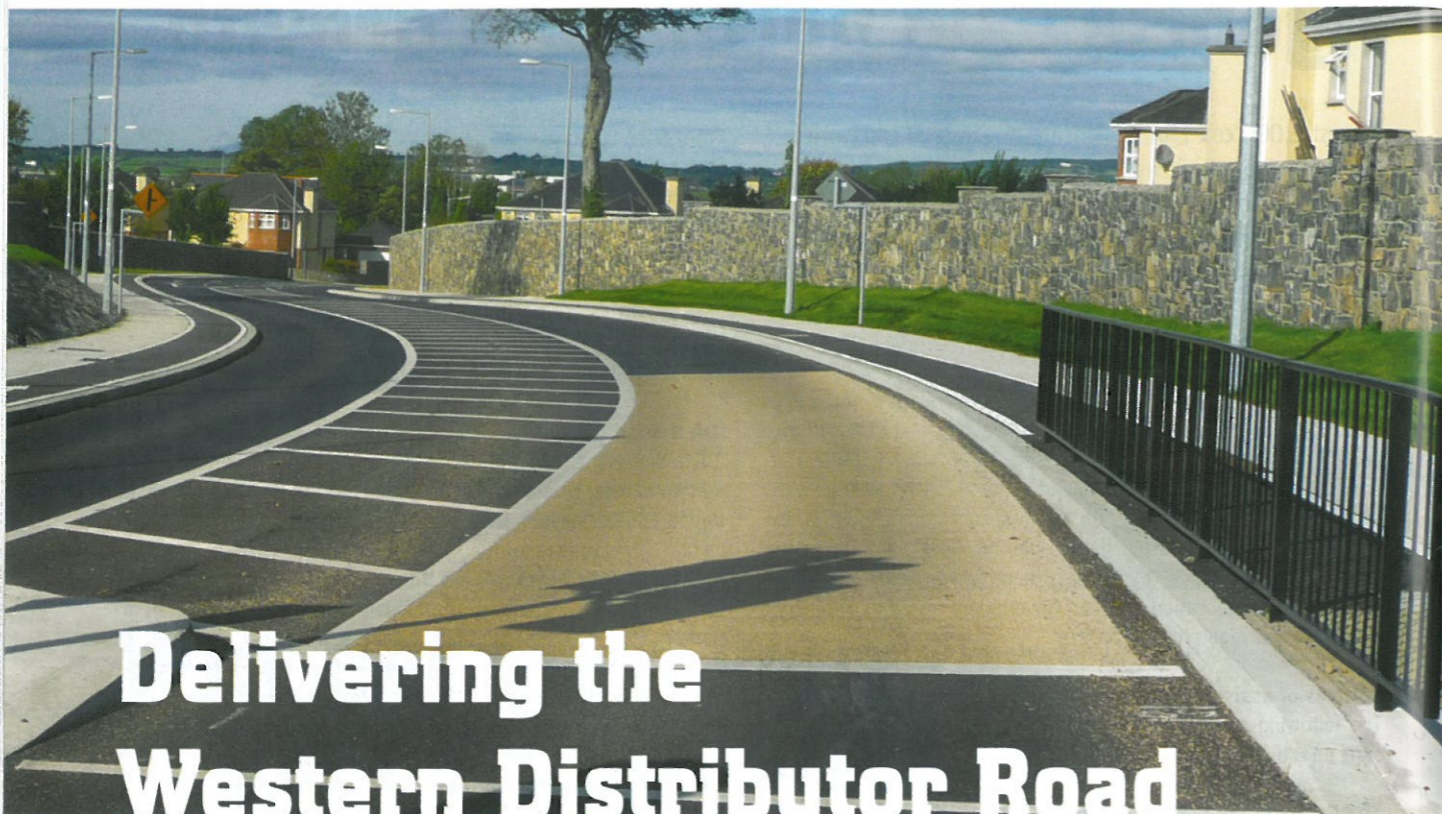


Western Distributor Road at Kevinsfort Heath.



Delivering the Western Distributor Road

One of Ireland's first projects to be completed under the new Government Public Works Contracts, this road comprises 2.5km of single carriageway, two traffic signal controlled junctions, one roundabout junction, one railway overbridge, sustainable drainage and attenuation works, and accommodation works. Ronan Clifford, senior project manager with Atkins, and Emer Concannon, senior executive engineer, with the transportation section, Sligo County Council, outline the development and construction of the project

The Western Distributor Road, a strategic non-national scheme links the N4 dual carriageway at the Caltragh Interchange to the Strandhill Road at Ballydoogan. The objective of the scheme is to open up development land, industrial, commercial and residential, on the west side of Sligo City and to improve access to the western side of the town. The planning phase of the road started in earnest in 2001, when Atkins was appointed as consultant firm for the scheme by Sligo Borough Council. The journey from a green field site and a line on a development plan to the construction of a road has taken Sligo Borough Council and Atkins through several stages of development, namely, a constraints study, preliminary design, Part VIII planning process, CPO, detailed design, procurement and construction. The scheme was divided into two phases – phase 1 construction was recently completed and the CPO process for phase 2 is underway.

Phase 1

A prequalification process was undertaken in order to vet potential contractors and ensure that a suitably experienced and competent contractor was appointed to the works. The prequalification process resulted in a total of 11 contractors being successfully shortlisted. Tender documents were issued in September of 2008 to the eligible tenderers with tenders returned in October of the same year. A

preferred tender was identified, with the contract awarded to Gerald Love Contracts in January 2009.

The Form of Contract used for Phase 1 was the new Public Works Contract for Minor Building and Civil Engineering Works Designed by the Employer, which was introduced nationally for Government-funded infrastructural schemes in 2007. The Sligo Western Distributor Road Phase 1 scheme was one of the first in the country to be let under this Form of Contract.

Ronan Clifford, Atkins project manager for the scheme, explains: "Under the new Government Public Works Contracts, the contractor is obliged to tender a fixed price lump sum whereby the price will not change over the duration of the contract unless specific instructions are issued to the contractor to undertake additional works, or to omit original works, in accordance with the relevant clauses. The new Public Works Contracts also allow a clearer allocation of risk under the contract, should unforeseen events occur on site. General risks are listed and allocated in the contract schedule to the parties best able to manage those risks in advance of tendering."

In addition, provision is made within the contract for a fixed delay contingency, which does not entitle the contractor to an extension of the completion date, unless cumulative delay events awarded to the contractor exceed this contingency period. Even then, when this delay contingency is exceeded, the contractor is not automatically



Western Distributor Road overlooked by Ben Bulbin.

entitled to monetary compensation unless this entitlement is indicated in the contract schedule.

The Sligo Western Distributor Road Phase 1 scheme construction contract commenced on site in February of 2009. The construction works comprised of a 550m section of 10m wide single carriageway with verge, cycle lanes and footpaths extending from Strandhill Road in the north to Ballydoogan Road to the south. The Works Requirements also included associated earthworks, including rock and soft material excavation, drainage, significant utilities and ducting, retaining wall and revetment construction, accommodation works, landscaping, lighting, signs, traffic signals and ancillary works. The works also included one at-grade signalised T-junction, two priority junctions, two signalised pedestrian crossings, revised entrance to a public park, diversion of existing utilities, erection of significant boundary wall with fencing and landscaping and accommodation works.

During the course of the Sligo Western Distributor Road Phase 1 scheme works, a total of 10 change orders were issued to modify, add to or remove from, the original works requirements. Some of these change orders resulted in a delay event under Clause 9, whereby the contractor was awarded additional time to complete the works, and some resulted in a compensation event under Clause 10, whereby the contractor was entitled to additional payment for works undertaken that were not originally included in the works requirements. Despite the issue of these change orders, the outturn cost was only marginally above the tendered sum, an outcome that would be in line with the original goals of developing and implementing these Contract Forms.

This outcome was primarily on account of a strong cooperative approach to the scheme between Sligo Borough Council, Atkins, Gerald Love Contracts Ltd, and the Site Supervisory Staff. This successful outcome was attributable to an open approach to problem-solving based on input from all parties, and prompt and clear instructions to issues arising during the construction phase.

A notable advantage in the new Public Works Contracts was in providing clearer mechanisms for quantifying additional entitlements where agreed. This is facilitated through the tendering of daily delay rates and personnel rates in the tender submission prior to contract award, which are incorporated into the construction contract for use in the event that delay/compensation events occur. This offers the facility to agree compensation amounts quickly, and avoid protracted claims disputes between contracted parties. The Phase 1 Sligo Western Distributor Road contract achieved substantial completion in December 2009.

Ronan Clifford Chartered Engineer, BA BAI, MSc, MIEI is a senior project manager in the roads department of Atkins. With 15 years postgraduate experience, he has been involved in several major infrastructural projects using traditional, design and build, PPP and the Public Works contracts. Emer Concannon Chartered Engineer, BE, MIEI, MBA is a senior executive engineer in the transportation section of Sligo County Council. Her experience in the public sector includes over 10 years in road design, construction and maintenance projects.