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Dublin City Council

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Mr Dominic Mullaney
Principal Advisor - Roads
Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
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Dublin 2

25th May 2021

**Department of Transport grant allocation for the future maintenance of
Dublin City Council's road network**

Dear Dominic,

We refer to the Department of Transport's grant allocation to local authorities for the purpose of delivering their regional and local roads annual works programme. As you know, this grant does not currently extend to the maintenance of the road network within Dublin City Council's administrative area and therefore, these maintenance costs are, for the most part, funded from the City Council's own financial resources. We wish to draw your attention to a number of important factors that we believe should be considered by the Department of Transport, in its future determinations on the allocation of the 'Roads Grant' to local authorities and why we believe Dublin City Council should be a benefactor of such funding.

Sustainable Transport

You will be aware that Dublin City Council is working closely with the National Transport Authority (NTA), on the implementation of new and improved sustainable transport measures across the City. This includes the reallocation of road space to facilitate the introduction of cycle lanes and infrastructure to improve safety for vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians and schoolchildren.

In fact, this year the NTA has made €50 million available to the City Council for the design and implementation of such infrastructure.

The aim of these measures, as you are aware, is to reduce reliance on the private car and encourage a modal shift to more sustainable transport means such as walking, cycling and bus use. As evidenced by the data collected and presented in the 'Canal Cordon Report, 2019', these measures are proving successful. During the period 2006 to 2019, walking as a means of transport has increased by over 44%, cycling has increased by over 170% and car journeys have decreased by over 20%. Furthermore, in 2019 we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the 'Dublinbikes' scheme, with over 25 million journeys taken. Fifty percent of this fleet of 1,600 bikes has recently been upgraded to hybrid bikes, thus encouraging more people to avail of this service.

Covid-19 Related Developments

The Covid-19 crisis has further highlighted the need to improve facilities for pedestrians and cyclists and it is our intention to continue this work that has already been carried out in this area. With this new infrastructure however, comes increased maintenance costs. You will know the NTA only fund capital costs and consequently a viable funding source for the ongoing maintenance costs of these schemes in perpetuity has not been secured. It could be mistakenly assumed that such funds are available to and will be borne by Dublin City Council.

Whilst increases in sustainable transport use is to be welcomed, it must also be recognised that vulnerable road users, such as the growing number of pedestrians and cyclists, are more exposed to the risk of serious injury as a consequence of defects and hazards on our road network. Therefore, as people continue to choose more sustainable modes, such as walking, cycling and with the increased use of e-scooters, it has become more important than ever that the surfaces people use are safe and fit for purpose. Furthermore, defects and hazards on the road network will only serve to act as a barrier to people who may otherwise choose walking or cycling as their preferred mode of transport into and around the City.

Surface Condition

Despite the investment that has been made by the City Council in the maintenance of our road network in recent years, the National Oversight and Audit Commission's Local Authority Performance Indicator Report – 2019, published in December 2020, notes that 10% of Dublin City Council's Regional road network has a '*Pavement Surface Condition Index*' (PSCI) rating of between 1 and 4, the lowest rating category. This means that 10% of our road network is in need of structural restoration and / or reconstruction. Only two counties in the entire country score lower in this category. Whilst a further 16% of our Local Primary, 23% of our Local Secondary and 18% of our local tertiary also fall into this category. The National Oversight and Audit Commission's report states, "... the overall number of local authorities with roads in this category is very worrying".

Dublin Context

Dublin City, as capital of Ireland, is home to over 550,000 people, living within a geographical area of 115km² and serviced by a 1,250km road network, additionally 170,000 people living outside the City commute to the City for work purposes each weekday. Our roads are heavily trafficked by a mix of cars, buses, HGVs, motorcyclists, cyclists, pedestrians and light-rail. The most recent Canal Cordon Report highlights that almost 220,000 people cross the canals and into the City between the hours of 7:00am and 10:00am each weekday. Our roads are, therefore, amongst the most heavily utilised in the country.

In order to ensure the safe and efficient movement of people and goods on these roads, it is incumbent on Dublin City Council, in its role as Roads Authority, to ensure that our roads are in good condition and fit for purpose. To achieve this it is imperative that the City Council is adequately financed and resourced to undertake the appropriate interventions at the right time. This includes the resurfacing and reconstruction of our roads, footpaths and cycling infrastructure, before they fall into a state of disrepair.

Deliverables from current funding levels

The level of funding that Dublin City Council has invested in the maintenance of its roads in recent years has facilitated the resurfacing of just 1% of the entire road network each year. If investment is to continue at this level, we will resurface each road once in every one hundred years. Dublin City Council has made €12 million available to our Road Maintenance Services' Division this year to deliver its annual works programme. This should facilitate the upgrade of 14km of carriageway and 12km of footpaths. There is not the financial capacity, within Dublin City Council's own resources, to increase the level of funding to maintain our road network.

The nature of movement in Dublin City Council is distinct to other local authorities and we suggest that this may not have been fully reflected to-date in funding allocations. Along with the road network, which is the primary mobility network of many councils, Dublin City Council has an extensive network of footpaths and increasingly cycle-ways. As you are aware repairing a stretch of carriageway does nothing to ensure that the footpath running in parallel is fit for purpose nor that the cycle-way alongside will facilitate reasonable use. The complexity of transport networks is that there is not one network with three uses but, rather three networks with different usage patterns and user safety needs.

Dublin City Council Financial Capacity

There may be a misconception around the financial capacity of Dublin City Council to fund the maintenance of its roads network, and in the future, the cycling and pedestrian surface networks from its own resources. Dublin City Council has the largest operational budgets of all local authorities in the State, but, with that comes the highest service related expenditure

With regard to the Local Property Tax (LPT), you will be aware that 20% of LPT receipts collected by the Revenue Commissioners are held in the 'Equalisation Fund'. Dublin City Council has yet to receive any funding from this mechanism despite having areas within the City with the highest

deprivation indices recorded in the State. The main urban areas (Cities and Dublin local authorities) have been termed as 'self-funding' resulting in grants previously funded by the exchequer being funded by the LPT. This includes the roads grant which, has been capped for some time and does not in any way reflect the trends in the cost of maintaining road surfaces. The net result of these funding arrangements is that Dublin City Council does not have abundant resources, has an extensive service delivery programme that brings associated costs, and little financial benefit whatsoever from the introduction of the LPT.

Commercial rates as a funding source

Dublin City Council wishes to engage constructively with the Department of Transport and to do so in an open manner. Dublin City Council has made extensive efforts to allocate as much funding for roads maintenance as possible, in the context of available resources and competing demands. That funding is very much now at the maximum. There is no prospect of securing additional resources to maintain a greater quantum of road network and maintain a cycling and pedestrian network from within Dublin City Council's existing funding options. There is and will be political and economic pressure to maintain commercial rates at existing levels, if not that of a reduction in rates, and if there is an assumption that funds could be sourced in this way and be available to maintain the road network, it is considered that this is currently highly unlikely, if not improbable.

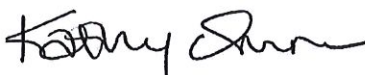
We emphasise that Dublin City Council is finding it difficult to sustain the funding of the maintenance of the road network to an acceptable standard without an exchequer funding source. Dublin City Council can be available to provide for a forensic accounting exercise, on a full transparency basis, to clarify this funding availability.

Common Understanding

Dublin City Council and the Department of Transport share a common goal, which is to provide a road network that facilitates the safe and efficient movement of people and goods across the City and its environs. Therefore, we consider that it is important to jointly explore all options available to us in order to address the issues and concerns that we have highlighted, including an examination of the potential for Dublin City Council to receive from the Department of Transport an annual grant for the maintenance of the City's road network.

We trust that you will be able to give this matter consideration, and we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these matters further. Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours sincerely,



Kathy Quinn
Head of Finance



John W. Flanagan
Assistant Chief Executive & City Engineer