being prepared for consideration.

Next Steps

To note at this stage.

REGIONAL PLANNING POLICY AND CASEWORK DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: Alistair Beggs

Notable Planning Applications

Dalradian

In September 2021 former Minister Mallon announced that the Dalradian Gold Mine project at Greencastle, County Tyrone would be the subject of an independent Public Local Inquiry (PLI) and requested that the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) make the necessary arrangements. The PLI opened on 13 January 2024.

The PLI process allows for the identification of processing issues and to allow them to be rectified to better inform the process. In this case a procedural matter regarding transboundary consultation was raised in discussions

Although disappointed at the Commission's decision to suspend the PLI, the Department acknowledged the concerns of the public and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and accepted there was no alternative but to accept the requests that the PAC should suspend the inquiry until further consultation takes place.

The Department has carried out further transboundary consultation with the Irish government which will allow the public in the south of Ireland the opportunity to have their say and express their views on the project prior to the resumption of the PLI. A mid inquiry meeting has been scheduled for the 26 March 2025 to consider further the procedure in dealing with the transboundary matters.

The PAC has been requested by DfI to hold PLI's into 4 windfarm applications; to afford Mid Ulster District Council an opportunity of appearing before and being heard by the Commission following notice of opinion to approve an application relating to Lough Neagh; to afford both the applicant and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council an opportunity in relation to the recommendation to refuse the mixed use scheme at Blaris; to afford Derry City and Strabane District Council a similar opportunity in relation to the recommendation to refuse a multi sports facility for Strabane Athletic Club, and to afford the applicant an opportunity in relation to a recommendation to refuse a windfarm proposal located within the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). To date no arrangements have been published by the Commission for this work.

Next Steps

Planners continue to liaise with DOJ (who sponsor the PAC) and the PAC on the workload pressures and the implications for the planning system, the economy and communities.

Casement Park

The application for the re-development of Casement Park was granted planning permission on 28 July 2021.

It was accompanied by a Planning Agreement between Department for Infrastructure, UCGAA and DfC to secure mitigation measures out with the red line of the planning application including the measures to be implemented in the Event Management Plan.

The permission is subject to a range of conditions (46) controlling the construction and operation of the development. Applications to discharge conditions have been and are being processed by the Department for Infrastructure. The development is being carried out in a phased approach with demolition being phase 1. Departmental officials are awaiting the applicant for further information regarding the remaining 2no, conditions which are required to be discharged prior to demolition works being able to be commenced.

Newry Theatre Applications - LA07/2023/2193/F and LA07/2023/2213/LBC (Council Applications) LA07/2023/2225/DCA (DfI application)

Planning applications LA07/2023/2193/F and LA07/2023/2213/LBC were presented to the Planning Committee in Newry Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC) on 18 December 2024, the Council agreed to approve. The council is also the applicant. The proposal is for a new four-storey theatre & conference centre extension to the Town Hall. Construction of atrium connecting theatre extension with town Hall. Demolition of the Sean Hollywood Arts Centre and No. 2 Bank Parade. Alterations and refurbishment of Town Hall. Public Realm proposals to portion of Sugar Island, portion of Needham bridge, portion of East side of Newry canal, area around Bank Parade and Kildare Street.

The associated application for conservation area consent (LA07/2023/2225/DCA) for the demolition of the Sean Hollywood Arts Centre and No. 2 Bank Parade and is currently being processed by the Regional Planning Policy & Casework Directorate.

Newry Civic Hub Application - LA07/2023/2274/F (Council Applications) (LA07/2023/2275/DCA) (DfI application)

Planning application LA07/2023/2274/F was presented to the Planning Committee in Newry Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC) on 18 December 2024, the Council agreed to approve the application. The council is also the applicant. The proposal is for a civic hub building accommodating a council room, meeting rooms, council offices and associated ancillary accommodation. It includes associated public realm works to part of the existing surface car park at Abbey Way Car Park, Abbey Way, Newry.

The associated application for conservation area consent (LA07/2023/2275/DCA) for the demolition of the existing decked multi-storey car park at Abbey Way Car Park, Newry and is currently being processed by the Regional Planning Policy & Casework Directorate.

Next Steps

Submissions will be provided regarding recommendations to be made for your decision for these applications in the coming weeks.

Belfast Transport Hub

Planning permission was granted under LA04/2017/1388/F for the Transport Hub and was subject to a number of conditions. Several conditions require subsequent approvals from the Department prior to subsequent works taking place. A number of conditions related to works commencing on the public highway and in particular Durham Street. These conditions were discharged on 21 January 2025.

4 conditions remain to be discharged and relate to a Travel Plan, remediation of contaminated land, and a landscaping plan.

Correspondence recently from Ulster Architectural Heritage Society (UAHS) and William Dickson (Blackstaff Residents Association) have been received expressing disappointment with the decision to continue with the demolition of the Boyne Bridge. UAHS through their solicitors have also asserted an intention to seek judicial review of the Department's decision to discharge the conditions relating to the next phase and in particular allowing the work on the bridge to continue.

Although suggestions have been forwarded that the Boyne Bridge be retained and Durham Street reopened, pursuit of any alternative to that for which planning permission was granted, is a matter for Translink or an applicant.

An application (under section 54 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011) seeking non-compliance with a condition restricting Enterprise services is under consideration and your officials are working towards a recommendation.

North South Interconnector

Planning permission was granted to SONI for the North-South Interconnector on 14 September 2020 the main element of which was a 400kV overhead line comprising 102 towers over 34.1km and a substation. Planning permission was also granted on the same date for associated works such as site levelling, access points and lanes, and construction working areas. These Planning permissions were granted subject to conditions, some of which needed to be discharged prior to the commencement of development. Applications for those specific conditions have been discharged by Planning officials.

A PAPL was received on 6 December 2024 relating to the Department's decision to discharge a condition on each permission related to submission and approval of a Planting and Woodland Management and Maintenance Plan for the overhead line element of the scheme. The case is listed before the court for a rolled-up hearing at the end of February 2025. Officials are carefully considering this matter and all papers with the legal team.

Local Development Plan Process

Local Councils are advancing with their Local Development Plans. LDP's provide a 15-year plan framework to support the economic and social needs of a council's district in line with regional strategies and policies, while providing for the delivery of sustainable development.

DfI have a Plan Oversight role as well as a consultee role and have responsibility to move plans onto the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to undertake an Independent Examination (IE) of a Plan Document.

Following receipt of the PAC's IE report, the Department also has the responsibility to direct councils to adopt their LDP documents accordingly. The Department is currently considering the submission of Mid Ulster District Council's (MUDC) draft Plan Strategy (dPS) which will require a Ministerial decision in due course.

[redacted]

PAC Resourcing for LDPs

The PAC has flagged the potential to hold a single IE in the financial year 25/26 if they prioritise its examination ahead of other work. Recent correspondence from the PAC indicates the ability to facilitate some IE's in 2027 onwards. In our plan-based system, the progress of LDPs are critical to having an up-to-date policy context for decision making, and in facilitating Council aspirations for their areas. However, progress here is at risk as, for example, if we refer a Plan Strategy to the Commission for IE they would probably report back to us in the late 26/27 financial year. A backlog of IEs is also likely to build up in coming years as we could reasonably expect the potential for 4 more IEs as Councils publish their draft Plan Strategies and for further IEs as others move on to the subsequent draft Local Policy Plans. Any backlog runs the risk of the evidence supporting LDPs becoming outdated and requiring review. Such delays could therefore require Councils to review multiple topics at significant cost - £40K per study has been mentioned by Councils.

Transformation Bid

Recently the Department submitted a bid to the Interim Public Sector Transformation Board. The Department's bid included seeking funding for independent examiners for Local Development Plan Independent Examinations and for Public Local Inquiries and Hearings for Departmental planning applications.

The focus of the Bid was improving decision times, economic delivery and our climate change response by utilising powers to appoint persons to report on local development plans and regionally significant planning applications, and by creating teams to improve capacity, guidance and to reduce bureaucracy around consultation responses in the planning process. We await the outcome of the bid.

Review of Regional Strategic Planning Policy on Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

During 2023, the Department consulted on proposed changes to the SPPS on renewable and low carbon energy with the aim of ensuring that planning policy remains fit for purpose and up to date to inform plan-making and decision-taking, while reflecting our commitment to the Energy Strategy and the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022. This review is at an advanced stage of completion.

[redacted]

Next Steps

Private office has been seeking to arrange this meeting as soon as possible. Following this meeting officials will prepare a Version 4 Executive paper for circulation which will also take account of a recent comments from the DAERA Minister. The revised policy will be published as soon as possible following Executive Committee agreement. When published, the final policy will replace the existing provisions titled 'Renewable Energy' as contained in the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS).

Review of the SPPS in relation to Climate Change – Call for Evidence

Beyond the review of policy on renewable and low carbon energy, it is important that the wider policy framework provided for by the SPPS is fit for purpose and suitably future proofed to appropriately support the Climate Change agenda going forward.

Last year, the Department undertook a Call for Evidence on a potential focused review of the SPPS in relation to Climate Change, with questions focused on the areas of flood risk management, transportation and development in the countryside, although wider comments and evidence were also to be welcomed. The primary purpose was to engage with key stakeholders on the proposed areas of focus for a review of the SPPS and to invite the submission of evidence, from all interested parties, on the relevant factors that can assist with determining the best way forward. The consultation closed on the 28th March 2024 and the 59 responses received have been analysed.

Next Steps

Officials will shortly be engaging with the other relevant business areas in the Department before briefing you on the responses to the Call for Evidence and the proposed next steps.

Crumlin Road Gaol/St Lucia site

The Historic Core of the St Lucia site remains in the ownership of the MoD, who had been pressing DfI to accept this element of the site. The DfI position is that the ownership of the Historic Core would

be a considerable drain on resources. Following a request from MoD to come to a decision on the Historic Core, an EF decision to refuse the Historic Core has been taken and communicated to MoD. The Department intends to dispose of the St Lucia site which may be a joint exercise with MoD who also intend to dispose of the Historic Core. On the assumption that this remains the direction of travel, we would intend to keep you updated on progress.

There are currently two occupiers at the Gaol site - Belfast Tours Limited (BTL) who have a non-exclusive licence to manage the Gaol Visitor Attraction and Conference Centre (GVACC) by means of an Operator Agreement and Belfast Distillery Company Limited (BDCL) who have a 125 year lease for a Distillery at A Wing.

[redacted]

Next Steps

[redacted]

REGIONAL PLANNING GOVERNANCE & LEGISLATION DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: Rosemary Daly

Improving the Planning System

A Planning Improvement Programme (PIP) has been developed and is being delivered in partnership with local government to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our planning system.

The programme incorporates work undertaken by the Department and others to improve the planning system, as well as key recommendations set out in reports published during 2022 by the NI Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee, which suggested that the planning system in the North was not delivering for people and the economy and identified specific areas for improvement.

The Department, in collaboration with local government, developed a joint programme comprising a suite of actions across key thematic areas including policy & legislation, local development plans, development management, performance and engagement. The objective of the PIP was not to fundamentally revisit the two-tier planning system put in place by the Executive/NI Assembly, but rather to identify and secure efficiencies and improvements within the current system.

PIP was endorsed by the former Infrastructure Minister (Nicola Mallon) and by the Society of Local Government Chief Executives (SOLACE). The work programme was progressed by officials and governance arrangements are in place to ensure that programme progress is monitored, reported upon and that appropriate programme oversight is in place. Significant progress has been made to date in delivering the PIP and some of the key achievements include:

- Legislation to enable statutory validation checklists in council planning authorities.
- Two planning fee inflationary uplifts (the last implemented in May 2024).
- A full review of DfI's internal notification / call-in process; a review of the policy approach to call-in criteria and an ongoing review of Departmental directions.
- A review of the Planning (Development Management) Regulations (NI) 2015 (ongoing).
- A review of Local Development Plans (LDPs) in term of what improvements will make most impact to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the plan making system
- Enhancing the role of planning statutory consultees, including the Planning Statutory Consultee Forum (PSCF); the development of quarterly and annual reports on statutory consultation

performance; a review of statutory consultee advice and published guidance; and production of a protocol for statutory consultees which sets out what involvement/support is required from them to support an effective and efficient planning system.

- An interim Regional Planning Commission (iRPC) was established in early 2023 to provide advice and support to the wider PIP while promoting continuous improvement in the planning system.

- Environmental Governance Work Programme (EGWP) to enhance Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) capacity and competence for public sector planning staff in the most complex area of the planning application process.

Whilst all of these actions and measures should collectively help to secure tangible improvements, it must be recognised that it will take time for them to bed into the system and to take full effect in terms of system performance.

Next Steps

Minister O 'Dowd recently endorsed the next phase of planning improvement agenda, which will refocus on specific areas of action and initiatives to support the long term sustainability of the system, as well as improve overall performance. The ongoing workstreams in Phase 1 will continue to be monitored and progressed to conclusion. Phase 2 will involve:

1) A DfI / Council collaborative diagnosis of the operational issues impacting the performance of the system. Actions until now have focused on the regulatory 'framework' such as legislative changes. The next phase will focus on evidence-based scrutiny of, and intervention in, planning authority practices and procedures. Stakeholder engagement with the 12 planning authorities (including DfI) is underway.

2) Improving wellbeing and a sense of agency for people in the system. To collectively address the wider challenges including: the image of planning; pressures associated with bureaucracy and negative feedback from stakeholders; poor wellbeing of staff in the sector; and consequentially problems in securing and maintaining sustainable workforce capacity; and

3) A real focus on making a difference by seeing the big picture. The ultimate objective is to ensure that planners do what they are trained and employed to do i.e. to deliver good planning which furthers sustainable development and improves the wellbeing of people. This will be achieved by freeing planning staff from the burden of process and reactive bureaucracy and building capacity and capability in the planning system. This will need to be supported by consideration of the financial sustainability of the end to end planning process

The planning improvement agenda is an opportunity, as well as a collective responsibility, for all those involved in the process, to ensure that NI has a modern, fit for purpose planning system which delivers the right socio-economic and environmental outcomes for all.

Potential 'Call Ins'

Portstewart Hotel Application

The Department is currently considering a notification and third party 'call in' requests in relation to planning application LA01/2016/1328/F, which has been recommended for approval by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council. The application proposes a hotel and spa complex on land south of 120 Ballyreagh Road (A2), Portstewart. The Department must now decide whether or not the application should be referred (called in) to it for determination and a detailed submission will be provided in due course. The council cannot issue decisions until, as Minister, you have decided whether or not to 'call in' the applications.

Newry Civic Hub Application

The Department is currently considering a notification and third party 'call in' request in relation to planning application LA07/2023/2274/F, which has been recommended for approval by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. This application relates to a proposed civic hub building at Abbey Way, Mill Street and Lower Water Street, Newry, for which the Council is the planning applicant. The Department must now decide whether or not the application should be referred (called in) to it for determination and a detailed submission will be provided in due course. The council cannot issue decisions until, as Minister, you have decided whether or not to 'call in' this application.

Next Steps

Submissions will follow on both these issues.

Planning Legislation

There are a number of legislative actions being brought forward through subordinate legislation:-

Validation Checklists

Validation Checklists: Legislation and guidance have been brought forward to enable the introduction of validation checklists in council planning authorities, with the aim of improving the quality of planning applications coming into the system. The amending legislation was made in October 2024 and will come into operation on 1 April 2025.

Review of the Development Management Regulations

A review of the Planning (Development Management) Regulations (NI) 2015 is underway, and a public consultation was undertaken in 2024. The consultation focused on a review of the existing classes of development and the corresponding thresholds for local, major and regionally significant development; proposals to make pre-determination hearings discretionary for councils; and proposals to provide for in-person and online/electronic engagement as part of pre-application community consultation process. The Department is continuing to review and analyse the responses from the consultation. The aim is to ensure that the Regulations are practical and appropriate to support current and future development trends, streamline the planning application process, and encourage greater participation in the planning process.

Planning Fees

Planning application fees: Two planning application fee inflationary uplifts have been implemented by the Department within the last 2 years, and a third uplift is planned later this year (2025).

Next Steps

Any fee increase would take effect from April 2025. A submission is currently with the Minister.

Primary Legislation: Planning Bill

You may receive calls and may want to bring forward a Planning Bill to deliver potential amendments to primary legislation. [redacted] The development of a Planning Bill will require resources to establish a Bill Team and will need to be considered alongside your and the Executive's other legislative priorities.

Next Steps

We would want to discuss this with you in due course.

DVA

DIRECTOR: Jeremy Logan

Infrastructure Project – New Test Centres

The new DVA test centre and depot at Hydebank, Belfast are open for the delivery of driver testing and compliance and roadside enforcement services, along with a range of corporate support services.

The construction of a second new test centre at Mallusk is underway, with the build scheduled for completion in Autumn 2025.

Work is ongoing to finalise the designs, costs and planning applications for two further new test centres in the Campsie and Enniskillen. A submission detailing the proposals will be prepared for your consideration in due course.

The provision of vehicle testing services at Hydebank and Mallusk is subject to progress with the vehicle testing contract (see below). When operational, these two new centres will provide the capacity to test over 200,000 additional vehicles per annum, which will help meet the future demand for this service.

Next Steps

To note at this stage.

Vehicle Testing Equipment

[redacted]

[redacted]

- [redacted]
- [redacted]
- [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Next Steps

[redacted]

[redacted]

Diesel Emissions Testing

In 2006, because of the risks to the health and safety of staff and customers, and in consultation with the Health and Safety Executive for NI, the diesel smoke test for cars and light goods vehicles was suspended.

The reintroduction of a diesel smoke test for cars and light goods vehicles under 3,500kgs will require a substantial capital investment in the vehicle testing estate to create a safe environment, in which the test can be conducted. New test centres at Hydebank and Mallusk will include facilities for full emissions testing and will meet all current and known future requirements.

The European Commission recently recommended diesel emissions Particle Number (PN) testing as an alternative to the ineffective smoke density test for younger vehicles. This is because younger vehicles, due to their design, may produce high levels of hazardous particulate matter if not properly maintained, and are unlikely to fail the smoke density test.

The DVA conducted a public consultation on proposals to introduce a PN diesel emissions test, for cars and light goods vehicles first registered from 1 January 2013 and subject to MOT testing, concluded on 18 September 2024. Having reflected on the responses, Minister O'Dowd instructed officials to prepare for the introduction of the new emissions test at the earliest opportunity.

Introducing the PN diesel emissions test for younger light vehicles at existing Test Centres and reintroducing the diesel smoke density test for older vehicles at newly constructed Test Centres that will have the facilities to safely conduct these tests is an integral part of the DVA's plans to provide a fully compliant diesel emissions test.

The Department is currently subject to a Judicial Review, in relation to the failure to deliver a fully compliant diesel emissions test for light vehicles. This Review has been brought jointly by Friends of the Earth (FoE) and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), and FoE is asking the Court to compel the Department to reintroduce a full diesel emission test as soon as possible. The review hearing concluded on 1 March 2024, and we are currently awaiting the judgement.

Next Steps

Introducing the new PN emissions test will require an amendment to the Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations (NI) 1999, and the establishment of a supply and maintenance contract for PN emission testers. It is currently estimated that the necessary work to provide for the introduction of the new test will take around 6-12 months to complete.

Driver & Vehicle Testing Capacity

In 2024, the DVA conducted 67,658 driving tests, the second highest number of driving tests conducted since 2009. During the same period, the DVA also conducted almost 1.15 million vehicle tests, there were only six days in the year when the DVA did not offer MOT appointments. Disappointingly, on average around 800 vehicle test appointments are missed each week due to no shows, placing additional demand on this service.

Despite these excellent statistics the demand for both driving tests and vehicle tests remains high. In June 2024, Minister O'Dowd introduced Temporary Exemption Certificates for five and seven-year-old cars within specified date ranges. This measure, along with the high number of vehicle tests conducted, means the average waiting time for an MOT test has fallen from 99 days on 1 June 2024 to 33 days on 31 January 2025.

To further increase vehicle testing capacity, the DVA is investing in new test centres. The two new test centres at Hydebank and Mallusk when opened for vehicle testing will provide the capacity to test over 200,000 additional vehicles per annum, which will help meet the future demand for this service. However, the exact opening date of these test centres is dependent on the outcome of the legal dispute with WEP.

Next Steps

[redacted]

Driver Licensing Fees

The DVA operates as a Trading Fund under the provisions of the Driver & Vehicle Agency Trading Fund (Northern Ireland) Order 2016.

As a Trading Fund, all expenditure must be recovered from the fees charged to customers or centrally funded by the Department to match the costs incurred for defined activities. The DVA can increase its expenditure in response to increases in demand and, conversely, is expected to reduce its expenditure in response to falling demand.

Driver licensing fees were last amended in 2012. Since then, several changes have been introduced to how licences are processed, including the introduction of online services for some categories of licence.

Next Steps

A review of driver licensing fees is ongoing and once completed officials will draft a Submission setting out the fee proposals for your consideration. This is likely to be in the final quarter of 2024-2025. Any proposed changes to the existing fees will be consulted on as required.

TRANSPORT AND ROAD ASSET MANAGEMENT (TRAM)

TRANSPORT PLANNING & POLICY DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: SIAN KERR

Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland

Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland

A draft of a new Transport Strategy has been developed for Ministerial consideration. It is intended that this Strategy will set the vision and strategic priorities for transport through to 2035.

Next Steps

A draft will be with you for your consideration imminently.

Transport Plans

Four Transport Plans are currently being prepared:

- The Eastern Transport Plan (ETP);
- The North West Transport Plan (NWTP);
- The Sub-Regional Transport Plans (SRTPs); and
- The Regional Transport Plan (RSTP).

The Transport Plans aim to maximise integration between Transport Planning and Local Development Planning and are being prepared in conjunction with the Councils' Local Development Plans (LDPs). There are inter-relationships between transport and economic, environmental and social objectives; and the Transport Plans will be the primary means through which the Department will seek to meet its climate change target for transport. This creates quite a complex environment with many participants and with each of the 11 councils delivering their LDPs to different timetables.

The three Transport Plans that are most advanced are the Eastern Transport Plan (ETP), the Fermanagh and Omagh Sub Regional Transport Plan (FO SRTP) and the Regional Transport Plan (RTP).

The Eastern Transport Plan

The ETP (which encompasses the five councils: Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Ards and North Down Borough Council, Belfast City Council, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council and Mid and East Antrim Borough Council) was publicly launched in September 2023 with an online engagement survey. The engagement report was published in July 2024. There were over 500 responses with 73% in agreement with the vision and agreement on the objectives ranging from 62% (reduce unnecessary use of the private car) to 87% (Support the efficient, sustainable movement of people and goods).

Next Steps

Given the linkages to the 5 councils' LDPs and the varying stage of their development the ETP will be published in stages.

The first stage, covering Belfast City centre and the wider Metropolitan area, is nearing completion. Proposals for this stage are due to be shared with key stakeholders over the next 2 months before they are finalised. A public engagement exercise will follow around May.

The Fermanagh and Omagh Transport Plan

We are now at an advanced stage in the preparation of the FO SRTP and have identified potential measures to improve connectivity across the district.

Council officers are aware of the potential measures, but these have not yet been presented to Council Members. Officials met Council Members back in December 2022 to explain the development of the Transport Plan. Officials agreed to meet them again when the Transport Plan was at an advanced options stage.

Council Officers have proposed holding this meeting with their Members in week commencing 3rd March. We would like to meet with you first to discuss the scale of the measures and the best way to deliver them, particularly in rural areas. Subject to your agreement the FO SRTP is expected to issue for public consultation in May 2025.

The Regional Transport Plan (RTP)

The RTP 2035 (Previously known as RSTNTP) is a strategic transport plan that sets out priorities for maintenance and capital improvements in the road, rail, inter-urban limited stop bus network, and park & ride, through to 2035.

This plan is at the long listing stage (Stage 2) where road, rail, inter-urban limited stop bus network, and park & ride scheme proposals have been identified in line with the plans objectives outlined at Stage 1. We would like to meet with you to discuss these scheme proposals coming forward.

Next Steps

Officials would be happy to meet to provide an update of the suite of Transport Plans and provide an overview of plan programmes and upcoming potential consultations.

Residents' Parking Zones

A review of residents' parking has been completed, and the review report was published on the Department's website on 29 November 2024.

Next Steps

Work is now being taken forward to revise residents' parking policy and supporting guidance based on the review findings and a submission will be prepared to seek your agreement of the identified next steps.

Inconsiderate Pavement Parking

The Department undertook a consultation exercise on possible options to deal with the issue of pavement parking, along with parking across dropped kerbs, and a Findings Report was released on 6 December 2023.

Next Steps

As part of the work on inconsiderate parking, officials are exploring options to address this issue. However, the legislation is complex and we are still awaiting legal advice on the three options identified within the Findings Report.

Transport Decarbonisation

The Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 places significant obligations on all departments and will have implications for much of the work being undertaken by DfI. Within the legislation, DfI has responsibility for the decarbonisation of the transport sector.

A chapter in relation to transport for inclusion within the Climate Action Plan was provided to DAERA in December 2024 and this input has been informed by a strong data led evidence approach in the form of the Department's bespoke Transport Emissions Model.

The transport chapter of the Climate Action Plan outlines three high level policy initiatives to reduce emissions across the sector:

- Reducing vehicle emissions by switching fuels to low emission alternatives such as electric vehicles (EV) and other alternative fuels.
- Reducing vehicle emissions by shifting modes of transport away from private car journeys to sustainable travel alternatives.
- Reducing vehicle emissions by reducing the need and length of vehicle journeys.

Next Steps

DAERA officials are in the process of finalising the draft Climate Action Plan document for consultation and, given the cross-cutting nature of the Plan, the draft will need to be approved by the Executive prior to its publication for consultation.

Work to develop the Department's Transport Sectoral Plan is underway and it is envisaged that the publication of the Plan will follow the consultation of the Climate Action Plan.

Officials are very happy to brief you on the current data led approach to transport decarbonisation and the actions being progressed. A key element of this work is the ZEV Mandate.

Zero-Emission Vehicle (ZEV) Mandate

The Zero-Emission Vehicles mandate and Vehicle Emissions Trading Schemes (Amendment) Order 2024 was introduced here in January 2025. This legislation is designed to support the commercial development the electric vehicle and charging infrastructure markets.

The UK Government published a consultation of two parts on 24 December 2024. Part 1 asks for views on their manifesto pledge to roll back the ban on the sale of non zero-emission cars and vans

to 2030, from 2035, and Part 2 is a joint consultation between UKG, Scotland, NI, and Wales on some proposed technical amendments to the VETS Order. This consultation is due to close on 18 February 2025.

Next Steps

A written briefing will be provided on the Mandate in the coming weeks and an update on the consultation will be provided following the end of the consultation period.

Ports Review

The Department has been undertaking a review of the policy and legislation associated with our Trust Ports and launched a consultation paper on this issue in December 2024. Although most of the consultation deals with Trust Ports (Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Coleraine Harbour Commissioners, Warrenpoint Harbour Authority and Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners) some of the legislative areas touch on all our Statutory Harbour Authorities (SHA). The consultation is open for responses until 10th March. Some of the proposed policy changes will require changes to both primary and secondary legislation.

Next Steps

The consultation closes on 10th March after which a submission to you on next steps and consultation responses will be submitted.

Trust Port Appointments

You appoint the Chair and members to the boards of the Trust Ports at Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Foyle (Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners) and Warrenpoint Harbour Authority. Currently all three Trust Ports have recruitment competitions ongoing for Board Members posts (and the Belfast Harbour Chair post). Submissions will be with you imminently in relation to:

- the final steps to formalise the recruitment of three Non-Executive Board Members to Warrenpoint Harbour Authority.
- the appointment of members to the Belfast Harbour Commissioners; and
- the way forward in relation to the appointment of the Chair of Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

Next Steps

Submissions to follow.

Coda Funding

Over the last five years the Department has facilitated payments to Derry City & Strabane District Council to assist the City of Derry Airport (CoDA). It was agreed that the Department would facilitate the funding of £3m to CoDA for the 2024/25 financial year, with DfE taking responsibility from April 2025 onwards. The funding will have to be provided to the Council through The Local Government Finance Act which requires the approval of the Department of Finance before any money can be paid out. The process to achieve this approval is ongoing between DfI Finance Officials and DoF. DfI Officials have agreed the format of a Letter of Offer with council officials so payment can be made on receipt of the DoF approval.

Next Steps

Once DoF approval is received the payment can be processed.

The Procurement of The Parking Enforcement Contract

The Traffic Management (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 provided the Department with the powers to introduce Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE), in line with the rest of the UK.

DPE was first implemented by the Department at the commencement of the Contract for the Operation of Parking and Enforcement Services on 30 October 2006. This contract was operated by Marston Holdings Ltd (NSL) from 2006 - 2012. They retained the contract in October 2012 following a successful bid for a new 10-year contract. That contract was granted up to a three-year extension to allow a new contract to be procured. The current contract is due to expire on 31 October 2025.

Over the past two years, the Department has been working with the Department of Finance's Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) and the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) to procure this new parking enforcement contract. The procurement is being taken forward through the Competitive Dialogue process, overseen by CPD, and several meetings have taken place with two potential suppliers covering all aspects of the enforcement contract, as well as developments to enhance and improve parking enforcement.

A submission updating you on the procurement so far has been sent to your private office and will be with you imminently.

Next Steps

Further updates will be sent to you during the final stages of this project.

ROAD ASSET MAINTENANCE DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: COLIN SYKES

Maintenance Of Roads

Essential Maintenance (generally resource funded) includes the key functions of defect repair, grass cutting, gully emptying and traffic signal repair. These are important aspects of road maintenance in ensuring public safety. In 2022-2023 the Department provided a 'limited service' with reduced levels of pothole repair, grass cutting and spend across other areas such as road markings and safety barriers. This limited service has been in place since 2015. In 2023-2024 the Department plans to continue operating this level of service subject to the budget position becoming clearer. It is estimated that £55m of resource funding is needed annually for normal maintenance needs, the provision of this limited service is currently estimated to be in the region of £42m annually and is fully funded this financial year.

Structural Maintenance is the collective term given to a range of functions including road resurfacing, surface dressing, footway resurfacing and structural drainage.

It has been independently established (Barton 2018) that some £143 million (£194m at today's prices) is needed to maintain the structural integrity of Northern Ireland's road network. Both the Barton Report and the Northern Ireland Audit Office VFM report on 'Structural Maintenance of the Road Network' (March 2019) emphasise the need for certainty around longer-term funding of road maintenance budgets and highlight the planning and delivery challenges across the Department and the wider construction industry as a result of reliance on late in-year budget allocations.

Next Steps

Total spend on structural maintenance across the last 5-year budget period was around £547m with outturns of £109 million in 2018/19, £106 million in 2019/20, £100m in 2020/21, £105m in 2021/22 and £127m in 2022/23; representing a significant shortfall against the annual requirement. The budget for structural maintenance for 2024/25 is currently in the region of £110m.

Winter Service Programme

The Department carries out precautionary salting of carriageways on identified priority roads to prevent ice from forming. Every night from the middle of October until the middle of April around 300 staff and over 130 gritters are on standby to ensure the main roads are salted. The aim is to provide

a winter service which, as far as is possible, will permit main road traffic to move safely and freely in wintry conditions.

The current policy aims to treat approximately 28% of the road network that carries around 80% of the traffic and involves salting around 7,000 kilometres of main roads in just over three hours, at a cost of approximately £95,000 per night. DfI Roads salts main through routes carrying more than 1,500 vehicles per day as well as other busy through routes with special difficulties (e.g. steep hills) that carry over 1,000 vehicles per day.

The Winter Service average normal budget requirement is £7m, but has, in the past, been £10m for a bad winter as was the case in 2017-18. The delivery for this winter season has commenced, and the budget requirement for the service is fully funded.

As a result of Industrial action, the Department's winter service activity was significantly disrupted during January 2024.

Next Steps

The Department is currently taking forward a review of the operational delivery of winter service to ensure that a sustainable service can be maintained in future years.

Potential Industrial Action – Roadworkers – Industrial 1 Grade

Roadworkers are unique in that they avail of a bonus incentive scheme which provides a top up to basic pay based on individual weekly output levels. For equal pay reasons the level of bonus on top of basic pay that can be earned is capped at the maximum of the AO / Industrial 2 pay scale. In recent years unions have asked that the Industrial 1 & 2 grades are merged, and the bonus scheme removed. These are issues affecting the wider NICS with read across to AA and AO grades and are out with the Department's remit. The unions are now in dispute with the Department over this issue and have taken a number of discontinuous weekly periods of strike action in the past 6 months. The ITUS focus has moved more recently to the basic pay level which impacts all depots with the most recent action being in January 2024.

Next Steps

The Department continues to engage with DoF and the unions on these issues.

Operations & Maintenance (Internal Contractor) Stabilisation Plan

Operations & Maintenance (O&M) are the Department's internal road maintenance contractor. Located in 23 depots across Northern Ireland they deliver a range of essential road maintenance activities as well as winter service and incident response.

In recent years there has been a significant decline in O&M's both the industrial and non-industrial workforce. As a result, the business unit is finding it increasingly difficult to maintain a suitable presence across all of the depots from which they operate. This has led to increased risk in terms of health and safety, governance and service delivery. As such, a review of resources and service delivery across all the depots has been undertaken. This has identified a number of options to temporarily combine operations across some depots to secure a safer and more sustainable delivery of services.

It should be stressed that none of the options being considered would permanently close any depots; some activities such as winter service will continued to be delivered across the whole depot estate. However, the aim is to provide greater operational resilience and ability to continue to deliver the wide range of essential maintenance activities.

Next Steps

O&M continues to review the sustainability of its operational delivery and develop contingency plan. Any further proposed actions will be brought forward to you for consideration.

Flags and attachments on Department Owned Property

The issue of the removal of attachments from lamp posts and other equipment is a highly sensitive one.

Article 87 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 makes it an offence to attach unauthorised signs or advertisements to structures such as lamp posts. One of the Department's primary considerations is the safety of the public and where unauthorised flags or attachments pose a hazard to road users, the Department will seek to remove that danger. Where there is no such danger, the Department will liaise closely with other key stakeholders and seek to provide a solution.

Our approach to date recognises that the health and safety of our staff and contractors is of paramount importance. For this reason, we will always consult with partner agencies when considering whether to remove any attachments from our equipment and infrastructure.

In recent months, posters have been erected on streetlights in various locations, including Belfast, North Down and Portrush, portraying anti-immigration messages to deter foreign nationals from occupying housing in certain areas. Silver and Bronze, multi-agency task forces have been meeting to monitor and assess the situation. Some posters, which contained threats, have been removed by PSNI or local residents.

Paula Bradshaw MLA is bringing forward a Private Members Bill in relation to the display of flags and emblems on street furniture. Ms Bradshaw MLA is currently consulting on the proposal and this is due to close on 31 March 2025.

The Committee for the Administration of Justice (CAJ) has recently issued the Department with a pre-action protocol letter, notifying DfI and PSNI of their intention to apply to the High Court for leave to apply for judicial review, into the Department's policy regarding the removal of racially motivated posters attached to its property. Departmental Solicitors Office has responded to CAJ, to confirm that there is nothing inappropriate or unlawful in the Department's current procedures.

Next Steps

The Department will continue to act on advice from PSNI to assess the likelihood that removal would increase community tension. Officials are also engaging with the PSNI to consider options for working more closely when dealing with unlawful attachments.

ROAD ASSET DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: LIAM McEVOY

Strategic Transport Master Plan for Titanic Quarter / Queens Island, Belfast.

Development of the Titanic Quarter / Queens Island area of Belfast commenced late 1990s / early 2000s with the construction of the Odyssey Arena. A development masterplan was subsequently approved under an outline planning application. This planning approval related mainly to the development of the land from the rear of the SSE Arena, northwards, along Queens Road, almost to the northern extent of Queens Island and required a number of improvements to major transport infrastructure in the area including:

- a slip road from the M3, located across from the front of the SSE Arena;
- a grade separated junction over the Sydenham bypass, at the south-eastern corner of Victoria Park, adjacent to the Connswater River; and
- a public transit system, later to become Glider.

The M3 slip road and Glider have been in operation over several years, however, the grade separated junction has not been constructed.

Since early 2021, Departmental officials have been working with Belfast Harbour and their agents to develop a new Strategic Transport Master Plan for the area. While progress has been made on the scoping for a Transport Assessment, we have not reached agreement on major transport infrastructure provision and proposed green travel measures.

The developer's agents have proposed an at-grade junction to gain access to the Sydenham bypass, as an alternative to the grade separated junction discussed above. The developer's rationale for the alternative proposal is based on emerging and significant change to planning and transport policy which has a greater emphasis on more sustainable transport proposals reflecting climate change obligations. Work to assess the alternative at-grade proposal is well advanced and is anticipated to be complete soon.

Next Steps

Once complete, you will be provided with briefing to assist in agreeing the way forward.

Backlog of Adoptions of Private Streets

It is currently estimated that there are over 900 unadopted development sites across the province. That is, sites that require the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order, Article 11 enforcement action to bring those sites up to a standard that is adoptable by the Department.

There are a number of reasons for the high number of backlog sites;

- The bond being inadequate to cover the cost of construction works necessary to bring the development to an adoptable standard;
- Lack of resources in the Department to progress enforcement action; and
- Developer going out of business resulting in the Department unable to engage in enforcement action.

The backlog of unadopted sites has been the subject of a 2012 Regional Development Committee Inquiry (update issued to the committee in 2021), numerous Assembly questions, industry criticism and has been reported on by local and national news organisations. There has been limited success in reducing the number of sites in the past 11 years.

There is no budget allocation or legislative requirement for DfI to bring backlog sites up to adoptable standard, this obligation lies with the Developer. Any works necessary to bring a site to an adoptable standard over and above the value of the bond would need to be funded from the Department's budget for maintaining the road network. The Department currently considers the maintenance of the adopted network and associated safety/liability implications a higher priority than addressing the backlog of unadopted sites.

Following an Assembly Motion in November 2024 on 'Tackling the high number of unadopted housing developments and roads', a commitment was given by the previous Minister to provide updated guidance on enforcement for Private Streets that seeks to reduce the risk of new developments entering the backlog of unadopted private streets sites.

A submission (SUB-0057-2025) regarding the introduction of the new guidance and the associated procedural and staff resourcing implications will be with you shortly.

Next Steps

Your consideration and a decision on how you wish to proceed with the draft guidance for Private Streets Enforcement.

Private Streets - Increase in Inspection Fees

The Private Streets (NI) Order 1980 (the Order) and the Private Streets (Amendment) Order 1992 provide the statutory basis for the adoption of new development roads, including street lighting and road drainage systems.

Article 3 (10) of the Private Streets (Construction) (Amendments) Regulations (NI) 2001 states "The person by whom or on whose behalf the [development] plans were deposited shall bear any expenses incurred in carrying out inspections, investigations and tests and the taking of samples."

Private Streets Inspection fees are set in accordance with the Departments Policy Statement, Director of Engineering Memorandum DEM 59/03 – Private streets Inspection Fees after Oct 2003. The fees payable were established following consultation with the Construction Employers Federation (CEF) at that time. The fee mechanism is based upon a simple sliding scale of fees linked to the bond value of each development and currently calculates for each phase of a development that is bonded.

The fees have not been amended since 2003 and analysis has shown that the Department does not recover all staff costs associated with the inspection and administration of the private streets inspection process.

A 12 week public consultation detailing a proposed increase in Private Streets Inspection Fees was completed on 8 March 2024. The consultation sought feedback on three options.

- Option 1 – Increase the Private Streets Fees to ensure full cost recovery.
- Option 2 – Apply a charge for administration costs for all bonds taken out by developers.
- Option 3 – Increase Private Streets Fees to cover the costs of enforcement.

On 4th November 2024, the Committee for Infrastructure was presented with a written update on private streets inspection fees including a summary of the findings on the public consultation.

A submission is currently being drafted to present options for the introduction of increased Private Streets Inspection fees.

Next Steps

A submission and recommendations will be forwarded for your consideration.

Caw Roundabout, Derry

Caw Roundabout accommodates the intersection of 4 main dual carriageway roads: A2 Limavady Road; A2 Clooney Road; A515 Madams Bank Road (Foyle Bridge); and A514 Crescent Link. The junction also accommodates a 5th minor road providing access to Waterfoot Park.

The junction typically carries 50,000 vehicles per day and is within the top 4 sites in the north in 2023 for the number of recorded road traffic collisions. There has been numerous AQW's and other correspondence from elected representatives regarding the need to expediate the signalisation of Caw Roundabout.

Planning conditions associated with the adjacent H30 development, as mitigation to additional traffic generation, included the upgrade of Gransha Roundabout to a signalised junction prior to occupation of the 151st dwelling and the upgrade of Caw Roundabout to a signalised roundabout prior to the occupation of the 301st dwelling in the development. Officials have been engaging with the developer, South Bank Square Ltd (SBS) to commence delivery of the agreed upgrades to the junctions as soon as possible.

In December 2024 SBS submitted a revised transport mitigation strategy at Caw and Gransha Roundabouts seeking to reduce the mitigations at Gransha and bring forward the signalisation of Caw Roundabout prior to the occupation of more than 262 dwellings.

The alterations to the mitigation strategy have positives and negatives, and varying levels of impact on different groups and users of the network. Officials have assessed these impacts and are content that the proposed approach balances these elements to the overall benefit of the travelling public.

However, as this is a non-routine matter, in part due to the significance of this location on the network and in part due to the level of public, media and elected representative interest, before the Department takes a final decision on this matter, a submission has been prepared and will be issued to you to ensure the department proceed in a manner that you are content with.

Next Steps

A submission will be forwarded for your consideration.

North Lisburn Feeder Road – Phase 3

The North Lisburn Feeder Road (Phase 3) is an extension to the B101 road to the north of Lisburn City, it is approximately 500m long. It is a Developer-led and funded road scheme which will complete

the North Lisburn Feeder Road. There has been local and elected representative interest for the completion of the road.

Phases 1, 2, and 2A of the North Lisburn Feeder Road (the A513 from Belsize Road to the B101) have previously been completed by the North Lisburn Development Consortium (NLDC) and adopted by the Department.

The Department have been working closely with the NLDC over the past decade (since July 2014) to progress this scheme to completion. The delivery of the third and final phase of this road is secured by an Article 122 Agreement between the Department and the NLDC.

The NLDC have a capped bond of £1.5m as part of the Article 122 Agreement to fund the Land and Construction costs. With the passage of time however, this £1.5m is no longer sufficient to cover the costs, and as part of the Article 122 Agreement, the Department will have to make up any shortfall in costs.

A meeting has been arranged between Departmental Officials and the NLDC on 6 February 2025 to discuss a way forward on outstanding matters

Next Steps

Following the forthcoming meeting with the developer, a submission will be forwarded for your consideration.

ENGINEERING DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR – DAVID PORTER

Resurfacing Contracts

Northstone (NI) Ltd successfully challenged the former Department for Regional Development's handling and determination of a tender process for road resurfacing contracts in 2015. This decision was unsuccessfully appealed by the Department.

An independent investigation was carried out into the 2015 procurement competition following the Court of Appeal judgement. This is known as the Hannaford Report and it was published at the end of 2023.

Officials are currently engaged in mediation with the plaintiff contractor to determine if a financial settlement can be reached to avoid the High Court being required to rule on the damages. [redacted]

Next Steps

[redacted]

Highway Structures (Bridges)

DFI is responsible for approx. 6,000 bridges ranging in size from small single span culverts to larger multi span complex structures such as the Foyle Bridge.

It is recognised that the risks, including safety risks, associated with the management of structures has increased over recent years. Increased traffic volumes and weights, changing weather patterns, reducing staff resources, limited funding levels, and the loss of engineering skills and experience, have all contributed to the increased risk.

To improve our management of this risk, responsibility for the management of highway bridges was consolidated under the Engineering Directorate in April 2023. A review of the management of the structures function was carried out which identified proposals on the organisational structure and staffing numbers required to manage the function in a manner that returns the risk to an acceptable level. Due to continued funding and staff pressures it has not been possible to make significant

progress on the Action Plan and recently a decision was taken that a different approach is needed to manage this risk.

Next Steps

Our planned approach to the management of highway structures (mostly bridges) will be discussed with you in the context of the wider staffing pressures in the Department soon.

A5 WTC & ACTIVE TRAVEL DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: COLIN HUTCHINSON

A5 Western Transport Corridor (A5WTC)

The A5WTC is an Executive Flagship project which, on completion, will provide 85 kilometres of new dual carriageway in the west of the province between New Buildings and the border just south of Aughnacloy. Design and development work on this scheme dates back to 2007 but has been delayed, primarily as a result of legal challenges by the AA5A (Alternative A5 Alliance), a local group opposed to the proposals. It also has been the subject of three public inquiries, the most recent being in May and June of 2023.

Following Executive agreement on 2 October 2024, Minister O'Dowd announced his decision to proceed with the length of the project between south of Strabane and Ballygawley (55 of its total 85km length).

On 13 November, the Department received a formal legal challenge to the decision from the Alternative A5 Alliance (AA5A). Work is ongoing with the Department's officials and legal team in the preparation of evidence with a view to robustly defending against this challenge. The Court had fixed a timetable for preparation of the case, leading to a substantive hearing on 3 March 2025, with an expected timeframe of 5 days. However, this timeline has now had to be revised as a result of some delays in the exchange of evidence between the parties. A hearing is now scheduled to be heard, beginning on 18 March, subject to Court acceptance.

While there is no defined timeframe for handing down of the Court's decision following the substantive hearing, the Court has previously indicated the importance of getting this case dealt with as quickly as possible.

Impact of The Legal Challenge

On 25 November, the vesting orders became operative and the lands necessary for construction of this 55km length of the overall scheme transferred into the ownership of the Department. The legal challenge did not affect this transfer of ownership.

Archaeological and geotechnical investigations have been underway across the 55km length of the new road since April of last year and are continuing.

In the hope of a successful defence to the legal challenge and in preparation for the main construction contracts, advance works in the form of site clearance, fencing, and the setting up of compounds have commenced throughout the 55km length.

Contracts for full construction will not however be entered into pending the outcome of the Court hearing.

Subject to a successful outcome from the Court hearing, it is anticipated that main construction works could commence across the 55km length during the early summer period.

Budget And Part Funding From Government Of Ireland

The project remains critically important infrastructure and an Executive flagship project. Annual budget allocations to the scheme will be subject to Executive and Assembly approval as part of the statutory budget process.

The Executive's draft budget for next year (25/26) includes ring fenced funding for the A5 scheme which would allow construction to get underway across the 55km length in accordance with the anticipated delivery programme.

The Government of Ireland's announcement in February of last year of a commitment of €600 million to the A5 was a significant development and provides a substantial degree of certainty around funding going forward. This commitment was further reinforced through the Joint Communique from the North South Ministerial Council Transport Sectoral Meeting of June last year and in a letter to me from the then Taoiseach in August.

Since then, there has been further engagement between officials and those of the Department of Transport with a commitment to work together and agree how and when funds will be released in line with the relevant budgetary and approval processes in both jurisdictions.

Progression Of The Remaining Parts Of The Overall Scheme

Further work is on-going in relation to addressing the Planning Appeals Commission recommendations on the remaining two sections of the scheme, i.e. south of Strabane to New Buildings and Ballygawley to the border. These will be subject to separate decisions by you in due course.

Officials are confident that the issues raised by the Planning Appeals Commission can be resolved in due course and the Department remains committed to delivery of the A5 project in its entirety.

A6 Dualling – Derry to Dungiven – Phase 1: Dungiven to Drumahoe

The 25.5km A6 Dungiven to Drumahoe dualling scheme is the first phase of the A6 Derry to Dungiven Executive Flagship project. The contract to design and build this c.£260m and was awarded to Sacyr Wills Somague JV in March 2018.

Construction commenced in September 2018 and the dual carriageway fully opened to traffic on 6 April 2023 with contractual Completion being achieved on 30 November 2023.

During construction the Department took the strategic decision to continue to pay the Contractor and not invoke optional contractual mechanisms to retain further payments. This decision was taken to increase the likelihood of the successful, and timely, delivery of the scheme with an understanding that the contractor has a contractual obligation to return any overpayments at defined points within the contract.

Resolution of ongoing contractual disputes, [redacted] between the Department and the contractor, regarding the costs associated with various issues that occurred during the construction process (impacts of Covid /Brexit etc) will have direct implications for the monies that the Contractor has to repay. There is uncertainty over the total value of the dispute(s) as the contractor has advanced one position formally, but also provided an alternative, lower, figure during Without Prejudice discussions.

To resolve the disputes in the most efficient and effective manner possible, the Department is currently preparing to enter into a mediation process with the contractor. The mediation process is expected to be completed by summer 2024.

Next Steps

Officials will present a submission, prior to the conclusion of the mediation process, setting out the mediation outcomes and a recommendation on the way forward.

Active Travel

The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 places a statutory requirement on the Department that- "*The Department for Infrastructure must develop sectoral plans for transport which set a minimum spend on active travel from the overall transport budgets of 10%".* 10% of the transport budget [redacted] on average per year until 2050.

Since the publication of the Act, the department has been developing plans to support the increased investment necessary to meet the requirements.

This work includes the development of an Active Travel Delivery Plan. When complete, this plan will complement the Belfast Cycling Network Delivery Plan (2022) and the Strategic Plan for Greenways (2016) to provide a firm basis for future prioritisation of active travel infrastructure investment and delivery. Public consultation on the Active Travel Delivery Plan is ongoing and will close on 28 February 2025. We have held a number of public engagement events as part of the consultation and have upcoming events in Bangor, Omagh and Enniskillen.

Ramping up to the required scale of investment will take considerable planning. The Department is working on the basis of increasing overall active travel investment to meet our Climate Change Act obligations by 2030.

In addition to the allocations for Active Travel capital projects and resource budgets, the Department routinely invests significantly on elements of active travel infrastructure that have not traditionally been reported within the active travel spend figures. Work is currently ongoing within the Department to analyse all areas of spend for the benefit of pedestrians and cyclists within the overall transport budgets in order to report a comprehensive position of active travel spend going forward.

The work of the Active travel Team is currently being audited by the NIAO. The review will provide an overview of the actions taken by the Department to date and will examine how well it is managing the delivery of its requirements for active travel under the Climate Change Act. The report is currently due to be published in May 2025.

The Cycling Proficiency Scheme is normally launched mid-term February when schools are invited to submit their return with numbers to be trained and any new instructors requiring training. The period between mid-term February and Easter is used to issue resources and conduct instructor training at schools. Schools normally schedule the pupil training in the third term due to the greater likelihood of good weather. Due to the timeline for engagement with schools, a decision is required imminently on the CPS for the 25/26 Financial year.

There is currently a funding round to Councils for the delivery of greenways and active travel related facilities. Officials will be writing to you on this shortly.

MAJOR PROJECTS DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: JONATHAN SAULTERS

Newry Southern Relief Road

The proposed Newry Southern Relief Road aims to provide a new strategic road link to the south of Newry city, between the A1 Dublin Road dual carriageway and A2 Warrenpoint Road dual carriageway. This will provide an alternative route for strategic traffic that avoids Newry city centre. The scheme is 3km in length and consists of a Wide Single carriageway plus overtaking lane.

The project was prioritised within the Belfast Region City Deal, securing £93.4m funding. The current estimate for the project is £1115.2m therefore with a funding shortfall of £21.8m. Former Minister O'Dowd asked officials to engage with Growth Deal partners to resolve the matter and this is underway. This cost is based on a fixed bridge crossing of Newry Ship Canal, a Scheduled Monument, which is one of the main structural elements of the project.

In the absence of a Minister, the previous Permanent Secretary took the decision to progress with the fixed bridge option under the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2022. Her decision was taken after detailed consideration of a range of factors, including engineering, economic, heritage impact and environmental assessments. This decision was confirmed by Minister O'Dowd in 2024 and your views will be sought as the project progresses.

In advance of the publication of the draft Statutory Orders and Environmental Impact Assessment Report, planned for spring 2024, the Department held a non-statutory Community Information Event to provide an update on the emerging final proposals for the scheme from 16 to 19 October 2023.

There is a growing lobby campaigning for an opening bridge over the Newry Ship Canal. This was evident at the Community Information Event, recent media articles, and from a significant number of councillors at a presentation provided to Newry, Mourne and Down Council on 31 August 2023.

The draft Statutory Orders and Environmental Impact Assessment Report for the scheme were published for public consultation on 21 January 2025, commencing a six-week consultation period.

Next Steps

Following the public consultation, it is anticipated a Public Inquiry (PI) will be held. Your views and permission to proceed will be sought at each stage in the process

A6 Dualling – Derry to Dungiven – Phase 2: Drumahoe to Caw

Phase 2 of the Flagship project is between Drumahoe and Caw roundabout. It is estimated this 7km section will cost around £200m and is not currently programmed. This section was not included in the current phase 1 construction contract.

Part of the line of phase 2 encroaches on the Mobuoy waste site. This is a contaminated landfill site due to the illegal dumping of waste material, which has been the subject of a court case taken forward by DAERA.

The Department have been liaising closely with DAERA in relation to this project to ensure that any remediation proposals take account of each parties' requirements, including those associated with Phase 2.

Next Steps

We are currently awaiting DAERA's Optimum Remediation Strategy, site vision and confirmation of the construction programme for the Mobuoy waste site, which are required before Phase 2 can progress to development. Once these are received a delivery strategy, which will include a project timeline, will be finalised to determine the most efficient mechanism for Phase 2.

Belfast Rapid Transit Phase 2

Phase 2 of the Belfast Rapid Transit Project (BRT2) is one of 3 infrastructure projects included in the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD). The proposal is to extend the existing east-west Belfast Rapid Transit network to serve North and South Belfast as well as extending the existing G2 Glider service (which currently operates between Belfast City Centre and Titanic Quarter) to connect with Queen's University and Belfast City Hospital.

The estimated cost to deliver BRT2 is £142m-£148m, submitted to BRCD Partners in August 2020 as part of an Interim Outline Business Case. It is envisaged that the estimated cost may change as a result of an update to the Outline Business Case (OBC) that is nearing completion.

BRT2 was not prioritised within the BRCD and therefore only £35 million has been made available to deliver the project. The project was successful in securing £20m funding from New Deal (NI) pending Treasury OBC approval, however this funding has been paused. The shortfall in funding will need to be made up from Executive funding and will be subject to discussions and agreement between you and your Executive colleagues.

The preferred route for BRT2 was announced in October 2022, by Former Minister John O'Dowd, along the Antrim Road in the north and along the Ormeau Road and Saintfield Road in the south. Minister O'Dowd decided that the north and south routes should extend to Glengormley and Carryduff, respectively with the feasibility of these extensions being further assessed as part of the detailed design. The announcement also noted that the existing G2 City Centre to Titanic Quarter Glider service will be extended to connect with Queen's University and the City Hospital. In line with the Minister's decision, work on the feasibility of extending the route to Glengormley and Carryduff has now been completed with Minister O'Dowd agreeing that the extensions to Glengormley and Carryduff should not be progressed with at this stage. The Outline Business Case is being finalised and will concentrate on a phased approach given the limited funding available at this time.

Next Steps

A Ministerial announcement was planned for 28th January but had to be postponed due to Storm Eowyn. Subject to you being content with the decision, a submission to announce the conclusions of the review will be put to you; officials will work with Private Office to determine a suitable date for its delivery.

Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge

The Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge is also included in the BRCD. The bridge will be a key element of the walking and cycling network connecting Belfast city centre with the south and east of the city and the Connswater Community Greenway. The new bridge will also encourage people from the city centre and local communities to visit Ormeau Park for recreational use.

The project was prioritised within the City Deal, securing £12.1m funding, however the estimate has recently been revised to £24m to account for significant inflationary pressures and engineering challenges apparent following more detailed design work. The Department has agreed to fund the shortfall from the its Active Travel budget. The Pre-Qualification process for the procurement commenced in June 2024 and is due to move to the Invitation to Tenderers (ITT) stage shortly.

Next Steps

It is hoped to award the contract later in 2025.

Mid-South West (MSW) Growth Deal

Two schemes, A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass (A4 ESB) and A29 Cookstown Bypass are included in the Mid-South West Growth Deal.

The current estimated funding requirement is £28.7m to deliver the procurement and construction phases for the A4 ESB scheme. £16.2m of capital funding has been agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive alongside the approved early release from the Executive's contribution of £12.5m from the Mid South West Growth Deal.

The scheme is currently in the procurement phase which commenced on 30 April 2024, with the prequalification stage concluding on 10 June 2024. Following assessment, a shortlist of contractors were invited on 4 September 2024 to bid for the construction of the scheme. This second stage of the procurement process is well underway and is progressing towards appointing a contractor to commence construction of the scheme in late spring/early summer 2025 and is expected take approximately 2 years to construct.

Publication of the draft statutory Orders and the Environmental Impact Assessment report for the A29 Cookstown Bypass was undertaken in April 2024. The consultation period for this ended in May 2024 and the representations made to the Department were carefully considered. As a result, a decision was taken to hold a Public Inquiry on the scheme which took place on 22 -24 October 2024. The Public Inquiry report is expected early 2025 and will be given careful consideration before any decision is taken on the scheme.

Following a current review of the Cookstown scheme estimate there is a £19m funding shortfall as MSW are only proposing to fund £42m of the £61m future requirement.

DfI officials have been working to explore the funding options with MSW.

The timescales for progressing to procurement and construction will depend upon on a number of factors including the successful completion of statutory procedures and the availability of funding in future years.

Next Steps

Following receipt of the Inspector's Report, a submission will be issued to you on the way forward for the Cookstown Bypass.

York Street Interchange

The York Street Interchange project is a Strategic Road Improvement scheme that will provide a fully grade separated interchange to replace the existing at-grade signal-controlled junction. It will provide direct links between Westlink and the M2 and M3 motorways.

A procurement competition was run in 2016 but a legal challenge prevented the Department from awarding the contract. The competition was subsequently terminated in 2019 following an unsuccessful court hearing and appeal. The Department carried out mediation with the plaintiff contractor in December 2023 and reached a financial settlement, which avoided the High Court being required to determine the damages.

An Independent Assurance Review of the York Street Interchange project, initiated at the request of Minister Mallon, to provide assurance on how and to what extent the proposed scheme reflected and accommodated key Ministerial, Executive and Belfast City Council objectives and priorities (or could be adjusted to do so) was completed and published in March 2021.

One of the recommendations was the completion of a further review to ensure the scheme aligns with the concept of “placemaking” and new best practice in terms of urban transport design.

Further work was undertaken to provide proposals to strengthen the placemaking and active travel provision of the project and advises that additional measures could be implemented in tandem with it, to maximize the benefits for communities. The outcome of this was a Placemaking and Active Travel report (PATR), published by former Minister O’Dowd in October 2022, recommending that three of the enhancement options are further developed and refined to allow an informed decision to be taken on the way forward. Officials were asked to carry out further work on the 3 scenarios recommended in it, by further refining the scenarios and exploring any implementation issues.

This further work included meetings with stakeholders. The report on further consideration of the 3 PATR scenarios was completed and your decision on adoption of the recommended PATR option and publication of the Placemaking and Active Travel Development (PATD) report will be sought at the appropriate time.

In August 2023, the DfI Permanent Secretary took a Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2022 decision on the prioritisation of the major roads programme. Under this, York Street Interchange was placed in Priority Tier 3, which determined that the scheme development work was to be paused after the placemaking and active travel review work was completed. Any future decision on progression of the scheme will be informed by the Department’s emerging transport policies and plans

– the Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan (RSTNTP) and the Eastern Transport Plan (ETP). A decision to proceed would require confirmation of funding.

Next Steps

Before making a decision on the PATD report Minister O'Dowd asked officials to meet again with elected representatives from the North Belfast area and share with them the presentation he had received and seek feedback. These meetings have been arranged for February and March 2025, after which officials will report back to you.

A1 Junctions

The Statutory Orders (Direction Order & Stopping Up of Private Accesses Order) for the scheme were made in 2021.

On 2 July 2024, former Infrastructure Minister John O'Dowd announced in the NI Assembly that the scheme would proceed to the procurement stage. The Pre-Qualification process for the procurement was advertised in December 2024.

Next Steps

A submission will be prepared advising you that the Vesting Order is currently planned to be Made in Autumn 2025.

The Invitation To Tenderers (ITT) procurement stage will commence in May 2025 with a view to awarding a single delivery contract by February 2026. The expected start date on site is March 2026. The construction period will be 3 years.

Prioritisation of the Major Roads Programme

On 14 August 2023, the Department published a prioritised list of major road schemes that would continue to be progressed. Former Minister O'Dowd carried out a review of the prioritisation over a number of months which concluded in December 2024.

[redacted]

On 27 January 2025 in response to an Assembly Oral Question, Minister O'Dowd announced that "I hope to be in a position in the next number of short weeks to make a formal announcement to the Assembly on which projects we will move forward."

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Next Steps

Subject to you being content with the position, a submission to announce the conclusions of the review will be prepared.