

From the Permanent Secretary
Peter May

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Dear Daniel

A5 WTC SCHEME FUNDING

Thank you for your letters of 22 June and 6 July regarding the A5 Western Transport Corridor scheme. As your correspondence would normally be passed to the Minister, and given the Department does not currently have a Minister in post, I am replying to you on behalf of the Department. I would like to begin by reaffirming that the Department continues to strive to expedite delivery of this strategically important flagship project in line with the Fresh Start Agreement.

The December 2015 Budget Statement identified a number of flagship projects, including the A5, for which indicative allocations were provided for the 2016-21 period. The indicative allocation for the A5 was £229m, with £40m of this initially profiled for 2017-18. To ensure that the anticipated scheme expenditure profile aligns with the associated budget allocation, Departmental officials have been liaising with their counterparts in the Department of Finance. These discussions have yielded a scheme budget allocation of £10m for 2017-18. The full utilisation of this allocation is subject to construction commencing as planned on the New Buildings to north of Strabane section in late 2017.

In developing the scheme, the Department has taken all reasonable measures to ensure that the statutory and environmental documentation is complete, accurate and able to withstand any potential scrutiny. Draft statutory orders and the Environmental Statement were published for consultation prior to the public inquiry held in late 2016. In addition, the Department has also updated draft reports to inform an Appropriate Assessment in accordance with the Habitats Directive and published these for further public consultation in April and May of this year. Six responses were received by the close of the consultation period and these will be taken into account as part of the assessment process. Further environmental information will be published for public consultation in the coming weeks.



You also ask about the current political situation and its impact on decisions to progress the scheme. I can confirm that, should a Minister not be in office at the point when all the necessary steps are in place, I will take the necessary decisions to allow construction of the first section of this scheme, between New Buildings and north of Strabane.

However there remains the risk of a legal challenge to the scheme. This would be despite our every effort to ensure full compliance with all statutory and environmental requirements. Unfortunately, if a challenge materialises, further delay to the scheme is likely to result.

Finally in your letter of 6 July you ask about the funding implications for the A5 of the recent agreement reached between the UK Government and the DUP. Decisions on funding will be taken in the context of the budget outcome for 2018-19 and beyond and that will determine what the impact is on the A5 scheme.

You have also today requested a meeting and my office will be in touch to arrange a suitable date.

Yours sincerely



PETER MAY