



Inland Waterways Association of Ireland

Honorary Secretary, Gamekeeper's Cottage, Mackney, Ballinasloe

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Dear Minister O'Dowd,

On behalf of the members of the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI) we, the national executive of the IWAI, wish to bring to your attention matters of significant concern regarding the Newry Southern Relief Road (NSRR) and the proposed fixed bridge design for crossing the historic Newry Ship Canal.

IWAI, established in 1954, is a respected islandwide voluntary organization dedicated to promoting, developing, and maintaining Ireland's navigable waterways. Our efforts have been instrumental in preserving and enhancing numerous waterways across the island, including the Shannon, Grand Canal, and Royal Canal.

We write to express our deep concern regarding the Department for Infrastructure's (DfI) intention to proceed with a fixed bridge design for the Newry Southern Relief Road (NSRR) crossing the Newry Ship Canal. This decision, made during the Assembly's suspension, but later confirmed by yourself threatens to permanently block access to Newry's Albert Basin inland port for the vast majority of yachts, not to mention tall ships and larger vessels. The 12m (39ft) headroom suggested in the design is insufficient for even medium sized yachts and would exclude all the yachts currently berthed in the basin.

We believe this plan contravenes established navigation rights which require the waterway to be kept open to shipping and which were never formally abandoned when Newry port closed. Acceptance of the duty to maintain these rights is one reason why the Narrow Water bridge, 4 miles downstream, will have an opening section. This opening bridge will allow ship and yacht access along the Newry river to the ship canal. However, any vessel passing the opening Narrow Water bridge will be halted by the low fixed bridge of the NSRR. Such a situation defies logic and is a perplexing and ill thought out decision. Building a low fixed bridge is an irreversible decision that will permanently close off the Albert Basin and undermine the cultural, economic, and tourism potential of the area.

President: Kay Baxter **Executive:** **Vice-President:** John Fitzgerald **Past President:** Alan Kelly

Honorary Secretary: Graham Bartlett **Honorary Treasurer:** Alison Maddock **Membership Sec:** Bríd Joly

Directors: Denis Baker, Colin Becker, Kevin Clabby, Peter Maxwell, Chris McCarney, Matthew Daniels, Darragh Dolan, John Kearns, Steve Kitt

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We only have to look at earlier decisions to fix the swing bridges over the inland canal in Newry to see how this has closed off the potential to develop the canal through the city centre. The same mistake should not be repeated.

Furthermore, this decision for a low fixed bridge appears at odds with the Department for Communities' £16 million funding for a new Newry City Park at Albert Basin, which aims to celebrate Newry's maritime heritage and encourage waterside leisure development and activity .

The justification provided for the fixed bridge design, citing minimal interference with the historic monument, in our opinion, contradicts the Department for Communities: Historic Environments Division's own guidance, which prioritizes restoring and maintaining the original use of historic waterways. The Newry canal is the oldest true canal in the UK and Ireland, approaching its 300th anniversary in 2031. It was the engineering marvel of its day, talked about across Europe. It would be deeply regrettable if this national treasure was to be lost to a short term decision to build a low fixed bridge on a bypass road.

As the national body representing waterways enthusiasts across Ireland, we respectfully request a meeting to discuss these concerns in person. We believe that a collaborative approach can lead to a solution that respects both infrastructure needs and the preservation of Newry's rich maritime heritage as well as leaving open the possibility of further development along the waterway.

We look forward to engaging constructively in the remaining stages of public consultation for the NSRR project.

Yours sincerely,

Kay Baxter
President
Inland Waterways Association of Ireland

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