

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT AND DETERMINATION

Roscommon County Council – Draft Noise Action Plan
2024-2028



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1 Introduction

1.1 Background of Plan

This Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report has been prepared by Oran Ecology on behalf of Roscommon County Council. This SEA Screening report considers the applicability of the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations S.I.435/2004 as amended by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011, S.I. No. 200 of (hereafter referred to as the 'SEA Regulations'). The focus of this report is to provide justification for whether SEA is needed.

The requirement to prepare a Noise Action Plan (NAP) is set for members of the European Union under the Environmental Noise Directive (END) (2002/49/EC), a legal instrument for addressing adverse effects of environmental noise which have been transposed into Irish law and require preparation of strategic noise mapping and implementation of NAPs. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the national competent authority responsible for implementing the END and will ultimately report noise mapping and action planning to the European Commission. Under the Regulations, the APA are responsible for preparing a NAP for Roscommon (Relating to Major Roads within County Roscommon Carrying more than 3,000,000 Vehicle Passages per year).

The purpose of the NAP is to provide a strategic overview of the management of noise issues and effects within county Roscommon. The NAP aims to develop clear priorities based on detailed noise mapping results, with a view to prevent environmental noise where necessary; particularly where exposure to noise levels can induce harmful effects on human health. The NAP also identifies areas to preserve environmental acoustic quality where the baseline is good.

The END requires routine updates to noise mapping and action planning every four years. The NAP to which this SEA Screening report refers to is for the period 2024 – 2028 and is the third NAP for county Roscommon. Further details are set out within Section 3 of this report.

SEA Screening is defined in the relevant guidance documents (DoECLG, 2009) as “the process for deciding whether a particular plan, other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects, and would thus warrant SEA.” SEA is a formal process used to evaluate the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before a decision is made to adopt the plan or programme. This SEA Screening Report considers the applicability of the SEA Regulations and the NAP ('pre-screening') as a 'plan or programme' and presents details of the SEA screening process and to determine whether further assessment is required in respect of the NAP.

An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report has been prepared concurrently with this SEA Screening Report. This considers European Directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (the 'Habitats directive' and the 'Birds directive', respectively), which are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 (S. I. No. 477 of 2011)), the 'Habitat Regulations'.

2 Strategic Environmental Assessment Legal Context and Approach

2.1 The SEA Regulatory Context

SEA is a systematic, on-going process for evaluation, at the earliest possible stage, of the environmental quality and consequences of implementing certain plans and programmes on the environment.

European Union (EU) Directive 2001/42/EC7 (the 'SEA Directive') requires EU Member States to ensure that certain plans and programmes are subject to a requirement for SEA. In the context of transport sectoral plans the 'SEA Directive is transposed into Irish law through the following regulations:

- S.I. No. 435 of 2004 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011)
- S.I. No. 436 of 2004 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011).

Pre-screening checks have followed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland (2001-DS-EEP-2/5)' – Synthesis Report.

The following guidance documents were reviewed in the preparation of this report;

- Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland (EPA, 2013)
- Implementation of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC): Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment- Guidelines for Regional Authorities and Planning Authorities (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2004)
- Implementation of Directive 2001/42 on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment (European Commission, ND)
- SEA Resource Manual for Local and Regional Planning Authorities (EPA, 2015)
- Integrating Climatic Factors into Strategic Environmental Assessment in Ireland - A Guidance Note (EPA, 2019)
- Synthesis Report on Developing A Strategic Environmental Assessment (Sea) Methodologies For Plans And Programmes In Ireland (EPA, 2003)

2.2 Existing Requirements Already in Force

Existing requirements already in force that are taken into account by the screening exercise when considering cumulative effects and the degree of additionality that is provided for by the Noise Action Plan are identified in this section.

There are various measures already in force that provide for noise management. The Plan will further contribute towards these provisions. At a national and regional level these include:

- National Planning Framework (NPF) 2040;

- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) 2020-2032
- Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028
- The Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992;
- The Roads Act 1993;
- Building Regulations;
- Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments, 2007;
- Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas: Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2009;
- Urban Design Manual: A best practice guide;
- Guidelines for the Treatment of Noise and Vibration in National Road Schemes (National Roads Authority, now Transport Infrastructure Ireland), which set out limits and mitigation measures for noise related to both the construction and traffic flow on new road schemes;
- IPPC/ Waste Licensing and associated Guidance Note for Noise: Licence Applications, NG4
- Surveys and Assessments in relation to Scheduled Activities, containing suggested noise limits;
- Wind Energy Planning Guidelines;
- Quarry and Ancillary Activities;

2.3 SEA Screening

2.3.1 Overview

The procedure of undertaking SEA screening is based upon the evaluation of specific criteria in Annex II of the SEA Directive (Schedule 1) and was carried out having due regard to the legislation and guidance outlined in Section 2.1.

According to the EPA Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening the screening process covers three different stages as below:

- Applicability;
- Screening;
- Determination.

The core guidance declares that the overall characteristics of the plan should be checked to determine if the plan falls within the overarching requirements of the SEA Directive. This is therefore the first stage of 'Applicability' screening.

Should the first check determine that the plan falls within the requirements of the SEA Directive, further consideration should be made to any potential environmental significance resulting from implementing the plan itself. At this stage, the significance criteria outlined in Annex II (2) of the SEA Directive (Stage 2 'Screening') should be followed.

2.3.2 Stage 1 'Applicability' Methodology

The applicability stage of SEA screening consists of a 4-step process as outlined in the EPA Good Practice Guide on Screening (2021). Table 2.1 sets out these stages as below:

Table 2.1 Applicability Steps - Stage 1

| Applicability Step | Step Guidance |
|--------------------|--|
| Step 1 | Establish and identify the status of the plan to be assessed, or the competent authority compiling the programme. Is the plan (ie. The NAP) prepared and/or adopted by an authority at national, regional, or local level? |

| | |
|--------|---|
| | Is the plan prepared by a relevant authority for associated adoption through a parliamentary or governmental legislative procedure? |
| Step 2 | Establish the description of the plan or programme. Is the NAP required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions? |
| Step 3 | Determine if the NAP is not exempt from SEA screening. Is the sole purpose of the NAP for national defense, civil emergency, or finance/budget? |
| Step 4 | Does the NAP require mandatory SEA? Is the NAP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecoms, tourism, town and country planning or land use, and does the NAP set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in the Annexes of the EIA Directive? Or Will the NAP require assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the EU Habitats Directive? |

Following this stage of SEA screening, there are three possible outcomes regarding whether the SEA Directive applies in this case:

- The SEA Directive does not apply to the NAP – this means that the NAP is not of a type which falls within the remit of the regulations themselves, and therefore there is no requirement to notify environmental authorities.
- The SEA Directive does apply to the NAP – this means that the NAP is of a type that falls within the remit of the regulations and therefore triggers mandatory SEA. This then triggers the process of proceeding to SEA scoping and relevant consultation with designated authorities.

The SEA Directive may apply to the NAP – in this scenario, the NAP may be within the remit of the SEA Directive because there is some uncertainty with the provisions considered at Stage 1 screening, therefore a case-by-case determination is required. At this point, the screening would proceed to Stage 2.

2.3.3 Stage 2 ‘Screening’ (If Applicable)

If there is potential that the NAP may give rise to significant effects or there is uncertainty on key characteristics, Stage 2 Screening helps to determine if SEA is required for the NAP. While it is not a mandatory requirement, the production of a screening report has become good practice as part of the overarching process. Stage 2 is a four-step process as per the EPA’s Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening Reports. Table 2.2 below summarises the next steps.

Table 2.2 Applicability Steps - Stage 2

| Applicability Step | Step Guidance |
|--------------------|---|
| Step 1 | Describe the features of the NAP and the environment in which it would be received, outlining any environmental challenges. |
| Step 2 | Identify the potential for significant environmental effects. |
| Step 3 | Statutory consultation with designated environmental authorities (a minimum of 4 weeks). |
| Step 4 | Draft determination. |

Part of this screening stage includes a screening of environmental significance, to assess whether the plan is likely to result in significant effects and therefore taken forward for SEA. The criteria for undertaking this are embedded into Annex II of the SEA Directive and is transposed into Irish legislation as Schedule 1 of the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 as amended.

The criteria that will be used as part of Section 5 of this report, is outlined in section 7 Stage 2 SEA Screening. The aforementioned EPA's Good Practice Guidance on SEA and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities (2022) have been used to guide this assessment. At this stage it is required to consult with the relevant environmental authorities for a minimum of 4 weeks (Step 3), after which a draft determination can be prepared (Step 4) and finalised as Stage 3 following the input from consultation.

2.3.4 'Determination' - Stage 3

Following the consultation with the relevant authorities, after the competent authority has made their the final decision as to whether SEA applies to the NAP, a summary of the screening should be available for public inspection both digitally and as a hard copy. A copy of the final determination should also be made available to relevant SEA authorities who were also consulted during screening.

2.4 Appropriate Assessment

It should be noted that concurrently an Appropriate Assessment Screening has been undertaken and a report documenting this prepared. The AA Screening considers European Directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (the 'Habitats directive' and the 'Birds directive', respectively), which are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 (S. I. No. 477 of 2011)), the 'Habitat Regulations'. The overarching goal of the Habitats and Birds Directives are to uphold or restore the 'favourable conservation status' of habitats and species recognised as of European Community Interest.

These specific habitats and species are outlined in the Habitats and Birds Directives, with the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) aimed at safeguarding the most vulnerable among them. Together, these designations are commonly referred to as European Sites, also known as Natura 2000 sites. Should AA Screening determine that the likely impacts upon a Natura 2000 site of a plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant, then this will also trigger the requirement of SEA for the plan.

3 Roscommon County Council – Draft Noise Action Plan 2024-2028

3.1 Background and Overview

Roscommon County Council is the Action Planning Authority for this Noise Action Plan. In County Roscommon, the noise source to be considered in this Noise Action Plan, as required under the Regulations relates to major roads carrying in excess of 3 million vehicles per year.

This is the third NAP for Co. Roscommon which reports the findings of the strategic noise mapping prepared in consultation with

Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), Irish Rail and the EPA, in respect of the calendar year 2021 for noise from the following sources:

- Road traffic;
- Rail traffic; and
- Industrial activity sites.

As required by the END, the NAP seeks to provide a framework for long-term management of environmental noise from transport systems, referring to the results of the strategic noise maps to inform assessments of population exposure and harmful effects of noise.

As part of this management, areas are identified for noise management activities during the implementation of the NAP, and the recommended protection of quiet areas within Co. Roscommon is also set out within the NAP. The temporal framework for the NAP is 4 years, at which time the noise mapping will be reviewed as well as the NAP.

This Noise Action Plan has been prepared by Roscommon County Council for major roads carrying more than three million vehicles per annum, which in County Roscommon comprises the M6 Motorway/N6 Dual Carriageway, 15km of the N61 between the M6 and Lecarrow and 0.3km of road N4 within the urban area of Cortober near Carrick-on-Shannon. For the purpose of the SEA, relevant sections of the NAP include the overarching long-term strategy which incorporates the Noise Policy Statement, as set out in Section 3.2 of this document. By way of a summary the management of noise within Co. Roscommon focusses on Prevention, Protection and Mitigation Measures as set out within the Noise Policy Statement.

3.2 Noise Policy Statement

The Noise Policy Statement for Co. Roscommon is detailed as follows:

“Roscommon County Council’s Noise Action Plan is aimed at strategic long term management of environmental noise from traffic on major routes within the County, particularly where the noise exposure levels have the potential to induce harmful effects on human health.

This will require reduction of existing environmental traffic noise where practical and also protection of the future noise climate in areas not currently impacted by traffic noise.”

Example mitigation measures as set out in the NAP include the identification and implementation of priority areas and at noise sensitive buildings. Noise mitigation measures within these areas should be evaluated of their effectiveness through the following steps set out in the NAP:

- Identification of practical noise mitigation options
- Appraisal of noise mitigation options monetised benefits to health

- Financial assessment of noise mitigation options
- Cost-benefit analysis
- Recommendation of noise mitigation measure(s).

Once the extent of the existing noise exposure levels have been confirmed for a PIA, potential noise mitigations measures will be investigated and a cost benefit analysis undertaken for each, with the aim of developing a selection matrix which leads towards a recommendation for action.

Noise mitigation measures can be implemented on or directly alongside the sources, in this case the road (source control), others may be in the region between the roads and the dwellings (pathway control) and others may be at the noise sensitive locations (receiver control). All PIAs are located along a 1.2km stretch along the N6/M6 outside Athlone at Junction 13 and also parts of the R362 and R446 leading South from J13.

Protection measures as set out in the NAP includes the identification of candidate quiet areas to which protection measures should be put in place to manage activities in these areas which would impact the acoustic environment.

3.3 Roscommon County Development Plan

The Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028, makes reference to noise in Sections 6.5 for the Extractive Industry, Section 7.11 Waste Management, Section 12.11 on Backyard Development and Section 12.15 on Commercial Development relating to Fast Food & Take Away Outlets. In addition, Section 12.5 on Overarching Planning Principles provides details on assessments required for planning purposes and states:

Proposals for development will be assessed in terms of potential impact on existing adjacent developments, existing land uses and/or the surrounding landscape. Where proposed developments would be likely to have a significant adverse effect on the amenities of the area through pollution by noise, fumes, odours, dust, grit or vibration, or cause pollution of air, water and/or soil, mitigation measures should be included in order to eliminate adverse environmental impacts or reduce them to an acceptable operating level.

Using the provisions of the development management process, the planning authority will aim to take account of and mitigate noise and/or vibration at site boundaries or adjacent to noise sensitive locations, in particular residential properties with reference to layout, design and/or noise attenuation measures. Consideration also needs to be given to avoid adverse impacts when introducing noise sensitive uses in proximity to existing and future national roads. Where warranted proposals should include mitigation and should have regard to Section 3.7 of the DoECLG Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines.

with neighbouring counties including Athlone/Monksland, Carrick an Shannon/Cortober, Ballyleague/Lanesborough and Ballinasloe/Creagh.

The environmental context of County Roscommon has been identified in order to understand the environmental issues, trends, and characteristics. Setting this environmental context can inform, if the NAP were considered a plan or programme in accordance with the SEA Regulations, what potential significant environmental effects could arise. The environmental context is set out with reference to the environmental issues indicated within the SEA Regulations (biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape). The information presented is proportionate to the strategic nature of the environmental assessment required and the scale of the NAP itself.

4.2 Environmental Baseline

4.2.1 Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

County Roscommon baseline for biodiversity can be quantified in terms of the number of designated sites and an indication of the habitats and species across the County. As per the Appropriate Assessment Screening Report that was prepared in conjunction with this report, there are twenty-nine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and eight Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Areas designated as Natura 2000 sites, are an EU-wide network of protected areas covering vulnerable species and habitats, designated under the Birds and Habitats directives. Further details on each protected site and why they are designated, can be found within the accompanying Appropriate Assessment Screening of the NAP. There is one Ramsar site, Lough Gara, within the County, which is a wetland of international importance designated under the Ramsar convention and are also often designated as SPA and SAC sites. In terms of the identified habitats and species across County Roscommon, peatlands, wetlands, grasslands, woodland, lakes and waterways are present within the County. In terms of faunal species in the County, there are a number of species records present, including amphibians, frog and smooth newt, mammals such as otter, badger and Irish hare and birds such as curlew, lapwing, whooper swan and kestrel. Article 6 of the Habitats Directive obligates Ireland to maintain and/or restore natural habitats and species of wild fauna and flora. The National Biodiversity Action Plan aims to meet urgent conservation, and restoration needs for habitats and species in Ireland.

4.2.2 Population and Human Health

The focus of the County Roscommon baseline for population and human health is about the number of people affected by noise. County Roscommon has a population of 70,259 (2022). It is a predominantly rural county with approximately 54% of its population living in urban areas. There are four major towns with a population over 1000 people in the county: Roscommon (6,555) Boyle (2,915) Castlerea (2,348) and Ballaghaderreen (2,387) and the county shares agglomeration of urban areas with neighbouring counties including Athlone/Monksland, Carrick-on-Shannon/Cortober, Ballyleague/Lanesborough and Ballinasloe/Creagh.

The assignment of population to the calculated noise levels is set out within Annex II of the END (CNOSSOS-EU), where harmful effects due to noise are statistically assessed at geographically specific locations. The EPA Guidance sets out the process for using the calculated number of people Highly Annoyed to generate a gridded “heatmap” of values which represent (approximately) the number of people 100m². Using the heatmap, the areas of higher concentrations of people highly annoyed (HA) are identified and delineated as a digital polygon. The EPA Guidance sets a density criterion of 15 or more people per 100m² as being the most appropriate for Most Important Areas in main urban areas, with lower criteria of 10 and 7.5 people per 100m² appropriate on the edge of urban or in rural

areas. A summary of the Most Important Areas identified along the major routes using the EPA Guidance density criteria (Highly Annoyed Threshold) of 7.5, 10 and 15 or more people per 100m² is provided in the NAP.

4.2.3 Water and Soils

The County Roscommon baseline for water and soils can generally be quantified in terms of soil status, underlying geology, and Water Framework Directive (WFD) status.

County Roscommon, in terms of its underlying geology, is a mixture of bedrock comprising of Silurian Metasediments and Volcanics, Ordovician Metasediments, Granites & other Igneous Intrusive rocks, Dinantian Mixed Sandstones, Shales and Limestones, Dinantian Sandstones, according to GSI bedrock data.

The underlying soils in the county are comprised of, poorly drained Acidic soils, and deep well drained mineral soils, as well as areas of acid shallow, lithosolic or Regosols type soils potentially with peaty topsoil, and acid deep poorly drained mineral soils.

The WFD helps to quantify water quality status, bathing water quality, protected areas, and groundwater vulnerability across Ireland. Within the county, there are a number of WFD waterbodies classified as having poor ecological status.

There are several WFD protected areas within the county, and there is also differentiated areas in terms of groundwater vulnerability, with low vulnerability in central areas and areas of moderate, high, and extreme vulnerability in other areas of Co. Roscommon.

4.2.4 Air Quality

The County Roscommon baseline for air quality can be quantified in terms of emissions levels of PM_{2.5} and NO₂. In terms of both, EU legal air quality limits were met in 2022 Ireland is moving towards measuring their performance regarding these emissions to a more stringent air quality guideline set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) rather than the EU. Latest modelled maps for PM_{2.5} show European Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (EMEP) annual averages across the county range from <2.0 in areas outside of the towns, to between 8.0-9.0 in the urban centres. Burning solid fuels in homes remains a key issue to reduce PM_{2.5} emissions across the County and indeed Ireland.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in partnership with Local Authorities, have implemented the Ambient Air Monitoring Programme which comprises of a network of 96 monitoring stations strategically positioned across the country measuring 'real-time' concentrations of atmospheric pollutants. At present, two Air Monitoring Stations (AMS) are operational in Co. Roscommon, located in Killkitt, Ballybay & Roscommon town.

4.2.5 Climatic Factors

Emissions data is not defined for County Roscommon and so national emissions are considered. In 2022, emissions across Ireland were estimated to be 60.76Mt CO₂ eq. This figure is 1.9% lower than the previous yearly data and is contextualised by the EU target to reduce emissions outside of the EU ETS scheme by 30% by 2030.

4.2.6 Material Assets

The Water Services Section of Roscommon County Council will co-operate with Uisce Éireann to provide and maintain an adequate public water supply and waste water infrastructure network to serve the County over the lifetime of this Development Plan and beyond. Future capital investment in infrastructure will be achieved through the Capital Investment Plan. The provision and maintenance

of quality waste water treatment infrastructure is critical in the interest of sustainable development and to protect public health. Irish Water is responsible for the treatment and disposal of waste-water in towns and villages. Irish Water's operations will be regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency who set environmental standards which must be complied with in respect of the provision of wastewater infrastructure.

There has been a significant reduction in the number of multi-unit residential schemes completed over the previous plan period. During the lifetime of the previous County Development Plan most houses were built in rural locations on unserviced land and, in more recent times, by social housing bodies. The 2022 Census recorded that a total 32,129 housing units exist in County Roscommon, of which 4,279 were vacant.

Less than 54% of the population live in an urban community which is considerably lower than the national figure of 62%.

4.2.7 Cultural Heritage

The Co. Roscommon cultural heritage baseline indicated that there are many heritage areas, sites, and monuments across the county. For example, there are hundreds of specific sites and monuments of cultural interest, including Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) and National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) records. Generally, sites are mainly concentrated in urban areas.

As part of the Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028, there is a requirement to compile and maintain a Record of Protected Structures (RPS) under the Planning Act 2000 (as amended). RPS includes over 2000 structures which are of special architectural interest across the County. Across Ireland, key environmental issues such as land use change, climate change and biodiversity loss may have a long-term impact upon the cultural heritage baseline in the county. Heritage Ireland 2030 sets out a framework to focus on protecting and managing Ireland's heritage assets.

4.2.8 Landscape

The name "Roscommon" is derived from the Irish "Ros Comáin," which means "St. Coman's wood." This name originates from Coman mac Faelchon, who established a monastery in the area during the 5th century. The woods surrounding the monastery became known as Ros Comáin, which was later anglicized to Roscommon.

County Roscommon, located in the province of Connacht in Ireland, boasts a diverse and picturesque landscape. The county is characterized by a mix of limestone surfaces, peat bogs, and water meadows.

County Roscommon is rich in water bodies, featuring several notable rivers and lakes including the River Shannon: River Suck: River Boyle, Lough Key, Lough Ree, Lough Gara, Lough Funshinagh, and Lough Allen.

It is considered that the quality of those landscapes continue to merit special attention over the period of the Roscommon County Development Plan 2022- 2028 and beyond. Some of the most highly valued landscapes include:

- Lough Key Forest Park and surrounding area, including Boyle and the Curlew Mountains; Rathcroghan archaeological complex;
- The River Shannon and River Suck corridors, which flow in a north-south direction on the eastern and western side of the county respectively;
- Roscommon town and surrounding areas, including Skrine Hill to the south, due to its unusual geology;

- Castlerea bogland area, which retains a unique sense of isolation and tranquillity.

This has been highlighted in the past by the public as a quality that needed protection as a distinctive feature of the landscape in Roscommon. The esker belts, which are sensitive to some activities, in particular quarrying.

5 SEA Screening Assessment

Table 5.1 SEA Applicability

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| Is the P/P prepared and/or adopted by an authority at national, regional, or local level or prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? |
| Yes. The NAP is prepared by Roscommon County Council and then will be adopted at a national level by the Environmental Protection Agency |
| Is the P/P required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions? |
| Yes. The NAP is required by The Environmental Noise Directive ("END") (2002/49/EC). A European Union legal instrument vital for protecting public health and the environment by addressing the adverse effects of environmental noise. The END was transposed into Irish Law by the Environmental Noise Regulations 2006 (S.I. 140/2006) (the "Regulations"). The Regulations were revised by the European Communities (Environmental Noise) Regulations 2018 (S.I. 549/2018) and amended through the European Communities (Environmental Noise) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (S.I. 663/2021). |
| Is the P/P prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use? |
| Yes. the NAP is being prepared for the transportation sector. Noise issues and interventions may have relevance for other sectors but is being prepared in the context of planning and land use. |
| Does the P/P provide a framework for the development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive? |
| According to the European Commission 'Guidance on the implementation of Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment,' this would "normally mean that the plan or programme contains criteria or conditions which guide the way the consenting authority decides an application for development consent. Such criteria could place limits on the type of activity or development which is to be permitted in a given area; or they could contain conditions which must be met by the applicant if permission is to be granted; or they could be designed to preserve certain characteristics of the area concerned (such as the mixture of land uses which promotes the economic vitality of the area)." The NAP does potentially set a locational framework for interventions within identified quiet areas and important areas regarding noise, but due to its high level of intervention recommendations, it does not therefore provide a framework for development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive. |
| Is the P/P likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site which leads to a requirement for Article 6 or 7 assessments? |
| No. The NAP is a strategic-level document which is designed to provide direction for action through the designation of strategic priority areas to preserve low noise levels and reduce areas where noise disturbance is high. The NAP does however locate where potential interventions (including mitigation and prevention measures) could take place, which may correlate with Natura 2000 sites. However, as outlined in the Appropriate Assessment Screening Report, the NAPs elements are not identified as having any direct or indirect impact on Natura 2000 sites. Therefore, there are no predicted significant effects upon the identified Natura 2000 sites and no requirement for Article 6 or 7 assessments. |
| Is the sole purpose of the P/P to serve national defence or civil emergency or is it a financial/budget P/P or is it co- financed by the current SF/RDF programme? |
| No. The NAP's sole purpose is not to serve national defence or civil emergency nor is it a financial/budget P/P nor is it cofinanced by the current SF/RDF programme. |

5.1 Outcome of Applicability Stage

The pre-screening checks as set out in Section 5.1, indicate that the NAP is not a plan or programme to which the SEA applies and it is concluded that an SEA is not required, for completeness the plan was assessed further in relation to criteria 9(3) which states 'A competent authority shall determine whether plans and programmes (..) are likely to have significant effects on the environment'. This is established by criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA regulations. A table detailing the environmental significance is presented within the following.

5.2 Stage 2 – SEA 'Screening

As the County Roscommon NAP is not within any of the categories established within the Stage 1 criteria, it is concluded that an SEA is not required. However, the NAP has been assessed further in relation to criteria 9(3) which states 'A competent authority shall determine whether plans and programmes (..) are likely to have significant effects on the environment'. This is established by criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA regulations. Tables 5.2 and 5.3 below set out the SEA criteria in for determining the likely significance of effects referred in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive.

Table 5.2 The Characteristics of Plans and Programmes

| Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive | County Roscommon NAP (Relating to Major Roads Within County Roscommon Carrying More Than 3,000,000 Vehicle Passages Per Year) |
|---|--|
| 1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to | |
| The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size, and operating conditions or by allocating resources. | <p>The primary objective of the NAP is to manage noise issues from major roads, avoiding, preventing or reducing on a prioritised basis the harmful effects of environmental noise based on a communal approach within the European Community.</p> <p>The NAP does set out principles and locational allocation of Priority Important Areas and Candidate Quiet Areas, along with mitigation which could constitute a plan or programme depending on their scale, nature, and details of the mitigation.</p> <p>The locational provision of quiet areas is an effort to maintain an environmental status quo, rather than allocating resources or ringfencing specific projects or activities outside of these areas. Similarly, where mitigation is set out in the NAP for Priority Important Areas these are suggested approaches and not site specific, they do not set out operating conditions or allocate resources. Therefore, the degree to which the NAP drives specific change is limited and therefore not significant.</p> |

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| | <p>As there is no provision in legislation upon which the actions outlined in the NAP can be enforced, reliance will be made on various other plans and policies such as the Roscommon Development Plan 2022-2028 and other Development Plans within the County, the National Planning Framework 2040, and the Planning Acts, for their implementation. Therefore, the degree to which the NAP drives other activities, is not significant.</p> |
| <p>The degree to which the plan influences other plans including those in a hierarchy.</p> | <p>The degree to which the NAP influences other plans and programmes is deemed to be minimal. It can be argued that the NAP sits within a horizontal hierarchy. The NAP refers to and relied upon other plans and programmes existing and proposed within the County itself. The NAP does not require new plans or policies to be created to help implement its key aims. Therefore, there are no new environmental effects as they already have been considered in the assessment of other plans and policies themselves.</p> |
| <p>The relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations, in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.</p> | <p>The County Roscommon NAP promotes environmental considerations and sustainable development, through the identification of noise-related issues in the County. However, the NAP does not go as far as recommending specific actions to deliver sustainable development within the County. The provision of noise important areas should make decision-makers aware of noise issues and should supplement other initiatives indirectly. Therefore, the NAP does not go against the principles of sustainable development, but it also does not have a direct influence over its integration. Therefore, the relevance of the NAP against this metric is deemed to be not significant.</p> |
| <p>Environmental problems relevant to the plan</p> | <p>The NAP directly addresses environmental noise within Roscommon sets out clear priorities based on detailed noise mapping results, with a view to prevent environmental noise where necessary; particularly where exposure to noise levels can induce harmful effects on human health.</p> <p>Overall, the NAP seeks to manage the risk of additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where they would have an adverse effect to health.</p> |

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| | In SEA terms it is not deemed that, when considered against other environmental conditions and problems, the County Roscommon NAP (as set out within Section 4) would give rise to significant environmental effects on account of the high level and strategic nature of the mitigation set out in the NAP. This is also on account of the reliance upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA. |
| The relevance of the plan for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste-management or water protection) | <p>The requirement to prepare a NAP is set for members of the European Union under the Environmental Noise Directive (END) (2002/49/EC), a legal instrument for addressing adverse effects of environmental noise which have been transposed into Irish law and require preparation of strategic noise mapping and implementation of NAPs.</p> <p>Therefore, the NAP must be consistent with the implementation of this EU Directive which is directly related to the protection of the environment and human health.</p> |

Table 5.3 Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected

| Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive | County Roscommon NAP (Relating to Major Roads Within County Roscommon Carrying More Than 3,000,000 Vehicle Passages Per Year) |
|---|--|
| 2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to | |
| The probability, duration, frequency, and reversibility of the effects | <p>The measures within the NAP aim to have an overall positive effect on noise levels and consequently human health and the environment in the long term. The mitigation set out is high level and strategic.</p> <p>Consequentially, details that would identify duration, frequency and reversibility of effects are not available. Furthermore, as is a reliance in the NAP placed upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA, or other environmental instruments linked to infrastructure development</p> |
| The cumulative nature of the effects. | The County Roscommon NAP is prepared alongside other national plans and programmes to act in conformity with the suite of measures that they identify. The environmental impact of those measures with |

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| | be evaluated within the plans themselves, some of which will be subject to mandatory SEA and AA. Therefore, because this NAP is not in direct conflict with the external overarching aims, the NAP itself is unlikely to have resulting significant effects and therefore cannot be cumulative in nature. |
| The transboundary nature of the effects. | On account of the scale and nature of the NAP, and the high-level strategic nature of the mitigation presented, the County Roscommon NAP will have no direct transboundary effects of its own account. |
| The risks to human health of the environment (e.g. due to accidents). | There are no expected risks to human health or the environment because of the NAP. Overall, the NAP seeks to manage the risk of additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where they would have an adverse effect to health. |
| The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected). | The County Roscommon NAP covers a large geographic area. The overall population is approximately 70,259. The population that is directly affected or considered as part of the NAP's aims (the implementation of candidate quiet areas and noise important areas) is however considered to be limited and at a small scale compared to the wider context. For example, in County Roscommon, the PIA calculation process identified 5 no. PIAs along the M6/M6, N61 and N4 routes in the County. On this basis and considering the strategic nature of the NAP mitigation, the environmental effects are not considered to be significant because they are strategic. |
| The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special natural characteristics, or cultural heritage; • Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or Intensive land use | <p>Were areas identified within the County Roscommon NAP to coincide with areas of special natural characteristics, or cultural heritage, owing to the reliance in the NAP placed upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA, or other environmental instruments linked to infrastructure development, it is unlikely a significant effect would arise. This same also applies to intensive land use.</p> <p>In respect of Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, through its noise policy statement, will aim to prevent additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where it is likely significant adverse impacts are likely</p> |

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| | to occur. It will aim to protect areas which are desirably quiet, and it will also identify appropriate mitigation measures to reduce noise levels where they are potentially harmful. A set of implementation actions underpin the statement itself. |
| The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status. | The County Roscommon NAP covers an area which includes 11 nationally and 37 EU-level protected sites regarding flora, fauna, species, and habitats. Subsequently, the factors to which ecologically designated sites such as SPA and SAC sites are protected, does not necessarily correlate with changing noise levels. Therefore, in summary, the County Roscommon NAP is not considered to have a significant effect upon recognised amenity sites within the County itself. This is consistent with the findings of the AA Screening report. |

5.3 Summary and Conclusion

In terms of setting a framework, the County Roscommon NAP does in one sense set out a locational framework for noise, but it is however limited in terms of scale and does not necessarily drive specific changes or actions at a site-specific level which would be undertaken separately. It should also be noted that the NAP will have a minimal influence on other plans and programmes within County Roscommon. The NAP is inherently a plan which promotes environmental best practice, but it does not influence the implementation of sustainable development principles.

The NAP is also relevant in the context of EU Directive implementation and must be consistent with these relevant directions. In terms of the characteristics of effects the NAP is a strategy which should not have any transboundary effects of its own accord, nor bring any expected human health or environmental risks because of its implementation. The NAP is also unlikely to be cumulative in nature because it should be implemented in compliance with other plans and programmes that have been stress tested by the SEA process. While Roscommon is geographically elongated in size, the NAP's interventions are localised. Therefore, the vulnerability and value of the area likely to be affected by the NAP is also relatively localised because areas where environmental limit values are (or are not) exceeded are small, pocketed areas within County Roscommon. The effects of the NAP upon national, EU or internationally protected sites are not significant. To conclude, this stage of the SEA screening process determines that the County Roscommon NAP does not require further SEA.

6 Statutory Consultation

Step 3 of Stage 2 of SEA Screening indicates there is a specific requirement to consult with relevant environmental authorities for a minimum of 4 weeks, regarding the outcomes of the SEA screening report. These authorities are:

- Environmental Protection Agency
- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Development Application Unit
- Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
- Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine
- Any adjoining planning authority whose area is contiguous

Following consultation, an SEA Screening Statement (Stage 3: Determination) can be prepared by the competent authority to be appended to the SEA screening report. This Screening Statement should be made publicly available upon determination.

