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Ms. Máire Daly
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Wednesday, 13 May 2015

Re: River Shannon Crossing: Athlone – EIA Scoping Document

Dear Máire,

I refer to the above EIA Scoping Document and to your letter dated 15th April 2015 inviting comments on the proposed content of the EIS. I also refer to my submission dated Thursday, 29 August 2013 sent to Mr. Andrew Warwick in ROD in regard to the previous EIA Scoping Report (re-attached here).

This short submission is being made through the work of the National Cycling Coordinator on behalf of An Taisce and Cyclist.ie, a position funded under the European Cyclists' Federation Leadership (ECF) Programme 2013-15. See www.ecf.com for more information on the ECF.

Overall we wish to express strong support for the proposed scheme. The provision of this cycle and pedestrian bridge is a crucial element of the longer Dublin to Galway cycle route which forms the final leg of the longer *EuroVelo* 'Capitals' Route #2 running from Moscow to Galway (<http://www.eurovelo.com/en/eurovelos/eurovelo-2>). A stand-alone bridge for non-motorised transport will send out a strong signal to locals and visitors alike that cycling and walking matters!

While we are strongly in favour of the concept of the bridge and its proposed location, we have a number of concerns I wish to raise here:

- Cyclists and pedestrians who will be travelling from the west side of the river and along Grace Road (perhaps having come from areas to the north and north west of the army barracks and the barracks itself) will be transitioning from a busy road onto the motor-traffic free cycleway / bridge – and visa versa. The scheme design needs to ensure that Grace Road / the R446 (Galway Road) / the Custume Bridge is traffic-calmed and a lower, safer (30km/h) speed limit is applied so that those accessing and exiting from the new route have a safer and more comfortable journey overall, not just while on the traffic free section.
- We are concerned that the proposed structure on the west side of the bridge will entail removing too many trees near the Luan Gallery (Figure 1 below). This would be unfortunate for ecological and visual reasons. Figure 4.4 (page 7) of the Scoping Document shows the proposed connection and ramp at the Luan Gallery. This design appears to be hard-landscape dominated and the area bereft of trees has an excessively industrial feel about it. We strongly recommend that a further effort is made to arrive at a design concept that is much more sensitively integrated into the tree-lined environment at this location and that the choice of materials on the west bank responds sensitively to the arboreal feel of the existing bank.



Figure 1 – Existing trees on west bank alongside the Luan Gallery (looking north)

- Figure 4.5 (page 8) of the Scoping Document shows an indicative photomontage of the proposed steel arch bridge. While we note that the “brief for the bridge requires the development of an iconic bridge structure which is slender in design and does not detract from the views of the castle and the other bridges” (page 6), we wish to stress the importance of the

bridge tying in sensitively with the receiving environment and the surrounding historic buildings and other structures. Therefore, we recommend that 'iconic' *does not* translate into having a bridge which creates a loud and garish architectural statement – i.e. a structure which is insensitively designed with respect to the pre-existing structures. The final choice of bridge colour/finish needs to be right!

- There is no mention in the Scoping Document of cycle stands or parking. Since the Luan Gallery is one of the main visitor attractions in Athlone and since the new cycleway is likely to attract significant numbers of cycling visitors, it is essential that the scheme incorporates cycle parking. The design of such parking needs to support the bicycle and to enable cyclists to lock their bicycle frame to the stand easily – there are still too many 'contemporary' examples of stands which do not fulfil these basic requirements! And referring to an earlier point above, it is recommended that cycle stands are sensitively designed as regards tying into an attractive soft-landscaped space. Furthermore, it is recommended that some initiative is shown to provide other amenities for cyclists at the cycle parking station such as public bicycle pumps – as shown in Figure 2 here.



Figure 2 – Public Bicycle Pump¹

I would be grateful if you could acknowledge receipt of this submission and advise us of any further decisions made in regard to the EIA process.

Yours sincerely,

Damien Ó Tuama
National Cycling Coordinator

¹ Image found at: <http://www.cyclehoop.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Paddington-Station3.jpg>