

Misplaced Terminus at Charlemont

Response to NTA Consultation on Draft Greater Dublin Transport Strategy from the Charlemont/Dartmouth Community Group



10th January 2022

1. Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission in relation to the draft Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2022-2042 (the “Strategy”). Our comments focus on Chapter 12.3 Light Rail.

This submission represents the views of a wide community group of 160 family homes with over 1000 residents from Charlemont, Dartmouth, Northbook, Lesson and Ranelagh North. The signatory leads are signing this submission on behalf of this community group.

We are fully aligned with the opinions and submissions made by the other Dublin South Community Groups, in particular **Rethink Metrolink** (representing communities from Ranelagh, Beechwood, Dunville, Cowper, Dartry), **Metro South West** (representing a very wide range of communities including Firhouse, Terenure, Templeogue, Rathfarnham, Harold’s Cross) and the **Knocklyon Network**. Collectively we represent a very large and significant body of Dublin South Communities. We are all consistent and aligned in our opinions that the NTA Metrolink proposal for Dublin South is not the right solution. Collectively we strongly urge the NTA to listen to this feedback and to make the necessary amendments to the draft Strategy. We collectively want to work with the NTA in partnership not in opposition.

We look forward to finding the best solution for Metrolink southside and one that meets the strategic goals of the Transport Strategy.

2. The Success of MetroLink is Dependent on Selecting an Optimal South Terminus.

The South Terminus of MetroLink will be in place as a vitally important city terminus until at least 2042 and it is essential that we get it right from the outset. The location of the South Terminus must be evaluated in the context of the current MetroLink proposal and not in relation to some future potential projects. A lot can happen between now and 2042 and today's assumptions may not be valid in the future. Therefore, the South Terminus must guarantee that it will function very well today and not merely promise success in the future.

MetroLink must be for people who live on both the north and south of Dublin as well as provide improved access to and from Dublin Airport. Therefore, the South Terminus must function not only as an appropriate end of the line for people travelling from the north of Dublin but it must provide an effective means of access to MetroLink for those living on the southside. The South Terminus must not solely be a solution for those living on the northside of Dublin.

The South Terminus must have the potential to become a major city centre interchange for all modes of transport in the future evolution of Dublin's transport network. It must not be located off centre and must not limit access from multiple modes of transport.

The South Terminus must maximise the opportunities for future southside route extensions and therefore it must be as central to the city as possible. It must not be located at the end of a partial southern extension along one potential route that may be assumed to be preferred today.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a successful MetroLink must result in very substantial contributions to achieving the objectives of Ireland's Climate Action Plan. MetroLink must be a key project in the achievement of "more ambitious targets for modal shift, involving building supporting infrastructures." Specifically, MetroLink has a vital role in "increasing [the] use of public transport, walking and cycling and a reduction in trips by car". Not only does MetroLink have the potential to be a very attractive new mode of public transport in Dublin, but it can also be a huge opportunity to increase interconnectivity with, and thereby use of, the planned new road transport fleet that will be converted to zero emissions vehicles.

In short, the criteria for choosing the location of the South Terminus, which in turn determines of the success of the overall MetroLink project, is that it:

- must be an appropriate end of the line for people travelling from the north of Dublin so that it is viewed as a better transport option than those currently available (i.e result in a modal shift for people living on the north side),
- must provide an effective means of access to MetroLink for those living on the southside, (i.e result in a modal shift for people living on the south side),
- must be a major interchange with other modes of transport in the centre of the city,
- must be in the optimum location for future southern route extensions (if and when they emerge), and
- must be a significant contributor to addressing the challenges of climate change.

3. The proposed South Terminus at Charlemont is a legacy from the abandoned NTA Preferred Route on the southside.

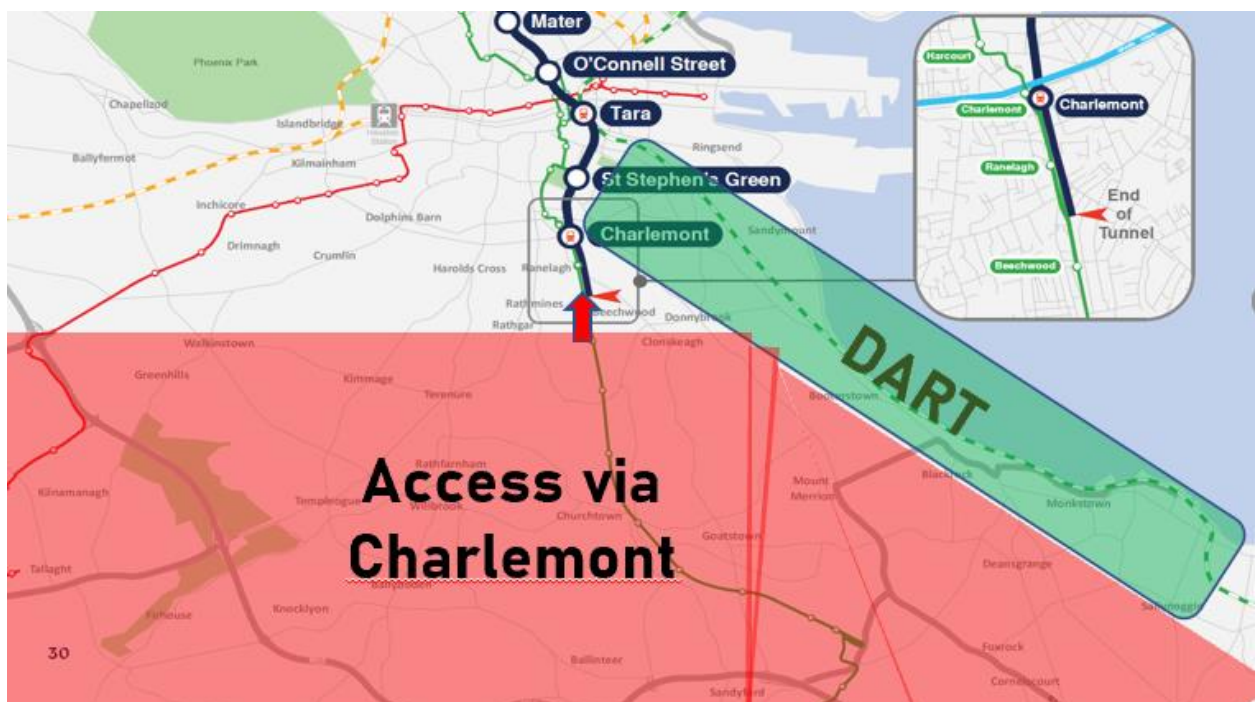
The proposed South Terminus is not in the city centre. It is outside the canals and is a partial southern extension along what was once the NTA's Preferred Route on the southside. Charlemont was a vitally important station on that route in that it provided the closest "tie-in point" where MetroLink would replace the Luas Green Line. Charlemont was to be a "temporary" terminus before a planned subsequent project would continue MetroLink over the Luas Green Line to Sandyford.

That route has been abandoned by the NTA in the current Strategy, and the MetroLink project has very substantially changed from Estuary to Sandyford to Estuary to City Centre. Yet Charlemont remains as the legacy terminus. Charlemont has become the South Terminus of the reimagined MetroLink project by default not by design and does not meet the criteria outlined above for a vitally important city terminus that will be in place for decades.

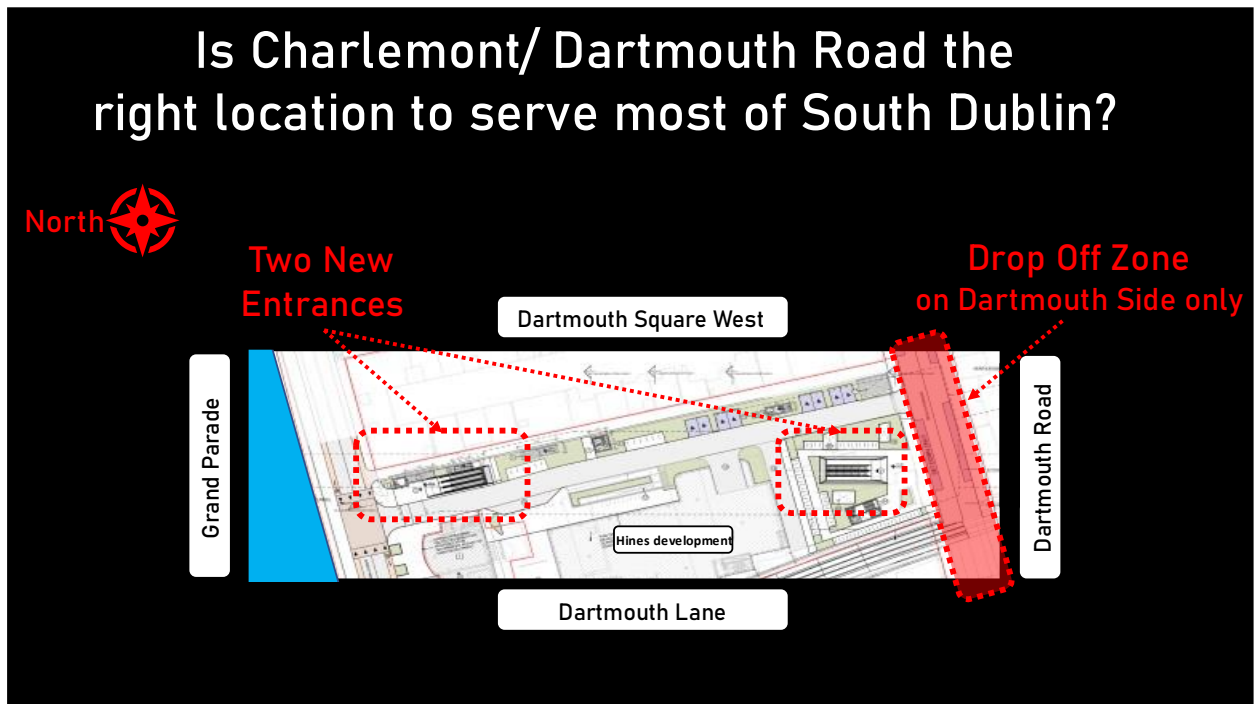
4. The Proposed South Terminus at Charlemont is expected to be the Main MetroLink Access point for the Southside.

In the Strategy the NTA state that "the south city terminus at Charlemont offers the optimal location for interchange with the Green Line in response to growing demand in the longer term and is an appropriate location to facilitate any potential future metro extensions to serve the south west, south or south east of the city region should sufficient demand arise".

Outside of the Dart corridor, the main point of access to MetroLink for people living on the southside is proposed to be at Charlemont as shown in the diagram below.



5. The Site of the Proposed South Terminus



The proposal is to construct the terminus underneath the listed “Carroll’s Building” and a new adjoining office building currently under construction by the developer Hines. The terminus is unexpectedly deep underground due to the fact that the metro tunnel must get below a major water drain and sewage pipe that is under the canal. The existence of this pipe was only recognised after the initial plan to connect to the Green Line north of the Ranelagh stop. Having to tunnel so deep underground rendered this plan obsolete because the resulting gradient was too steep even for light rail trains. The revised design (the “Preferred Route”) then proposed to “tie-in” to the Green Line just north of Beechwood.

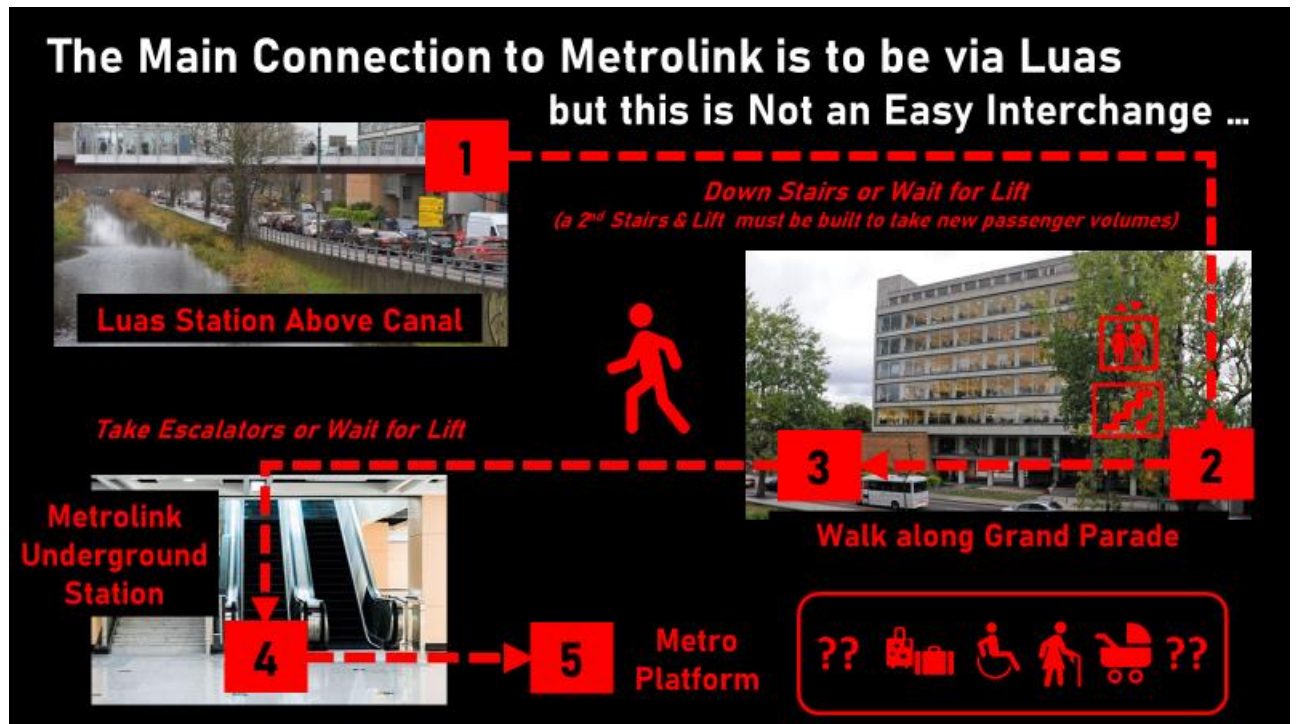
As shown in the diagram above, two new entrances are proposed at the north and south ends of the site. The site is bounded to the north by the canal which already faces heavy traffic congestion (so much so that no bus routes operate in this area), to the east Dartmouth Square West is not a through road, to the west is the very narrow Dartmouth Lane, so the only drop off zone identified by NTA is Dartmouth Road.

Effectively three of the four sides of the proposed South Terminus are inaccessible to road traffic. A “Drop-off Zone” is proposed on the Dartmouth Road side only.

Clearly this rules out the huge opportunity for the South Terminus to increase interconnectivity with the planned new road transport fleet that will be converted to zero emissions vehicles.

6. The Main Connection to Metrolink at Charlemont is to be via Luas but this is Not an Easy Interchange.

The NTA states that “the south city terminus at Charlemont offers the optimal location for interchange with the Green Line”.



As can be seen in the diagram above, this is not an easy interchange.

1. Passengers must get off the Luas at the Charlemont stop that straddles the canal.
2. They must then take the stairs or wait for a lift to bring them to street level. There is currently only one set of stairs and lift and the NTA, recognising that this is inadequate, is proposing to build a new second staircase and lift in front of the listed Carroll’s building. (Note: A difficulty for passengers unfamiliar with the area, such as tourists, is that if you use the stairs at the north end of the Luas stop you cannot access the MetroLink station because you are on the wrong side of the canal and you must retrace your steps up to the above canal station and exit to the south).
3. At street level passengers must walk c. 50-60 metres to the MetroLink entrance to the north of the site. The entrance to the south is not a practical option as the walk is approximately three or four times longer.
4. Passengers then take the long escalators, or wait for a lift, down into the particularly deep underground station.
5. Finally they make their way to the metro platform to make their connection.

Clearly any passengers with mobility issues, disability, elderly, travelling with young children, or those on the way to the airport with suitcases, will find this a difficult interchange and it will not provide seamless or attractive access to MetroLink.

However, the NTA view this as “the optimal location for interchange with the Green Line”.

For a project the size and cost of MetroLink, as well as the many years of planning that have gone into it, and the fact that the vitally important South Terminus of MetroLink will be in place for many decades to come, it is unacceptable to present this as a viable, let alone “optimal” solution.

7. How does the NTA itself expect Southside Passengers to Access MetroLink?

Hopefully the levels of walking and cycling will increase in the city but in terms of MetroLink these modes will only be relevant within a relatively close proximity to a station. The NTA outlined four ways in which it envisioned how passengers would access MetroLink from the southside of Dublin in response to a question asked during the online presentation of the Strategy in December 2021.

A) For passengers living in South Dublin with access to the Dart or Luas Green Line:

- Dart to Tara Street

This interchange appears to be a workable solution.

- Luas Green Line interchange at Charlemont

As demonstrated above, the interchange at Charlemont is a very poor quality solution and it is likely that a high percentage of passengers, even those living close to the Green Line, will not use the Luas to access MetroLink because it is too unwieldy. Instead, passengers will try to access the metro by road and since there is no quality bus connections to the Charlemont site (see below) they will be forced to try to use their cars to go to Charlemont or will abandon MetroLink as a transport option.

Furthermore, the NTA recognise that the current designs at St Stephen’s Green and O’Connell Street “are not conducive to connect to MetroLink at these points”. It is unacceptable that the NTA has not improved the designs of these two stations to dramatically improve their connectivity with all modes of transport.

B) For passengers living in South Dublin without access to the Dart or Luas lines:

- Bus into city centre to connect at Tara Street or O’Connell Street

It is not credible for the NTA to suggest that passengers would be willing to travel into the city centre by bus to then get the Metro out of the city to the airport or to their place of work.

- The remaining option is to try to access Charlemont by Road (via only 1 of 4 sides)

Buses do not service the canal, so passengers would have to walk from Leeson Street or Ranelagh Road. Cars and Taxis would have to converge on the small Drop-Off Zone on Dartmouth Road and even a small increase in road traffic volume will cause very significant congestion issues in an area that is totally unsuitable for road access. The NTA itself does not envision that passengers will access Charlemont by road but instead are relying on the assumption that the Luas interchange will be fit for purpose.

8. The majority of people living on the southside are likely to abandon MetroLink as a viable transport option and will continue to use their current unsustainable modes of transport.

MetroLink will only be a success if it results in a “modal shift” to increased public transport and a “reduction in trips by car”. The scale of the climate challenge is such that Ireland’s emissions must reduce by 51% by 2030 and reach zero net-emissions by 2050.

People living on both the north and south of Dublin, as well as national passengers and tourists travelling to the airport must use MetroLink in high percentages in order to achieve these very onerous targets.

For the reasons outlined above, the majority of people living on the southside will simply not view MetroLink as a viable transport alternative and the required “modal shift” will not happen.

By focussing on a default, legacy terminus location at Charlemont, the NTA has made the success of the South Terminal overly dependent on a single mode of transport – i.e. the Luas Green line.

The NTA’s fragile assertion that “the south city terminus at Charlemont offers the optimal location for interchange with the Green Line” is putting in jeopardy not only the success of the South Terminus but the MetroLink project as a whole.

9. The proposed South Terminus at Charlemont is Not an Effective Solution

- It is inaccessible for the vast majority of southside (for a very big price)
- It lacks integrated connectivity with multiple modes of transport
- There is very poor Luas accessibility especially for people with any disability or mobility needs
- The site is effectively a cul-de-sac in a residential suburb that cannot accommodate road traffic of any significant volume
- It will be largely ignored as a viable transport option for half the city
- It is a sub-optimum location for future southern route extensions as it limits the scope of future routes
- It will vastly underdeliver on a “modal shift” to increased public transport and a “reduction in trips by car” and will not alleviate any pressure off the M50
- It will fail to deliver on the key objectives in Ireland’s Climate Action Plan

10. Are there Better Solutions?

For Metrolink to be successful the South Terminus must deliver on a few key criteria:

- At least one Seamless and High Quality Connection Point with the Luas Green line
- Interconnect with multiple modes of transport – including to zero emissions road vehicles
- Provide for Greater Future Connection Options with the South of the City - especially to the South West
- Have a positive impact in taking Road Traffic Away from the M50 and onto Effective Modes of Public Transport

There are several options that are worthy of further exploration, for example:

St Stephen's Green Option

1. Put City Centre Terminus at St Stephens Green
2. With a showcase below ground connection between Luas and MetroLink
 - Via a c.550m pedestrian connection
3. Better connections with road transport and keeps more options open for future Metro South routes (and save money!)
4. This solution has wide support across Community Groups on the south side and doesn't stop MetroLink on the north



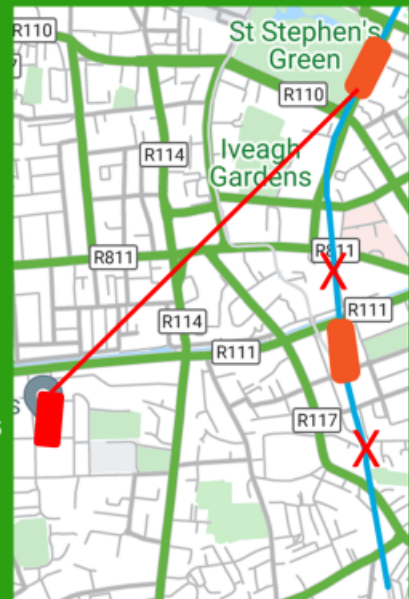
O'Connell Street Option

1. A showcase underground connection between Luas and MetroLink at O'Connell Street
 - Required for the Southbound direction only
2. Better connections with road transport and keeps more options open for future Metro South routes & again has wide community support



Cathal Brugha Barracks Option

1. Put the South Terminus at Cathal Brugha Barracks, combined with an underground connection between Luas and MetroLink at St Stephen's Green and/or O'Connell Street
2. Cathal Brugha Barracks has greater future development potential and the TBM can be removed thereby saving money
3. Better connections with road transport and keeps more options open for future Metro South routes & again has wide community support



11. Conclusion - Charlemont is Simply the Wrong Place for a Major Metro Terminus

The MetroLink project should progress now by urgently determining a more effective South Terminus location.

12. Signed

This submission represents the views of a wide community group of 160 family homes with over 1000 residents from Charlemont, Dartmouth, Northbook, Lesson and Ranelagh North. The signatory leads are signing this submission on behalf of this community group.

Signed:

Ciaran Black, Leon McCarthy, Grattan Boylan, Caitriona Shaffrey, Mark Colgan, Diarmuid Burke, Edward Kelly, Loraine Mulligan.