



Carrickfergus Town Centre Masterplan

Transportation - Executive Summary

Report

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Carrickfergus Draft Masterplan was presented to the people of Carrickfergus through a public consultation process including an exhibition, consultation workshops and targeted consultation meetings. The outcome of the process has been to directly inform changes to the draft masterplan, which is being represented to demonstrate how the public feedback has been incorporated into and affected the masterplan proposals.

This executive summary report sets out the transportation strategy which supports the masterplan and how that strategy has been influenced by the consultation process. The transport strategy has been proof checked against and found to satisfy the overall masterplan objectives.

Active Travel (Walking and Cycling)

Providing greater opportunities for the people of Carrickfergus to walk and cycle to the town centre is a significant contribution towards providing a stronger and more dynamic town centre. Key linkages include accesses from the Irish Quarter, Carrickfergus Rail Station and from the residential areas to the north of the town centre. Pedestrian linkages between the town centre, Castle and Harbour area are important to support the new and old areas of the town.

One of the controversial elements of the transport strategy is the reduction in width of the Marine Highway. The key reasoning behind seeking to reduce the width is to improve the physical relationship between the Castle and town centre. By reducing the crossing width to 7.3m (currently 14.6m) and implementing an at-grade traffic signal crossing the pedestrian linkages are improved significantly. With a strong at-grade pedestrian facility in place the existing grade separated subways could be removed.

In reviewing the highway and pedestrian facilities in this area we also considered the implementation of an improved pedestrian subway or a pedestrian overbridge. If pedestrians were going over the road the level difference between the roadway and pedestrian overbridge would be 7m, which could only be achieved if the Marine Highway was dipped in the vicinity of the Castle (as per Westlink). This was deemed to be too expensive for serious consideration. The alternative of improving the subway was rejected on the basis that there is insufficient space to develop a subway with all of the required safety principles of open approaches. The impact of the narrowing of the highway is discussed under Vehicles.

Key transport measures included in the plan include:

- Greenways paths through Shaftsbury Park and into the Harbour area;
- Improved pedestrian links between the town centre and Tesco, Rail Station and St Brides car park;
- Improved road crossing facilities for pedestrians across Irish Street and Marine Highway to ensure high quality pedestrian links;
- Clear pedestrian priority and linkages within the town centre area
- Improved pedestrian signage to support walking;
- Connections along the waterfront to link the harbour and marina areas to the town centre;

- Implement measures to improve pedestrian linkages including replacing the Irish Street roundabout with traffic signal control and reducing the width of Marine Highway to two lanes from the Castle northwards;
- Improve links between new major public parking areas and the town centre.

Public Transport

Carrickfergus benefits from good rail links and high quality bus links to Belfast. The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan identifies a number of significant enhancements which are included in the masterplan including improved inter-urban rail service, better integration between bus and rail, development of a Quality Bus Corridor to Belfast. The masterplan recommends a number of further localised transport improvements which include:

- A local shuttle service linking the remainder of Carrickfergus with key areas in the town centre;
- Improved parking and pedestrian linkages at Carrickfergus rail station;
- Investigation of alternative P&R facilities at Whiteabbey to reduce traffic demands in the town centre.

Translink proposals to enhance the Joymount bus stop area into a mini-interchange facility have been dropped. However, the masterplan recommends maintaining at least the current level of facility or enhancing where possible.

Motorised Transport

Highway Improvements

Traffic volumes on the approaches to Carrickfergus are high and significant investment is being provided to upgrade the A2 in the vicinity of Greenisland to provide a continuous 4 lane provision to Carrickfergus. The principle justification for this investment is that traffic flows south of Greenisland are around 36,000 vehicles per day (vpd) and 26,000vpd north of Greenisland.

On the approaches to Carrickfergus these traffic volumes start to dissipate through leaving the A2 to access a range of alternative routes serving the upper sections of Carrickfergus and the surrounding areas. JMP undertook traffic surveys at the Irish Street roundabout. The surveys were for both the AM and PM peak periods from which an estimate of all day traffic can be determined.

The Irish Gate roundabout is a significant traffic junction which accommodates around 2,500 vehicles in each of the AM and PM peak hours. The junction operates at or around capacity for a significant proportion of the day. An at-grade traffic signal controlled pedestrian facility is available to the south of the junction.

Traffic flows on the Marine Highway south and north of Irish Gate roundabout are 21,000vpd and 16,000vpd respectively. The significantly reduced traffic flows on the Marine Highway north of the junction and in front of the Castle, provides the opportunity to reduce the highway width to improve pedestrian linkages.

An assessment of the impact of the reduction indicated that:

- The ratio of flow to capacity of the reduced link would be 0.76, indicating that the reduced road width could comfortably accommodate current traffic flows;
- Given the reduced crossing width, the time given to pedestrians reduced and as a result the delay to traffic was reduced;

- By maintaining 4 lanes in the vicinity of the Irish Street junction the capacity of the junction was unaffected by the proposed narrowing.

Using the junction by vehicle or as a pedestrian is a frightening experience and JMP have sought to develop an alternative junction arrangement which aids traffic progression, improves pedestrian facilities and improves access into the Harbour area to accommodate future development opportunities.

Key transport measures included in the plan include:

- Strong support for the delivery of the Carrickfergus Spine Road to reduce the significance and severance of traffic on the Marine Highway;
- A reduction of speed limit on the Marine Highway to 30mph to reflect the urban nature of the route;
- Narrowing of the Marine Highway to two through lanes from the Victoria Road junction to south of Carrickfergus Castle;
- Maintenance of 4 lanes on the approach to the Irish Street junction;
- Replacement of the Irish Street Roundabout with a traffic signal junction and removal of access to the Harbour area from this point;
- The provision of a new access road into the Harbour area at Davy's Street forming a 4 arm traffic signal junction and
- The installation of traffic signal control at the Marine Highway / Rodgers Quay junction.

All of the above traffic signal installation would include full pedestrian crossing facilities.

It is also a recommendation that the space gained from narrowing the Marine Highway is not used for built development but is used for transport purposes, for example, cycle lanes, bus priority or on-street parking. This approach would ensure that the future capacity is maintained should it be required as a consequence of land-use or other material changes in transport character for the town.

Parking and Servicing

Parking is a particular issue in Carrickfergus. The masterplan reflects the need to provide an appropriate level of parking but to seek to reduce the impact of parking on development or sensitive areas through the application of a parking management strategy which seeks to reduce long term parking from the town centre, particularly within the castle walls and displace long term parking to the edge of the town centre. Short term parking would be maintained to improve and contribute to the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre.

Key parking measures included in the masterplan include:

- The replacement of lost parking and provision of appropriate parking (to Roads Service requirements) for new land uses, resulting in an overall uplift of parking serving Carrickfergus;
- The displacement of long term parking to the edges of the town centre;
- The provision of a number of large public car parks, sensitively designed in wrap round building form and where necessary with a multi-storey aspect;
- Improved signing to car parking areas on the approaches to the city;

- The maintenance of a parking management strategy which ensures that short stay parking is not abused. Note that the strategy is silent about whether parking charging is required but recognises that this is one form of management and control.

Appropriate servicing facilities require to be provided in association with new development and the existing facilities require to be maintained or enhanced. The need for one or more taxi stands at key areas of the town has to be recognised. However, the balance between providing for car parking, on-street servicing and taxi needs to be balanced in the overall design layout.