EIA Quality Mark Case Study

Belfast Transport Hub

Key Issues
The Belfast Transport Hub (BTH) is a large infrastructure and building project located in Belfast City Centre. Due to the project’s size, location and nature, there was a complex implementation strategy required for the construction phase to ensure that the current operation of bus and rail services could continue.

Early engagement with the local planning authority and relevant statutory bodies (approximately 2.5 years prior to submission) was essential to delivery.

Additional assessments were requested late in the EIA process from a statutory body post draft review of the ES. Although there was extensive consultation throughout, once the drafts were available for review, queries came to light, which were addressed with additional assessment and modelling to de-risk the need for further environmental information requests post submission of the planning application. The scope of the additional assessments was developed in conjunction with the statutory body to ensure the issues were addressed.

Purpose of the project
Translink are the operators of Northern Ireland’s public transport network. Translink are proposing to develop a new transport interchange to address the substantial growth in public transport users over recent years. The number of journeys made on coach services has increased by 45% in the last 10 years, while rail journeys have also increased by 23% in the last two years. Passenger numbers are projected to reach approximately 18 million per year by 2040.

The existing station facilities at the existing Europa Bus Centre and Great Victoria Street Railway Station currently accommodate approximately 8 million passenger journeys per year. At peak times, the stations experience high volumes of passengers with regular queuing for services. Therefore, there is a pressing need for a new facility to cater for current demand and future growth.

Description of the project
The Belfast Transport Hub is an integrated transport facility which will provide bus and rail services within a single station located on the site of the existing bus and rail stations. The Proposed Development will predominantly cater for regional bus services, railway services and the Enterprise cross-border rail service to Dublin in the Republic of Ireland, which will be relocated to terminate at the Belfast Transport Hub.
EIA Learning Outcomes

Lessons learnt

**Early engagement:** The high level of engagement with the local planning authority and relevant statutory bodies facilitated an excellent working relationship between the client, design team and statutory stakeholders which allowed continuous positive engagement throughout. This benefited the development of a robust EIA, with statutory bodies reviewing draft chapters of the Environmental Statement prior to submission minimising the risk of requests for additional information and potentially reducing the likelihood of onerous planning conditions.

**Early contractor involvement:** The construction phasing of the development is complex as there is a need to maintain operations at the bus and rail station during construction and the site is in a busy city centre with busy road networks, businesses and residences. This required close working with the construction team to understand the constraints and impacts. Early contractor involvement may have been beneficial to iron out some issues earlier in the process.

**Early consideration of complex construction traffic impacts:** Due to the size, nature and complexity of the project, earlier consideration of complex construction traffic impacts on the wider area would have been beneficial as the traffic impacts crossed several technical disciplines such as noise, air quality, socio-economic and the transport assessment itself.

**Legal review:** A legal review of the draft ES was very useful particularly given the current climate in Northern Ireland for challenge. A balance was required as to the technical elements of the EIA and addressing the legal concerns. Earlier engagement with the legal team may have been beneficial to address some of the issues earlier in the process.

**De-risking the construction programme:** The EIA was produced in parallel with the development of the contractor tender documentation to facilitate the programme, which also allowed the documents to be suitable for dual purpose, thus reducing the risk of differences between the ES and works information. This had the advantage of de-risking the construction programme by identifying early environmental works.

Contact details

Agnes Monaghan
Arup
3rd Floor, Bedford House, 16-22 Bedford Street, Belfast, BT2 7FD
T: +44 28 9089 0903

For access to more EIA case studies and hundreds of non-technical summaries of Environmental Statements visit:
https://www.iema.net/eia-quality-mark/eia-quality-mark-case-studies