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STRAND ROAD TRIAL RAPID DEPLOYMENT CYCLE ROUTE – AN ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL

BY STC COMMUNITY GROUP
(SERPENTINE AVENUE/TRITONVILLE ROAD, CLAREMONT AND
OTHER ADJOINING ROADS)

V3PC. 11 October 2020

Review of Proposed Strand Road Coastal Cycle Route

Overview

We have reviewed the document “Dublin City Council Covid-19 Mobility Response-Strand Road Trial Rapid Deployment Cycle Route”, and after almost 20 years of discussions and design reports on a coastal cycle route, we are delighted to see that funding has finally been made available to facilitate this amenity.

We are, however, very concerned with the proposed route as it stands, and have prepared this document in response, as an alternative to be considered. In preparing this report we have reviewed the “2015 ROD/AECOM (NTA) Sandymount/ Merrion to Blackrock Cycle Route Corridor Study, Feasibility Study & Options Assessment Report” and the Covid 19 Mobility Programme for Dublin, as well as the associated legislation for emergency Covid measures and the notes on the Transport Stimulus Fund.

Rationale

We are all fully aware that nationally and indeed globally, we are in a pandemic. These are unprecedented times and no one can predict when we will emerge. Neither can we predict what the new normal will be; however, we will still need a road network. Local deliveries will most likely increase as many people may choose to work remotely part-time. Staycations will increase as some people will have lost confidence in foreign travel and this is impractical without a vehicle. While many people will try to cycle and walk to their destinations with the benefits that physical activity brings, the need for regional and orbital routes for the city will remain.

It is clear that more cycling and walking facilities are needed in the short term, but these should be implemented in a manner which ensures as many of them can be kept in the longer term, whether in their entirety or in part, when possible. We feel that Strand Road is a case in point - the cycle track needs to be a permanent measure.

Sandymount

Currently the area between Merrion Road and Strand Road, as far as Irishtown, is very active with pedestrians, cyclists, scooters and dog walkers of all ages. Vehicular traffic volumes are perceived as low. There are a number of schools within the area and the vast majority of attendees either walk or cycle to school, with or without parents, depending on age. While these roads and footpaths are narrow, they operate as shared space at the moment- the low vehicular traffic volumes allowing this to evolve naturally. We consider ourselves a very green community, not just in the area of transport, but this report limits the discussion to this subject. (The schools include Star of the Sea, Scoil Mhuire, St. Matthews, Educate Together, Enable Ireland, and Marion College, with St Michaels on Merrion Road).

Residential areas are typically defined externally by arterial roads-Sandymount has Merrion Road to the west and Strand Road to the east which, for the most part, keeps the internal traffic to a minimum. It used to be a policy of the Council to discourage rat running through residential areas by creating home zones or cells within defined areas.

Reducing Strand Road to one way between Merrion Gates & Marine Drive would blur this definition and increase traffic volumes within the area substantially. This fact is noted in previous studies. In the absence of official traffic counts we cannot advise of this figure, but even residents of Sandymount who normally access their home via the arterial road must now navigate through the narrow streets to their abode.

In DCC's Covid-19 Mobility Response Report for Strand Road report it is mentioned that 10% of Strand Road traffic is locally generated - given the perceived volume of traffic on this road, 10% is significant. It would also push traffic onto Merrion Road causing congestion thus adding to the air pollution_- currently an issue in Dublin – an idling engine produces twice as much exhaust emissions as a moving one.

The re-routing of buses down a narrow Park Avenue is of concern to many, there are three sporting clubs in the vicinity, and many children walk and cycle to and from these grounds. Also impacted by the change will be residents of Brabazon House who rely on the buses along Strand Road to maintain their independence. The societal gain is therefore questionable as an offset for this level of disruption.

While the cycle path will be a fantastic amenity, the proposed route has neither a segregated cycle connection with the city nor indeed beyond Merrion Gates. It is unlikely to become a favored commuter route either, given the exposed nature of the road. Many of the cyclists of Sandymount (and beyond) avoid this road when commuting and favor the internal sheltered routes. As we approach the darker winter months, this will be more evident.

Previous Studies

We are aware of the many previous studies carried out to try to find a viable solution to a coastal cycleway, from 2002, 2007 & 2015 as well as DCC's current Covid-19 Mobility Response document. While many ideas were developed in the earlier design reports, in order to meet the defined functional requirements, all proposed designs required either land take from the bay (ecologically challenging and expensive) or from the gardens on the inbound side (expensive & time consuming). This clearly made the various options cost prohibitive in the short term. In addition, making Strand Road one way was assessed as one of these options and the 2015 report states:

“It is unlikely that the traffic impacts of this option would be considered acceptable or proportionate for the objective of this cycleway project”.

At that time (2015), the proposed one way was designed in a way to accommodate local movements, in a way that would have mitigated against some of the internal movements (rat-runs) which will now develop if a blanket one-way system along its entire length is introduced.

What we now propose is that an option be developed (from these previously commissioned reports) which is a “best available option” given the physical constraints, and without having an adverse effect on the surrounding *green* village.

Once additional finance becomes available, by way of central Government Funding or a Public Private Partnership, the optimum design can be implemented.

Proposed Alternative

Functional requirements (based on ROD/ AECOM 2015 report recommended widths)

We note the NCM guidance as outlined in the 2015 report for cycleway

- 2.5m absolute minimum
- 3.0m normal width
- 3.5m desirable with comfort: two abreast in each direction, and
- edge separation of 0.25m- 0.65m.

We also note the footpath widths from DMURS which ranges from 1.8m – 4m. We are aware that a 2m footpath is now required as part of the COVID-19 recommend safe distance.

The report however also mentions that where space is constrained, a shared greenway can be considered. The various acceptable widths provided are:

1. 9.15m Segregated Optimum
2. 5.6m Segregated Minimum
3. 4.3m Shared Desirable
4. 3.3m Shared minimum

The Route

Along the entire route we are proposing that the road is reduced to 6m. This will help reduce speeds along the route, which is one of the measures proposed in the DCC Interim Mobility Intervention Programme for the city, as well as facilitating the introduction of a 2-way cycleway.

The informal on-street parking along the road may have to be limited in certain sections, and in such instances, houses without parking would need to be offered parking alternatives such as the beach car parks or on an adjacent side street. Rough estimates show that this will only impact a handful of properties.

We propose, for the most part, the seaside footpath be used as it is for a 2-way cycleway, with pedestrians on the landside path. The seaside path is 4m for the most part, increasing and decreasing for short stretches.

Bus stops on this side would become “shared” space with rumble strips or similar to highlight this. As buses are not that regular, we do not see this as a major issue.

A traffic calming measure such as a buildout could be used to assist in crossing the road at each of the stops.

The land side footpath is currently only 1.8m wide so we propose that vertical bollards are installed similar to many places around Dublin, to give an additional clear width of 2m. In areas where the road is wider, parking could be considered. This can be altered easily as the bollards are removable.

While it is not possible with the current layout to provide cycle protection for the last 270m of strand road, we do not feel that having to “share” this short tight stretch is a huge ask given that it is what cyclists currently have to do. If additional measures such as a speed table or road markings were introduced, then this area would feel more like a “shared space”.

There are many examples of cycle ways across the city, county and country where tight spots have to be accepted and worked around. Driver behavior is also changing and awareness campaigns as well as speed restrictions are helping. (We also note that this section will meet the yet to be designed stretch of cycleway within DLRCC).

There is also a limited segregated cycle path leading to the new amenity, and all of these shortfalls need to be addressed as funds become available which can deal with them adequately.

We have broken down the cycle path into four sections:

1. Sean Moore Park to Gilford Avenue
2. Sandymount Promenade
3. Sandymount Promenade to Merrion Gates properties
4. Merrion Gates properties

Section 1: Sean Moore Park to Gilford Avenue



Fig 1 – composite map of coast road from Sean Moore Park to Gilford Road

As outlined in the 2015 report and verified again on site, the seaward footpath ranges from a minimum of 2.5m to over 4m in width, and the land side footpath is 1.8m.

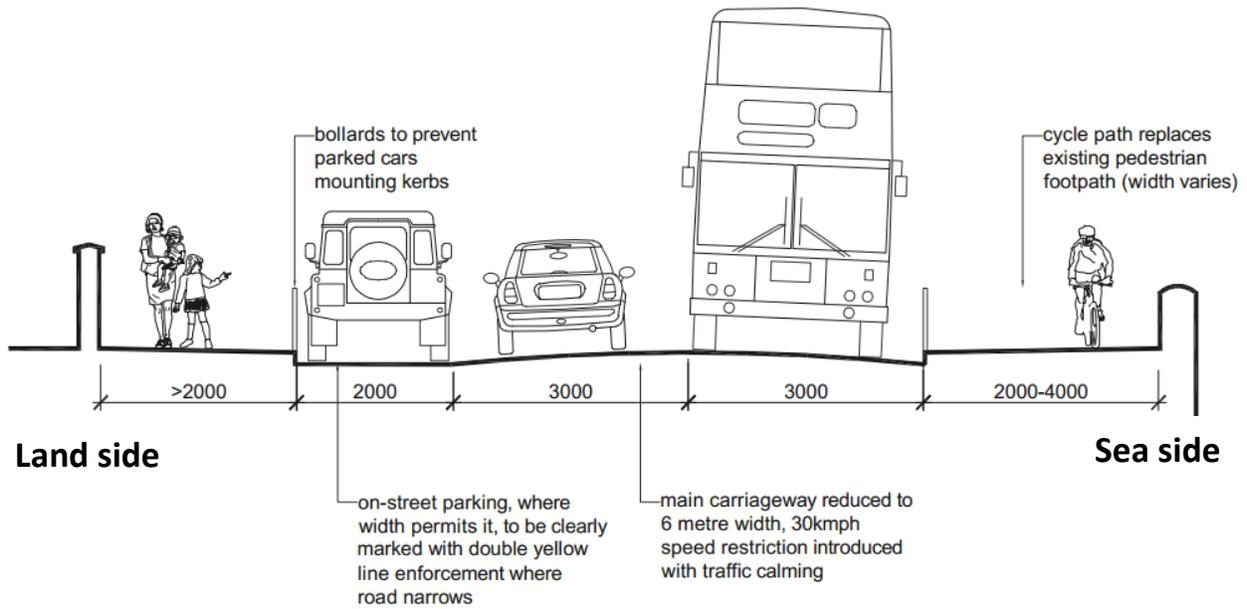


Fig 2 – proposed section where existing width allows inclusion of parking zone – minimum width

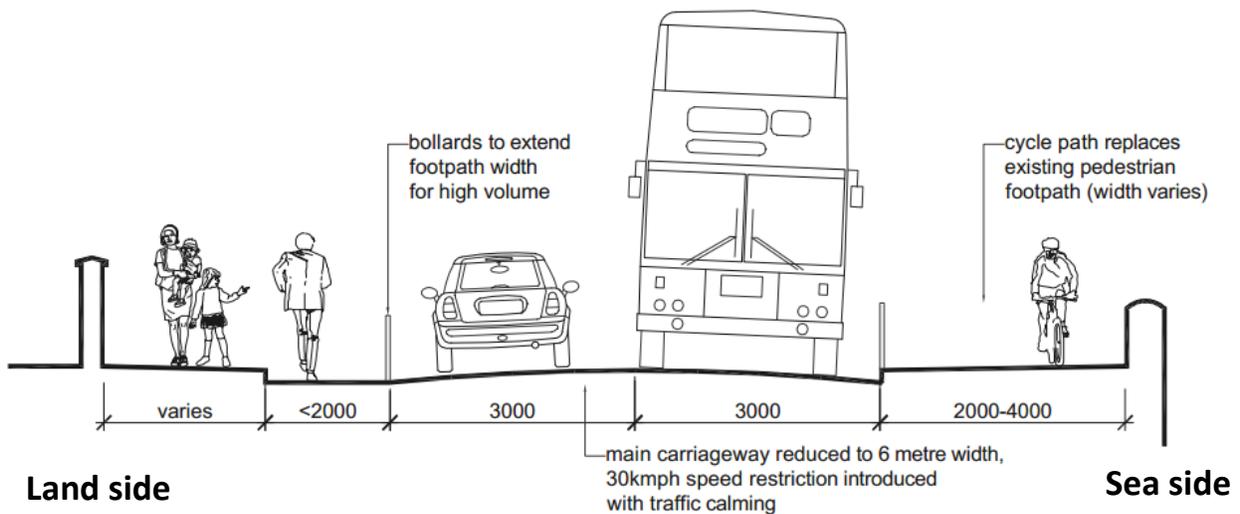


Fig 3 – proposed section excluding parking – minimum width

Section 2: Sandymount Promenade (see p 45 of 2015 report)



Linear Park

Option 1

The coastal cycle path is a seafront amenity and to build anything that keeps cyclists away from the seafront will be a wasted opportunity. There is plenty of room within the original seawall to build a cycle path adjacent to the existing footpath. We appreciate that this requires additional works in preparing a substrate for the cycle path so we are proposing an alternative.

Option 2

Given that there is already a promenade footpath and a footpath on the opposite side of the road there is scope to use the existing road-side footpath as a cycle lane, with a short incursion into the linear park to circumvent the tight path adjacent to the Martello Tower.

The disadvantage of this particular proposal is the potential hazard posed to motorists and cyclists at entrance and exit points to the 3 car parks, one of which is particularly active at weekends with traffic to and from the Recycling point. We would propose signage and speed calming to the cycle lanes at the points where potential hazards might be encountered.

- - - - - dashed line to encourage shared road use
- 2 way cycle path - width varies
- footpath - no less than 2m wide - introduce bollards to maintain width where on-street parking is permitted
- 6m min road way
- - - - - roadside parking, delineated
- traffic calming 'priority' chicane / crossing point

Fig 4 – promenade section from Gilford Road to St Alban's Park

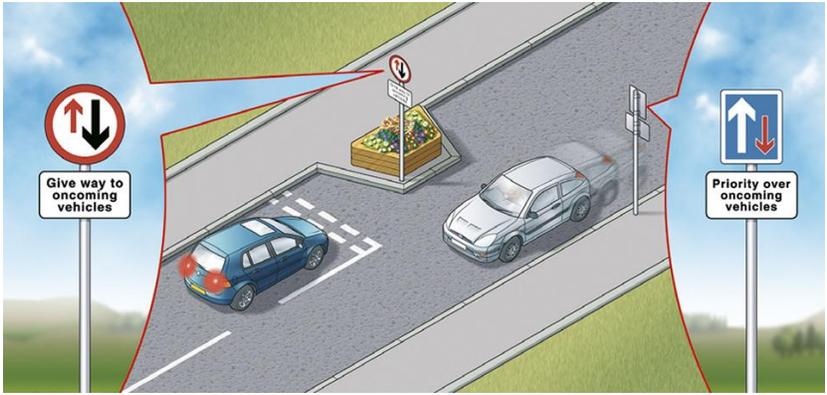


Fig 5 - graphic showing proposed chicane traffic calming located at pinch points + crossing points

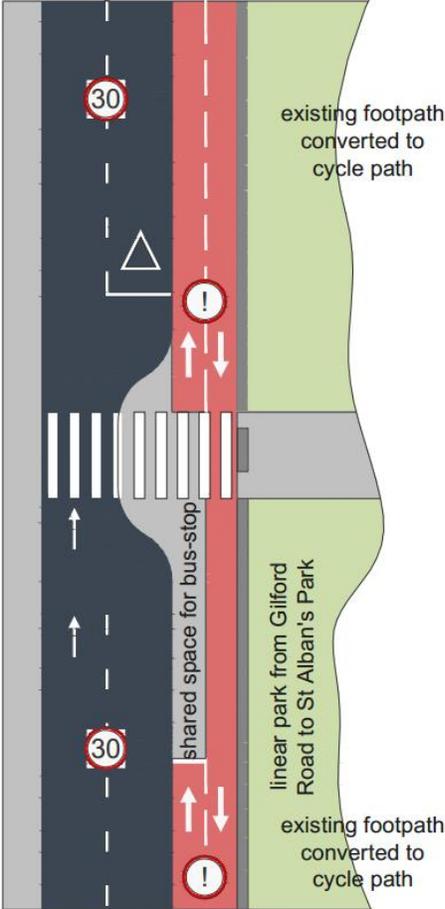


Fig 6 – traffic calming chicane to pinch point where the linear park begins. Where there are bus-stops there will a necessity to share the cycle lane space with people alighting, who will then be directed to crossing point

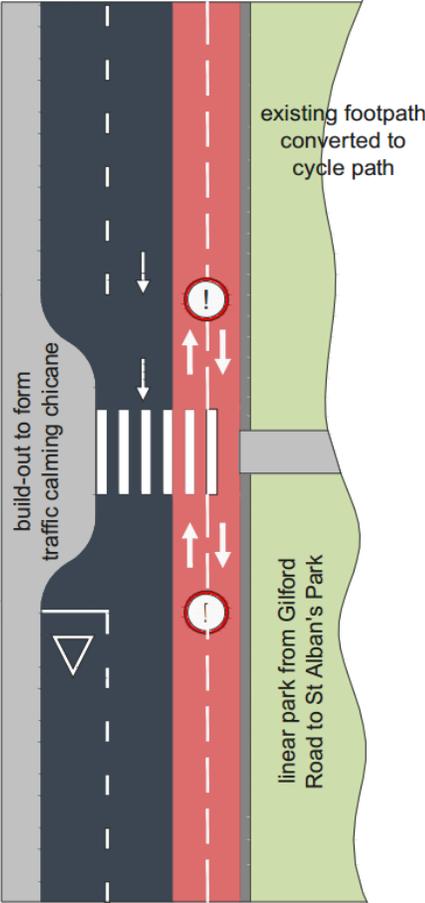


Fig 7 – traffic calming chicane located at typical crossing point at existing access points. This will provide better connectivity with land side footpath

Section 3: Promenade to Merrion Gates properties

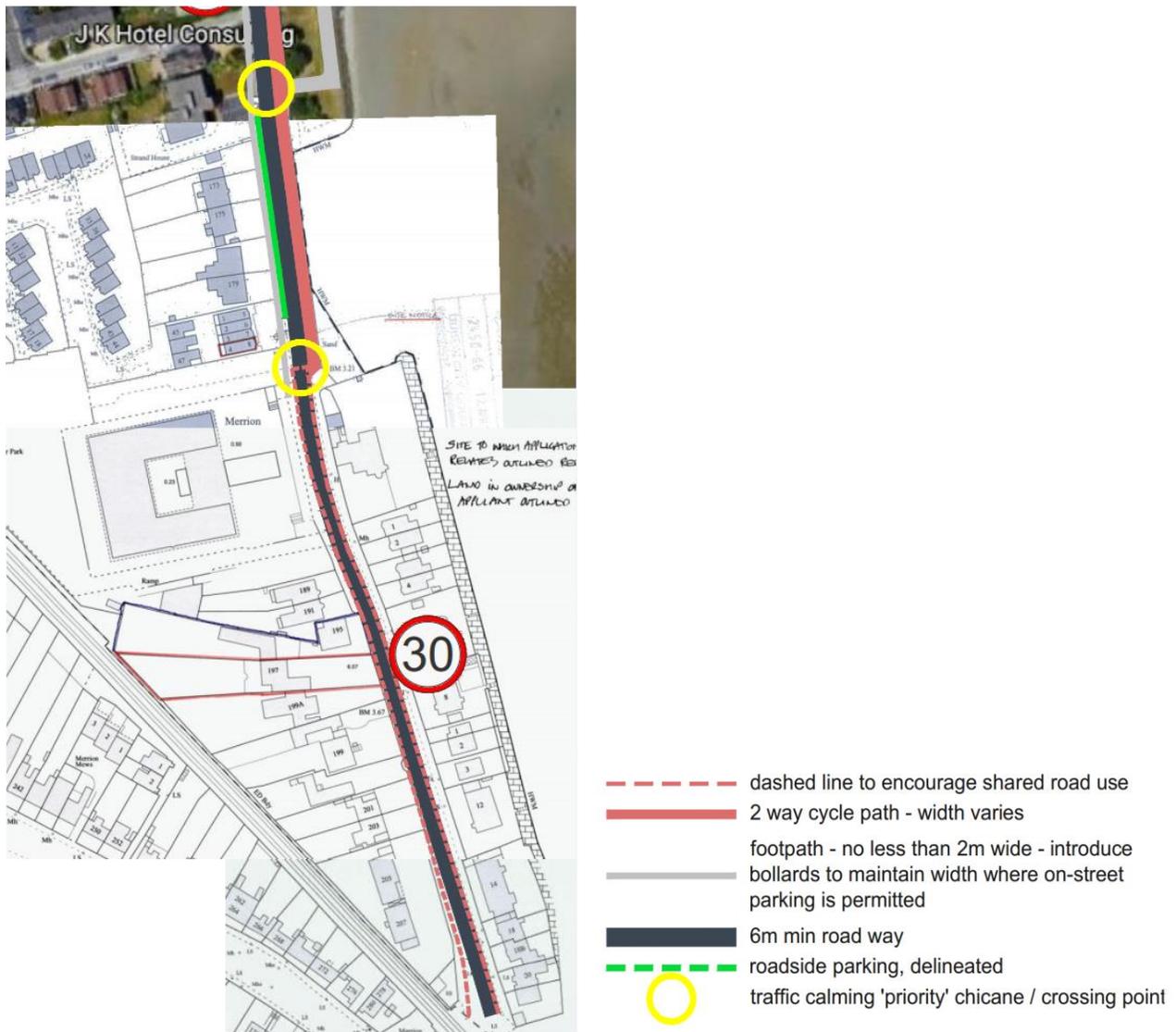


Fig 8 - section from St Alban's Park to Merrion gates

For the “infill section” between the promenade and houses, the carriageway is 7.5m wide and seaside footpath is 4.5m. By reducing the carriageway to 6m, the footpath could be widened to facilitate a 6m wide shared cycleway and footpath.

Or alternatively a similar approach to the earlier design could be used, with 1.5m of carriageway allocated to the pedestrian landside path.

Section 4: Merrion Gates Properties

We are aware that the last 270m is the challenging section of the cycle path. In our capacity with limited modelling resources, equipment and time, we offer the Council a variety of options, and hope that they will be able to work with local residents, community groups, schools and cyclists to come up with the best short-term solution for all.

Option 1

The underpass and bridge at Merrion Hall as suggested by the NTA 2015 report would be the safest design. Perhaps once finance is available, this can be implemented.

Option 2

A contra flow controlled by signals for traffic is one option we considered but it will cause significant queueing. In the absence of modelling tools, we cannot gauge these and ask that the Council run modelling tests to assess the feasibility.

Option 3

A lightweight cycle bridge could be prefabricated and lifted in to cross the gates. It would need to start before the houses with a gradual rise, but enough to give driveway clearance to the houses.

Option 4

In the mean-time we feel a shared space is a reasonable compromise given the cycleway is not connecting to anything after the Merrion Gates. To make it feel like a shared space, have a raised table, put in rumble strips, different coloured path and install a priority cycle gate. Additional toucan crossings before and after the shared space will also help.

For the amount of people who will use this as a cycleway versus those who will be impacted by the closure of one lane of traffic on Strand Road, there should be balance. 270m of shared space is not a big ask, for gaining the rest of the path.

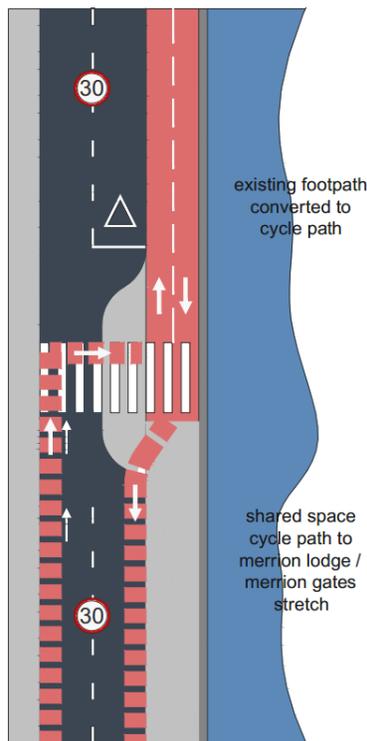


Fig 9 – traffic calming chicane to pinch point at the end of the sea wall – the road which leads to this point will have dashed cycle lane lines to either side and reduced speed limit to ensure a safer shared space and will remind queued traffic to leave space for cyclists. The traffic calming will have the added benefit of making it safer for cyclists to cross to the 2 way cycle lane

Mitigation Measures

If Dublin City Council's current proposal was to be implemented as it stands, introducing right turn bans along Strand Road outbound (such as Sydney Parade or St Albans) or indeed Merrion Road inbound (such as Serpentine Avenue) will just squeeze the traffic further into the limited rat runs while making day to day existence for residents unbearable.

A more holistic view of the village movements would need to be taken with more detailed modelling than the 2018 Sandymount Green report.

Lessons Learned

With the benefit of time, we can all see the impact of the recent DLRCC Covid coastal cycleway changes. While there is delight that a route along the coast is now partially available, the chaos and disruption to locals and those trying to access facilities is palpable.

The RNLI have even voiced their concern that volunteers can no longer reach their HQ within a reasonable length of time.

The congestion in Monkstown village has taken the "village" feel out of it and Dun Laoghaire was gridlocked over the weekends when it should have been enjoying the festival feel of weekend markets.

Would it not be better to get the praise of being able to open an attractive coastal cycle route while maintaining the coastal driving route-which is an amenity in itself?

By narrowing the road, the speeds will reduce and indeed many may try alternative faster routes, but at least locals and those with legitimate reasons for travelling this route (such as local deliveries and local businesses) have a safe route to do so.

We believe this is better than diverting a large amount of traffic through small residential roads, risking the lives of our vulnerable road users and affecting the trade of local businesses.

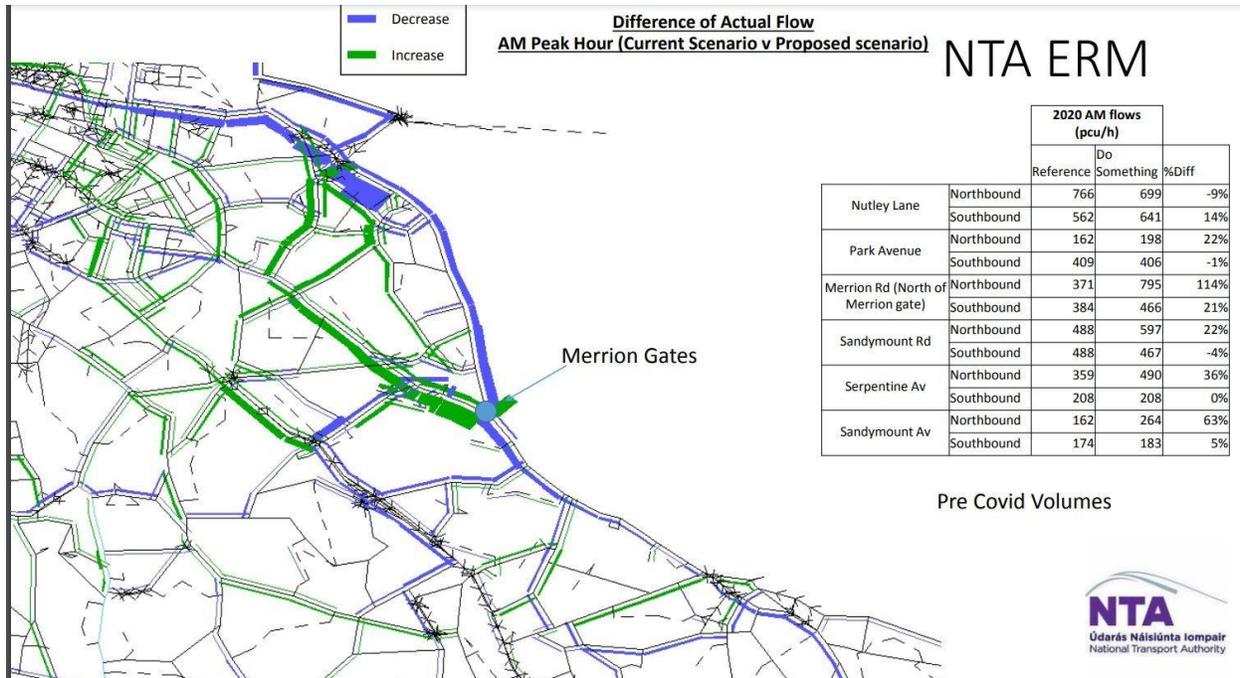
Ultimately the current DCC proposal would reduce the number of residents in Sandymount who currently use their bicycles to travel to work and school.

Conclusion

We all want to see enhanced cycling facilities across Dublin and we support the Council in this endeavor.

However, we would ask that the implementation of these measures take into account local communities as well as local cyclists, many of whom we believe will be scared off their local roads by the increased traffic DCC's current proposal will produce (see diagram below).

In a community survey amongst families in the area 78% of children who cycled to school do not and will not use Strand Rd as it is not part of their route.



Note: The data and map were produced assuming Beach Road is two-way. The Council's final report-Trial of Strand Road Rapid Deployment Cycle Route – Report on Public Consultation October 2020 – now proposes to make Beach Road one way for outbound traffic. This will significantly alter the data and map as most of the traffic to Sean Moore Road will need to be accessed via Church Avenue which is only 100m long and 6m wide with parking on one side of the road.

Previous studies such as NTA's 2015 Sandymount/ Merrion to Blackrock Cycle Route Corridor Study, Feasibility Study & Options Assessment Report (tinyurl.com/sandymountreport-a pg 42) have assessed this and deemed the impact on the locality to be too great to warrant the closure of Merrion Gates to traffic. Excerpt below:

Diversion of through traffic from Strand Road would have significant adverse impacts for strategic traffic network in the south-eastern area of Dublin City:

- a) The R131 Regional Route along Strand Road is one of two key access routes serving Dublin Port, with the Dublin Tunnel being the equivalent route from the northern direction;*
- b) Diversion of through traffic from Sandymount to Ballsbridge would have adverse implications for the environment in an important and vibrant employment and mixed-use inner suburb of the city;*
- c) Traffic toward the East Link Bridge would be diverted through the Irishtown and Sandymount residential areas;*
- d) Additional traffic pressure on the Merrion Road could present difficulties for the provision of additional capacity and priority for public transport and cyclists on that main radial route to the city centre. **In conclusion, it is unlikely that the traffic impacts of this option would be considered acceptable or proportionate for the objective of this cycleway project.***

This report with supporting drawings has been prepared by STC Community Group within a limited time frame as an alternative proposal to that tabled by Dublin City Council. Given the time constraints and accessibility to specialist design software, our proposal has not been verified by detailed traffic models, calculations and risk assessments and we recommend that DCC actions such studies. The content has been prepared on a good faith basis, in an attempt to arrive at a mutual solution to meet the cycling safety objectives of DCC whilst limiting the overall impact of vehicular traffic to South East Dublin in particular Sandymount Village and surrounding areas.