

2012-10-28

## Green Light for €370m Plan to Complete "Missing Link" between Luas Lines

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### Recommended Citation

McDonald, Frank, "Green Light for €370m Plan to Complete "Missing Link" between Luas Lines" (2012).  
*Media*. 26.

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# Green light for €370m plan to complete 'missing link' between Luas lines

FRANK McDONALD

Wed, Nov 28, 2012, 00:00

Preliminary work is expected to start next May on the plan to link Dublin's two Luas lines following a Cabinet decision yesterday to approve an updated "business case" for the €370 million project. The line will continue north as far as Broombridge

Minister for Transport Leo Varadkar will now ask the National Transport Authority (NTA) and the Railway Procurement Agency (RPA) to "proceed with procurement and contractual arrangements" to allow the project to proceed in 2013.

"This is an important step for the Luas BXD project, which will link up the existing Luas lines and give Dublin an integrated commute rail network for the first time," Mr Varadkar said. However, it will be "late 2017" before it is completed.

"The two Luas lines should have been joined up years ago. It's a privilege for me as Minister for Transport to be able to finish the job," the Minister said. Funding for the project has been included in the Government's capital investment plan.

The updated business case, which is not being published, takes account of the conditions attached to An Bord Pleanála's Railway Order, changes in land and construction costs and revised population and employment projections in the area.

Apparently, the latest study concluded that the case for proceeding with the project was "strong". Other sectors of the regional economy likely to benefit include construction material supply, plant hire and professionals providing technical services.

The project, with its estimated price tag of €370 million, is likely to generate up to 800 jobs during the construction phase, with a further 60 permanent jobs when the line opens. It would run through the city centre and onwards to Broombridge.

## Maynooth and Dunboyne

It will integrate with suburban rail services on the Maynooth and Dunboyne lines and serve the planned DIT campus in Grangegorman.

A new bridge being built over the river Liffey will carry the southbound Luas track from Marlborough Street to Hawkins Street.

"Every effort will be made to minimise the impact of construction works on the business community, road users, pedestrians and residents in the city centre area," the Minister said. Construction of the Tallaght and Sandyford lines proved disruptive.

An initial working group comprising the RPA, the NTA and Dublin City Council has been set up to develop traffic management arrangements for the construction phase of Luas BXD, and a broader "Project Forum" is also expected to be established.

The forum, to be chaired by Mr Varadkar himself, would include representatives of traders and businesses most likely to be affected along the 5.6km route as well as An Garda Síochána, Dublin Bus, Dublin City Council, the RPA and the NTA.

RPA acting chief executive Rory O'Connor welcomed the decision.

"This is a hugely important project for Luas as it finally joins the lines and completes the missing link in the Luas network and allows us to realise the full benefits of the original investment in Luas."

Mr O'Connor took over from former RPA chief executive Frank Allen, who took early retirement last August. He said Luas would carry a record 30 million passengers this year and this number was likely to increase to 40 million on completion of Luas BXD.

## Luas link-up: In numbers

## 5.6km

Length of the new route from St Stephen's Green to Broombridge

## 40m

Expected number of Luas passengers when extension is completed. Passenger numbers are expected to reach **30**million for this year a record for the service

## 60

The number of permanent jobs once the line opens

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