

2. Scheme Background

The NRA published the 'National Roads Needs Study' in July 1998. This Study presented the current level of service provided by the National Primary and National Secondary road system and forms a basis on which policy decisions for the development of the road network for the period 2000 – 2019 can be made.

The Policy Objectives outlined in the Roads Needs Study were carried forward from the Operational Programme for Transport (OPT), 1994 – 1999.

The purpose of the OPT was to provide essential infrastructural support for the economic objectives of the European Union (EU) Community Support Framework and to assist the fundamental aim of achieving further substantial progress towards the national and EU goal of economic and social cohesion.

The OPT identified deficiencies in Ireland's internal and access transport, which were considerations in forecasting National Road Needs for the period 2000 – 2019.

One of the major objectives of the Roads Needs Study was to examine the National Road Network and to "determine the appropriate type of roadway for each segment of the network to cater for projected traffic flows over the twenty year period from 2000 to 2019."

The study concluded that the National Primary Road System, including the N9 Route should be upgraded to provide a minimum 'level of service D' (LOS-D) equivalent to an inter-urban travel speed of 80kmph.

The National Road Strategy was reviewed again by the Government when preparing the National Development Plan. While the LOS-D objective was retained as policy for the road network generally, a higher Level of Service C (LOS-C) was proposed for adoption for five major inter-urban routes radiating from Dublin, including the Waterford to Dublin Route. LOS-C is equivalent to an average inter-urban speed of 84kmph on a single carriageway road, 94kmph on a dual carriageway and 105kmph on a motorway.

In addition, the following transport objectives are identified as part of the National Development Plan:

- To improve the reliability of the road transport system by removing bottlenecks, remedying capacity deficiencies and reducing absolute journey times and journey variance.
- To improve internal road transport infrastructure between regions and within regions, contribute to the competitiveness of the productive sector and foster regional development.
- To facilitate better access to and from the main ports and airports with the main objective of offsetting the negative effects of peripherality.

- To contribute to sustainable transport policies, facilitating continued economic growth and regional development while ensuring a high level of environmental protection.
- To help achieve the objectives of the Government's Road Safety Strategy in relation to the reduction in fatalities and serious injuries caused by road accidents.

The emphasis of the National Development Plan has changed from focusing on the provision of by-passes of towns on the National Roads Network, to the provision of high capacity inter-urban road links.

As there are a number of routes available for travel between Waterford and Dublin, the NDP did not specify the particular route to be improved to LOS-C. Both the route and the type of road were referred for further evaluation.

The NRA subsequently published an 'Assessment of Waterford–Dublin Route and Road Type Options' paper in February 2000. This assessment looked at three corridor options for the route, broadly along the existing N9, an East Coast Route (via Arklow, Enniscorthy and New Ross) and the 'Durrow Route' (departing the N8 at Durrow, continuing southwards to Waterford via Kilkenny). The 'Central N9 Corridor' was recommended as the preferred route for the inter-urban road link and forms the basis for this study. As indicated in Section 1.1, a high quality dual carriageway / motorway standard road was also recommended as part of the NRA assessment for the route.