

# Environmental Impact Assessment

## Screening according to Schedule III of S.L. 549.46

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| <b>PA Reference no.:</b> | PA/04721/20  |
| <b>Project Title:</b>    | Proposed Upgrading of Junction at Node WA23 including a new overpass, underpass and widening of road.                          |
| <b>Location:</b>         | Site at, Vjal I-Avjazzjoni, Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa, Triq San Tumas, Triq il-Mithna ta' Caraffa, Triq Ganni Vassallo, Luqa. |
| <b>Screening date:</b>   | December 2020  |

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### I. BACKGROUND

#### 1. Outline of Proposal

1.1. The proposal involves the development of a grade separated junction at Vjal I-Avjazzjoni, Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa, Triq San Tumas, Triq il-Mithna ta' Caraffa and Triq Ganni Vassallo, Luqa. This node is part of Route 1 of the Core Trans European Network and is a strategic stretch linking the Malta Freeport to Valletta, including connection with the Malta International Airport. The junction improvement seeks to improve traffic flow which is subject to traffic congestion, particularly during am and pm traffic peaks. The proposal also seeks to improve pedestrian access, cycling as well as public transport facilities (see Figure 1).

1.2. The project will consist in (see Figure 2i-v):

- The construction of a single direction underpass (tunnel), catering for the direction from Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa towards Qormi, with an approximate length of 59m. The underpass will be cut and cover, with the carriageway having a width of 5.5m and a headroom of 5.5m along the covered section of the underpass;
- The construction of an overpass (flyover), catering for traffic moving from Qormi (from Triq San Tumas) to Vjal I-Avjazzjoni, with an approximate length of 222m and a width of 5.5m. The overpass will be supported by reinforced concrete columns and an abutment at each end;
- Removal of the existing roundabout and replacement with dedicated carriageways for the remaining directions, to allow uninterrupted traffic flow;
- Merging and diverging lanes for the underpass and overpass traffic;
- The introduction of 1.1 km of new footpaths and 1.1km of new cycle lanes to improve access for pedestrians and cyclists, respectively; and
- Improved public transport bus stops, new street lighting, continuation of the existing stormwater system and other road safety improvements.

In total, the proposed road widening will be c. 2,375 m<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 2ii). The proposal will also involve the removal of 81 trees, of which 41 are transplantable.

[illegible]

Figure 2i: Site plan of the proposed development (Source: PA/04721/20 – 76a on EApps)



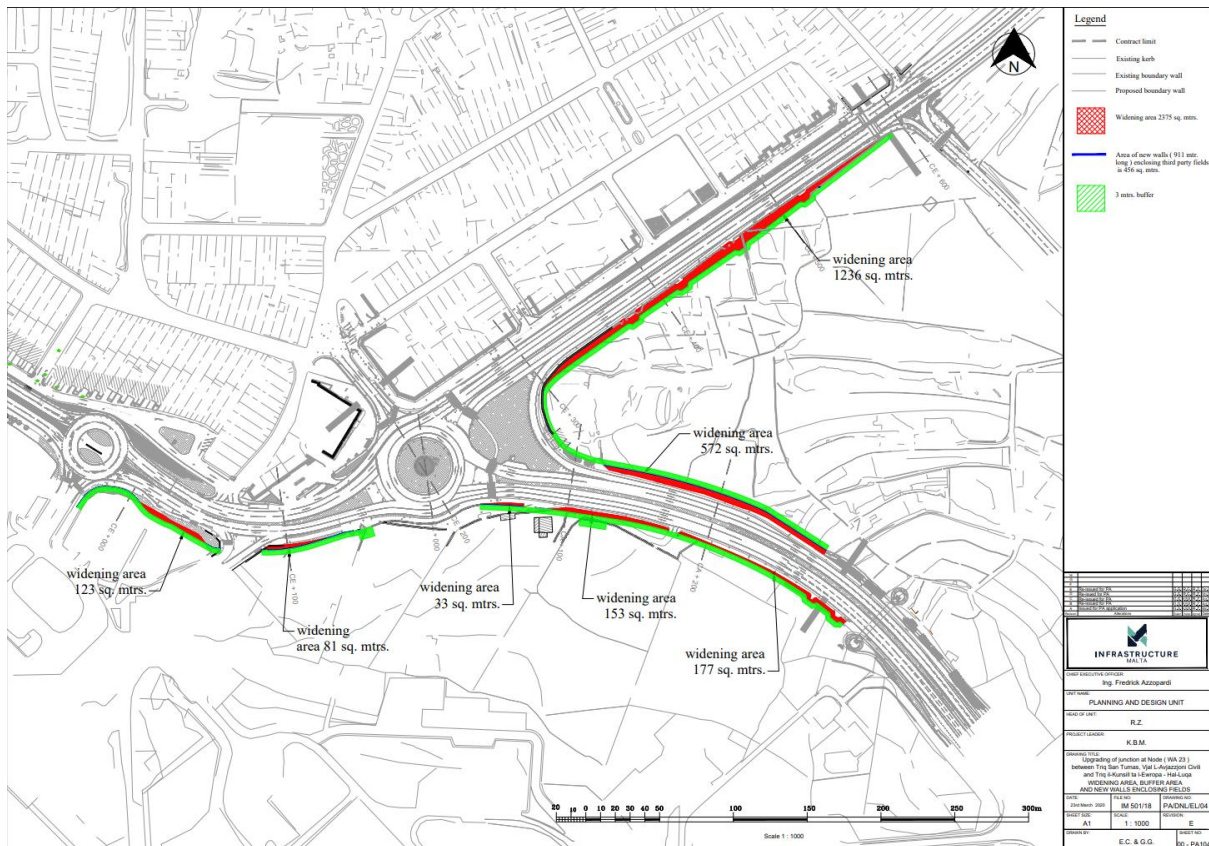


Figure 2ii: Proposed widening areas (red), new walls (blue) and buffer zone (green) (Source: PA/04721/20 – 78a on EApps)

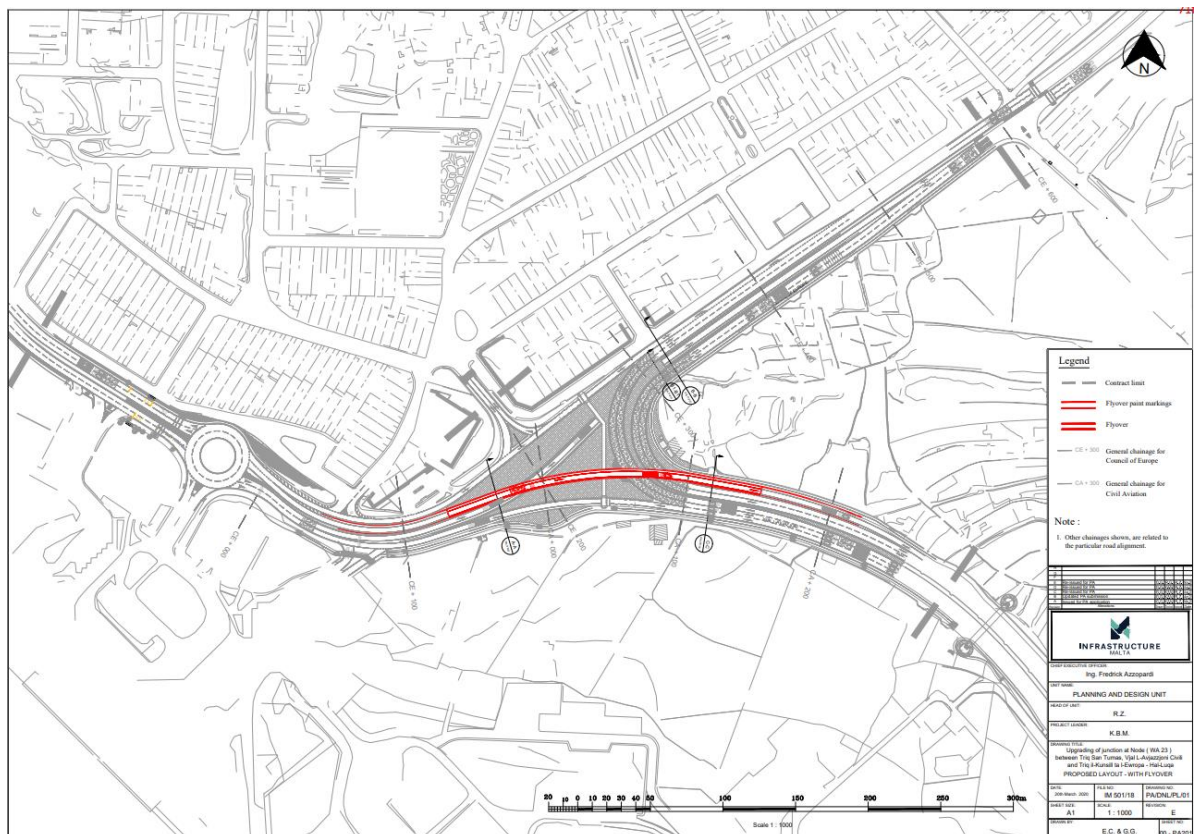


Figure 2iii: Proposed overpass (flyover) (Source: PA/04721/20 – 71f on EApps)

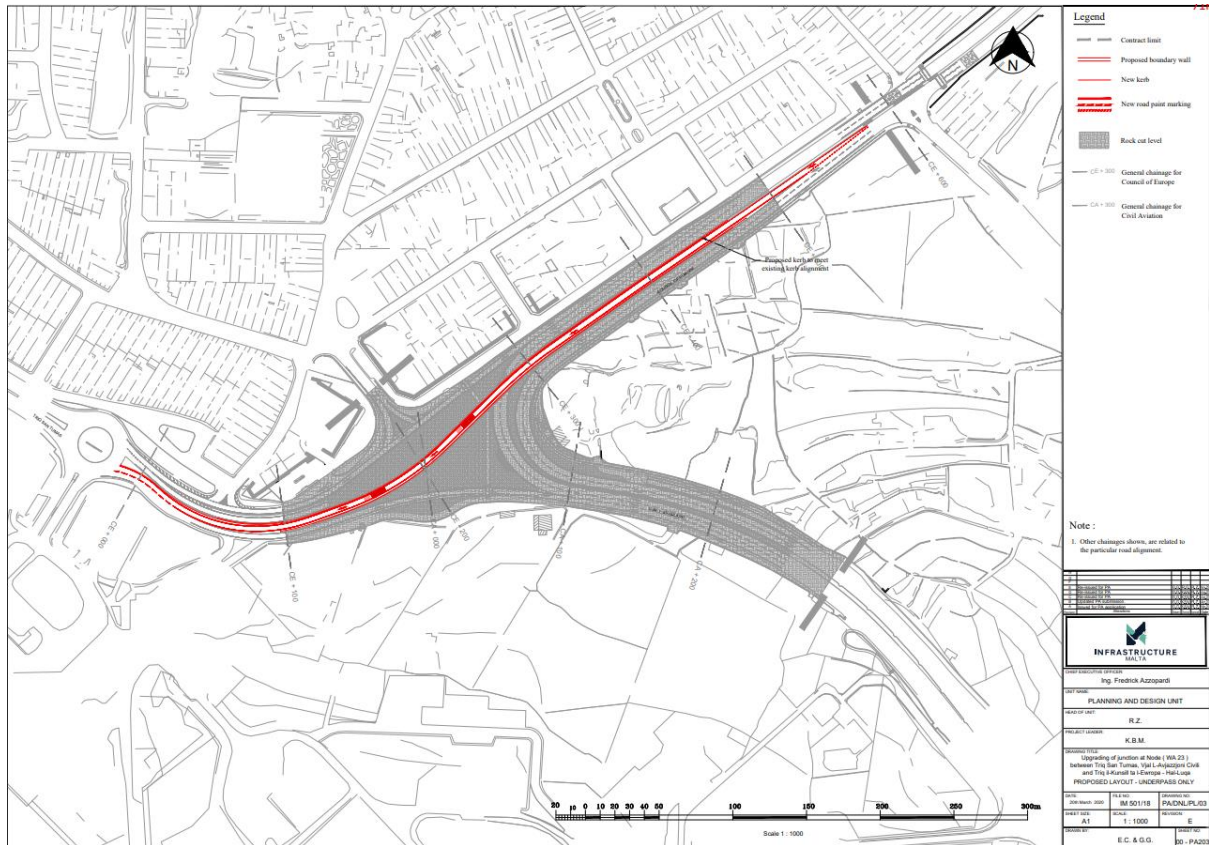


Figure 2iv: Proposed underpass (tunnel) (Source: PA/04721/20 – 71h on EApps)

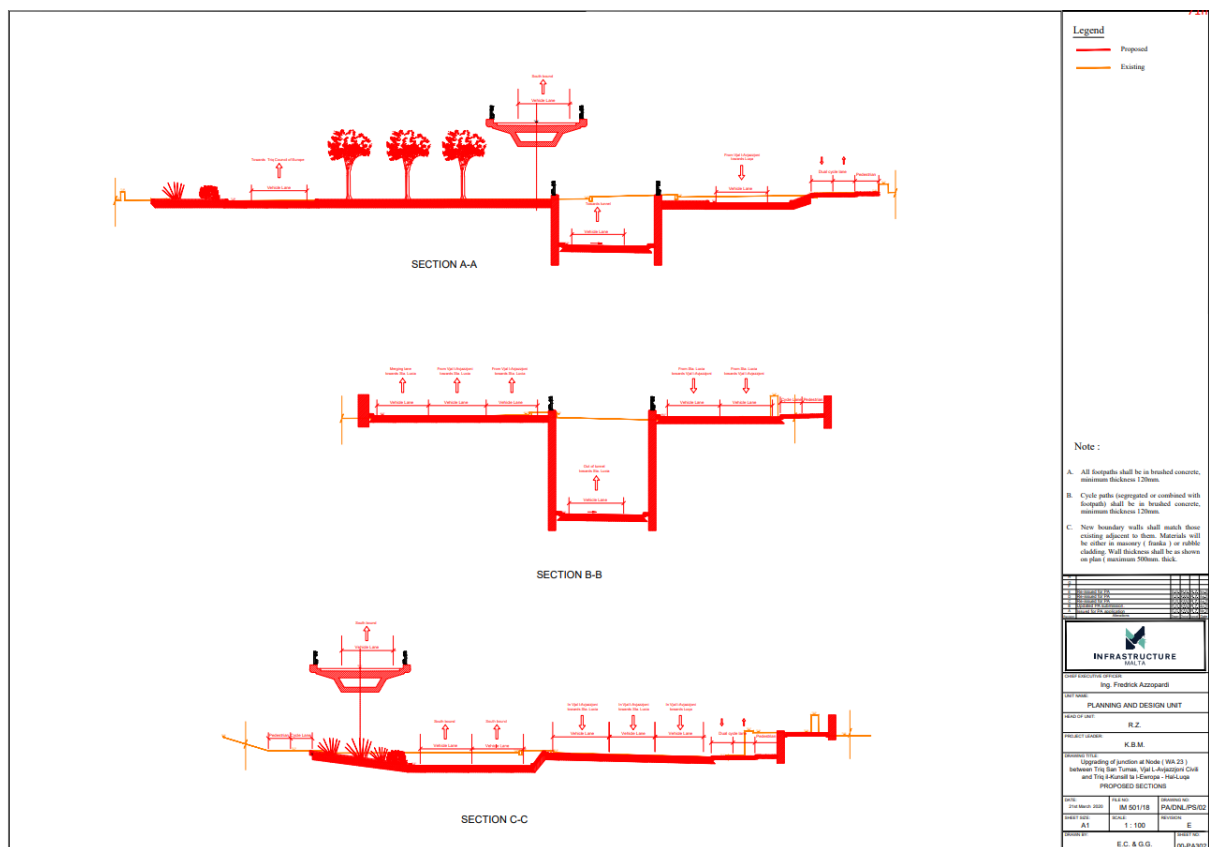


Figure 2v: Proposed sections (PA/04721/20 – 71m on EApps)



## 2. Site context

- 2.1. The site covers an area of approximately 37,876 m<sup>2</sup> and is located outside development zone (ODZ), adjacent to the Malta International Airport. The node subject to this application, WA23, was studied in conjunction with node WA24 (located adjacent to Malta International Airport), in view that both intersections are interconnected and bear significant traffic flows. Following such analysis by the project proponents, the proposed design as outlined in this application was considered as the most beneficial in terms of travel time savings, vehicle operating cost savings, reduction in environmental externalities and change in accident rate.
- 2.2. The site involves one of the most important nodes on the Maltese TEN-T Core network, namely WA23. This node is subject to the following traffic flows, which have been integrated into the proposal:
- Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa (East Side) to Vjal l-Avjazzjoni;
  - Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa (East Side) to Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa (West Side);
  - Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa (West Side) to Triq San Tumas;
  - Vjal l-Avjazzjoni to Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa (West Side);
  - Vjal l-Avjazzjoni to Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa (East Side);
  - Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa (West Side) to Triq Sant' Andrija;
  - Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa (West Side) to Vjal l-Avjazzjoni;
  - Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa (West Side) to Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa (East Side);
  - Triq Sant' Andrija to Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa (East Side); and
  - Triq Dun Guzepp Micallef to Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa (East Side).
- 2.3. Most of the site consists of the present road infrastructure. Other land uses, subject to road widening, include agricultural land.

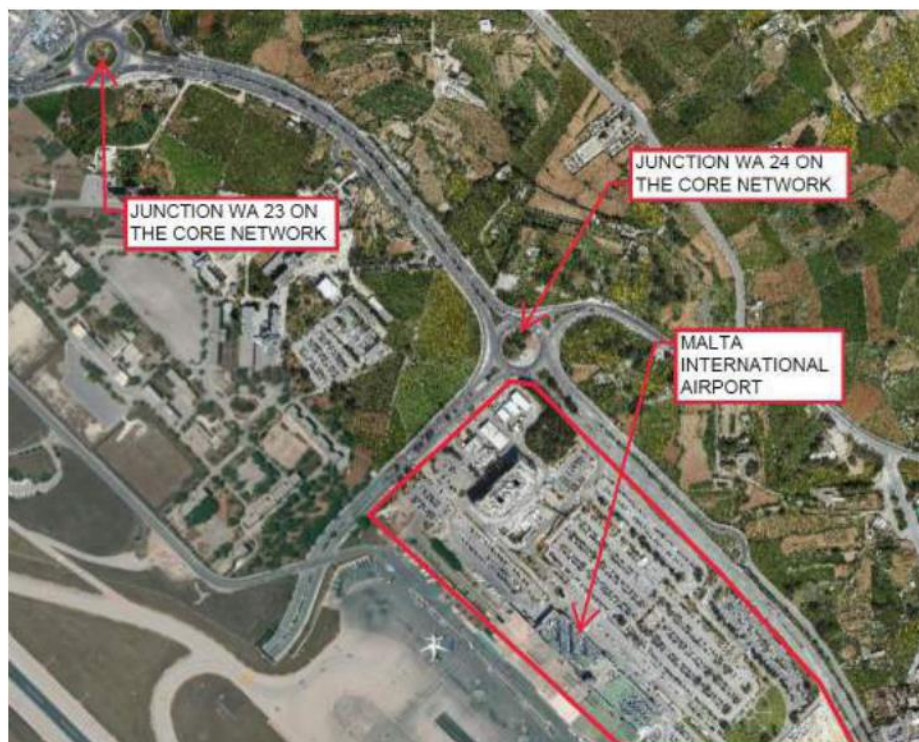


Figure 3: Plan showing location of node WA23 and WA24, in relation to Malta International Airport  
(Source: PDS)

### 3. Case history

The site was previously subject to the following relevant planning applications and enforcement notices;

#### 3.1. Planning applications on site:

- PA/03032/04 - Proposed roundabout junction upgrading at Vjal L-Avjazzjoni / Triq Il-Kunsill ta' L-Ewropa, Road (near Roundabout), Vjal L-Avjazzjoni, Luqa, Malta. (Application approved);
- PA/05518/10 - Proposed roundabout junction upgrading at Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa. Site at, Triq il-Mithna ta' Caraffa, Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa, Vjal L-Avjazzjoni, Luqa, Malta (Application approved); and
- PA/07252/18 - Proposed sanctioning of widening of northbound carriageway from 2 to 3 lanes. Site at, Vjal L-Avjazzjoni, Luqa, Malta (Application approved).

#### 3.2. Enforcement notices on site:

- EC/00620/10 - Dumping of construction material and other waste without permit. Site at Vjal il-Kunsill ta' L-Ewropa/, Vjal L-Avjazzjoni, Luqa, Malta (Enforcement Action Closed - Illegal development was removed by PA)

### 4. Screening Criteria

#### 4.1. EIA Screening

*(citations refer to S.L. 549.46, except where otherwise specified):*

The proposed development falls within the scope of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (S.L. 549.46), notably in terms of Category II criteria in Schedule I: Section 2.1.2.1 (*Construction, excavation or realignment of roads, tunnels, viaducts or bridges, not covered by Category I, if located ODZ or at the edge of the development zone*). Therefore, the proposal was also screened in terms of the EIA Regulations.

### 5. Documents used for screening

- a. Project Description Statement (PDS), referred to ERA on 27 November 2020 as per doc PA/04721/20 – 71n;
- b. Plans, Site Plans, Sections etc. [see documents PA/04721/20 – 71a-m];
- c. Revised plan on widening areas, referred directly to ERA on 11 December 2020, as per Annex III; and
- d. Revised plans, site plan, sections etc. [see documents PA/04721/20 – 75a-b, 76a, 77a 78a].

## II. ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSAL

### 6. Assessment of Impacts and Ancillary Considerations

*(Screening in terms of Schedule III of the EIA Regulations, S.L. 549.46)*

#### Land and Resources Use

6.1 The current land use on site is mainly the existing road infrastructure. Additionally, in the vicinity, one can find the Institute of Tourism Studies, residential areas (notably Hal-Luqa) and a number of small commercial areas (see Figure 9).

6.2 The proposed junction upgrading would require the uptake of 2,375 m<sup>2</sup> of additional land, to cater for the required increased footprint of the road network, as follows (see Figure 2ii):

- 1,236 m<sup>2</sup> along Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa to segregate traffic towards Vjal I-Avjazzjoni and traffic towards Triq San Tumas going through the proposed underpass;
- 572 m<sup>2</sup> along the northern side of Vjal I-Avjazzjoni, to cater for the merging of the proposed flyover coming from Triq San Tumas with the road coming from Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa;
- 363 m<sup>2</sup> along the southern side of Vjal I-Avjazzjoni to cater for a by-pass lane leading to Triq San Tumas; and
- 204 m<sup>2</sup> in the western side of the junction, to cater for the merging of the bypass lane coming from Vjal I-Avjazzjoni and the underpass coming from Triq il-Kunsill tal-Ewropa, and the ramp leading to the flyover on the other side of the road. In addition, the widening also caters for the bidirectional bicycle path and footpaths.

6.3 The widened areas mostly encroach onto privately owned land, characterised by agricultural uses. Third-party fields, along the widening areas, will be enclosed by newly constructed boundary walls, with a total length of 911m and covering an area of 456 m<sup>2</sup>. In addition to the widening areas, a 3m buffer zones has been included. ERA requires that this buffer zone is kept free from development and any eventual works in it would need to be clarified and assessed further.



Figure 9: Indicative land use map (Source: PDS)

### Natural and cultural heritage

- 6.4 The proposed works will be carried out adjacent to Malta International Airport, which is designated as L-Ajruport ta' Hal-Luqa Bird Sanctuary (in accordance with S.L. 549.42), which in this case is only a nominal environmental constraint, as the purpose of airport safety, and is not really related to environmental protection. Furthermore, there are no important or sensitive natural habitats within the area proposed for development.
- 6.5 On the other hand, the proposed interventions entail the removal of 81 trees of various species, of which 41 are earmarked for transplanting. A number of trees proposed for uprooting are protected through the Trees and Woodlands Protection Regulations S.L. 549.123 and would thus require a nature permit. Efforts should be made as much as possible to secure the transplanting of trees within the site and measures taken for the survival of these trees. With respect to the *Prunus dulcis* species located along Triq il-Kunsill Tal-Ewropa, near the junction with Triq Il-Gudja, such should be retained in view that these are located outside of the proposed widening area.
- 6.6 The ground material within the site consists of a thin layer of man-made fill overlying the bedrock composed of Lower Globigerina Limestone. Excavations (33,000 m<sup>3</sup>) would therefore take place entirely within the Lower Globigerina strata and are not likely to be significant subject that further details regarding the proposed reuse of excavated rock are provided.
- 6.7 The known cultural heritage features nearby the site are those located adjacent to the roundabout at node WA24:
- Class B scheduled Hal Resqun Catacombs Complex (through Govt. Notice 628 of 2008), located within the central island of the roundabout at node WA24, together with its 50 m buffer zone; and
  - Class B scheduled Megalithic Remains (through Govt. Notice 35 of 1996), located along the road which branches off the roundabout at node WA24 towards Gudja.
- These will not be affected by this stretch of works and have already been factored into the assessment of PA/00728/20.

### Landscape and Visual Amenity

- 6.8 The project will result in modifications to the appearance of the landscape along the route and junction, as well as in changes to the visual amenity afforded by the trees that will be lost to accommodate the development and the introduction of the flyover. Nonetheless, given that most of the interventions will be limited to the already committed area of the existing road network, and the limited visual sensitivity of the junction, no significant impacts on the landscape character and visual amenity of the site and immediate surroundings are envisaged, subject to the landscaping of the site, by the planting of trees and possibly, the inclusion of green infrastructure.
- 6.9 ERA agrees with the proposal for the inclusion of landscaping on site, notably in the areas that currently accommodate the roundabout. ERA is of the opinion that landscaping may also include elements of green infrastructure, such as green walls, green embankments, and *greening* of the flyover and its pillars. Such shall be addressed as part of the landscaping plan, which is considered as a reserved matter.





Figure 10: Photomontages of the proposal (indicative) (Source: PA/04721/20 – 71o on EApps)

### Construction-phase impacts

- 6.10 Given the scale of the interventions, fugitive dust emissions during construction may be envisaged, which may also temporarily affect the nearby residential area, as well as the agricultural activity and productivity in the wider area, however such impacts are of a temporary nature and can be effectively mitigated through the Environmental Management Construction Site Regulations (S.L. 552.09). Therefore, such impacts on the air quality during the construction works are not considered significant.
- 6.11 Potential impacts on the sensitive noise receptors in the area from the use of machinery on site are not expected to be significant as these receptors will not be exposed to the whole construction period of the entire project, and as long as good site practices are adhered to and works are in accordance with the Environmental Management Construction Site Regulations (S.L. 552.09).
- 6.12 The proposed site clearance and excavation works are envisaged to generate 4,700 m<sup>3</sup> of road surface materials, 30,300 m<sup>3</sup> of rock (Globigerina Limestone) and another 17,000 m<sup>3</sup> of soft stone and soil materials. Furthermore, mainly due to the widening and uptake of land, 4,000 m<sup>3</sup> of soil will be removed, which will be reused on site or for landscaping works in other sites, with any left-over being deposited at an authorised facility. Such waste generation is not considered significant subject to the submission of further details regarding the proposed reuse of excavated rock on site.

### Operational impacts

- 6.13 With respect to the operational phase, the widening of the road and the proposed underpass and flyover are aimed at alleviating the current traffic situation. The future short-term improvement in air quality due to decreased congestion is being acknowledged, and in this light, no significant impacts on air quality are being envisaged. In addition, noise emissions arising from revving engines from static and slow-moving vehicles currently present at the junction are envisaged to be reduced. Furthermore, the underpass may have the potential to mitigate noise effects at this junction to a certain extent. Therefore, no significant noise impacts during operations are envisaged.

### III. ERA CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDED WAY FORWARD

The proposal involves the upgrading of the road junction at node WA23, part of the TEN-T core network of Malta, and is aimed at alleviating the current traffic situation. Whilst certain environmentally relevant aspects have been identified through this screening (e.g. the uprooting of trees, additional land uptake with its associated loss of agricultural land, changes to the visual amenity of the site), these impacts are not considered significant to the point of warranting an EIA when taking into consideration the various preventive mitigation measures, and the nature and characteristics of the proposal and the surrounding area. Thus, no further assessment in terms of regulation 15 of the EIA Regulations (S.L. 549.46) is required subject that:

- The area indicated as *buffer zone* in Annex III is kept free from development and any eventual works in it would need to be clarified and assessed further;
- Efforts are made as much as possible to secure the transplanting of trees within the site and measures are taken for the survival of these trees. With respect to the *Prunus dulcis* species located along Triq il-Kunsill Tal-Ewropa, near the junction with Triq Il-Gudja, such should be retained in view that these are located outside of the proposed widening area;
- Further details are provided regarding the proposed reuse of excavated rock on site; and
- A landscaping plan is submitted (reserved matter), detailing the proposed planting of vegetation and inclusion of any green infrastructure, in order to offset the loss of vegetation on site due to the proposed interventions on trees and reduce the visual impact of the proposal.

In this regard, ERA does not object to the proposal from an environmental point of view, subject to the above requirements and the inclusion of ERA's conditions in the development permit.

#### **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.*