

11. Land Use and Agriculture

11.1 Introduction

This section describes the existing land use and agriculture within the refined constraints study area. The study was based on a desktop study and local knowledge of the area.

11.2 Assessment Criteria

The land within the constraints study area has been categorised under the following headings:

- Agricultural Lands
 - Dairy Farms
 - Stud Farms and Training Establishments
 - Tillage Farms (including Sugar Beet Farms)
 - REPS Farms
 - Grassland Farms
- Significant Land Based Sports Establishments
- Agri-Businesses

The farming practice, enterprise mix and soil types are similar throughout the constraints study area. Therefore it is unlikely that standard farming practices will act as a constraint in deciding the route to be selected. The affect of a new road will be keenly felt by a given number of farmers along the chosen route.

It is important to consider areas in which the placing of a major road would create a significant impact. For example where prominent dairy farms or a cluster of dairy farms occur, and/or where land based sports establishments, stud farms and training establishments are based. Establishments that are of national and international importance would need individual assessment before deciding to route a road through them.

11.2.1 Agricultural Lands

All of the constraints study area, except for urban areas and roads, can be broadly classified as agricultural land. Generally soils are highly fertile and agricultural land is highly productive. Agriculture is practiced intensively with specialist sugar beet, cereal, dairy, stud, beef & sheep farms throughout the area.

Individual farms occupy the vast majority of the area and should a route pass through these individual farms they will be significantly affected. However, the selection of an alternative route will equally significantly affect another set of individual farms. Therefore, since the quality of land and the farming practices are common throughout the area, the length of the route is of most significance since it will decide the number of farmers affected.

11.2.2 Dairy Farms

Table 1 of Appendix E lists a number of the prominent dairy farms, including individual dairy farms or clusters of dairy farms may be found, highlighting where dairy farming is of importance in the local industry. Field assessment to reveal more comprehensively the level of dairy farming will be required at route selection stage.

Dairy farms are particularly sensitive to the location of a major road. A dairy farm is entirely dependent on the land parcel or grazing paddocks adjacent to the farmyard. The location of a major road may cause severance of the land parcel into smaller areas or severance of the access from the yard to the grazing paddocks. This would have a significant impact on the future viability of the farm or it's continuation in dairying.

11.2.3 Stud Farms and Training Establishments

Table 2 of Appendix E highlights a non-exhaustive listing of stud farms and training establishments. The exact site boundaries of these industries would require individual mapping surveys at route selection stage.

The location of a proposed road would have a significant impact on stud farms or equine-based enterprises. Horses would be greatly affected by the location of a major road in close proximity to a farm. It would have implications for both the rearing and breeding of horses in the area. The severance of land parcels can create field sizes and shapes unsuitable to the training of horses.

11.2.4 Tillage Farms

Prominent tillage regions are associated with lands of very high quality and fertile soils. The southern section of the study area does not contain significant tillage areas.

The impact of the location of a major road on a tillage farm is not as significant as the impact on a dairy or stud farm. It may lead to the severance of an area or parcel of land resulting in access problems for machinery.

11.2.5 Sugar Beet Farms

The soil type and the climatic conditions favour the growing of sugar beet in this area. The sugar factory located in Carlow town has contributed to farms within the constraints study area growing sugar beet.

The location of a major road in the area will have a similar effect on individual sugar beet farms as tillage farms. That is, severance of land causing problems for machinery, as well as the additional potential impacts of access problems and severance of minor local roads impeding the delivery of beet to the factory in Carlow town.

11.2.6 Rural Environment Protection Scheme Farms

There is among the lowest uptake of the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS) in Ireland, reflecting the high percentage of intensive farmers and high quality soils within the study area.

It is not considered that REPS farms will form a significant constraint in the routing of the new road.

11.2.7 Grassland Farms

Grassland based farming operations include suckler, drystock, sheep or mixed farms. These farms are spread evenly throughout the study area.

The impact of the location of a major road on grassland farming is not as significant as the impact on a dairy or stud farm. This is due to access not being required to the grassland areas on as regular a basis as with the dairy farm. Cattle and sheep are not as sensitive as horses would be to the impact of a major road. The route location may lead to the severance of an area or parcel of land resulting in access problems for machinery to the severed area.

11.3 Significant Land Based Sports Establishments

Table 3 of Appendix E lists a sample of golf courses and race-courses within the constraints study area. Of these Mount Juliet Golf Course and Gowran Park Racecourse are internationally famous.

11.4 Agri-Business

A sample of agri-businesses in the constraints study area that would be most significantly affected by the location of a major road are listed in Table 4, Appendix E. These businesses, most of which are used by the farming community on a daily basis, are involved in the collection of milk, the supply of animal feeds, fertiliser, etc. and services to the agricultural and the wider community.

The location of a major road near such businesses will impact on the accessibility of the businesses to the agricultural and wider community.

11.5 Summary of Land Use – Southern Section

South Kilkenny City to Goresbridge The land quality of this area is generally very high, with the exception of the area around Gowran, where land quality was slightly lower. As a result of this, a high level of dairy and tillage farming was found. Large land parcels in both the dairying and tillage areas reflected the intensive nature of the farming currently in practice. Other grassland based farming is evident although the field sizes are generally smaller.

Bennettsbridge to Kells to Thomastown - The land quality is very high from south of Kilkenny City to Kells and extending east to the River Nore. To the east of the River Nore the land quality is average to good. There is a significant level of tillage west of the River Nore although the farming there is predominantly grassland based. There is a high level of dairying in the Kells region. East of the River Nore the farming is predominantly grassland based with a higher level of mixed livestock enterprises such as suckler cow herds, drystock and sheep. Field and land parcels are larger to the west of the area.

Thomastown to Ballyhale - Land quality in the Thomastown region and west of the N9 road is very high. In the south-east of this area the quality decreases with several areas of poor quality land or hilly areas where land quality is low. There is a high level of grassland farming throughout this area and a significant level of tillage west of the N9. There are several large parcels of commercial forestry.

Ballyhale to Mullinavat – There is a large parcel of commercial forestry to the east of the N9 road. The constraints study area extends south on both sides of the forestry parcel. Land quality is mixed with large areas of poor quality land throughout this area. Land quality west of the excluded area is generally average with grassland based farming and small field sizes. East of the excluded area it is poor to average with large parcels of commercial forestry. In the Mullinavat region the land quality improves with a higher level of tillage and dairy based farming activity. There are some poor land parcels and commercial forestry east of Mullinavat town.

South of Mullinavat town to Waterford - The land quality is high in general with a few areas of average to good land quality, mainly along the eastern side. In this area the land use is grassland based with tillage levels highest in the center, around the N9. Of the grassland based farming, dairying is most prominent in the Kilmacow to Waterford area.