

Cork County Council update ...

For the past couple of months, my bedtime reading material has been the M28 Environmental Impact Statement. It is a vast document which I'm slowly working my way through on the laptop. You can too, at www.n28cork-ringaskiddy.com.

The morning run for residents from Carrigaline and Passage West/Monkstown into Cork City is, at best, a trial. Those living on the south side of the Owenabue River have the additional burden of traffic within Carrigaline. The evening run is little better. Understandably, some residents have told me how they are looking forward to the relief the M28 may bring to this daily drudge.

Let me make it abundantly clear. There is not one word that I have come across in the M28 planning application that confirms it will be available to daily commuters. This is a motorway to facilitate port traffic. Currently, almost 800 trucks travel Carr's Hill daily. The Port of Cork has predicted that when its permitted development is up and running, by 2033 it will be putting 3,800 trucks on the road every day. The motorway is expected to attract new industry to Ringaskiddy. Traffic modelling in the M28 planning application anticipates 5,500 trucks on the Carr's Hill section of the M28 each day, with almost 7,500 approaching the Bloomfield Interchange.

These trucks, whether associated with the port or industry, are what is defined as "strategic" traffic. The M28 is planned to accommodate strategic traffic. Strategic traffic does not include commuters. The planning application documents make repeated reference to the fact that construction of this motorway would free up the existing network for commuters. Nowhere does it tell us who those commuters are but if we can reasonably assume that commuters are ordinary residents heading for a day's work in the city, every indication is that even should the M28 be developed, they would continue to travel on the existing N28.

Now that is fine if, as predicted, the existing N28 is relieved of its current congestion. Certainly the planning application's traffic modelling shows that in 2035 (the year studied) the motorway would remove almost 85% of daily traffic between Carr's Hill and Shannonpark. But it also shows that traffic between Carr's Hill and Rochestown would increase by 60%. Presumably this is because commuters on the existing N28 heading from Carrigaline to the city would connect with the motorway at the new Carr's Hill Interchange. This interchange is planned to replace the current slip road from Maryborough Hill. So while we now have 46,000 vehicles heading towards the Bloomfield Interchange every morning, with the motorway in place, 65,000 cars would be heading towards the Bloomfield Interchange.

Although the M28 project does not include any upgrade of the Bloomfield Interchange itself, it does propose construction of what is called a westbound link road or a lane leaving the M28 just south of the Bloomfield Interchange and running at height to connect directly with the N40 South Ring Road somewhere behind the Rochestown Park Hotel. This would relieve the Bloomfield Interchange of vehicles heading west or towards the city. But bottom line, the predicted reality is for a 40% increase in traffic towards the Bloomfield Interchange, including an undefined but minimum 680% increase in trucks.

One of the key attributes of the proposed motorway is that it would eliminate bottlenecks for strategic traffic. So whilst the current bottleneck at the Shannonpark roundabout would indeed be eliminated, it doesn't take a huge leap of imagination to envisage an alternative developing at the one-lane Bloomfield Interchange. In fact, the only way to relieve the Bloomfield Interchange of this scenario is to keep commuter traffic off it. How could TII achieve this? By either introducing

restrictions at the entry to the M28 from the Carr's Hill Interchange or by tolling. Tolling is, in fact, a word not mentioned in a meaningful way in the planning documentation at all. And the consequence of needing to cede the Bloomfield Interchange to "strategic" traffic would be that people like you and me would have no alternative than to get to the city through Douglas. I need not expand on the implications of that scenario for either commuters or Douglas residents.

I am not blowing this out of proportion. Nowhere in the planning application for the M28 does it clarify whether commuters from Carrigaline or Passage West/Monkstown could indeed use the motorway for commuting. Whilst it tells us that the motorway is for strategic traffic, nowhere does it define what such traffic is. Would those working in the Ringaskiddy industries be considered "strategic"? If not, must they resign themselves to travelling on the existing N28 indefinitely? Nowhere does it tell us whether the motorway would be tolled. And if so, where would the toll booth be? Because if that tolling forces commuter traffic into Douglas, the consequences for ordinary people and urban roads would be beyond intolerable.

I am putting my submission together to be received by An Bord Pleanála before the closing date of 18th August. I will be asking them to clarify all these critical unknowns. If you share my concerns, I would urge you to do likewise. You can do this by writing to An Bord Pleanála at 64 Marlborough Street, Dublin 1, including your name and address and the project reference: 04.HA0053 – Cork County Council M28 Cork to Ringaskiddy Motorway Scheme. Unfortunately it costs €50 to make a submission but you can share that cost between two or more who are equally concerned. If you are making a group submission in this way, you can all sign it but identify one address with which the Board can correspond.

An upgrade of the N28 has been on the cards for a very long time. These improvements were always intended to ease the congestion of the daily commute. The M28 project is to serve another purpose and I feel very strongly that we, local taxpayers who have long been promised infrastructural improvements, should have a clear picture of what our investment will deliver for our benefit. To date, the evidence does not reassure that this motorway would indeed be the great white hope we all long for.