

Environmental Impact Assessment

Schedule III

(Screening according to S.L. 549.46)

ERA Reference no.:	EA/00055/18
PA Reference no.:	PA 11083/17
Project Title:	Proposed road widening
Location:	Site at, Triq Buqana, Rabat, Malta
Screening date:	September 2018

1. Description of Proposal

1.1 Outline of project/development

PA 11083/17 is a proposal to widen Triq Buqana (Distributor Route 16), from the Qlejja roundabout (Node ND12) to the Mtarfa roundabout (Node ND13). It will cover a site area of about 51,880 m², approximately 40,990 m² (79%) of which is the existing road network; thus, the area of the additional land take required for the widening measures approximately 10,890 m². An additional 6,818 m² of land (described as a 'buffer area') may be used during the construction works to provide access to the construction site, where necessary; any such land taken up will be rehabilitated following the completion of the proposal.

1.2 Site description and related considerations

The development site in its entirety lies in the Rural Area (Outside Development Zone – ODZ); the site straddles the Mosta, Rabat, Attard and Mdina Local Council administrative areas.

Furthermore, the site is located:

- within the Chadwick Lakes Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV), as identified in the Central Malta Local Plan (CG22);
- within a Protected Area for Hydrological Importance, as identified in the Central Malta Local Plan (CG29);
- within a Groundwater Safeguard Zone;
- within the Wied tal-Qlejgħa valley system, which is a designated Area of Ecological Importance (AEI), as identified in the Central Malta Local Plan (CG22). This is also subject to a Conservation Order (GN 1235 of 2012); and
- 175m from the Ta' Qali Bird Sanctuary (L.N. 41/03).

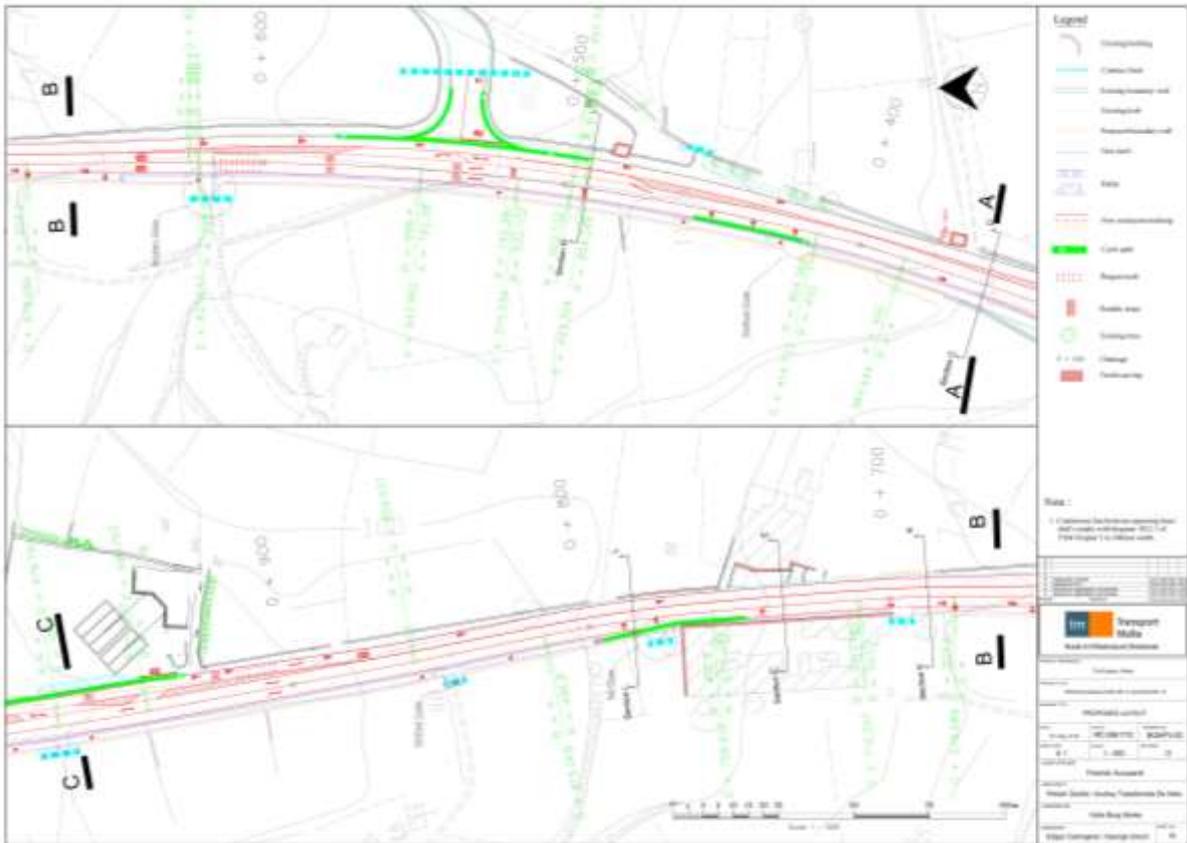


Figure 3. Scheme Layout #2 (Source: PDS)

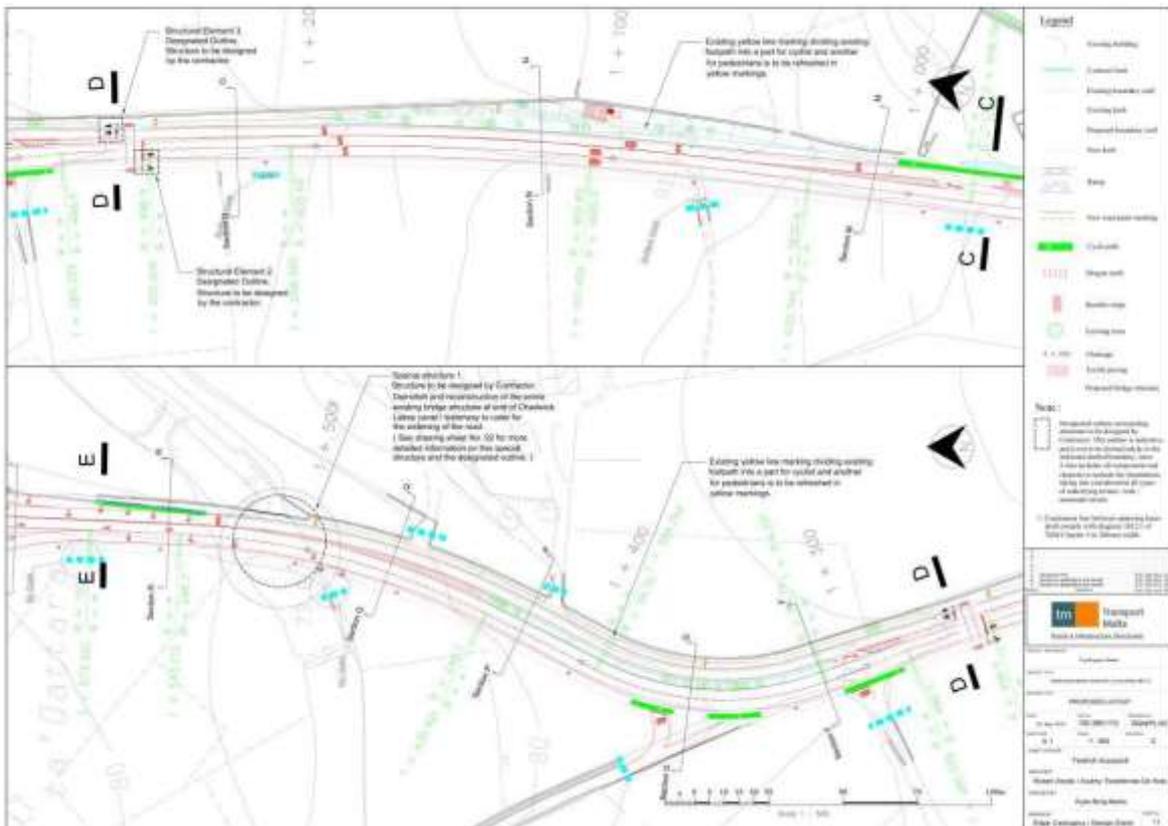


Figure 4. Scheme Layout #3 (Source: PDS)

3. EIA Screening

- 3.1. The area to be taken up by the proposal covers a site area of approx. 52,000m², with an additional circa. 7,000m² of land being used temporarily during construction – this will be subsequently reinstated. Of the 52,000 m² of land to be permanently affected by the proposal, approximately 79% (41,000 m²) of this is existing road network (including hard-surfaced areas adjoining the carriageway). Thus, the area of undeveloped land, most of which is agricultural land identified in the North West Local Plan as an Area of Agricultural Value, required for the widening measures approximately 11,000 m² in the form of a relatively narrow strip that extends along most of the side of the existing road. It is also being proposed to temporarily utilise additional land in the 'buffer area' to facilitate access to the construction site. This will lead to further loss of agricultural land, although the impact is likely to be temporary.
- 3.2. The loss of soft ground cover and vegetation, and the increase in hard-surfacing, is likely to increase storm water runoff and reduce aquifer recharge within a Protected Area of Hydrological Importance and the Groundwater Safeguard Zone. However, the impact is unlikely to be significant given that the proposal seeks to widen an existing road and will thus not disturb the existing water flow patterns.
- 3.3. The proposal also involves the uprooting of 257 trees of varying maturity. Of these, 50 are deemed to be transplantable; 30 are covered under The Trees and Woodlands Protection Regulations 2018 (S.L 549.123). These will be transplanted in various sites and preference will be given to areas within and close to the development site. Furthermore, compensatory planting will be undertaken to mitigate the impact of the non-transplantable trees.
- 3.4. The project also lies within the Chadwick Lakes AHLV, within the Wied tal-Qlejgħa valley system, which is a designated Area of Ecological Importance (AEI – Level 2). In view of the fact that there may be rare and protected species within this valley system, it is recommended by ERA, and the PDS, that any works occurring in the vicinity of the valley (and specifically at the point where the road intersects the valley) be carefully and supervised by monitoring ecologists.
- 3.5. The extensive, but ultimately marginal, land uptake and the uprooting of existing trees will also result in a modifications to the visual amenity all along the route, albeit such impact as well as the ensuing impact on the landscape is not expected to be particularly significant relative to the existing baseline, as long as appropriate measures are taken to ensure the effective blending of the realigned road verges into the rural surroundings.
- 3.6. While it is likely that the project will lead to an increased number of vehicles using this route, the removal of bottlenecks is also likely to increase traffic flow; the proposal also serves to widen an already existing road. Thus, any increase in air and noise emissions is not significant from an environmental point of view.
- 3.7. Furthermore, the project may result in impacts on cultural heritage relating to:
 - A number of dry stone rubble walls, which are to be demolished/removed to accommodate the proposed road widening;
 - Impacts on potential Wignacourt Aqueduct remains below ground; and
 - Impacts on the Mtarfa Military Cemetery.

Potential impacts, primarily from vibrations and excavation on the Aqueduct and Cemetery, must be investigated further to determine their significance. A detailed survey of the dry stone rubble walls that are to be demolished/part demolished should also be undertaken. Reference should be made to the SCH for further guidance on cultural heritage.

- 3.8. With regards to construction, impacts include noise, vibration, and dust emissions, as well as issues relating to surface water management. These potential impacts arising during construction will be short term and temporary and should be mitigated at source through the implementation of conditions imposed as part of ERA's Works Method Statement (WMS)).

3.9. Construction and excavation will also result in a number of waste streams, namely 500m³ of soil, 1,600m³ of rock, and 25,900m³ of Bituminous mixtures and tarred products. According to the PDS, the excavated material will be processed off-site and reused both on-site and off-site as fill and aggregate. Any removed topsoil will also be reused on-site to accommodate the new landscaping, with any leftover soil to be deposited at a facility as directed by the Department of Agriculture and ERA. Given the nature of the proposal, there will be no operational waste.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Screening Conclusion and recommended way forward

The above screening has identified the following main areas of concern:

1. Sideways extension of the overall road footprint with consequent impacts on uptake of undeveloped land (namely agricultural land), existing rural features (e.g. terraced rural fields and old traditional rubble walls) and the rural landscape;
2. The uprooting of a number of mature trees which will change the visual aspect of the area; and
3. The risk of localised impacts on ecology from any near the road's intersection with the underlying watercourse, and on surrounding cultural heritage features, primarily from vibrations and excavation.

The proposal is a modification to an existing road infrastructure. Impacts indicated in points 1 and 2 above are evident upfront, such that studies *per se* would not significantly help resolve the underlying considerations, whereas impacts indicated in point 3 require further targeted investigation. In terms of significance, the impacts of the development are unlikely to be significant to the point of warranting an EIA, as long as various mitigation measures are duly incorporated into the mainstream development consent mechanism by means of conditions and specifications (e.g. approved documents) in the development permit.

Furthermore, it is being recommended that all proposed upgrades and extensions to the national road network are assessed at a strategic level, in order to have a clear outline of the resultant impacts on traffic and air quality.

4.2 Screening Disclaimer

The above screening results, the ensuing conclusions and recommendations are without prejudice to any required changes or updates should the development proposal be eventually modified or should the information/assumptions provided turn out to be incorrect. Any deviations of the proposal from this submission would need to be re-assessed and the merits of this screening would need to be re-opened.