Chapter 2  

2.1 Introduction  

The National Primary Route N4, Dublin to Sligo is a strategic corridor from Dublin to the northwest and border counties (See RCSR 101 in Volume 2). The National Roads Needs Study (NRA 1998) identified it as part of the East-West corridor from Dublin to the northwest and a bypass of Carrick-on-Shannon was recommended in the Phase 2 needs. The National Spatial Strategy has since recognised the route as a Strategic Radial Corridor and investment in the N4 has been supported by subsequent National Development Plans.

The N4 runs through Carrick-on-Shannon / Cortober and provides access to the Midlands, West and North-west regions from Dublin. It is recognised as being of particular importance in opening up some of the most peripheral areas in Leitrim and west of the Shannon.

The road network around Carrick-on-Shannon consists primarily of a number of radial routes emanating from Carrick-on-Shannon and Cortober. At present the existing N4 relief road which avoids the town centre provides some relief to this existing situation. However, the need for all traffic to cross the Shannon via a single bridge combined with a narrow carriageway, frequency of sharp bends and associated junctions continues to result in significant traffic congestion, especially during peak periods. Convergence of national, regional and local traffic in the town causes considerable congestion in the Town Centre and delays to through traffic.

This situation will gradually worsen as traffic volumes increase resulting in an impediment to the economic development of the region and increased delay on the National route with decreased journey time predictability. The Carrick-on-Shannon Bypass Route Selection Study 2002 predicted that the N4 through Carrick-on-Shannon would be significantly congested with a Level Of Service (LOS) F (which represents a breakdown in flow) in the 2029 design year scenario, which is significantly worse that the target LOS D for national routes.

On the N4 between Carrick-on-Shannon and Dromod, the reported accident history between 2002 – 2007 indicates a number of accident clusters, notably in the vicinity of the junction with the R201 and R299. This section of the N4 is a single carriageway with high traffic flows, poor alignment and frequent junctions and accesses that combined together are considered to be a significant factor in the accident history along this section. The large number of slower vehicles, in particular HGV’s and agricultural vehicles, along these sections of the route coupled with the limited overtaking opportunities can lead to driver frustration and in turn unsafe overtaking manoeuvres. Similarly, traffic on the N4 through Carrick-on-Shannon conflicts with local traffic, pedestrians and cyclists. The data contained in the N4 Carrick-on-Shannon Bypass Route Selection Study 2002 and the N4 Carrick-on-Shannon to Dromod Feasibility Study 2007 indicates that the majority of accidents occurred in the vicinity of Carrick-on-Shannon or at junctions and accesses.

The removal of N4 through traffic from Carrick-on-Shannon, improvements in N4 alignment geometry combined with the upgrade to dual carriageway and a reduction in number of at grade junctions and direct accesses would significantly reduce the number of accidents along the length of the route.
The N4, being a national primary route and part of different strategic programmes, has seen a significant length of the route improved / upgraded to dual carriageway cross-section, over the past several years. With these improvements, especially the opening of N4 Dromod-Roosky Bypass, the study section has become a bottleneck for traffic passing through Carrick-on-Shannon.

The main objective of the scheme is to provide a high quality road designed to appropriate standards along this section of the N4 with sufficient capacity for future traffic growth. The strategic requirement for the scheme is covered in detail in section 2.3.

2.2 The Previous Study on N4 Carrick-on-Shannon Bypass

In 2001 Leitrim County Council appointed M.C. O’Sullivan and Company Ltd (MCOS) to provide engineering consultancy services for an N4 Carrick-on-Shannon Bypass Project.

The study area considered for this project extended over an area of approximately 6km in diameter centred on the town of Carrick-on-Shannon and the village of Cortober. The studies culminated in the production of a Constraints Study Report, a Route Corridor Selection Report and the identification of a preferred route corridor.

During the 2001/2002 Route Selection Study six possible alternative routes were identified. Two routes passed to the south of Carrick-on-Shannon, three to the north and one followed the alignment of the existing N4 National Primary Route.

During the subsequent public consultation events during 2001/2002 it was made clear that the local population considered relieving the traffic congestion in Carrick-on-Shannon Town Centre caused by traffic from the R280 Leitrim Road as a priority and was one of the reasons the northern route options were preferred. The R280 is the principal north-south route within County Leitrim, linking its largest towns and providing access to key National routes.

Each of the alternative routes was assessed in terms of their potential environmental, social, economic and engineering impacts and the resultant Framework Assessment Matrix identified Route F as the preferred route for the Carrick-on-Shannon Bypass. Route F would provide a 6.3km northern bypass of Carrick-on-Shannon which included an at-grade junction with the R280 Regional Road. (Refer Drawing RCSR 201 in Volume 2)

Since 2002, the proposed scheme has been considerably extended and now incorporates the existing N4 road section from Carrick-on-Shannon to the northern tie-in of the recently opened N4 Dromod Roosky Bypass. In this context the original route corridor identified (Route F) may no longer be the optimum solution and has been reviewed as part of this scheme.

2.3 Strategic and Local Policy Context

The compatibility of the proposed project with existing policies and plans is set out in the following sections:

- *The National Spatial Strategy;*
- *Transport 21;*
• Regional, County and Local development plans, and
• Plans and programmes of the National Roads Authority.

2.3.1 National Development Plan 2007-2013

In January 2007, the Government published the National Development Plan 2007 – 2013 Transforming Ireland - A Better Quality of Life for All.

One of the Landmark Challenges identified in this NDP is to:

‘remove the remaining infrastructure bottlenecks that constrain our economic development and inhibit balanced regional development and environmental sustainability.’

To meet the challenges, a number of General Goals (Objectives) have been identified which expand upon the need to continue to upgrade the transport network. These include:

• Decisively tackle structural infrastructure deficits that continue to impact on competitiveness, regional development and general quality of life and to meet the demands of the increasing population;
• Integrate regional development within the National Spatial Strategy framework of Gateway cities and Hub towns to achieve the goals of economic growth in the regions and provide for major investment in the rural economy;

While Carrick-on-Shannon / Cortober is not defined as a Gateway or Hub it does form a bottleneck on the Strategic Radial Corridor connecting the Gateways – Dublin and Sligo. It can clearly be determined therefore that this project addresses the two Objectives highlighted above.

This assertion is supported by an examination of the Strategic Investment Priorities. The Roads Sub-Programme within the Economic Infrastructure Priority clearly identifies that a particular focus and priority will be investment on road routes which link Gateways, including the N4 Dublin to Sligo route.

2.3.2 The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002-2020

The National Spatial Strategy for Ireland (NSS) ‘People, Places and Potential’ is a twenty year planning framework which is designed to achieve a better balance of social, economic, physical development and population growth between the regions through the promotion of polycentric development.

The NSS supports Dublin’s pivotal role in national economic success but promotes the recognition of critical Gateways (urban population over 100 000) and Hubs (urban population 20 000 – 40 000) as being essential for balanced spatial development.

The NSS recognises and advocates that in order to be successful this polycentric development requires networks of physical infrastructure linking Dublin and the Gateways and Hubs.

‘To support balanced regional development, Ireland’s transport networks must build on Ireland’s radial transport system of main roads and rail lines connecting Dublin to other regions by developing an improved mesh or network of roads...’

The drawing of the NSS vision for Ireland’s transport network is contained in Volume 2 (refer to Drawing RCSR 202: National Transport Action Framework of the NSS).
This map views Ireland’s future transport network in terms of Strategic Radial and Strategic Linking Corridors. This concept map clearly shows that the N4 Dublin to Sligo route, which encompasses Carrick-on-Shannon, is recognised as a Strategic Radial Corridor which are key infrastructure priorities requiring completion under the NDP. This is shown more clearly on the NSS Regional concept maps for the Border and the Western Region (see Drawing RCSR 203 & 204 in Volume 2).

2.3.3 Transport 21 2006-2015

Transport 21 is a capital investment framework under the National Development Plan through which the transport system in Ireland will be developed, over the period 2006 to 2015. This framework addresses the twin challenges of past investment backlogs and continuing growth in transport demand. The projects and programmes that make up Transport 21 will aim to:

- Increase accessibility – making it easier for everybody to get to and from work, school, college, shopping and business;
- Ensure sustainability – recognising that a modern transport system must be sustainable from an economic and environmental perspective;
- Expand capacity – addressing existing deficiencies and providing for future growth;
- Increase use - managing the transport network and seeking to increase the use of public transport; and
- Enhance quality – improving safety, accessibility, integration, reliability, speed and comfort.

Transport 21 is made up of two investment programmes – a national programme and a programme for the Greater Dublin area. The main objectives of the national programme are:

- to create a high quality, efficient national road and rail network consistent with the objectives of the National Spatial Strategy;
- to provide for a significant increase in public transport use in provincial cities;
- to strengthen national, regional and local public transport services; and
- to enhance safety and security facilities at the regional airports.

The total estimated cost of implementing Transport 21 is €34 billion in current cost terms. The €34 billion investment package is comprised of:

- €26 billion to be provided from the Exchequer and €8 billion from Public Private Partnership funded projects;
- €18 billion will be invested in the national roads programme, while €16 billion will be provided for public transport projects and for regional airports;
- the National Programme will receive about €20 billion and the Greater Dublin Area Programme about €14 billion.

The following paragraphs are taken from the “N4 Dublin to Sligo” section of the Transport 21 website:

“This road is intended to provide a high quality link between Sligo and Dublin.

Already major sections of this route have been upgraded to motorway or high quality dual carriageway standard.
In addition major funding has been allocated to the route to improve junctions, relay road surfaces and improve overall standards and safety.

A bypass of Edgeworthstown and the Sligo Inner Relief Road have already been delivered.

Further improvements currently in planning stage include a bypass of Carrick-on-Shannon, Cloonmahon/Castlebaldwin and a three part programme to upgrade the road between Longford and Drumsna.'

2.3.4 Regional, County and Local Development Plans

Regional Planning Guidelines for the Border Region

The primary aim of the Regional Planning Guidelines is to achieve the balanced regional development outlined in the National Spatial Strategy. To this end the key Strategic Goals for the Border Region promotes the development of the Gateways Dundalk, Sligo and Letterkenny and supports the development of the Hubs Cavan and Monaghan and the Regionally Strategic town of Carrick-on-Shannon. The guidelines prioritise the delivery of the necessary networks of physical infrastructure required to support this development. This includes the N4 Dublin – Sligo route.

Similarly the Regional Planning Guidelines for the West (includes Roscommon) provide Strategic Goals which seek to secure for the Western Region an integrated transport and access infrastructure.

County Development Plans

Leitrim County Development Plan 2009 – 2015 sets out Leitrim County Council’s policies and objectives for the proper planning and sustainable development of the County. The Plan seeks to develop and improve the social, economic, cultural and environmental assets of the county.

To this end the plan recognises that a modern, efficient and safe road network is vital for the future development of Leitrim and the Council supports the construction of the Carrick-on-Shannon Bypass under policy 5.6a:

“It is the policy of the Council to upgrade the National Primary Routes serving the County. This shall be served by carrying out and completing the following road schemes within the lifetime of the Plan –

• N4 Carrick-on-Shannon to Dromod
• N4 Carrick-on-Shannon Bypass

This is identified on Map 2.5 in the Plan.
The requirement for a connection of the proposed scheme with the R280 is also recognised in Policy and Objectives 5.6d which states:

**Policy 5.6d**  It is the policy of the Council to upgrade the Regional Routes serving the county and seek to have them upgraded to National Route status where appropriate.

The R.280 is the backbone of the County, linking the N.4, N.15 and N.16 National Primary Routes. This road connects Carrick-on-Shannon to Manorhamilton and onwards to the N.15 at Bundoran/Ballyshannon Bypass. It is a vital link if the north of the county is to prosper. The Council will prioritise this road for upgrading to National Route standards and will seek its designation as a National Primary Route.

**Objective 5.6d**  It is an objective of the Council to pursue the upgrading of the R.280 to National Primary standard and status.

The Roscommon County Development Plan 2008 - 2014 aims to build on the vision of the County Development Board that Roscommon be a “vibrant county with an increased population, an enhanced quality of life, employment growth, high quality infrastructure and a strong entrepreneurial spirit”.

The Strategic Aim for Infrastructure within the Plan is to ‘provide the necessary infrastructure to deliver a better quality of life for all...’ The supporting Roads policies include the completion of the N4 Carrick-on-Shannon Bypass and a further upgrade of the N4 from Cortober to Castlebaldwin.
Local Development Plans

Carrick-on-Shannon Local Area Plan 2004 - 2010

This local area plan is the statutory development plan regulating and controlling development within the Carrick-on-Shannon area boundary. The plan recognises the major potential for development that occurs as a result of the town lying on the N4 National Transport Corridor between Dublin and Sligo. Under Section 1.5.2 the plan emphasises the need to relief the congestion caused by the limited capacity of the Shannon Bridge and the Leitrim Road (R280) junction, both of which act as existing bottlenecks. In answer to this, it is a specific policy, under Movement and Transportation Policies, of the plan to construct a bypass around the town as part of the N4 National Primary Route.

Cortober Area Plan 2008 - 2014

The Cortober area is located to the south-west of Carrick-on-Shannon in County Roscommon and is bound to the east by the River Shannon. The Strategic Goal for Infrastructure refers to a more efficient transport system that will improve the road network to serve the population of Cortober. Reference and support is made to the upgrading of the N4 and the need for a Carrick-on-Shannon Bypass to provide a second River Shannon crossing to alleviate problems of congestion and pedestrian safety.

2.3.5 Plans and Programmes of the National Roads Authority

In July 1998 the NRA published the National Road Needs Study. In Annex 4: Schedule of Improvement Needs, it identifies two sections of the N4 which fit with this proposed scheme. These are ‘Carrick-on-Shannon Bypass’ and ‘Carrick-on-Shannon / Dromod’. Both have a recommended road type of Standard 2 Lane with the Bypass being identified as Phase 2, requiring implementation within the period 2005 – 2009, and the Carrick-on-Shannon to Dromod Road Project being Phase 1, requiring implementation within the period 2000 – 2004.