

27. REPORT OF THE LAND TRANSPORT SUBCOMMITTEE - WESTERN BELFAST BYPASS

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The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of the recommendations of the Land Transport Subcommittee in respect to the Western Belfast Bypass.

Outlined below is the report considered by the Subcommittee on 20 November 2003 attended by Councillor Denis O'Rourke (Chairman), Councillors Ingrid Stonhill and Ron Wright which:

- Summarises the background to the Western Belfast Bypass (or bypass)
- Briefly informs the Committee of proposed land use developments that will affect the ability for the bypass to be constructed in the future.
- Informs the Committee of discussions with other stakeholders
- Indicates that the Council will need to decide whether it is sufficiently committed to the bypass to initiate the investigative work necessary to support lodging a designation
- Briefly outlines the designation process, timeframe and costs

This report has been bought before the Committee at the earliest possible time. There are a number of fast moving issues affecting the bypass which are set out below.

BACKGROUND

A bypass of Belfast has been in most transport plans for Christchurch since the first master transport plan in the early 1960's. The bypass has either been a western bypass of Belfast connecting Johns Road in the vicinity of the Groynes to the Northern Motorway or an extension of Radcliffe Rd to Johns Rd to direct traffic to the northern arterial. With the development of the Northwood subdivision the latter option is no longer possible.

The Northern Rooding Options Scoping Study (NROSS) which concluded in December 2002 and looked at the transport needs in north Christchurch for the next 20 years indicated that the bypass was economic towards the end of the planning period. However, construction of the bypass ahead of the Northern Arterial would have an adverse effect on the economic viability of the latter.

The NROSS Study showed that without the bypass, evening peak traffic volumes on Main North Rd north of Johns Road would be 23% higher in 2021 than in 1996 even with the Northern Arterial in place. With the bypass traffic volumes would be 43% lower. (Note: These flows do not include the additional traffic that will be generated from the estimated 3500 – 4500 people within the section 293 land between Johns Road and Main North Road (The Environment Court is using s293 of the RMA to consider residential development of this area), or further potential rezoning as part of the Belfast Area Plan)

The consultant's final NROSS report concluded that the bypass was not recommended for further action at this time. In essence, the bypass did not meet Transit New Zealand's current policy focus on works that provide direct congestion relief.

However, Council resolved in June with respect to the NROSS Study - "*That the concept of a Western Belfast Bypass be supported for the long term, and promoted through mechanisms such as urban growth policies or area plans for Belfast, but that this strategic network link not be constructed by Transit New Zealand before the Northern Arterial.*"

A pre-application for the development of the Rosebank site was received by Council in early August 2003. The Rosebank site is indicated with mid-blue outline on attachment 1 (a colour copy has been separately circulated). The landowners consultant was informed of the Council's resolution and desire for a bypass in the area not long after the pre-application was received. As a result of this Council officers developed approximately five bypass alignment options that were taken to the Land Transport Subcommittee for consideration. The minutes of that meeting note "*The Subcommittee decided to support Option A1(b) with some adjustments in regard to the Groynes area to allow for more separation.*"

It was agreed that staff should discuss the option further with the interested parties and then report back to appropriate Standing Committees (including Sustainable Transport and Utilities Committee) for formal approval by the Council. Option A1(b) with adjustments is shown as option A1(d) in attachment 2.

The second attachment shows the complete bypass alignment, the majority of which runs through land owned by Environment Canterbury. A bypass generally along the indicated alignment is considered the last possible option for a bypass. The Groynes and the Clearwater development remove alternatives to the west, while a bypass through the S293 land would be less efficient, more expensive in terms of land purchase, would separate urban development east and west of it, and the landowners have indicated that it would be strongly opposed.

An area planning team has been working on an overall plan for Belfast which includes development of the S293 land, see attachment 2 outlined in solid yellow line, and potential rezoning of more land elsewhere in Belfast for urban development. The draft area plan will be brought to the Council for consideration in due course. As a result of the Council resolution the bypass and northern arterial have been assumed to be integral parts of the currently draft area plan. They are significant considerations as to eventual land use patterns, quality of the environment for this community, and the efficient provision of infrastructure. Eventual construction of the bypass, in conjunction with the already designated northern arterial would divert through traffic out of the middle of Belfast allowing the Main North Rd to be reclaimed as a "Main Street" focus of Belfast.

PROPOSED LAND USE DEVELOPMENTS

Council subdivision staff were notified during the week of 28 October 2003 that Rosebank intended to lodge a subdivision application for development this week. A meeting with the Rosebank landowner and their consultant was held on Tuesday 4 November 2003 to discuss this. The owner of Rosebank has indicated that a contract for sale of the developable area of the site has been signed with a developer. This contract goes unconditional on the 28 November 2003. However, the landowner has indicated a willingness to negotiate the sale of the whole site to Council if it wishes to pursue the bypass. It is understood that at this stage the developer is unaware of Council's potential desire for the bypass through this area. There are a number of issues with regards to the Rosebank site that need further detailed consideration and are beyond the scope of this report.

On attachment 2 the area labelled S293 land, outlined in solid yellow line, is being considered by the Environment Court for rezoning for residential use. (Note: This area was not considered for urban use during NROSS). A workshop was held with the majority of landowners on Monday 27 October 2003 to discuss the development of the area. They are also seeking that the area with a green dotted boundary also be allowed to be rezoned for residential use. The landowners have informally indicated that want the Council to make a decision regarding the designation of the bypass route to confirm the Council commitment as well as allowing them appeal rights to the Environment Court. They have instructed their urban designer to ignore any possible bypass corridor within their S293 design analysis. As part of the S293 process the Environment Court will also want a clear indication that the Council is committed to the route, ie will be designating to protect it, and has initiated such a process. The landowners have indicated that they are hoping to lodge a development plan this month which then has to be publicly notified and allows for further Council input, although based on meetings with the developers this time frame is considered 'optimistic'.

DISCUSSIONS WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

It is worth noting that Transit New Zealand's Board in it's recent visit to the Council indicated that some other cities in New Zealand were taking a proactive role in protecting strategic transport corridors that Transit could not protect at the present time.

A letter was sent to Transit New Zealand's Regional Manager on Tuesday 7 November 2003 outlining the issues potentially facing the Council with respect to the bypass. This information was taken to the Transit New Zealand Authority meeting in Wellington on Wednesday 8 November 2003. As a result of that meeting the Authority have verbally indicated that regional officers should meet Council staff to discuss the bypass further as there is a case for the City to designate to protect the route.

A letter was also sent to Environment Canterbury's Environment Transport & Built Environment Policy Manager on Tuesday. The Manager has noted that there may be opportunities for both Council's to cooperate on a joint alignment of the southern end of the bypass and the secondary stopbank which is currently undergoing a review. However, they would need further time and information to consider a position on the by-pass itself.

Detailed discussions were held with Parks & Waterways Unit staff on Monday 3 November 2003 with respect to the bypass. Parks & Waterways have indicated in a memo to City Streets the unit's concerns at the potential adverse effects on the Groynes of the bypass.

During the NROSS Study and the initial consultation undertaken for the Belfast Area Plan there has been a reasonable indication of support from the community for the bypass. The NROSS final report shows there were 83 submissions supporting the bypass and 14 opposing it.

There have been no discussions with any land owners at the northern end of the bypass route.

INVESTIGATIVE WORKS TO SUPPORT A DESIGNATION

Given the proposed land use developments outlined above and the Environment Court S293 process, certainty on the Council's position on the bypass is required. Council will shortly need to decide whether it is sufficiently supportive of the bypass to initiate the investigative work necessary to support a designation being lodged to protect the bypass route.

The investigative work would provide:

- Detailed traffic modelling justification for the bypass;
- An outline plan, including the exact corridor alignment and extent of the designation;
- An environmental impact assessment of the route.

The Council would still have the opportunity of not designating the bypass if it felt that the investigative work showed the bypass was not justified or the impact of the bypass was too significant.

If Council decides not to proceed with the investigative work there would seem to be a significant risk that the opportunity for a bypass will be permanently lost or that it would become significantly more expensive to re-establish in the future. As noted above a bypass generally along the indicated alignment is considered the last possible option for a bypass of Belfast.

As a result of the Transit Authority meeting in Wellington on Wednesday 8 November 2003 the Regional Manager has indicated that Transit would be supportive of the City Council writing to the regional office seeking funding for the investigate works in the financial year starting July 2004.

DESIGNATION PROCESS TIMEFRAME AND COST

The investigative work to support a designation is likely to take of the order of 6 to 18 months. The cost is likely to be of the order of \$50,000 to \$200,000 depending on the extent of work undertaken to support the designation.

If the Council decides to designate, it has to apply to itself to place the designation. Because of this, it would be preferable to use external planning expertise to put together the notice of requirement for the designation to remove any conflict of interest for City Plan officers.

Hearings on the designation would be held in front of an independent commissioner with the decision being able to be appealed to the Environment Court.

CONCLUSION

There are a range of issues that need further consideration with respect to the Belfast Bypass. Detailed consideration by Committee members of these issues is required before Council decides whether or not it wishes to pursue land purchase and/or designation to protect the bypass.

Land Transport Subcommittee

Recommendation:

That the Committee recommend to Council that it:

1. Reconfirm the Council's commitment to the Western Belfast Bypass as a integral part of the strategic road network and the development of the Belfast area.
2. Commit to the investigative works necessary to support a designation to protect the Western Belfast Bypass.
3. Write to Transit New Zealand seeking funding for the investigative work to support a designation to protect the Western Belfast Bypass.