

MetroLink

Introduction

In 2019, Transport Infrastructure Ireland and the National Transport Authority published their “Preferred Route” proposals for MetroLink, extending from Swords to Charlemont, for public review and feedback. Since that publication, work has continued to finalise the technical design, undertake the necessary surveys and investigations and prepare the necessary documentation required to support a planning consent application for the project.

MetroLink is a key part of Project Ireland 2040, the National Development Plan 2021-2030, the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy 2016-2035 and the Climate Action Plan 2021.

Current Status

In line with the Public Spending Code, the Preliminary Business Case (PBC) for MetroLink has been provided to the Department of Transport (DoT) and is currently being reviewed prior to Government decision.

The planning process for MetroLink involves the submission of a Railway Order application, inclusive of an Environmental Impact Assessment Report, to An Bord Pleanála for its consideration and determination. Following the transposition last month of the updated European Directive on environmental impact assessment, the Environmental Impact Assessment Report and the remainder of the Railway Order documentation for the project are nearing completion and are expected to be finalised over the coming months.

It is anticipated that the Railway Order application will be submitted to An Bord Pleanála at the end of Quarter 2 of this year, subject to Government approval of the Preliminary Business Case.

Expenditure to date

The total amount spent on MetroLink from 2016 to Dec 2021 is €88.1M.

Implementation Phase

The start of construction will be determined by the timing and outcome of the statutory planning process and the resolution of legal challenges, if any, to that process or the project.

When construction is authorised, the design team for the project have advised that a prudent time period for the construction, systems’ installation, testing and commissioning of this automatic (driverless) metro system is between 8 and 9 years. While contractors and suppliers may deliver on an earlier basis, and will be encouraged to do so, the complexities of this project means that this is a prudent time period to apply to this project.

DART+ Programme

Summary of the DART+ Programme

The DART+ Programme is a transformative programme of projects which aims to modernise and improve existing rail services in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). It will provide a sustainable, electrified, reliable and more frequent rail service, improving capacity on the rail corridors serving Dublin and increasing the overall length of the DART network from 50 km to 150 km (approximately).

The DART+ Programme will provide frequent, modern, electrified services to Drogheda on the Northern Line, Hazelhatch & Celbridge on the Kildare Line, Maynooth and M3 Parkway on the Maynooth/Sligo Line, while improving DART services on the South East Line as far south as Greystones.

The programme of work is comprised of 5 main elements:

- DART+ Fleet – New Electric and Battery Electric DART Fleet;
- DART+ West (Maynooth / M3 Parkway to City Centre);
- DART+ South West (Hazelhatch Celbridge to City Centre ;
- DART+ Coastal North – Drogheda to City Centre; and
- DART+ Coastal South – Greystones to City Centre.

Current Status

In line with the Public Spending Code, the Preliminary Business Case (PBC) for the DART+ Programme was submitted for Government authorisation. In December 2021 the Government confirmed the following approvals:

- Approval in principle of the DART+ Programme Preliminary Business Case;
- Authorisation for NTA to approve the award of the DART+ Fleet Framework Contract and the initial fleet order; and
- Authorisation for the DART+ West project to proceed to Railway Order Submission.

DART+ Fleet: The fleet framework agreement was signed and the initial fleet order placed during December 2021. The initial order will supply fleet to expand the entire existing DART fleet to operate 8-car train sets for all DART services, in addition to the replacement of existing diesel trains between Drogheda and Dublin with Battery Electric DART Fleet. This will allow those diesel train sets to be cascaded onto other lines.

The build time for the new fleet is approximately 30 months, with testing and commission of fleet taking a further 12 months. On this basis new DART fleet will be delivered during 2024 with the fleet entering service during 2025.

DART+ West: Iarnród Éireann published the preferred option for public consultation, with consultation closing on 6th October 2021. Proposals around the mitigation of the closure of the level crossing at Ashtown Stables was the most significant issue raised during the consultation. Iarnród Éireann has been consulting with the relevant land owners and their advisors to assess alternative options in this area. Once this review of designs in the area has been completed a further round of local public consultation focussing on the Ashtown area may be held.

Preparation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report and other statutory approval documents is continuing. It is anticipated that a Railway Order application to An Bord Pleanála for the DART+ West project will be made at the end of Q2 or the start of Q3, later this year.

DART+ South West: A second round of public consultation process on the Preferred Route for DART+ South West was held during November / December of last year.

The preparation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report and other statutory documentation is continuing. It is currently anticipated that a Railway Order application will be submitted to An Bord Pleanala for the DART+ South West project in Q3, 2022, subject to approval of an updated Preliminary Business Case by the Government.

DART+ Coastal North: An initial public consultation for the emerging preferred route for the DART+ Coastal North project will be undertaken early this year. The primary element of the project is the electrification of the railway line north of Malahide to Drogheda.

Design development and options assessment is currently on-going. A Railway Order application is expected to be submitted to An Bord Pleanala next year.

DART+ Coastal South: The DART+ Coastal South project is at early stage development. It is currently planned to launch an initial public consultation for the emerging Preferred Option for the DART+ Coastal South project in mid-2022. The primary elements of the project includes infrastructure changes to enable increased train frequency between Bray and Greystones, the closure of level crossings between the city centre and Merrion Gates to facilitate increased train frequency plus additional train turn back facilities.

Design development and options assessment is on-going. A Railway Order application is expected to be submitted to An Bord Pleanala next year.

DART+ Tunnel / DART Underground: In September 2015, a Government decision was taken not to proceed with DART Underground in its existing format. Since then the Phoenix Park Tunnel rail line has been reopened for passenger service and this link is planned to accommodate DART services as part of the DART+ South West project.

In January 2021, the NTA commenced the preparation of a Route Alignment Options and Feasibility Study to establish the route of a DART Tunnel that would form part of the integrated public transport network and meets the long-term passenger demand in the Dublin city centre, taking due cognisance of the known changes to the existing and proposed public transport network (e.g. the extension of the Luas Green Line to Broombridge, the DART+ Programme, MetroLink). The corridor associated with this route will then be protected for later delivery.

That study has been completed and has been published in full as part of the consultation on the draft Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area in mid-November. The study concludes that the tunnel should follow a broadly similar corridor to the previous Railway Order alignment, but with the western terminal point of the tunnel relocated closer to Heuston Station, significantly reducing the overall tunnel length.

The draft Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2022-2042 proposes that *"[a]n alignment for the DART+ Tunnel will be preserved and protected to allow its future delivery subsequent to the strategy period, but subject to periodic review to determine whether earlier implementation is required by emerging transport patterns."*

Expenditure to date

The total amount spent on DART+ Programme including DART+ Fleet from 2016 to Dec 2021 is €183.1m.

BusConnects Dublin

Summary of BusConnects Dublin programme

BusConnects Dublin is a transformative programme of investment in the existing bus system to provide better bus services to more people.

The BusConnects Dublin programme brings together all areas of bus investment identified in the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy 2016-2035, including enhanced and new bus infrastructure, investment in fleet and service enhancements such as higher frequency and new routes serving a wider catchment. It is a key part of the Government's policy to improve public transport and address climate change.

Current Status

In line with the Public Spending Code, the Preliminary Business Case for BusConnects Dublin has been provided to the Department of Transport and is currently being reviewed prior to Government decision.

The approval of the BusConnects Dublin Preliminary Business Case will permit the lodgement of planning applications for the Core Bus Corridors and the commencement of the tender process for Next Generation Ticketing.

Core Bus Corridors: A total of twelve applications, each comprising an Environmental Impact Assessment Report and associated compulsory purchase order, will be submitted to An Bord Pleanála in respect of the Core Bus Corridors projects. Lodgement of these applications will commence following authorisation of the Preliminary Business Case. For logistics reasons the submission of these applications will be spread out over a number of months.

Next Generation Ticketing: The evaluation of the tender pre-qualification submissions for the overall design, build, operate and maintain contract for the new ticketing system is now complete and a short list of five tenderers has been selected. The approval of the Preliminary Business Case is required to permit the tender stage to commence.

Bus Network Redesign: The NTA has decided to introduce the new bus network on a phased basis comprising of 11 phases, with its implementation subject to Government funding.

Two phases were implemented in 2021, with the first phase centred on the "H-Spine" along the Howth to City Centre corridor. The second phase, comprising the "C-Spine" along the Lucan to City Centre to Ringsend corridor, was launched in November 2021, in tandem with the introduction of a new 90 minute fare. This provides a single fare for most public transport journey across the Dublin Metropolitan Area, allowing transfers between services and across all modes undertaken within 90 minutes of the start of the first journey.

In 2022 it is planned to launch a further three phases of the Network Redesign.

Transition to Low Emission Fleet

As part of BusConnects Dublin, the existing bus fleet is being transitioned to a low and zero emission fleet. At the end of 2021, a total of 221 new hybrid diesel-electric buses had been introduced into the bus fleet in the Dublin Metropolitan Area.

In July 2021 NTA entered into a framework agreement for the supply of long length single deck electric buses, with an initial order of 34 buses for Dublin. It is expected that these vehicles will be delivered and ready for operation by Q4 2022.

NTA has also completed a procurement process for a framework agreement for the supply of double deck electric buses with an initial order of 100 buses for Dublin. Contract award is expected in February 2022.

NTA purchased 3 hydrogen fuel cell double deck buses for the purposes of undertaking a pilot to assess the potential for hydrogen buses to provide a zero emission solution for longer distance / higher duty bus routes through increased range. The pilot commenced in July 2021 and the buses are currently being operated by Bus Éireann on the 105X routes to Ratoath.

Expenditure to date

The total investment to date under BusConnects Dublin, excluding fleet, is €89.9 m. Fleet investment under this programme accounts for a further €69.2 m.

Bus Shelters

Shelter Installation Works Completed During 2021

As of the end of 2021, there are now a total of 1,995 bus shelters managed by the NTA through an operations and maintenance contract. While Covid restrictions precluded bus shelter construction for a considerable portion of 2021, a total of 56 bus shelters were installed by year end, with underground works completed at a further 11 sites.

Bus Shelter Installation

It is worth noting that many bus stop locations are unsuitable for the installation of bus shelters, due to items such as insufficient footpath width, potential to block windows or accesses, visibility line issues or similar matters.

For this reason the NTA works closely with Local Authorities to coordinate the development and implementation of bus shelter programmes at county level rather than through piecemeal arrangements. This is necessary as the installation of a bus shelter will frequently require the upgrading of footpaths and / or roads as well as the relocation of underground services. Accordingly, the planning and execution of those preparatory works is undertaken by local authorities. The bus shelter structures are then installed by the NTA's bus shelter contractor. All of the capital costs involved are funded by the NTA.

2022 Programme

The NTA is currently developing its 2022 programme of bus shelter installation. As of January 2022 the NTA, in collaboration with various local authorities, has identified 137 proposed bus stop locations for shelter installations nationwide during 2022. However many of these locations will be dependent upon the local authority undertaking certain works to enable the bus shelter installation. A further 28 locations are being progressed through the planning permission process.