

IN THE MATTER OF AN APPLICATION TO
AN BORD PLEANÁLA

FOR APPROVAL OF THE BUS CONNECTS GALWAY: CROSS CITY LINK (UNIVERSITY ROAD TO
DUBLIN ROAD) COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER NO. CCL-CPO-001, 2022

ORAL HEARING

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE

Overview of the need for the proposed scheme

by

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6 February 2024

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1. Qualifications, experience, and role in the proposed scheme

1.1 Qualifications and experience

- 1.1.1 My name is Uinsinn Finn I am acting Director of Service at Galway City Council.
- 1.1.2 I am a qualified engineer with an Honours degree in Civil Engineering from Queens University of Belfast and I also have a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) from DCU. I have been employed by Galway City Council since 2016, and prior to that, I had been employed by Clare, Offaly and Galway County Councils. My professional background also includes several years with Balfour Beatty in the UK within their Major Projects Division
- 1.1.3 In my current role, I oversee Infrastructure Development and Planning within the city. This remit includes the Active Travel Unit, Capital Projects, Housing Capital, Planning Development Management and Forward Planning as well as public realm enhancement under Urban Regional Development Fund.

1.2 Role on the project

- 1.2.1 My role in the BusConnects Galway: Cross-City Link (University Road to Dublin Road) project (the Proposed Scheme) is Project Director on behalf of Galway City Council.

2. Need for the Proposed Scheme

2.1 Transport Context

- 2.1.1 Project Ireland seeks to develop the regional cities of Waterford, Cork, Limerick and Galway, positioning them as viable centres of scale. Under the National Development Plan, Galway City and its Metropolitan Area are designated as a regional city that will play a crucial role in driving economic growth in the north-western region. However, Galway has been grappling with traffic issues leading to congestion for decades. This congestion not only impacts on quality of life and the urban environment but also poses challenges to the safety of all road users. Furthermore, the economic performance of Galway City, recognised as a Regional City, is impacted by the traffic congestion and stagnates growth in the city and region. Its impact extends far beyond the city into the wider county and region, due to the large commuter population reliant on the city for employment and education.
- 2.1.2 Several specific characteristics of Galway City and environs currently result in significant problems and inefficiencies with respect to the movement of people and goods, including:
 - a. An over-reliance on private cars.
 - b. Peak hour congestion and journey time unreliability for all motorised transport.
 - c. Safety concerns because of traffic congestion.
 - d. Many key junctions within the city operating at or over capacity.
 - e. Connectivity issues on the National and Regional Road network resulting in significant volumes of cross-county and strategic travel demand between east and west Galway being concentrated and funnelled through the city area in order to cross the River Corrib.
 - f. The pattern of residential development in the area, along with the location of employment destinations, generating a large amount of cross-city as well as city-bound travel demand.

- g. Large amounts of residential development located proximate to major employment and educational destinations city-wide, but not readily accessible by walking, cycling or public transport, thereby encouraging travel by private car.
- h. The short distance between Lough Corrib and Galway Bay, two significant natural physical constraints impacting upon the city.
- i. A natural barrier to cross-city and cross-county travel formed by Lough Corrib, the River Corrib and Galway Bay, with the three principal river crossings experiencing heavy traffic flows, leading to congestion and delay.
- j. The position of Galway City as a major regional centre for employment and education for a large geographical area, leading to large numbers of long-distance commuters for whom public transport is not currently a viable option, which leads to greater numbers of cars entering the city.
- k. The impact of traffic congestion on the City's reputation, particularly with regard to inward development. The suburban nature of much of the residential areas, and the wide distribution of jobs across a number of central and non-central locations, which lead to a situation where travel by public transport is not a viable option for many journeys.
- l. Long journey times and delays on the current bus network, due in part to the limited available road space in the city centre for introducing bus priority which both reduces its attractiveness to passengers and increases costs of operating; and
- m. Limited road space on most of the principal roads, which reduces opportunities for safe and comfortable cycling.

2.1.3 We must plan for the future needs of the city in a sustainable manner, creating communities and places that are connected by infrastructure and transport services which support sustainable mobility choices and improved accessibility for all. It is clear that an integrated transport solution is required for Galway. This has been developed in the form of the Galway Transport Strategy (GTS).

2.2 The Galway Transport Strategy (GTS)

2.2.1 The GTS was completed in 2016 and has been incorporated into both Galway City Council's and Galway County Council's respective adopted Development Plans. It establishes a framework for the development of the transport network over the next 20 to 30 years. As part of the development of the GTS, the needs of all travel modes were considered. The travel demand and requirements of each mode was informed by census data relating to employment and educational travel demand, as well as national household travel survey data which provided additional detail on other types of trips such as shopping and leisure.

2.2.2 The GTS places an emphasis on delivering sustainable transport solutions, to reduce the dependency on private car travel whilst providing essential linkages between residential areas and employment areas. The GTS sets out proposals for the road network, public transport network, walking and cycling networks, and contains a number of significant projects and interventions which will allow the city to continue to grow in a sustainable manner.

2.2.3 The GTS has established a core set of principles guiding the development of transport services and supporting infrastructure in Galway as follows:

- a. To promote and encourage sustainable transport, and in particular to make it convenient and attractive to walk, cycle or use public transport.
- b. To improve accessibility and permeability to, and within the city centre for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users (while also maintaining an appropriate level of access for vehicular traffic for commercial and retail purposes).

- c. To maximise the safety and security of pedestrians, cyclists, and other transport users, particularly within the core city centre.
- d. To manage and increase transport capacity (where necessary), for the efficient movement of people and goods into and within the city.
- e. To provide opportunities to enhance the city centre public realm through traffic management and transport interventions.
- f. To maintain and develop transport infrastructure and services to a high degree of quality and resilience.
- g. To adopt a ‘smarter technology’ approach to all transport interventions, whereby transport infrastructure and services are future proofed.

- 2.2.4 The Cross City Link, which will be realised through the Proposed Scheme is the cornerstone of the GTS. It will let the city centre ‘breathe’ again, free from traffic congestion, creating a safer, more attractive environment for walking and cycling and ensure journey time reliability for existing and future bus services to and through the city centre, locally, regionally and inter-urban.
- 2.2.5 The NTA has commenced the review of the transport strategy for the Galway Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (GMATS), identified as an objective in the 2024 Climate Action Plan. The Transport Strategy will cover a twenty-year period and address all land transport modes. The Transport Strategy will provide a long-term strategic planning framework for the delivery of transport and the integrated development of transport infrastructure and services in the Galway Metropolitan Area and will replace the existing ‘Galway Transport Strategy’ 2016.
- 2.2.6 Work on the strategy development is well underway with a Draft Strategy anticipated to be published for non-statutory public consultation early in Q2 of 2024. Background technical reports and feasibility studies will be published as supporting documents with the Draft Strategy.
- 2.2.7 The Galway BusConnects Network was adopted in December 2023, and will be included in the draft GMATS. In this regard, the Cross City Link will be incorporated into the updated GMATS as an essential transport infrastructure project, required to deliver the Galway Bus Connects Network.

2.3 Galway City Development Plan 2023-2029

- 2.3.1 The Elected Members of Galway City Council adopted the Galway City Development Plan 2023-2029 in November 2022, and it came into effect from Wednesday 4th of January 2023. The new Development Plan continues to support the Cross City Link Project. Specifically:
 - a. Section 2.4 of the Development Plan, titled ‘Integrating Climate Action into the City Development Plan’, ‘supports the delivery of public transport and sustainable mobility projects in the Galway Transport Strategy (GTS) such as **Cross City Link** (emphasis added), Bus Connects and the National Greenway Network in the city’.
 - b. Chapter 4 of the Development Plan, titled ‘Sustainable Mobility and Transportation’ specifically references the GTS and states that ‘the core of the strategy is built around a **‘Cross-City Link,’** (emphasis added), which provides a safe, coherent and attractive route through the city centre restricted to public transport, pedestrians, cyclists, and some local access.
 - c. Chapter 4 further states that the review of the GTS will not preclude the advancement of the Cross City Link. This is enshrined in Adopted Policy No. 4.1, Sub-Section 5, reproduced in full below, which:
 - i. Support the Galway Transport Strategy (GTS) and the outcomes of the planned evidenced based review to be carried out in collaboration with Galway County Council, the NTA

‘and other stakeholders’. This review will consider all transport modes including the feasibility of a very light rail/light rail option and will not preclude the advancement of the Cross City Link route or the planning of other projects already commenced within the Galway Transportation Strategy to planning consent stage with Galway County Council and the NTA. This review will consider all transport modes including the feasibility of a light rail option and will not preclude the advancement of the Cross City Link route to planning consent stage’.

3. Support for Proposed Scheme

- 3.1.1 Galway City Council undertook a non-statutory public consultation on the proposed Cross-City Link project. Prior to going on public consultation in 2020, the proposed project was brought to an Ordinary Meeting of Galway City Council. During this meeting, following consideration of the proposal and debate, the project was unanimously supported by all members present and a motion was passed by council to that accord. Following the public consultation, a comprehensive report on the Proposed Scheme summarising the 93 submissions received and our consideration and responses, was presented to Council. The proposal was very well supported by our elected council.
- 3.1.2 Furthermore, Galway City Council actively engaged with the Galway Chamber and attended an information session that they hosted where the scheme was presented to members representing business leaders in the city. Again, the proposal was well received and supported.

4. Implementation of the GTS

- 4.1.1 Galway City Council is fully committed to the implementation of the GTS and substantial progress has already been made in advancing elements of the transport strategy. The delivery of projects under the GTS is already well underway with a focus on the short-term delivery of sustainable measures such as cycling, walking and public transport.
- 4.1.2 Galway City Council sets out the programme of works and services in its Annual Service Delivery Plan, prepared in accordance with Section 134 (A) of the Local Government Act 2001. Approved by Council, the plan takes into account the budget expenditure necessary in the financial year and includes a range of sustainable transport projects, funded and resourced by the National Transport Authority.
- 4.1.3 I set out in Appendix A, a summary of projects under the GTS that have been completed since the adoption of the GTS in 2016, that are at construction stage, and others that are at an advanced stage of preliminary design and planning.

Appendix A

GTS Schemes Undertaken by Galway City Council

Galway City

Active Travel Projects

An Overview

February 2024



Completed Projects



Salmon Weir Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge

- New pedestrian and cycle bridge (85m in length) over the Lower River Corrib.
- Upgrade works of apx. 200m of existing footpaths on the western and eastern side of the river. Two new pedestrian crossings also delivered as part of the works.
- The bridge is a low-level clear span bridge that crosses three separate water courses: Persse's Distillery River, the Lower River Corrib and Friar's River.
- Opened in May 2023.



Millers Lane

- Provides an apx. 1,100m long pedestrian and cycle link between Ragoon Road, Western Distributor Road and Kingston Road, connecting various residential areas and amenities. Provides off-road walking and cycling routes for residents, and for children travelling to school.
- Provides enhanced permeability between Ragoon Road, Manor Drive and the surrounding areas
- The completed scheme includes lighting along the route, and 2 no. pedestrian crossings at Gort na Bró and the Ragoon Road to improve connectivity.
- Millar's Lane links into the wider Galway City Cycle Network, supporting active travel beyond the Knocknacarra/ Ragoon area, and supports access to the Galway bus network.
- Formally opened in June 2023.



Martin Junction Upgrade

- Upgrade of the former Martin roundabout to a 4-arm signal-controlled junction, including new cycle lanes, bus priority measures, footpaths and associated landscaping.
- Works included the provision of 860m of segregated cycle lanes, 630m of footpath, 200m of shared walking and cycling pathways, and 265m of Bus Lanes.
- Crossings were provided for, and the junction was tightened to reduce the speed of turning vehicles.
- Works were completed in June 2023. Official opening event planned for the coming weeks.



Eglinton Canal Active Travel Scheme

- Galway City Council resurfaced apx. 900m of an existing shared pedestrian and cycle path along the West side of Eglinton Canal. Zebra crossing points with raised platforms were installed on the junctions with Presentation Road, New Road, Dominick Street and Fr Griffin Road.
- 11 publicly accessible, free to use cycle parking stands were installed as part of these works.



Doughiska Road South Cycle Scheme

- This scheme entailed upgrading the existing footpath and cycle infrastructure, as well as the provision of new footpaths & cycle infrastructure, junction treatments & upgrades.
- A total of 1,300m of footpaths were upgraded, and 1,100m of segregated cycle facilities have been installed.
- 3 no. new crossings were constructed, and junctions along the road were tightened to reduce the speed of turning vehicles.
- These works were completed in 2023 and an official opening will be held in the coming weeks.



N6 / N84 Junction (Kirwan Junction) Upgrade



Before

After

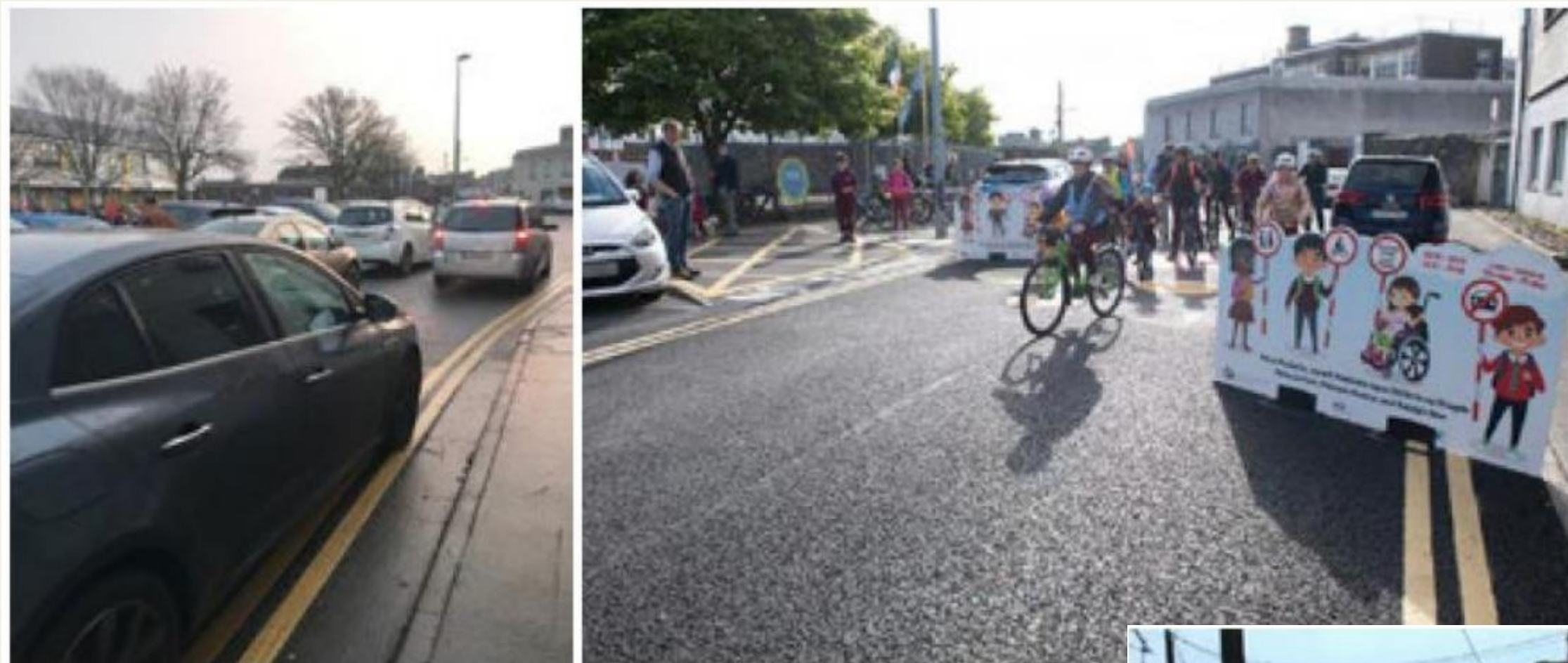


School Street - Scoil Iognáid, Raleigh Row

- First city-centre school street in Ireland.
- The school street first opened in 2020/21, and quickly proved to be successful in meeting its objectives to promote active travel.
- To further support the School Street at Scoil Iognáid, Galway City Council partnered with the school, the NTA and An Taisce on recent improvement works (completed in 2023), which have been funded by the National Transport Authority and include:
 - Narrowing of carriageway width and widening of pedestrian footways.
 - School gateway treatment with contrasting surface finish, signage and coloured circles fronting the school.
 - Reintroduction of pencil bollards in front of the school.
 - Upgrade to road marking and signage. Rigid bollards at residential areas to discourage parking on footways.
 - Junction tightening and upgrade to crossings at 4 locations.
- Galway City Council continues to engage with An Taisce and the NTA in expanding the *Safe Routes to School* and *School Streets* programmes to other schools in the city.



School Street, Scoil Iognáid, Raleigh Row



An initial pilot found a 14% fall in daily car use to school, as well as increased in daily cycling (up 7%), walking (up 11%) and daily scooting (up 3%).

Staff also noticed better moods, behaviour, readiness to learn and physical activity levels among students.

Photos showing the difference in traffic levels outside Scoil Iognáid at school drop-off time, before and after the School Street initiative was put in place.



Under Construction / Ongoing



Wolfe Tone Bridge II



Construction due to be complete in Q2 2024.

Parkmore Road Bus Priority Scheme



Construction commenced - Expected completion Q1 2025

Increased Provision of Cycle Parking



Bus Stop Improvements



Planning / Preliminary Design Stage



Bóthar Stiofán Cycle Network Scheme



Part 8 Planning application lodged January 2024.

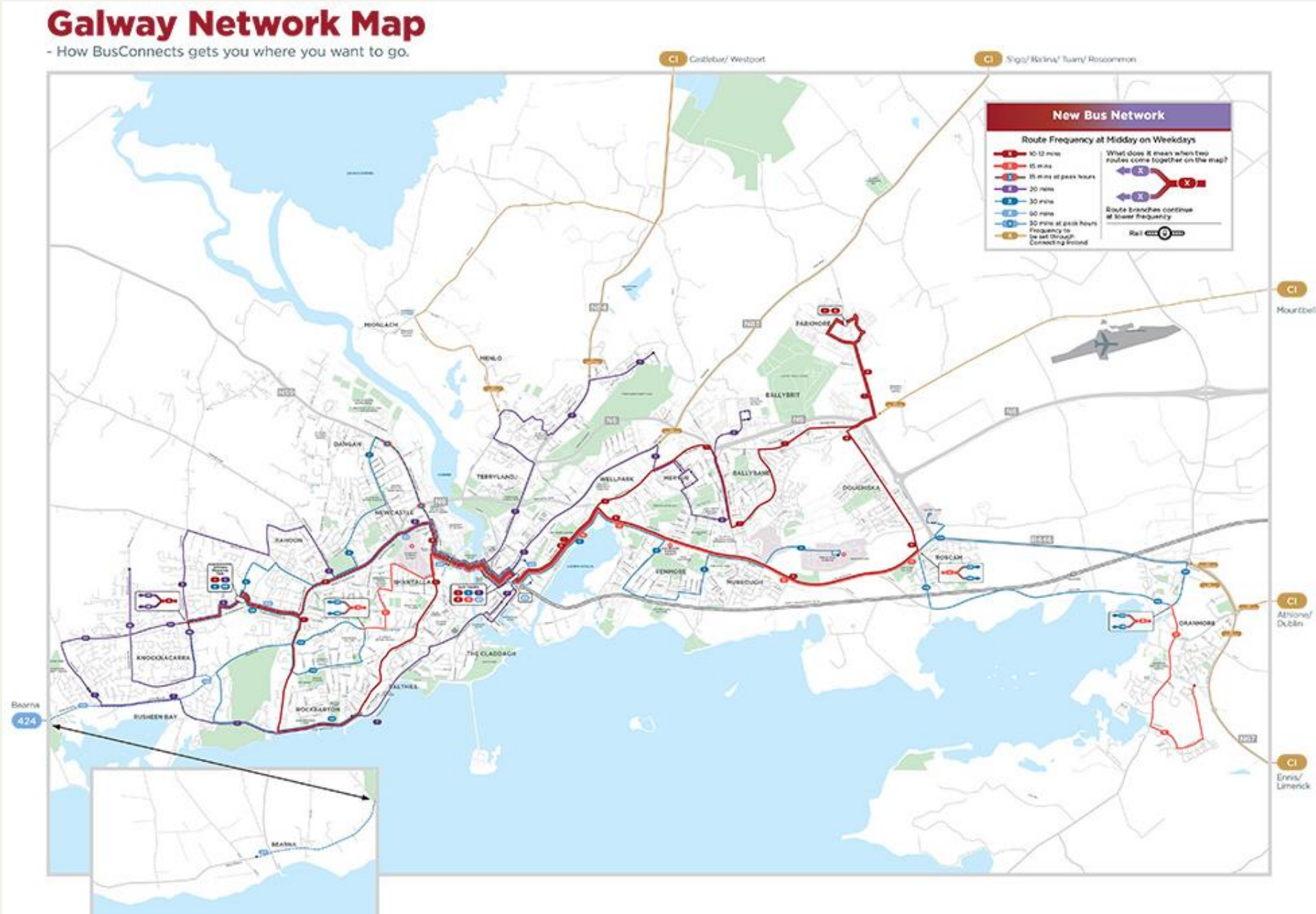
Ballybane Road and Castlepark Road Cycle Network Scheme



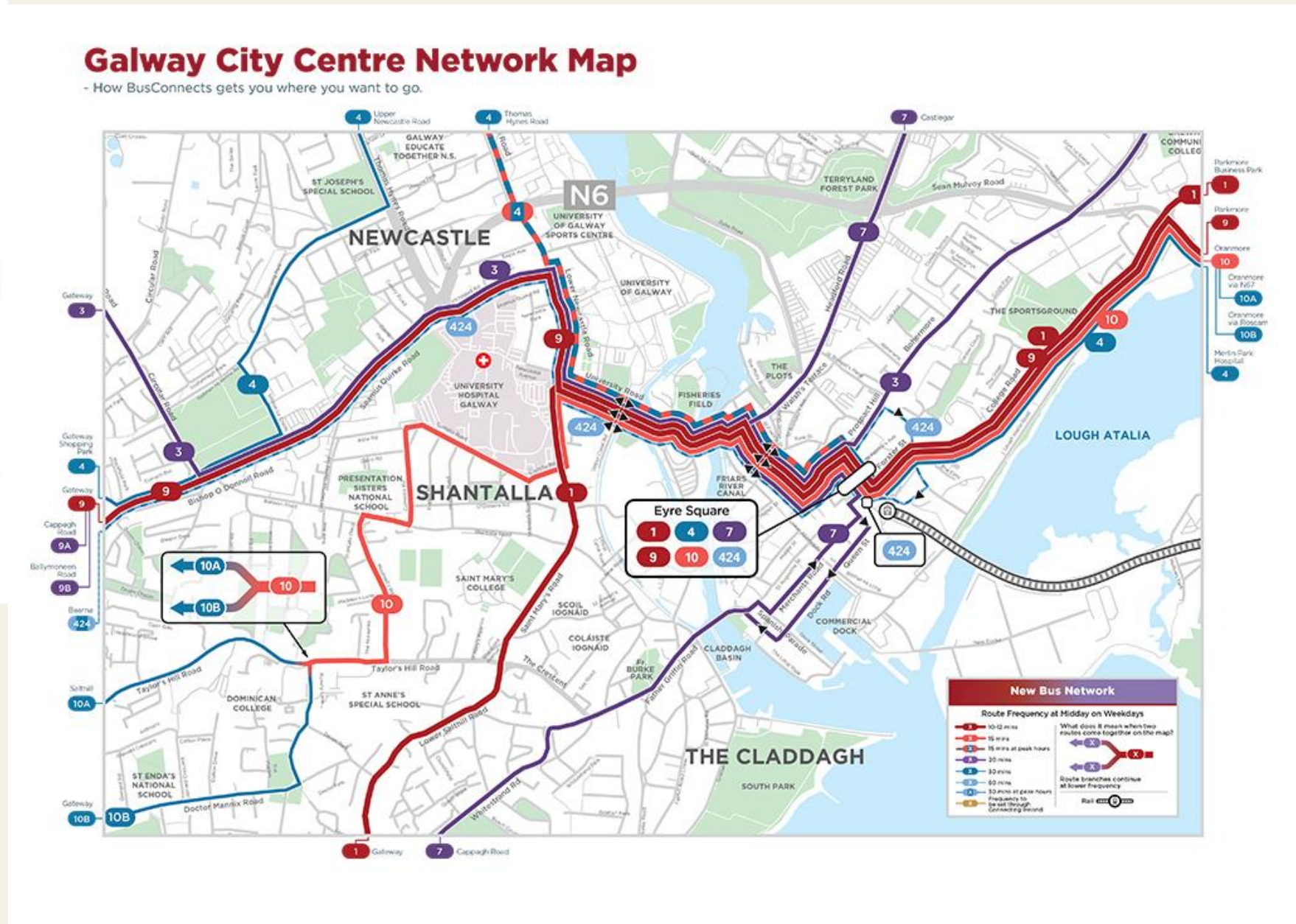
Planning approval received. Detailed design works ongoing.

Construction expected to start Q3 2024.

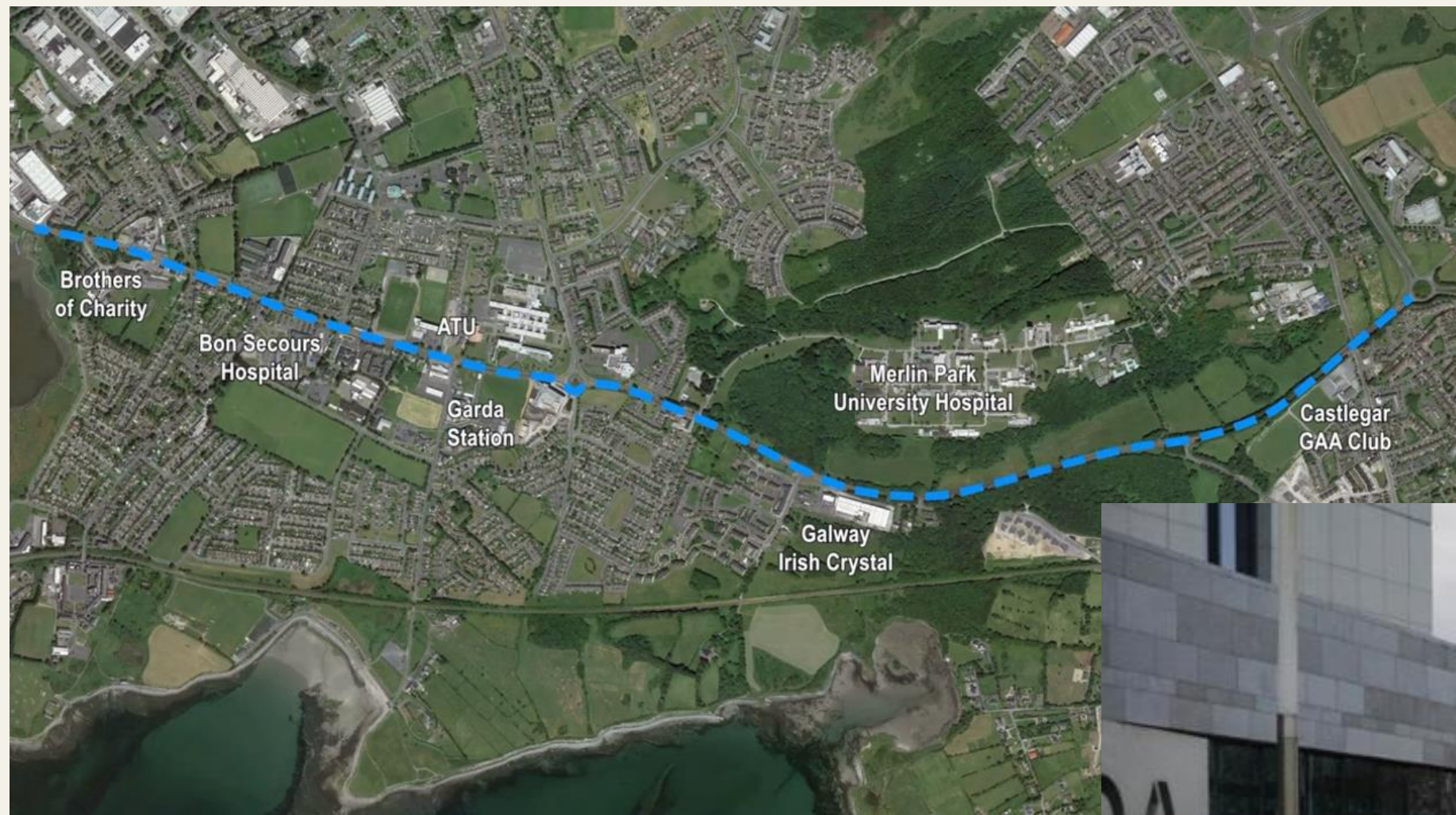
New Bus Network For Galway



Published by the NTA in December 2023. Rolling out between 2025 and 2026.



Bus Connects Dublin Road



This scheme is scheduled for submission to An Bord Pleanála in Q3 2024. It is currently progressing through the Preliminary design and preparation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report.

