

Submission to the National Transport Authority

Public Consultation on Swiftway Bus Rapid Transit – Swords/Airport to City Centre

28th November 2014

Introduction

Dublin Chamber welcomes the opportunity to input into the National Transport Authority's consultation on the proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route from Swords to the City Centre.

With over 1,300 member companies, Dublin Chamber is the largest chamber of commerce in Ireland and the most representative and broadly-based business group in the Greater Dublin Area. The Chamber's policy work focuses on developing the Dublin region's infrastructure and transport, promoting competitiveness and improving local governance.

In developing plans for this route, it is essential that the Authority adheres to certain key principles, outlined below.

Integration

It is vitally important that BRT plans are developed in line with a wider strategy for Dublin transport.

Dublin Chamber therefore welcomes the NTA's commitment to enhancing the benefits to pedestrians and cyclists along the proposed route via segregated cycle tracks, improved cycle lanes, cycle parking at Swiftway stops and improved pedestrian routes. At present, BRT plans also account for certain interchange points with existing Luas and DART infrastructure.

However, route plans should also anticipate ways in which future investment projects may interact with the BRT service.

Fingal County Council is developing a plan for a sustainable transportation network to cater for the expansion of Swords from its existing population of 40,000 to an eventual population of 100,000. The plan includes a proposal for a Swords Western Ring Road to relieve traffic volumes on the congested section of the M1.

The NTA has pointed to a public transport deficit along the proposed Swords route, stating that "if development occurs along this corridor as currently planned, further significant investment in rail-based transportation infrastructure along the corridor will be required, which may include Metro North."

The RPA have also proposed plans for heavy rail in Swords and Lucan, while Iarnród Éireann have plans for a heavy rail link to the airport in the form of a spur from the DART line.

BRT's attractiveness as a low-cost solution is weakened if other projects overlap and serve the same or similar catchment areas. All projects must be placed within a strategic transport network to ensure demand is adequately met and avoid duplication of services.

Similarly, the impact of ongoing projects must be taken into consideration. For example, the M50 demand management scheme begun in 2013 is expected to affect traffic on a number of regional roads connecting Swords with the N2/Ballymun/Finglas area.

The NTA should explain its vision for how BRT can interact with future transport projects to absorb demand along the proposed route.

Projected demand

Of the three proposed BRT routes, it is estimated that the Swords to City Centre line will experience greatest demand. According to the 2011 Census, Swords is the largest town in Dublin county and has seen strong population growth in recent years.

However, the Authority should carry out an in-depth demand assessment to ensure that the BRT service is adaptable for maximum and minimum demand scenarios.

Implementing BRT asks existing Swords commuters to switch modes from their current preferred transport option e.g. Dublin Bus, car, private bus operator etc. If this switch is not sufficiently incentivised, demand will not reach expected levels and the BRT service could be in danger of being undersubscribed. Conversely, Amsterdam's experience implementing BRT saw usage in the first year up to 99% higher than had been estimated.

The NTA must find a middle ground between these two demand scenarios, taking careful consideration of the transport services already in operation in the Swords area, and the reasons why commuters choose these.

Speed of implementation

The NTA has acknowledged the need to provide Dublin with a wider set of transport options. Furthermore, it is necessary to move quickly in order to address worsening congestion in the city centre.

Figures from Dublin City Council and the NTA suggest that between 2012 and 2013, there was an increase of 6.9% in the number of public transport users crossing the canal cordon between 7:00 and 10:00. The number of users is up from 86,047 in 2012 to 91,981 users in 2013.

All three modes of public transport – bus, rail and Luas – have shown increases in recent years. Crucially, bus had the largest number of additional passengers with 4,170 additional users between 2012 and 2013. Bus also has the largest modal share of public transport, carrying over 56,000 passengers into the city in 2013 and representing 61% of all public transport trips in the morning peak.

BRT systems are one of the fastest transport solutions to build and operate, and could therefore be a speedy way to tackle this upward trend of public transport users travelling into the city centre.

Proposed Route

The route proposes to take the Swords Bypass and continue on to Airside. This means that the BRT service would be positioned some distance away from densely-populated estates such as River Valley and Rathbeale. If BRT aims to attract commuters who currently choose commercial or Dublin bus services, the service must be within



reasonable walking distance for commuters.

The NTA should carefully consider the case for servicing Dublin Airport, and the times at which this would be most beneficial to the maximum number of commuters.

Dublin Airport's peak hours differ from those of the City Centre. The peak hour in terms of aircraft movements is generally 6/6.30-7.30am. Passengers begin arriving for these flights up to 90 minutes beforehand, that is, from 4.30am onwards for a 6am flight.

Dublin Airport Authority's 2013 survey of staff transport choice suggests that a third of all staff can start their early shift before 6am. Those living in Swords, Santry, Whitehall, Blanchardstown, Clonsilla etc. have no public transport options that will get them into the Airport before this early shift commences. Some 47% stated that there were poor or no public transport options open to them.

For those commuting to the City Centre at peak morning hours, an airport stop would add approximately 10 to 15 minutes to their journey time.

The NTA has suggested that there may be "a separate Swiftway service starting and terminating at Dublin Airport and running to the City Centre." Dublin Chamber considers it prudent to distinguish between direct routes to the city centre and those servicing the airport. The two routes would cater to differing demand periods. For example, early morning and daytime buses (e.g. 5.00-7.00am and 9.30am-4.30pm) could serve the airport, while other buses could bypass it, catering to 'normal' rush hour times (e.g. 7.30-9.30am and 4.30-6.30pm).

Current route plans would see the BRT service passing through Santry and Drumcondra, which are commonly perceived as bottleneck or pinch areas at peak hours. By contrast, commercial bus operators from Swords use the Port Tunnel to reach the City Centre, thereby bypassing congestion in Santry and Drumcondra. If the public perception is of a 'bypass vs. bottleneck' situation, potential BRT users will need to be convinced that dedicated lanes and improved prioritisation will minimise delays in problem areas.