RPA
Railway Procurement Agency

METRO NORTH ORAL HEARING

OVERVIEW

Frank Allen
Wednesday 1st April 2009

Metro North Oral Hearing
Proof of Evidence
Overview
Frank Allen

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 My name is Frank Allen and I have been Chief Executive of the Railway Procurement Agency since 2002. I am pleased to introduce the evidence for the Metro North project, which will be presented by my RPA colleagues and by specialist advisors retained to contribute to the design of this important project.

2.0 RAILWAY PROCUREMENT AGENCY

2.1 When the Government established RPA in 2001, it set as the main objectives for the new agency to (i) complete the Luas Red and Green Line project then under implementation and (ii) develop a metro for Dublin. Development of a high capacity metro for Dublin had been under consideration since the 1990s. However, the decision to establish a dedicated infrastructure agency with a specific mandate to enter into agreements with public and private agencies for the design and construction of a metro, the Government confirmed its commitment to bring the metro project to fruition. It was also a recognition of the importance of such a project in transforming the future of the City of Dublin and the positive impact it will have on the lives of generations to come.

3.0 POLICY CONTEXT FOR METRO NORTH

3.1 Since RPA was established, certain policy initiatives by the Irish Government and other trends in transport and land use have given support and urgency to the need for a metro. The greater Dublin area experienced rapid population and employment growth from 2000 to 2008 resulting in high growth in transport journeys, particularly in the morning and evening peak periods. Despite efforts by national and local government to achieve sustainable patterns of urban development and transport flows, the actual pattern of settlement and trip making has continued to be highly dependent on private cars. The high level of congestion on all routes into and out of Dublin is an inevitable consequence of these trends.

3.2 The negative consequences of dispersed, car-dependent development have been recognised in a number of key Government policies. The *National Spatial Strategy* published in 2002 recognised that the balanced development between Dublin and the rest of the country required more consolidated development in the Dublin metropolitan area. The *Regional Planning Guidelines* published in 2003 sought to give effect to this national policy in the preparation and implementation of local authority development plans. All of the relevant policies approved by national and local government for the Dublin area recognised the central role of high capacity public transport offered by a metro in achieving planning objectives. The ten-year funding plan for transport set out in *Transport 21*, which was approved by Government in November 2005, had at its centre, the mandate to RPA begin design and consultation for Metro North. It is based on that mandate that RPA applied to An Bord Pleanála for a railway order for Metro North in September 2008.

3.3 While the overall pattern of transport use has been unsatisfactory, Luas and Quality Bus Corridors have demonstrated that the public is willing to use public transport when the public is assured that sufficient capacity and reliable service will be provided. In particular, the change in perception of public transport brought about by Luas has confirmed that successful public transport does more than address problems of traffic congestion in the peak periods. Luas continues to attract high passenger numbers and encourage people to leave their cars at home. This is particularly apparent at times of the day traditionally regarded as off-peak for public transport. Dublin local authorities can now plan more consolidated urban areas in the confidence that people will embrace a less car-dependent approach to commuting for work, recreation and shopping, if transport providers commit to a corresponding capacity and high quality service. RPA has designed and planned Metro North incorporating the features of high accessibility and service quality that

have been embraced by the public in the neighbourhoods served by the Luas Red and Green Lines.

4.0 CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS IN PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

4.1 There is a commonly held view that planning for transport infrastructure in Ireland has not achieved sufficient integration with land-use and other urban planning. The Transport (Railway Infrastructure) Act that established RPA specifically mandates RPA to work in partnership with other public and private sector agencies in planning and implementing our projects. I would like to acknowledge the huge commitment of time and resources on the part of Fingal County and Dublin City Councils in contributing to the design incorporated in the railway order application for Metro North. The design presented for approval has resulted from an iterative approach where RPA modified the proposed route, stop locations and other features of the design when local authorities and other statutory stakeholders demonstrated that an alternative design would perform better according to relevant public policies, without compromising the transport objectives.

4.2 The railway order design has also benefited greatly from the strong response to our public consultation efforts since we began formal consultation in February 2006. In keeping with the scale and importance of Metro North and recognising that a project of this nature will have significant construction impacts, RPA has conducted extensive public consultation at both national and local levels. We have communicated directly with householders and businesses and we have engaged with representative groups for residents and businesses. It would not be possible to respond positively to all of the diverse submissions made during consultation but every effort has been made to explain our design decisions and to commit to continuing consultation during the implementation and operating phases of the project.

5.0 TIMING OF IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 The public and stakeholder response to RPA's consultation has been overwhelmingly positive in terms of the need for a high capacity metro and the quality of life and other benefits that Metro North will bring to the people of Dublin. However, it has been asked in very recent months whether the slowdown in overall economic activity would recommend a delay in implementing the project. We have also been asked if the scope and design of Metro were based on a continuation of the demographic and employment growth rates observed in the ten years until 2008 and whether this design remains appropriate if the Irish economy is to experience a prolonged recession and may never return to growth rates of the last decade.

5.2 It is true that Metro North is expected to influence future urban growth, particularly in the areas identified by Fingal County Council as designated for employment and higher density housing. However, the case for Metro North does not depend on that future growth but is in large part a response to development that has already taken place. The public is well aware of the challenge faced by the educational sector to meet the increased demand for primary school places resulting from the rapid demographic growth in north County Dublin. Planning by Fingal is to ensure that other infrastructure, including transport, can cope with that same demographic growth. In the short term, there will not be an increase in demand for public transport due to the recession but the trips generated by the colleges, hospitals, airport, businesses and residential areas already in existence justify a rail-based transport solution to the problems of traffic congestion on the north side of Dublin. The modular design and proposed commercial arrangements with the operator of Metro North allow for staged increases in capacity as economic conditions improve and further development takes place in the future. When RPA was developing the project concept for Metro, alternative transport solutions were considered, including for example a surface light rail system that could later be increased in capacity to a

metro system. The analysis demonstrated that such an approach would barely meet short-term needs and that the financial cost and negative impact on third parties of building a medium capacity surface-running scheme and later investing in a tunnel would be considerably higher. While the timing and pace of economic recovery is impossible to predict, it is clear that a metro is needed for when that recovery will take place.

5.3 There are also certain advantages associated with building Metro North in the short term. Infrastructure projects provide an important stimulus to construction activity at a time when commercial development is in recession. The consortium that will be selected to build Metro is likely to include both Irish and international contractors but as a large civil works project, much of the work will involve local contractors, professional service firms and workers. Civil works projects also source materials locally and we expect this to be the case for Metro.

5.4 RPA has worked with local authorities, transport providers, Gardaí and business representatives to agree traffic management arrangements for the period of construction. Reduced traffic congestion on street and available capacity on public transport during an economic slowdown should make traffic management somewhat easier than would be the case if traffic congestion were continuing to grow.

5.5 Overall for reasons of economic stimulus and the likelihood of competitive implementation costs, RPA believes that this is an appropriate time to proceed with Metro North.

5.6 RPA is pleased to present the planning case for Metro North to An Bord Pleanála and to respond concerns expressed by affected parties during this Oral Hearing. It may be useful for the Inspector to be aware that other non-planning aspects of the project are being reviewed in parallel with this planning phase.

5.7 The final decision to proceed with Metro North will be made by the Government taking account of the decision by An Bord Pleanála and the outcome of the PPP procurement process. RPA has conducted an economic analysis of Metro North, which shows a positive Benefit to Cost Ratio. This analysis has been audited by independent economic advisors to the Department of Finance and separately by economic advisors to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport. The published report of the advisors to the Oireachtas Committee concluded that RPA's assessment of the positive economic case for Metro tended to underestimate the benefits that will accrue from the project. RPA will update the economic analysis at the conclusion of the tendering process, which will give a reliable estimate of the cost of implementation, but also take account of updated economic and patronage forecasts. It will be on this basis that the Government will make a final decision on the project.

5.8 RPA has mobilised a team of experienced engineers and other professionals, who in partnership with key stakeholders, have brought the design of Metro North to a stage that has allowed us to apply for a railway order. Many of these staff have worked on implementing earlier Luas projects and Metro North will benefit from their experience. In keeping with Government policy, the project will be implemented as Public Private Partnership and procurement of the main contract is at an advanced stage.

5.9 I believe that the proposed project is well-planned and structured and, if approved by An Bord Pleanála, will make a positive contribution to the quality of life for the people of Dublin for generations to come. My colleagues and I look forward to clarifying issues that have been raised by third parties in their submissions to An Bord Pleanála and any other issues that may arise in considering our application for a railway order.

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