3 SCHEME BACKGROUND AND SCHEME DEVELOPMENT

3.1 NEED FOR THE PROJECT

As Mayo’s second largest town, Ballina is one of the counties major industrial, commercial, retail and tourist centre which has experienced substantial economic growth over the last number of years. This economic growth has seen the population of the town and its environs increase by 20%, from a figure of 16,012 in 1996 to a figure of 19,294 in 2002. The economic and population growth experienced by the town has resulted in a substantial increase in traffic and as a consequence the existing road network within the town and its environs has come under increased pressure to cater adequately for the existing and future traffic needs of the town. The problem is further exacerbated by the layout of the town’s road network. The majority of the roads, whether national primary or national secondary, regional or local, essentially converge in the centre of the town from the surrounding hinterland, in a radial pattern via the two bridge crossings over the River Moy. Consequently, local town traffic, traffic from the towns of Killala, Crossmolina, Foxford, Swinford, Castlebar, Bonniconlon, Enniscrone, Tobercurry and Sligo and surrounding villages or traffic wishing to bypass the town using the national primary, national secondary or regional road network generally need to negotiate the town’s road network.

The objective of the Ballina Orbital Route Project is to provide an orbital link around the town connecting all existing and future National Primary and National Secondary Roads, all existing Regional Roads and all existing Local Roads radiating from the town. The consequent benefit will be a reduction in traffic congestion due to traffic having the opportunity of avoiding the town centre. It will also serve to open up lands on the periphery of Ballina for future development.

The roads that will be linked by the Ballina Orbital Route Project include the recently opened N26 Stage 1, the existing N59 Sligo Road, the existing and proposed N59 Crossmolina Road, the existing R314 Killala Road, the existing R294 Bonniconlon Road, the existing R297 Enniscrone Road, and a number of Local Roads including the LP109 Ardoughan Road, LS112 Tullyegan Road, LP122 Creggaun Road, LS139 Rathnaconeen Road, LP124 Attymass Road and the LS132 Quignashee Road.

3.2 NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The National Development Plan 2000 – 2006 overall objective is “to enable the economy to develop along a path of strong, sustainable growth.” Some of the key elements of the Plan in meeting this objective are:

- A major investment programme in Economic and Social Infrastructure
- A commitment to a better regional distribution of public and private investment

3.2.1 National Roads: Analysis of the Current Situation

Roads are the primary mode of internal transport in Ireland, accounting for 96% of passenger traffic and 90% of freight transport. While Ireland has reasonably good road coverage in terms of road density (38 persons per km of road compared to the EU average of 99, and 1.3 km of road per square km of area compared to the EU average of 1.6 km) the quality of the road infrastructure is poor by EU standards.

At the regional level 52% of national primary roads and 30% of national secondary roads are in the S&E (Southern and Eastern) Region. The S&E Region has a higher percentage of quality roads reflecting the higher traffic volumes in the region, both from within the region and from outside it. Despite better quality roads in the S&E region there is greater congestion in the region and journey times can take longer than in the BMW (Border, Midland and Western) Region. However the lack of better quality roads serving the BMW Region makes it less attractive to inward investment and acts as a constraint to growth and competitiveness in the region.

Road travel has grown rapidly in Ireland in recent years. Related to this, there has been significant growth in the number of registered vehicles. The number of private cars has risen by 40% since 1992 and now stands at 1.2 million. However people are more dependent on car travel and travel longer distances in the BMW Region reflecting the relatively rural nature of the region. For example, in 1996, 9.9% travelled more than 24 kilometres to work or school in the BMW Region compared to 8.3% in the S&E region.

3.2.2 National Development Plan: Strategy For National Roads

The primary road transport objectives are:

- To improve the reliability of the road transport system by removing bottlenecks, remedying capacity deficiencies and reducing absolute journey times and journey time variance;
- To improve internal road transport infrastructure between regions and within regions, contribute to the competitiveness of the productive sector and foster balanced regional development;
- To facilitate better access to and from the main ports and airports with the main objective of offsetting the negative effects of peripherality;
- To contribute to sustainable transport policies, facilitating continued economic growth and regional development while ensuring a high level of environmental protection;
- To help achieve the objectives of the Government’s Road Safety Strategy in relation to the reduction in fatalities and serious injuries caused by road accidents.

These objectives will be achieved as part of an integrated transport investment programme for the period 2000-2006. The key features of this programme will include:

- A concentrated and focused development strategy for the national primary road network focusing in particular on key national routes;
- Improvement of national secondary roads of critical importance for economic development and balanced regional development;
- A high priority to the safety of road users in the design and construction of road projects.
3.2.3 National Development Plan and National Primary Roads in the Ballina Area

National Primary Roads account for 3% of the network and 27% of total road traffic. These are major long distance through routes linking the principal ports and airports, cities and large towns. The development strategy for national primary roads in the National Development Plan will include further major improvements on national primary routes including the N26 Ballina-Foxford Road which will connect with the N5 Westport-Longford Road, all of which provide a Strategic Corridor Link along the East/West Road Corridor.

This programme is based on a policy of providing a high quality of service on the national primary network. It is estimated that the investment planned will result in a minimum level of service D on 90% of the routes involved.

A feature of the work to be undertaken on national primary roads will be the adoption of an integrated planning approach involving the identification of improvement needs and route selections for substantial sections of the routes rather than focusing solely on the delivery of by-passes of congested centres of population.

3.2.4 National Development Plan and National Secondary Roads in the Ballina Area

National Secondary Roads account for 3% of the network and 11% of total road traffic. They act as medium distance routes connecting important towns, serving medium to large geographical areas and providing links to the national primary routes to form a homogeneous arterial network. The strategy for National Secondary Roads will concentrate on routes which are of particular importance to economic and regional development, including links to the strategic corridors, roads serving key ports, airports, tourist areas, industry and multi-purpose roads. The works to be undertaken will include:

- The provision of small by-passes, minor inner relief roads;
- Safety improvements including the elimination of accident blackspots and the improvement of the layout of junctions and access points;

Among the routes on which improvement works will be carried out are:

- N59 Ballisadare-Ballina-Westport-Cilfen-Galway and N60 Castlebar-Claremorris Road which will link up with the Western Road Corridor from Sligo, through Limerick, to Rosslare and the Europort.

3.2.5 National Development Plan and Advanced Planning

In addition to the investment programme set out above for national roads, the need for the development of new routes to augment those mentioned above will be evaluated over the period of the Plan. Where the need for a new route is established, funding will be provided for the advanced planning and design of the route in the Plan period, with a view to bringing the project to construction in an appropriate time frame.

3.3 NATIONAL ROAD NEEDS STUDY


Some of the key findings included the following:

- Roads are the dominant mode of internal transport in Ireland, accounting for 89% of freight traffic and 96% of passenger traffic.
- The provision of an adequate transport infrastructure to support necessary economic growth is a fundamental objective of a sustainable Transport Policy.
- Ireland’s peripheral island location, without a land link to the rest of the European Union, requires efficient access to ports and airports in order to minimise the economic disadvantage of the absence of a land link.
- Development in Ireland is characterised by a dispersed pattern of human settlement and economic activity, though with increasing concentrations in the vicinity of the major coastal cities.
- A sustainable Road Transport Policy requires integration of development needs with environmental protection and conservation. This requires a continued focus on the elimination of bottlenecks and inefficiencies in the infrastructural system, diversion of traffic away from communities where practicable, upgrading of existing alignments where this is an option rather than new routes, identification and mitigation of adverse environmental impacts, with effective public consultation in the planning stage.

The study assessed the needs of each national road and proposed the phasing of future road projects. The national roads in the Ballina area were scheduled for improvement need as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Route</th>
<th>Improvement Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N26: Ballina-Foxford</td>
<td>Phase 1 (Stage1 opened in December 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N59: Ballisadare-Ballina</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N59: Ballina Bypass</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N59: Ballina-Crossmolina</td>
<td>Phase Backlog</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Backlog: refers to routes that by 1999 were not capable of delivering 80kph average inter-urban journey speeds.

- Phase 1: Sections of road falling below LOS D between 2000 – 2004
- Phase 2: Sections of road falling below LOS D between 2005 – 2009
- Phase 3: Sections of road falling below LOS D between 2015 – 2019

(LOS – Level of Service: a technical concept which describes the travel experience in terms of operating speed, the ability to overtake traffic in safety, traffic congestion, overall safety and driver and passenger comfort. There are 6 levels ranging from LOS A, representing free flow conditions, to LOS F, representing breakdown flow)
3.4 THE NATIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY

The National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020 is a twenty-year planning framework, which is designed to achieve a balance between social, economic and physical development and population growth in the regions. Its main objectives are the future provision of a better quality of life for people, a strong competitive economic position and an environment of the highest quality.

Ballina is located in the West Region of the National Spatial Strategy which covers the Galway-Mayo-Roscommon Counties. It has been selected as a linked hub with Castlebar as they are strategically located within the West. These towns contain complementary functions and capabilities that point towards a capacity to energise wider areas through integrated and co-ordinated development.

The National Spatial Strategy states that Ballina and Castlebar, as hubs, will: “…perform important roles within the national structure at the regional and county level. Critical factors will include improvements in regional accessibility through advanced communications infrastructure, by road and public transport and through the regional airport in Knock.”

It also advances the argument that: “Linking the Midlands Gateway with Castlebar-Ballina through up-graded road, public transport and communications links also has the potential to benefit a number of other towns, including Roscommon, Castlerea, Ballyhaunis and Claremorris.”

3.5 MAYO COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The current development plan for Mayo is the Mayo County Development Plan 2003 – 2009 (CDP). The plan recognises that the peripherality of the county in national and international terms is exacerbated by major infrastructural deficiencies particularly in relation to strategic road connections. One of the key issues of the County Development Plan is that “the provision of a sound infrastructure is of fundamental importance to the future development of the County.”

The County Development Plan also states that “it is an objective of the Council to secure improvement to the standard and safety of the public road network to cater for the economic, social and cultural development of the County.” and “to protect the investment of public resources in the provision, improvement and maintenance of the public road network.”

In the County Development Plan Appendix 1: List of Road Improvements: Objective NS3 in Table 1.1 – National Secondary Route Improvement proposes to Commence route selection and design of Ballina Orbital Route.

The Ballina Orbital Route Project will also have to take cognisance of the other road improvements associated with the greater Ballina area listed in the County Development Plan. They include NP1: N26 Ballina-Mount Falcon section at Carrowntreilla, NP5: N26 Ballina-Bohola Stage 2, NS5: N59 Ballina-Crossmolina Road, R01: Ballina Western Relief Road, BR1: Ballina Bypass.

3.6 BALLINA AND ENVIRONS DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2003-2009

The current development plan for the Ballina Town Council area is the Ballina and Environs Development Plan 2003-2009. It has stipulated as an objective of the Council to “to consolidate the existing structure of the town in a balanced manner. This will give a more equal distribution of traffic throughout the town. Future circulation will improve with the proposed ring road, linking the R314 (Killala Road) with the N59 West (Crossmolina Road) south to the Foxford Road (N26) and later crossing the River Moy and linking up with the Tobercurry Road (R294) until it reaches the N59 East (Sligo Road). This bypass route will take a lot of traffic from the town centre, especially on the main route between the N26 and the N59.”

It is a policy of Ballina Town Council and Mayo County Council “to develop an outer ring road system for the town.”

It is an objective of Ballina Town Council and Mayo County Council “to develop Stage 1 of the outer ring road linking the N26 (Foxford Road) with the N59 – West (Crossmolina Road) and the R314 (Killala Road) (T19) and also to develop Stage 2 of the outer ring road linking the N26 (Foxford Road) with the N59 – East (Sligo Road) (T20).”

The location of the Ballina Orbital Route reserved corridor, detailed in Map 07 of the Ballina and Environs Development Plan 2003-2009, is shown on Figure No.3: Ballina Orbital Route Reserved Corridor Options on page 13 and is located within the Study Area.

3.7 OTHER PLANS AND STUDIES

3.7.1 Ballina Transport Study 2002

In 2000 Transportation Planning (International) Ltd. (TPi) were appointed by Mayo County Council to undertake a Transport Study of Ballina.

The overall objective of the study was to enable Mayo County Council and Ballina Town Council to “introduce transport policies and a series of traffic and transportation measures over a ten year period.” They achieved this by assessing the problems with traffic around Ballina by analysing the present traffic situation and projecting future traffic demand. The outcome was the Ballina Transport Study 2002 in which they proposed measures to use the existing infrastructure to maximise capacity and to improve it for future demand. Included was a prioritised list and timescale to implement their proposals. One of its proposals for future traffic relief was that “traffic assessments have shown that the most effective road proposal would be an orbital route extending southwards from the N59 Sligo Road and east of Ballina to reach the N26 Foxford Road for access to the N5. As part of the orbital road around Ballina, we strongly recommend that the proposed road realignment extend to the N59 to the west of Ballina and the R314 to the north of Ballina effectively forming a western by-pass of Ballina. The completed route will act as an orbital road and will, in effect, remove the majority of traffic from Ballina Town Centre.”
3.7.2 N26 Ballina-Bohola Stage 1 and 2
At the time of this publication the Stage 1 of N26 Ballina-Bohola Road Project has been constructed and is open to traffic since December 2004. Stage 2 is currently reaching the end of Phase 4: Preliminary Design/Land Acquisition as per the NRA National Roads Project Management Guidelines. This has involved the completion of the Preliminary Design Stage 2 Design Report, the Environmental Impact Statement and the preparation of Compulsory Purchase Drawings. It is expected that Stage 2 will progress to Compulsory Purchase Order stage towards the end of 2005.

The Ballina terminal section of the preferred route for the N26 Ballina-Bohola Stage 1 and 2 is located within the Study Area of the Ballina Orbital Route Project and is shown on Figure No. 3: Ballina Orbital Route Reserved Corridor Options on page 13.

3.7.3 Ballina Area Action Plans
Both the Killala Road and Quay Road areas published Area Action Plans in 2004 which identified various proposals and objectives for the relevant areas. From a transportation perspective both plans stipulated as an objective to provide roads within their area that conformed with the plans proposed for the Orbital Route of Ballina within the Ballina and Environ Development Plan 2003-2009.

Quay Area Neighbourhood Action Area Plan 2004-2009
T21 “Develop Relief roads as indicated by the Plan and indicated by Map No. 2.1 of this Action Area Plan”

Killala Road Neighbourhood Action Area Plan 2004-2009
T19 “Develop Stage 1 of the outer ring road linking the N26 (Foxford Road) with the N59 – West (Crossmolina Road) and the R314 (Killala Road).”

3.8 SECTION 85 AGREEMENT
In conformance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 2001 an agreement between Ballina Town Council and Mayo County Council will be required in order that Mayo County Council, on behalf of Ballina Town Council, can procure sections of the Ballina Orbital Route Project located within Ballina Town Council’s boundary.

3.9 LEGAL ISSUES
As part of any constraints study, consideration of legal issues, which may arise during the design and construction process, must be taken into account at an early a stage as possible so as not to delay the timely completion of the project. On this basis the following should be noted at the appropriate stages.

- European and Irish environmental legislation
- Text of amendments to Local Authority Development Plans
- Guidelines on Process and Codes of Practice relating to environmental and legal aspects of road design and construction
- EIS and CPO format and procedures
- Requirements under Section 50 of the 1945 Arterial Drainage Act for the construction or alteration of any bridge or culvert over any watercourse.
- Rights of statutory undertakers
- Railway implications and acquisition of land from the railway operator
- Intermediate stage procurement
- Wayleaves
- Site Investigation Notices

3.10 PROGRESSION OF SCHEME
The Ballina Orbital Route Project proposes to provide an orbital link around the town that will connect the critical road network radiating from the town. The objective of this exercise is to identify relevant constraints, examine viable route options and select a preferred route with the assistance of the public and expert guidance. Once the Design Team has selected the preferred route, approval will be sought from the elected members of the County Council. This route corridor will then be reserved for the future until funding is made available for the scheme to be advanced. Funding for the future progression of the entire orbital route will not come from the National Roads Authority alone. The National Roads Authority is responsible for the national road network and consequently will be funding the development of the section of the orbital route connecting the N59 Sligo Road, the N26 and the N59 Crossmolina Road existing and proposed roads only. The remainder of the orbital route will then be developed by the relevant road authority subject to available finances.

3.11 NRA REQUIREMENTS
The design and construction will follow the process as set down by the National Roads Authority in its National Roads Project Management Guidelines: March 2000. This report satisfies Phase 2: Constraints Study, which has “focused on determining what constraints (physical, procedural, legal, environmental etc.) exist that could affect the design of the scheme, delay progress and influence the costs.”

The next stage, Phase 3: Route Selection deals with the technical evaluation of a number of possible route options culminating in recommending a preferred route for the project. Following approval from Mayo County Councillors a Route Selection Report is sent for approval of the preferred route to the NRA.
Phase 4: Preliminary Design/Land Acquisition Procedures is the final step in identifying the land required for the project. Sufficient design is carried out to adequately identify land for the CPO process to proceed and an EIS is prepared if required. Approval of the Preliminary Design Report and approval to proceed to CPO has to be obtained from the NRA at the end of this phase to proceed with the project.

Following An Bord Pleanála approval of the CPO Phase 5, 6 and 7 (Detailed Design, Tendering and Construction) may proceed. As of yet the tendering/construction process has not been decided upon.

The proposed timeframe for the above phases for the Ballina Orbital Route Project can be seen in table 3.10 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Constraints Study</td>
<td>Constraints Study Report</td>
<td>August 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Route Selection</td>
<td>Presentation of Route Options</td>
<td>September 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Decision on Preferred Route</td>
<td>Nov./Dec. 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Preliminary Design/ Land Acquisition Procedures</td>
<td>CPO Process to start</td>
<td>To be decided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>An Bord Pleanala approval</td>
<td>To be decided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Construction Documents Preparation/ Tender/ Award</td>
<td>Award of Tender</td>
<td>To be decided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Scheme Construction</td>
<td>Construction Duration</td>
<td>To be decided</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.10: Timeframe for Ballina Orbital Route Project
Figure No.3: Ballina Orbital Route Reserved Corridor Options (including N26 Ballina-Bohola Stage1 Terminus)