

Planning Background

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2.1 Introduction and Summary

The existing National Primary N3 Dublin to Cavan Road is one of the principal routes linking Dublin to the north-west. This route is currently dual carriageway to the Clonee Bypass, then passes through the centre of Dunshaughlin to the Navan Inner Relief Route and on through the centre of Kells.

The proposed M3 Clonee-North of Kells Motorway is a much-needed scheme. The N3 is identified as a Strategic Radial Corridor in the National Spatial Strategy and its upgrading is:

- an objective of the National Development Plan, 2000-2006 (NDP),
- an objective of the Meath County Council Development Plan,
- referenced in the Dublin Transportation Office “A Platform for Change” Strategy 2000-2016,
- referenced in the Strategic Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area.

The M3 Route Selection reports were published in 2000 and 2001 and the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was published in March 2002. This was followed by a 28-day Oral Hearing in Autumn 2002, detailed in the six volume Inspector’s Report. The Motorway Scheme for the project and the EIS were approved by An Bord Pleanála in August 2003, and became operative in September 2003.

2.2 Route Selection

A summary of the route selection process and the basis for selecting the chosen route for each Section may be found in the EIS. The relevant categories are outlined in this section (page 9). However, as most interest is in the area of Dunshaughlin to Navan (Section 2), this is dealt with in detail in the following paragraphs.

2.2.1 From Dunshaughlin to the Navan Bypass

When considering the route between Dunshaughlin and Navan it was important to ensure the road connected with the other sections to the south and north.

Route options

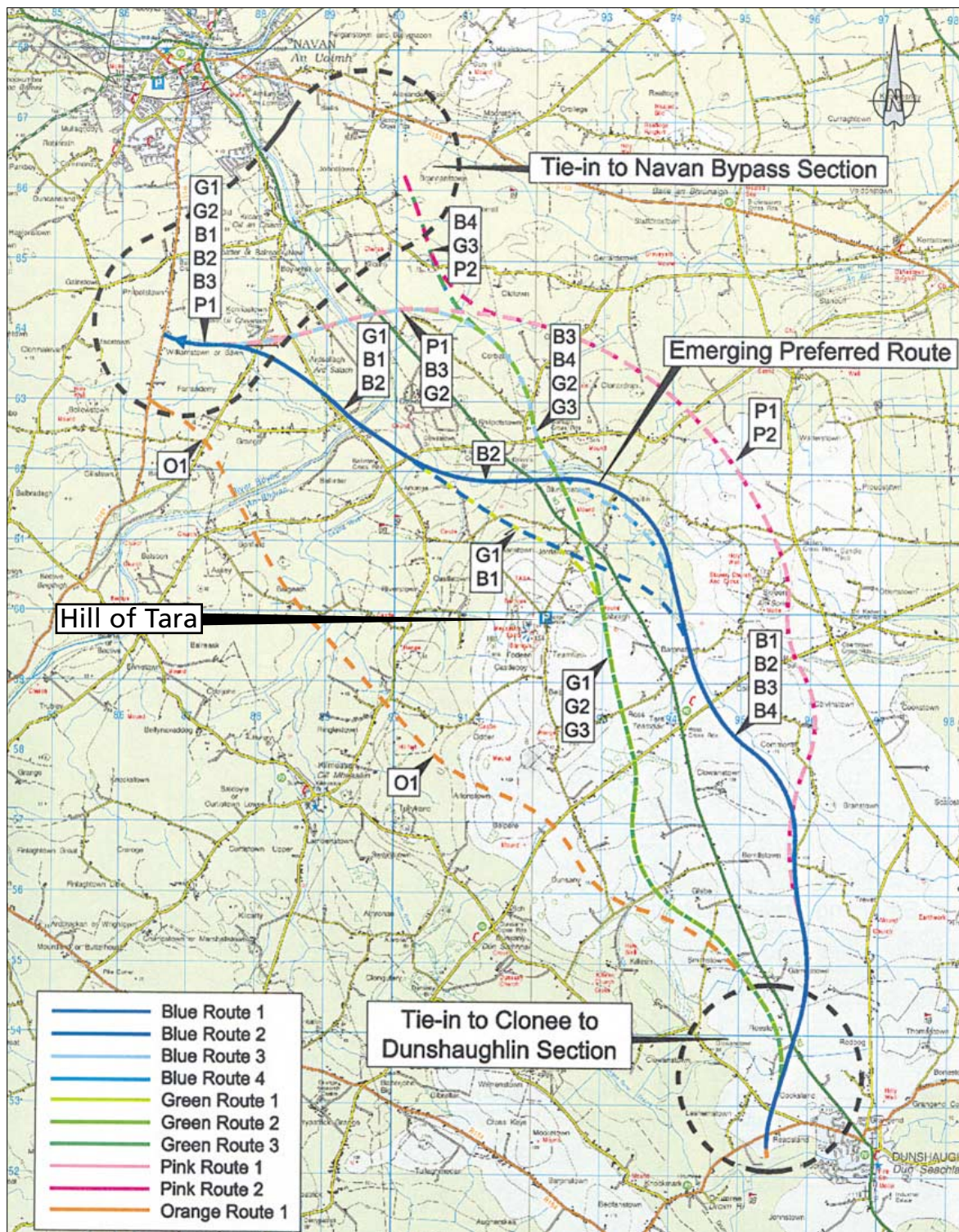
The route selection report for M3 Dunshaughlin to Navan was issued in September 2001 with ten possible route options identified (see Fig 2.1). These were:

- Orange (O) – one option of O1 (west of Hill of Tara).
- Green (G) – three options of G1, G2 and G3 (generally between the Hill of Tara and the existing N3).
- Blue (B) – four options of B1, B2, B3 and B4 (generally to the east of the present N3, between Tara and Skryne¹).
- Pink (P) – two options of P1 and P2 (east of Skryne).

These ten potential routes formed two basic route corridors either side of Navan.

¹ *There are two spellings for Skryne, the modern village is usually spelled Skryne while the townland and archaeological sites are spelt Skreen.*

Fig 2.1: M3 Section 2 Dunshaughlin-Navan Route Selection Emerging Preferred Route



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0 1km

Business and residential developments along with zoned land on the eastern side of Navan meant an eastern bypass would have to be considerably longer and have a considerably greater impact on the environment than a western option. As such, the western bypass option was the most viable, so only those proposed routes passing to the west of Navan are discussed below.¹ This reduces the original ten options to seven.

Orange Route 1

The view to the west from the Hill of Tara encompasses the central plain of Ireland and extends to east Galway. The Orange Route would lie in full view of this panorama, passing very close to several large archaeological sites, including Ringlestown Rath, as well as the villages of Dunsany and Kilmessan.

The Orange Route would therefore have a significant impact on the setting of the Hill of Tara archaeological complex as well as a significant impact on local communities. Meath County Council's consultants stated that the Orange Route was not a viable option. Dúchas (now National Monuments Section of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government [DoEHLG]) considered that the Orange Route would cause severance of the River Boyne at a new location (through building a bridge where none previously existed). It was also considered that there was very high potential for uncovering archaeological sites to the west of the Hill of Tara.

Green Route 1 and 2

From the north of Dunshaughlin to the Hill of Tara, the Green Route kept to the west of the existing N3 and passed midway between the present N3 and the monuments on the Hill of Tara. Dúchas clearly stated that no road could be allowed to go so close to the Hill of Tara.

Blue Route

The Blue Route starts from the north of Dunshaughlin, crosses to the eastern side of the present N3 at Roestown, then passes from Berrillstown to Baronstown near Skryne. It then splits into a number of options to pass down the Gabhra valley between the existing N3 and Skryne. Dúchas acknowledged that the Blue routes between the N3 and Skryne were likely to encounter more archaeology than to the east of Skryne, but accepted that any potential impact could be mitigated by prudent design of the final alignment to avoid known sites.

Blue Route 1:

Blue Route 1 sweeps around the northern side of the Hill of Tara, entering the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) zone of protection on this side. Meath County Council's consultants stated that the Blue Route 1 was a less viable option.

¹ Consequently, the following routes are not discussed: Blue Route 4, Pink Route 2 and Green Route 3.

Blue Route 2:

Blue Route 2 lies in a curve over 2km away from the summit of the Hill of Tara (at its closest point 1.2km beyond the recorded archaeological zone of Tara [RMP ME031-033 and ME037-002, 008, and 032]). It passes close to Lismullin House and then swings round to connect with the existing N3 before proceeding to cross the River Boyne near Ballinter Bridge. The route impacts on two known sites, cropmarks in the form of an enclosure and adjacent field system in Ross (RMP ME038-001 and 002).

Meath County Council's consultants determined that the Blue Route 2 was a viable option as long as there was appropriate mitigation. Blue Route 2 became the chosen route brought forward for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Blue Route 3:

Blue Route 3 was very similar to Blue Route 2, but had an alternative crossing point for the River Boyne. Blue Route 3 would pass Lismullin House and continue north, crossing the Boyne at Corballis-Ardsallagh using a high-level suspension type bridge.

Meath County Council's consultants determined that the Blue Route 3 was a less viable option mainly due to the large size of the bridge needed midway between the existing Kilcarn and Ballinter bridges; an area where no bridge has previously existed. The construction of a bridge at such a location would involve significant visual impact on the landscape.

Pink Route 1

The Pink Route passes to the east of Skryne. From a desk-based archaeological perspective, Meath County Council's consultants stated that the Pink Route had the least impact on the Hill of Tara, due to its relatively distant location (4km from the hilltop of Tara). Dúchas also agreed that the Pink Route option was preferred in relation to archaeology.

The Pink Route is, however, remote from the existing N3, necessitating local road upgrading and additional link roads connecting the new motorway to the existing N3 Dublin-Navan Road. The increased footprints necessitated by such upgrades and link roads would have more extensive environmental implications than the Blue Route 2. It also has a severe impact on the village of Skryne with its associated residential areas and local roads. The Pink Route passes very close (450m) to the zone of archaeological protection around Skreen. Due to a large spur of land to the north of Skryne, the Pink Route uses the undesirable River Boyne crossing at Corballis-Ardsallagh (as Blue Route 3 above).

Meath County Council's consultants determined that the Pink Route was a less viable option given the impact on the local communities and the remoteness of the route relative to the existing N3.

2.2.2 Pink Route versus Blue Route 2

There have been claims that the Pink Route constitutes a better alternative to Blue Route 2. On a balanced assessment of all the relevant factors, Blue Route 2 significantly out performs the Pink Route. The following comments relate to a comparison of the Blue 2 and Pink 1 routes in an attempt to explain further why the Blue Route 2 is the best available option when all relevant considerations are taken into account as required by the EU Directive on EIA.

Archaeology

Based on the desk survey of recorded archaeology and field inspection, the Pink Route is less intrusive than Blue Route 2 on the archaeological setting of Tara, as the Pink Route is hidden from the Hill of Tara by the Hill of Skryne. However, as Blue Route 2 is positioned in the base of the valley between Tara and Skryne, it will be well hidden by the topography of the areas, supplemented by the effects of hedgerows and landscaping. The proposed N3/M3 interchange at Blundelstown will only be visible from the vicinity of the northern end of the Hill, due to the natural curve of the Tara hilltop. As such, the visible impact of the Blue Route 2 on the Hill of Tara cannot be described as significant.

In terms of location, Blue Route 2 is over 2km from the Tara hilltop, whilst the Pink Route is 4km from it. Both routes lie within an area always considered to be potentially rich in sub-surface archaeological remains.

While the Pink Route was the preferred option from a solely archaeological point of view, the Blue Route 2 between the present N3 and Skryne was also considered acceptable, as long as it incorporated appropriate mitigation and prudent design.

Community impacts

The Blue Route 2 performs better than the Pink Route in terms of impacts on people, homes, farms and communities. There are 80 properties within 300m of Blue Route 2 which may be impacted by noise. There are almost three times this number, 218 properties, within the same distance of the Pink Route, most of these, including a school, in and around the village of Skryne. Thirty-five of these properties are within 25m of the centre line of the Pink Route, some of which would have to be demolished for the motorway. The effect on the local population of a new motorway near Skryne would be severe in terms of visual impact, farmland and community severance, house demolitions, increased air pollution and noise levels.

Remoteness

Another drawback with the Pink Route is its remoteness from the present N3, which would lead to difficulties linking traffic from the existing network to the new motorway. The Pink Route would require the construction of several new roads and a split N3/M3 junction. Furthermore, the existing local road network would need to be radically upgraded, resulting in significant impacts for residents in terms of reduced accessibility, increased traffic, more road closures and increased severance.

As the Blue Route 2 option can provide a single, sustainable N3/M3 junction on the present N3, disruption to the existing local road network will be minimal. Blue Route 2 therefore will reduce traffic on local roads and entail less construction or operational air/noise impacts.

Boyne crossing

The Pink Route crosses the River Boyne at a less advantageous location than Blue Route 2. Due to the wide and shallow nature of the Boyne valley near Ballinter Bridge, Blue Route 2 can cross the river at a low level, in an area where there is already a bridge over the Boyne. Due to the length of crossing needed for the Pink Route, a cable-stayed or suspension type bridge would be required. Such a bridge would be highly visible in the landscape at a location where there is no existing river crossing point.

2.2.3 Summary of route selection process: Dunshaughlin to Navan (Section 2)

Engineering considerations

There is little to choose from between the ten (east and west of Navan) Route Options in terms of design standards and safety. The Pink, Green 2 and Blue 3 routes were longer and disrupt the greatest number of side roads (all of which would need upgrading) and, as such, are less desirable from an engineering viewpoint.

Economic considerations

All routes provide very high economic benefits due to traffic travelling towards and away from Dublin/M50. The Pink and Orange routes are best for through traffic, although the remoteness of the interchanges may discourage local drivers from using them. The Blue Route, with junctions on the existing main road network, would provide for more local (Navan) traffic.

Environmental considerations

A major environmental consideration is the Hill of Tara, undoubtedly one of the most significant archaeological sites in Ireland. The proximity of the Green and Blue 1 routes, together with the associated interchanges, make these options very undesirable. In addition, the Orange Route would have a severe impact on the visual landscape around Tara and would, consequently, be very damaging to the setting of the Hill.

Environmental issues and the effects on the local population were really the key route selection criteria. In this respect, the Orange and Pink route options suffer significantly through their location relative to the existing road network. In both cases the country roads running between the proposed Orange or Pink interchanges and the existing N3 would experience very significant traffic increases. Also, both Orange and Pink routes impact severely on populated areas such as Dunsany, Kilmessan, Skryne, Collierstown and Philpotstown, all of which would suffer severance and increased air/noise pollution due to increased traffic flows.

Conclusion

The Blue Route 2 was selected as the preferred option as it was considered to have the least impact on the local community and to be viable from an archaeological perspective, compared to the alternatives. Blue Route 2 did not have remote junction locations and thus there was no requirement to provide connections to such junctions. It also had least impact on minor roads.

Since the Blue Route 2 was approved by An Bord Pleanála after the Motorway Scheme and EIS Oral Hearing, it now has legal status as the most appropriate route for the proposed road, taking everything into consideration. The archaeological test trenching undertaken in 2004 has not revealed any archaeological sites that would be considered unexpected on any similar sized road scheme anywhere in Meath (see Part 5). As such, Blue Route 2 is still considered the best option between Dunshaughlin and Navan.

2.3 EIS and Oral Hearing

The EIS was published in March 2002, and comprises seven volumes of text, seven volumes of drawings and seven volumes of appendices (specialist report detail). This was followed by a 28-day Oral Hearing in Autumn 2002. The scheme was approved, with modifications, in August 2003. No High Court objection to An Bord Pleanála’s decision was raised and the scheme became operative in September 2003. In approving the scheme An Bord Pleanála stated that:

‘Having regard to the provisions of the current Co. Meath Development Plan, the National Development Plan 2000–2006 and the Strategic Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area, the existing and predicted traffic flows and to the mitigation measures proposed in the environmental impact statement, it is considered that, subject to the modifications¹ set out in the Schedule to this order, the proposed road development would be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and would not have significant adverse effects on the environment.’

An Bord Pleanála Decision on County Meath Motorway Order and associated Road Development Approval Application for the M3 Clonee–North of Kells Motorway Scheme 2002. August 2003

The Inspector’s report is available in full from An Bord Pleanála (www.pleanala.ie) and runs to six volumes. It gives details of all the proceedings, who attended, what evidence was given and the Inspector’s conclusions and recommendations. Arguments about route selection and the archaeological impact on the Hill of Tara and the associated landscape were covered at length during the hearing and were considered fully by the Inspector and An Bord Pleanála in making its decision.

‘Having regard to all of the evidence given at the Hearing and the cross-examination on the archaeology impacts in the Tara/Skreen area presented at the Hearing and to the details set out in the EIS, I am satisfied that the route as proposed would not have a significant impact on the archaeological landscape associated with the Hill of Tara, as indicated by the area designated as the core zone of the RMP Map SK 500. I also consider that the route proposed will not impact significantly on the archaeological landscape associated with the Hill of Skreen.’

Page 983. Brendan Declin, Inspector appointed by An Bord Pleanála. Report to An Bord Pleanála on Oral Hearing into County Meath Motorway Order and the associated Road Development Approval Application for the M3 Clonee to North of Kells Motorway Scheme 2002. June 2003.

¹ *The M3 was approved without any modifications relating to archaeology. This approval was subject to the following cultural heritage modification:*

‘The road authority shall undertake a survey and prepare a report (which shall be available for public display) of local cultural and historical placenames and items of folklore interest affected by the route of the proposed Motorway Scheme under the direction of the Project Archaeologist and in consultation with the Meath Archaeological and Historical Society and the Dumboyne Historical Society.’

Categories of Potential Impacts considered during the EIS Process

Environmental Aspects	Details
Human Environment	Socio-economic Air Quality Noise & Vibration Landscape (including visual impact)
Natural Environment	Terrestrial Ecology (including bats, badgers & trees) Aquatic Ecology (including vegetation, fish, water quality and drainage) Soil, Geology & Hydrogeology Climate
Material Assets	Agriculture (including equestrian, dairying, dry stock and arable) Non-agricultural properties (including commercial, residential and facilities) Natural resources
Cultural Heritage	Archaeology Historic Buildings

Key Points (Part 2)

- Existing route a principal corridor from Dublin to north-west
- Ten possible new routes
- Ten routes divided into four categories (Orange, Green, Blue and Pink)
- Ten routes divided into four basic route corridors either side of Navan
- Each route evaluated under categories of potential impacts
- Blue Route 2 selected as preferred option.

