



## SOUTH BELFAST PARTNERSHIP BOARD

### **Belfast on the Move: Transport Masterplan for Belfast City Centre**

The South Belfast Partnership Board are supportive of the overall aims of the proposed Masterplan, particularly the need to improve the ease and safety for pedestrians and cyclists accessing and moving around the city centre, improving public transport services, reducing the impact of traffic and maximizing opportunities to create a high quality public realm within the city centre. We are committed to supporting the key principles within the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015, which we believe are adequately embedded within the draft Masterplan.

Within this context, we would like to take this opportunity to make a number of comments in relation to both the Sustainable Transport Enabling Measures and the longer-term proposals for delivering a high quality transport system for the City Centre.

#### **Sustainable Transport Enabling Measures**

We understand that the Sustainable Transport Enabling Measures are part of a longer terms strategy to improve the pedestrian environment and public transport services within the City Centre. However, whilst we would welcome most of the changes proposed, which we believe will help to improve cycling and walking and the reliability of bus services, we would wish to raise concerns regarding the proposed traffic management to the west side of the City Centre.

Firstly, it is unclear from the proposals whether the lower section of Sandy Row, from Hope Street to Grosvenor Road, will remain two-way or be converted to a one-way street. Assuming that it remains as it currently is, we would have concerns that the existing road lacks the capacity to carry the increased traffic flow that is likely to result from the proposals. Should congestion build at this location, particularly during peak times, we would expect that a knock-on impact would occur in the surrounding area.

Areas that may be affected would include Sandy Row to the south of Hope Street, and in turn Donegall Road, Shaftesbury Square and Great Victoria Street to the south, Grosvenor Road to both the East and the West and back along Howard Street

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into the City Centre. Many of these routes already experience severe congestion during peak periods, with further knock-on effects throughout South Belfast.

Secondly, whilst we acknowledge that changes to the road layout and the implementation of a one way system in Durham Street/College Street North will reduce a “Southbound ‘rat-run’ on Barrack Street”, we would highlight the likelihood of increased levels of through-traffic on Sandy Row, heading both north and south. Sandy Row is a Neighbourhood Centre, providing a number of important services for the local community. A major increase in through-traffic would be to the detriment of the pedestrian environment and would reduce the attractiveness of many of the services on Sandy Row.

### **Bankmoor Link, Inner City Ring Road**

Proposals for an inner box ring road for Belfast have been around for over 30 years, with the overall aims of relieving traffic congestion crossing the city centre. Since the idea was first suggested in the 1970s there have been significant increases in traffic flows throughout South Belfast, leading to major congestion, particularly around Shaftesbury Square and the lower Ormeau Road. Whilst we support the aims of reducing traffic congestion in the City Centre, which will in turn improve pedestrian and cycle movement and improve the reliability of public transport services, we would contend that this should not be to the detriment of South Belfast.

The draft Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) for South Belfast, prepared in December 2008 for the Partnership Board, outlines our Strategic Priorities in relation to transport and movement, including the need to “Review the requirements for a future inner box ring-road which is currently sterilising development opportunity along its route.” This relates not only to the need for an improved road link through South Belfast, but also to the scale of the proposed road and options for the suggested route. We would welcome further engagement in this regard.

It is noted with the SRF that the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan proposes completing the Inner Box as a ‘boulevard’ or ‘avenue’. At present, South Belfast has arguably the best pedestrian access into the City Centre when compared to the other four quarters. Whilst the river Lagan limits the opportunity to provide good pedestrian links from the East, it is notable that pedestrian access to the city centre from the North and West are limited by major transport infrastructure. The creation of a wide ‘boulevard’ or ‘avenue’ with fast moving through traffic through South Belfast is likely to negatively impact the South of the City, effectively cutting off some of the communities from the City Centre.

It is noted in our SRF that “views on the proposals are mixed and local communities have registered their objection to the development of any link road.” Given these objections and opposition to the scheme, we would underline the importance of engaging early with the communities likely to be most affected by the proposals. We would welcome the opportunity to work with DRD Roads Service to ensure that all of

the available options are considered for this proposal, including alternative route and scale of infrastructure, and that the communities are fully engaged in the process.

### **South Belfast Strategic Priorities – Transport and Movement**

The Strategic Priorities outlined in our draft SRF are central to any consideration we give to transport measures within South Belfast. In brief, the priorities of most relevance to these proposals include:

- **Improve the functioning of important traffic nodes of Shaftsbury Square and Cromac Square:** We believe that the flow of traffic through Cromac Square could be improved as a result of the proposed changes. However, as outlined above, we would have concerns that the proposed traffic management to the west side of the City Centre could negatively impact the functioning of Shaftsbury Square with regard to traffic flow and pedestrian movement/environment.
- **Improve pedestrian and cycling routes:** Whilst the proposals should result in an improved environment for pedestrians and cyclists within the City Centre, we would be concerned that the proposed inner city ring-road could lead to reduced pedestrian access into the City Centre from South Belfast.
- **Review the requirements for a future inner box ring-road:** As we have noted above, there are considerable concerns with the proposed route and scale of the inner city ring-road. It is also notable that the uncertainty surrounding the need and timescales for such a scheme has led to a band of vacant land and is currently sterilising development opportunity along its route. As we have outlined above, we would welcome the opportunity to work with Roads Service to consider alternative proposals to reduce traffic through the City Centre, whilst minimizing the impact on the communities within South Belfast. We would underline the importance of engaging early with the communities and believe we are in the best position to facilitate this.
- **Review the current proposals for the Belfast Rapid Transport Scheme:** We would expect that the proposed Rapid Transport Schemes will help improve the quality and reliability of public transport services in Belfast. However, at present, such proposals are not included within South Belfast. We would urge Roads Service to reconsider, as a minimum, any opportunities for extension of improved public transport services into South Belfast and to ensure that strong linkages are provided for South Belfast residents into this important new transport system.