

# Appendix 1

## M3 Dunshaughlin to Navan: Frequently Asked Questions

### Introduction

Much of the debate, amongst both archaeologists and the general public, has focused on a number of specific questions in relation to the M3. In this section we attempt to put into a balanced context those questions with particular reference to issues of concern to the archaeological community.

1. Why do we need a new road?

The M3 motorway is a key part of the plan to upgrade the overall roads network for the country. It will significantly improve road transport connections between the north-west and the east of the country. The transport corridor that links the north-west, Cavan and north Meath with Dublin City is one of the busiest in the country. The existing road is struggling to cope with the hugely increased volumes brought about by the population explosion in towns such as Dunshaughlin, Navan and Kells, as well as other areas of County Meath.

When complete the M3 will enable motorists to by-pass those towns. The road will also cater for the traffic from all of these towns and from other towns such as Trim and Dunboyne. In this way, the M3 will make life better for both those living in the towns and the motorists using the road. The M3 will, on opening, provide safer, faster travel for approximately 22,000 vehicles daily. This figure is in fact predicted to more than double in the ten years after its construction. If the road is not built now the situation on the existing road will continue to deteriorate, becoming less safe, more congested and, ultimately, unsustainable.

2. Why not change the Blue route (approved route) for the Orange or Pink routes?

The whole aspect of Tara is as a viewpoint across the plains to the west of the Hill. The 'western', Orange route would be fully visible from all points on the Hill of Tara (see Part 2). It would also have substantial impacts on several known archaeological sites, particularly the bi-vallate hillfort, Ringlestown Rath, located 2.5km south-west of Tara.

The Pink route would necessitate a high-level bridge over the River Boyne at Ardsallagh-Corballis, in order for the road to pass north of Dalgan Park and around the topographical ridge north of Skryne (see Part 2). The Pink route would sever already densely populated residential areas surrounding Skryne/Skryne Cross/McKeown's Cross and Oberstown Cross, cut through the GAA pitch and pass adjacent to a school. Skreen is a hilltop of high archaeological potential and this hilltop would be severely impacted by the proposed Pink Route. Because of the relative

remoteness of the Pink and Orange routes there would be a difficulty linking them to the existing road network. Long link roads with all the attendant impacts of a new road would be required to connect the proposed motorway with local roads. The Pink Route would also affect undocumented archaeology, but as it is longer than the chosen option, more landowners and more existing road networks would be affected when compared with other routes. Therefore, both Orange and Pink routes have a far greater impact on the environment.

3. Why not widen the existing N3?

The existing N3 is lined with occupied houses and gates leading to farms or holdings set back from the road. None of these accesses could be allowed onto a motorway/dual carriageway. Very many of the existing buildings would need to be demolished and almost all of the mature trees currently lining the N3 cut down. The existing N3 would need to be dug up, re-graded and re-laid so that widening the existing N3 would essentially mean building a new road significantly closer to Tara than the proposed road, but with a far greater environmental impact. In addition, there would also be a requirement to provide a non-motorway alternative, to facilitate the traffic not wishing to or prohibited by law from using the motorway.

4. Why put a new road through one of the richest archaeological landscapes in the country?

The whole of County Meath is a rich archaeological landscape with areas such as the World Heritage Site of Brú na Boinne, Tara itself, Fourknocks, Mount Oriel, Trim and Kells. Undoubtedly, any development in these areas would have an impact but every effort has been made to ensure that the impact of the M3 on this landscape will be minimal. Through careful design only two Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) sites are being impacted on the whole route (see Part 3). In recognition of the rich heritage of the area extensive geophysical surveys have been carried out and the road was moved during the Environmental Impact Assessment to avoid three new sites. As expected, a large number of new sites have been found throughout the route but the frequency and type of sites are very similar to that from other linear developments in County Meath and throughout the country (see Part 4). These discoveries will all contribute to the archaeological record whether through being preserved *in situ* where the road was moved or through full archaeological excavation in advance of construction.

5. Why destroy the landscape surrounding the Hill of Tara?

The landscape surrounding the Hill of Tara has not remained static since prehistory and much of the landscape visible today reflects the creation of demesnes in the 18th and 19th centuries. The M3 will also have an impact on the wider landscape surrounding the Hill of Tara just as the existing roads network and housing do. The M3, however, will be further away from Tara than the existing N3 Dublin-Navan Road being approximately 1.5km from the edge of the RMP zone around Tara and over 2km from the top of the hill. The design of the route has sought to minimise the impact by choosing a route to the east of Tara rather than the west, and by placing the route low in the valley below Tara where the natural topography, the existing hedging and newly planted landscaping will screen it from viewers on the Hill. The landscape architects<sup>1</sup> who assessed the visual impact for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), stated at the Oral Hearing that they considered the M3 would not visually impinge on the sensitive landscape setting surrounding the National Monument.

6. Why locate the M3 where it will separate the site of Rath Lugh from Tara?

In the Discovery Programme publication *Tara: An archaeological survey*, Newman<sup>2</sup> reinterpreted Rath Lugh, an RMP site which lies 2.5km to the north-east of Tara, as a defensive inland cliff-edge fort, rather than a ringfort. Newman tentatively proposed that despite problems of classification and dating it was tempting to consider it as part of a defensive zone around Tara.

Rath Lugh is today separated from Tara by the existing N3 and lies under dense vegetation and tree cover. It was not possible to route the M3 to the east of the site, instead it skirts the base approximately 20m below the elevated promontory on which Rath Lugh is located and will not interfere with the site itself or the view of this site from Tara.

7. Why destroy the archaeology that is found?

All new archaeological sites discovered on the route of the M3 have been found solely due to NRA advance archaeological works for the M3 project. None of these sites had any protection and if small-scale development had been proposed on any of them, it is debatable that any would have been subject to archaeological investigation. Discovered archaeological sites on the M3 will be excavated and recorded by hand within the fenceline (landtake) of the road subject to directions issued by the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government. All discovered sites will be subject to very thorough archaeological excavation and post-excavation reporting. Any sites found will be reported to the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government to be recorded on the RMP. The whole project will be fully published to add significantly to Irish archaeology in general and to our knowledge of the ancient settlement and society of this part of Meath in particular.

<sup>1</sup> Brady, Shipman and Martin.

<sup>2</sup> Newman 1997, 200-206.

8. Why did the public have no say in the chosen route?

Unfortunately, much of the debate about the M3 has been misinformed. The notion that unaccountable government agencies and official bodies just decided the route on a uninformed, unilateral basis is false. As well as the extensive planning process outlined in Part 2, the NRA and Meath County Council actively canvassed the opinions of the public and interested groups. In total, over 4,000 people attended public consultations throughout 2000 and 2001 on the planning of the road scheme. This process was supplemented by the publication of the Motorway Scheme for the M3 project and the associated EIS. Both documents were made available for public inspection and comment and were the subject of extensive scrutiny in the course of the 28-day Oral Hearing conducted by An Bord Pleanála into the road scheme proposal. Like any other building project, the M3 has had to pass through all stages of due process as stipulated in Irish and European Union law.

9. Why locate a floodlit junction (the Blundelstown junction) so close to Tara?

In adopting the proposed route for the project the M3 motorway has either to pass over or under the existing N3 road at some point. In this case the road design utilises the fact that there is a ‘dip’ or ‘hollow’ on the existing N3 south of Garlow Cross. This is the lowest point on this particular stretch of the existing N3 and allows the motorway to pass at grade through this area with the existing N3 passing over the motorway to ensure minimal elevation of the motorway. Where N3 and M3 intersect, two roundabouts will be added to the existing road and four slip roads will link from the roundabouts onto the motorway. This is the extent of Blundelstown Grade Separated Junction, which is a standard dumbbell design – not a ‘Spaghetti Junction’ Interchange.

The purpose of the Blundelstown Grade Separated Junction is to provide an essential link between the existing N3 and the M3 motorway and to allow substantial traffic on two important regional/local roads to join and leave the motorway rather than use the existing deficient N3. Careful thought was given to the placement of the junction and its location in the shallow valley at Blundelstown through which the existing N3 passes, minimising the visual impact of the motorway and junction as much as possible. A detailed landscaping scheme which utilises a combination of extensive, mainly indigenous, woodland areas and earth bunds has been developed to help integrate the junction into the surroundings.

Lighting is restricted on Blundelstown interchange to the small roundabouts, their immediate approaches and the bridge crossing. This is considered desirable from a safety perspective to highlight the potential danger of at grade roundabouts in an otherwise free flowing environment. However, the lighting design developed has utilised low-level columns which will incorporate special features to cut off the horizontal spread of the light, resulting in significantly reduced impact.

The junction is located approximately 1.2km from the Hill of Tara RMP. The landscape architect, who assessed the visual impact in the EIS, stated at the Oral Hearing that he considered the proposed M3, including the junction at Blundelstown, would not visually impinge on the sensitive landscape setting surrounding the National Monument.