



**Waterford Business Group's Submission to;  
"River Suir Sustainable Transport Bridge"**

**Date; 14<sup>th</sup> August 2018**

**Waterford Business Group** was founded on the 28<sup>th</sup> March 2013. A business membership organisation of, circa, 150 businesses across Waterford City.

The main aims of this voluntary, membership organisation are as follows;

- Development of Waterford City Centre as the economic hub and Gateway City of the South East.
- To work as a representative body and stakeholder for all businesses in Waterford City with priority allocated to the retail, hospitality and service industries.
- The establishment of Waterford City and County as the Retail, tourism and recreational destination of choice for the 500,000 people of the South East.
- Sustainment of current job levels within Waterford City and County as a priority and the development of the county as a sought after destination for the location for National, Multi-National and Foreign Direct Investment opportunities with consequent employment opportunities, across all business sectors.
- To ensure that the business community has a say in the overall development of Waterford City and County.
- The protection and development of employment opportunities, across all business sectors, in the surrounding hinterland of Waterford City Centre.
- The effective and structured representations to and lobbying of Government, Waterford City Council Executive, TD's, Councillors, MEPs and other individuals or related legislative and executive bodies.
- The fostering of community spirit, pride of place and instilling an attitudinal change to develop Waterford as the economic driver of the South East.
- Working in partnership with Government, Waterford Council Executive, TD's, Councillors, MEPs and other individuals or related professional bodies for the betterment of Waterford as the economic hub of the South East region.
- Developing a membership remit that encompasses all business sectors relevant to economic recovery and development of Waterford and the South East.
- Other additional Objectives that the Management Committee deem appropriate to the Group.
- To assist in promoting Waterford as a choice destination through national and regional marketing and social media.

Having canvassed a number of members and committee representatives, we have collated a summary of the thoughts and views on the River Suir Sustainable Transport Bridge.

**Submission to “River Suir Sustainable Transport Bridge”, as follows;**

### **Examples of Lack of Connectivity**

We have seen numerous examples of City Centre developments, where the lack of connectivity has had a detrimental effect on our City Centre businesses. Three very recent examples are the development of the Viking Triangle, the Waterford Greenway and Winterval. All projects have been excellent in concept, design and delivery. Yet, the lack of “Natural links” to the very heart of Waterford City Centre, has added to the lack of stability and investment across the City Centre.

- **Viking Triangle;** though connectivity from the Viking Triangle has improved over time, when the project was announced and planned, there was a clear need to ensure that this new tourism hub would connect with the retail heart of the City Centre. Sadly, it has taken a number of years for the two sectors to work close enough together. There is still some way to go, before anyone can say that these are inextricably linked or connected. The routes to and from the Viking Triangle are playing catch-up. Opportunities have very clearly been lost and the retail heart of the City has not fully benefited from this iconic development. In fact, the “Lag time” linking the City’s new tourism offering, to the retail centre has caused problems and issues. The lessons learned, from the creation of access routes to and from the retail spine of the City, must be acknowledged. The new “River Suir Sustainable Transport Bridge” and the, as yet undecided, mode of transport must be an instant, immediate conduit and be that link travelling right through the very heart of the City Centre.
- **Waterford Greenway;** the success of Ireland’s newest Greenway cannot be argued. There have been circa 250,000 visitors to Waterford’s Greenway in the first 10 months of operation. Places like Dungarvan, Kilmacthomas and Durrow have flourished, with their Greenway connection. Places that have easy access and quick links to the Greenway, have seen significant financial, economic and social benefits, in a very short period of time. Yet, the Bilberry link to Waterford City Centre is very sadly lacking, on a number of fronts. There is no real, imaginative, connectivity between the start of the Greenway and the City Centre. The result is that the City Centre is a disjointed link and any economic benefit is diminished, through the lack of proper, structured connectivity. Dungarvan is thriving, with its links to Waterford’s Greenway. In fact the town is now being marketed as “The Home of the Greenway”. The Greenway comes directly into the town centre of Dungarvan and the whole town has embraced the opportunities, this new tourism driver has brought. We are seeing an uneven spread of the cost benefits from the Greenway. This is despite the majority of Commercial Rates paying businesses being situated in the City, which was a significant part of the funding model that allowed the Greenway to materialise. City Centre businesses are once again playing “Catch-up”, as a direct result of the lack of connectivity, with the promoted starting/beginning point of the Greenway. Whilst towns and villages are seeing noteworthy investment, as a result of the Greenway. The City Centre is too remote from the economic benefits and as a result there is very little investment been attributed to the Greenway development. If, in the short term, the connections between Bilberry and the City Centre are improved, developed and perhaps most importantly, are iconic, then the City Centre will also see the benefits these new “Greenway Tourists” are bringing to other parts of County Waterford.
- **Winterval’s Lack of Linking;** we saw during the initial start-up years of Winterval, that a lack of connectivity, with the retail heart of the City Centre, has caused a clear disconnect with this project. Lobbying ensured that a “Winterval Train” connected with the retail spine and now there is a better “Buy-in” to this festival. The “Winterval Train” has proven that the WHOLE City Centre must be linked, from the start, if support and backing is to be secured. Playing catch-up cannot be an option, with this development and the proposed sustainable transport links.

## The “Original” Bridge Proposal

- **Change of plan/route for the “Courtesy Bus”**; the original plans promoted the fact that a mode of sustainable transport, would link the North Quays to the South Quays, at the Clock Tower. This would be further extended through the spine of the City Centre, all the way to the Applemarket and the new Michael Street Shopping Complex. Failure to adequately link these two areas will once again create a “Leaning Tower of Investment”. There is every chance that the North Quays will become thriving quarter and the Applemarket/Michael Street will, over time, deteriorate and become neglected, if connections are not established at the planning and build stages of this project. This cannot be allowed to happen, through a lack of planning foresight.
- **Iconic Bridge**; the outlined planning process detailed an “Iconic Bridge” linking the North and South Quays. This would be the channel to tie in the new “Shinny” developments in the SDZ, with the older parts of the City Centre. The Bridge would encourage people to cross, back and forth, through the spine of the City Centre. Thus, the economic benefits would be felt collectively and not just in one area. We should learn from the past that one area of the City should NOT be development at the detriment of the other. In addition, the pressures on City Centre retail are significant and will continue to be a challenge. As consumers change their shopping habits, City Centres will have to adapt and change. These areas can become iconic destinations in their own right. Offering a multitude of experiences, which are specific to Waterford. If the Bridge is “Just a bridge!” then people will NOT cross. It will NOT be iconic and we will NOT encourage people to use it. Thus, we will see a complete lack of connectivity between the two sides of the City. If the Bridge will not encourage people movement we could very well see a North-South divide developing. As is evident across many poorly planned European City Centres.
- **Define Iconic**; bridges such as Tower Bridge, Golden Gate, Ponte Vecchio, Forth Railway Bridge, Bridge of Sighs, The Iron Bridge, London’s Millennium Bridge (the wobbly bridge) have all become iconic. They are captured in millions of images and have become part of the tourism offering. Some of these bridges are huge engineering projects and others are small in nature. What links them is the fact that they were planned to be iconic! They just did not become iconic over night. The planners and architects wanted to create a legacy that would still be iconic hundreds of years later. Waterford’s new Bridge must be designed with this in mind. The Bridge needs to future proof the City.
- **A Living Bridge**; mistakes and lessons from Rice Bridge must be learned. The lack of animation across Rice Bridge, the shop window to the City Centre, is appalling. There are no flags! This, in the very City that designed and created the Irish Tricolour, first flown in 1848, on The Mall. A flag so proudly flown around the globe and yet the City of this flag’s origin, does not celebrate this most iconic of connections. The new Bridge must be animated with flags, flowers (As part of City in Bloom), lights, bunting, banners etc. The ability to adapt and change the Bridge’s “Look” must be planned and developed prior to construction. The animation of the Bridge cannot be an afterthought. Viewing and photographic points should be built into the design. In years to come just imagine the millions of images across social media, which could be

choreographed, showing Waterford City in its best light. This must be planned and built into the Bridge designs, to allow this to happen and directly benefit the City.

- **A Sympathetic Bridge;** the Bridge needs to be people friendly. Due to the windy nature of the Suir Estuary, there needs to be sufficient weather protection of people using the Bridge. Particularly important outside of the Summer months, where weather can be unpleasant. Any pedestrian protection must, ideally, be of glass to allow 360 visibility of the cityscape.
- **Clock Tower Landing Point;** the landing point of the Bridge on the South Quay, at the Clock Tower, must also be animated. This will be a drop-off point and a starting point of your journey across the Bridge. This “Transport Hub Point” must also cater for people travelling the length of the City Centre, to reach the Applemarket and Michael Street Shopping Centre. As public realm area this landing point must be as iconic as the Bridge and in keeping with the Bridge design. The middle of your journey on the “Courtesy bus”, linking North and South of the City Centre.
- **Transport Link;** the Bridge will act as the transport spine, allowing members of the public to explore the older parts of the City Centre. Running through the spine of the City Centre all the way to the Applemarket and the Michael Street Shopping Centre. Any sustainable transport MUST link the spine of the City Centre. The link must run from the North Quay all the way to the Applemarket and the Michael Street Shopping Centre. With the repositioning of the main railway station to the North Quays. People must be able to move quickly and freely through the spine of the City Centre. Limited movement to say just the Clock Tower, the South end of the new bridge, will prevent people naturally exploring the Applemarket and Michael Street Shopping Centre. People must be able to access the likes of the Applemarket, from the point of entry, i.e. the train station, in the quickest possible time. Failure to provide an adequate link through the whole City Centre, will be disadvantageous to the development of the Michael Street Shopping Centre area.

## In Summary

The River Suir Sustainable Transport Bridge must be;

- **Delivering Connectivity, throughout the length of the City Centre** – the route must be as proposed; the North Quays, to the South Quays, to the Applemarket and the Michael Street Shopping development and return. This innovative Bridge must be the new connector to the retail heart of the City Centre. Failure to deliver this very basic fundamental role, will leave Ireland’s Oldest City Centre in the doldrums for many years to come. It will also create a two tier City Centre, which nobody wishes to see.
- **Be Iconic** – become a synonymous image, promoting Waterford City, Ireland’s oldest City.
- **Be Adaptable** – a bridge that can reflect the City’s diversity with flags, flowers, displays etc. A blank canvas to showcase the City’s abundance of events and festivals.

- **An Economic Driver** – the Bridge must reflect the City’s desire to see future investment in the SDZ and perhaps more importantly, throughout the City Centre. The economic benefits must be spread across the heart of the City and reflect the need to develop the City as one destination.
- **A Public Realm Masterclass** – the landing point at the Clock Tower has to be the “Transport Hub” for the Bridge and as a result must reflect this by being a public realm masterclass in layout and design.
- **Sustainable Transportation** – the sustainable transportation vehicle must reflect the City’s image. It must also be suitable to traverse the return route, all the way from the North Quay to the Applemarket and back. Drop-off and pick-up points along this route also need to be planned and designed.
- **A 24/7-365 Days-a-year-Bridge**; the Bridge must be suitable for all weathers and operate 24/7, to encourage our night time economies, in line with our Purple Flag status.
- **Direct Access to City Centre**; a new Bridge, with a suitable transportation vehicle, must be able to access the furthest point of the City Centre i.e. the Applemarket and Michael Street. This will encourage an even spread of the potential economic benefits from the SDZ. Failure to plan this complete link will see another “Leaning tower of investment” development. A development that will not benefit the whole City.

**ENDS**