Inland Waterways Association of Ireland

Provision of Navigation Headroom at the Tamnamore Motorway Crossing on the River Blackwater

Application for funding to the Lough Neagh Partnership

Application Summary

Introduction

The purpose of this application is to request funds for the construction of a navigation channel under the M1 Motorway crossing at Tamnamore near Dungannon in Co. Tyrone.

Background

The immediate reason for the proposed project is to permit navigation on the River Blackwater above the Tamnamore Motorway Crossing by normal pleasure craft. This will immediately extend the navigable area as far upstream as Blackwatertown, provide an all-weather cruising ground for boats and form an essential element of the restoration of navigation on the Ulster Canal. Currently the motorway bridge restricts navigation to vessels with an airdraft of less than 2.26 metres.

The Ulster Canal linked Northern Ireland's two premier natural waterways, Lough Neagh and Lough Erne. Opened in 1841, it was 45.7 miles long with 26 locks, but was relatively unsuccessful as a commercial waterway.

In 1994 another unsuccessful commercial waterway, the Ballinamore & Ballyconnell Canal, was reopened as a tourism resource, linking the Shannon and the Erne and renamed the Shannon-Erne Waterway. This project was seen as having been extremely successful in promoting tourism and building confidence in its rural area.

IWAI believes that a restored Ulster Canal can be equally successful, enabling boats from Ireland north and south to visit Lough Neagh and attracting visiting boaters from Britain and beyond. We see a restored navigation providing recreational facilities and amenities for both waterways enthusiasts and local communities and acting as a catalyst for tourism-related economic activity in the region.

IWAI has already applied for European funding for restoration work at the Lough Erne end of the Ulster Canal; the provision of adequate headroom at Tamnamore would be the first step at the Lough Neagh end.

Project Objectives

The primary objective is to provide navigation clearance under the motorway bridge at Tamnamore and so restore navigation to the upper reaches of the Blackwater and the Ulster Canal.

Longer term we believe that the project will encourage the creation of new businesses and the expansion of existing ones in the area to provide goods and services to the boaters who will use the waterway and to the additional land based visitors who we believe will be drawn to the area by the increased boating traffic.

We believe that the establishment of a new marina and a boat sales and repair facility in the area is not an unreasonable expectation. The active development of such businesses is outside the scope of this project though the association will work informally to try to achieve this.

Similarly, we believe that existing businesses in the area such as pubs, shops and restaurants should see a growth in their business and allow them to take on some

additional staff. The active development of such businesses is outside the scope of this project though the association will work informally to try to achieve this.

This application is made under the Water Based Recreation Theme WR 1.2 – Support to Extend Navigable Waters of the Lough Neagh Strategic Plan.

Currently, navigation above the Tamnamore Motorway crossing is restricted to vessels with a headroom not exceeding 2.26m which is significantly less than the 3.5 metres available on the Shannon-Erne waterway and the height proposed for the restored Ulster Canal.

The aim of the theme is to manage, enhance and market recreational opportunities for local people and visitors whilst ensuring the Lough Neagh Wetlands environmental, economic and social integrity.

By providing clearance under the motorway bridge the project will allow larger vessels to travel further up the Blackwater River thus extending the navigation by a distance of approx. 11km. This will provide an opportunity for local entrepreneurs to develop businesses to provide goods and services to these visitors.

The extension of the navigation to new areas can also provide the impetus for other local amenity developments for the benefit of visitors and local communities alike.

Providing additional destinations and cruising grounds will enhance Lough Neagh's attractiveness as a visitor destination as a whole.

Improvement of the navigation headroom at Tamnamore is essential if the Ulster Canal is to be fully restored.

Sustainability

Long term, the project will not incur any significant costs other than those associated with routine maintenance and it is envisaged that those will be taken up by the appropriate navigation authority

Completion of the project will mean that the improved infra-structure will be available for the foreseeable future and the social and economic benefits should similarly be available.

The major opportunity for new business and employment creation will come in the context of a full restored Ulster Canal. However as indicated above, we believe that opening the navigation to Blackwatertown will of itself create some additional opportunities.

Boating tourism on the Irish waterways has experienced significant growth in recent years. (e.g. boat registrations on the Shannon system were up by over 7% in 2003 with virtually all the growth being in the privately owned sector)

IWAI believes that this growth will continue into the future and that Lough Neagh and the Ulster Canal zone are ideally placed to benefit from this.

Most of the Lough Neagh zone is nearer to the major population centres of Belfast and Dublin than most of the so-called "Honey-Pot" destinations on the Shannon and Erne navigations (e.g. the Lough Derg area, Carrick on Shannon, Enniskillen etc.). This means that the Lough Neagh Zone is also readily accessible to overseas visitors. We believe that with the appropriate encouragement and infra-structure boat hire businesses on the Ulster Canal and Lough Neagh would be quite viable.

For similar reasons, we believe that Lough Neagh and The Ulster Canal would be attractive as cruising bases for boat owners from Ireland and overseas (esp. England, Scotland and Wales.) There are already a number of English owned boats based a various locations on the Shannon and Erne systems

Benefits

The immediate beneficiaries of the project will be the recreational boaters who will use the extended navigation.

Longer term, and especially in the context of the re-opening of the Ulster Canal, there will be a range of opportunities for extending existing businesses and creating new ones.

Business opportunities will include:

Boat Hire, Marina Development, Boat Repair and Maintenance, Boat Sales, Chandlery Outlets, Restaurants, Pubs, Shops, Provision of Accommodation, Provision of Complementary Tourist Activities.

Some of these opportunities will be taken up by existing businesses; others will result from new start-ups. Some existing land-owners will (subject to all the necessary approvals) be able to build marinas.

Experience on other waterways suggests that boating activity on a waterway is attractive to land based visitors. This can provide additional opportunities for local businesses.

Experience on other waterways also suggests that the value of property adjacent to working waterways can be expected to increase in value. (e.g. the towns along the Shannon-Erne waterway have seen significant property development since the canal was re-opened.)

Environmental Considerations

The project is essentially a conventional infrastructure improvement project involving the construction of a short length of canal culvert under the existing motorway.

In the context of the overall restoration of the Ulster Canal, positive environmental impacts from the project will include:

- restoration, conservation and interpretation of historic canal structures
- creation of new wildlife habitats as a result of re-watering the canal line
- re-using land to provide amenities for tourists and local residents that are environmentally sustainable. The tourists are likely to be concentrated in low-energy-consumption activities such as walking, cycling, angling and canal cruising
- creation of attractive new features in the landscape.

A full environmental impact assessment will be conducted prior to commencement of construction works.

It is envisaged that during the construction phase there will be some short term disruption to the environment in the immediate area of the construction site.

Longer term, the new culvert itself should have no deleterious effects.

A full environmental impact assessment will be conducted prior to commencement of construction works.

The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland is committed to undertaking the restoration of the Ulster Canal in an environmentally sustainable manner and will work with all the relevant agencies to ensure that acceptable solutions are found to negative impacts.

Publicity

For the longer term we envisage that information about this project would form part of an overall marketing plan for a restored Ulster Canal. In the shorter term we would envisage spreading information using the associations own resources.

The association has an extensive network of contacts among waterways enthusiasts in Ireland (NI & RoI), Great Britain and overseas and we would initially use that network to disseminate information about the project. In addition we would use our contacts with local interest groups and the media to publicise details of the development.

In particular we would envisage:

- Coverage in our quarterly magazine "Inland Waterways News"
- Coverage on our web-site www.iwai.ie

As part of our overall campaign for the restoration of the canal the association has held and will continue to hold public meetings and presentations and this project has been and will continue to be covered in these presentations.

Risks

The major risks to the project can be classified under the following headings: Technical, Environmental, Land Ownership, Personnel, Planning.

Technical: WDR & RT Taggart conducted an in-depth feasibility study on this project and our proposals are based on this work. As with any construction project, it is possible that the work will encounter unforeseen technical difficulties. However, we believe that adequate contingency has been included in the engineering costing to allow for this.

Environmental: As with any construction project, there may be elements of environmental risk. At the present time we do not envisage any significant adverse consequences arising from this project however it is intended that a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment would be carried out prior to any construction work commencing.

Land Ownership: an early piece of work in the project will be to acquire land needed for the construction of the by-pass culvert. It is possible that some land-owner will emerge who is either unwilling to sell or asks too high a price for the property. Since the project will not have compulsory purchase powers (such as could be available if the project were being managed by a public body), we will be forced to rely on our ability to negotiate a suitable deal.

Personnel: We will be heavily dependant on the skills and expertise of the Project Manager for this project. Unplanned departure of this individual would adversely affect the project. We can minimise the risk by careful selection of the individual from the outset, by adherence to strict project management and record keeping and by close supervision of the project by the project board.

Planning: We have not as yet formally applied for planning consent for this project. It is our intention to fully comply with all the requirements of the planning authority.

Alternative Solutions

In their feasibility study, WDR & RT Taggart identified four possible options. These were:

a) Build a pair of locks connected by a short length of canal. (Also known as a drop lock)

b) Raise the road and bridge

c) Accept the existing headroom (the do nothing option)

d) Create a culvert under one of the approach roads (the option selected)

Option (a) was rejected because it would be more expensive to build than option (d) and also more expensive on an ongoing basis. It would be more complex to maintain and operate as it would involve a significant pumping system, a complex control system and it

would require trained personnel to be on site when the system was in use. It could also have adverse consequences for the flow in the river and perhaps some safety implications.

Option (b) was rejected because the cost of either re-building or raising the existing bridge and re-aligning the approaches would be many times more than the cost of option (d)

Option (c) does not provide the required headroom and would restrict navigation to the point that the benefits of further restoration of the canal would be severely curtailed.

Option (d) is the one proposed in this document.

A further option using a semi-submersible floating dock has been proposed in recent times. This might initially be less expensive but it would have higher ongoing costs for maintenance and operation and would require very skilled operators for safety. It was rejected for those reasons.

Project Costs & Funding

Estimated Total Cost of Project £1,398,258

(This estimate is based on the original study done by WDR & RT Taggart a number of years ago updated for inflation and a number of other factors excluded from the original calculations.)

IWAI has requested 50% of the required amount i.e. £699,000 from the Lough Neagh Partnership. IWAI has negotiated matching funding from charitable sources interested in waterways restoration projects in the past. We believe that we will be able to do the same for this project.

Further Information

For further information contact colin_becker@iwai.ie