



Transfer of the Ring Road in Mýrdalur

Consultation: Scoping document

Icelandic Road and Coastal Administration (Vegagerðin) has sent the scoping document for the environmental impact assessment (EIA) regarding the transfer of the Ring Road in Mýrdalur to the National Planning Agency which has started its consultation.

The history of this project is long and has been going on for some decades, but in 2013 the master plan of the municipality Mýrdalshreppur was approved with a new Ring Road through Mýrdalur, south of Geitafjall, above Dyrhólaós and through a road tunnel in the south of Reynisfjall.

The government has provided funding for the preparation of the project from 2020-2024, but the project itself has not been financed. Vegagerðin is currently working on a pre-design of the alignment of a road around Mýrdalur based on drafts from 2008 and the current master plan of Mýrdalshreppur. An EIA will be carried out in parallel with the pre-design to ensure environmental impact to be considered during the design.

The EIA Process

The scope of this project is such magnitude that it is subject to the law on EIA (Act. no. 111/2021), but the process of the EIA is shown in figure 1. Since the EIA process for this project began, a new version of the EIA law came into force, therefore ongoing work will be subjected to Act. no. 111/2021. Vegagerðin is going to undergo a comprehensive assessment as the road is planned on a sensitive area. The objectives of the assessment by law are:

- Sustainable development, a healthy environment and environmental protection. This shall be done with EIA for projects and plans that are likely to have a significant environmental impact.
- Efficiency in environmental assessment of projects and plans.
- To include public involvement in the environmental assessment of projects and plans as well as stakeholders and others who have interests.

As mentioned earlier, the National Planning Agency has started consultation regarding the scoping document, which can be found on the project's website (<https://vik-hringvegur.netlify.app>). At this stage, the public, stakeholders, licensors, and professional bodies will have the opportunity to make comments and remarks on the proposed EIA.

The scoping document explains the work to be carried out in the EIA, the main implementation and impact aspects of the project. The document also describes the research plan and data collection to assess the environmental impact of possible road alignments proposed. Vegagerðin has responded to comments and remarks related to the draft published in December 2020 and updated the scoping document aiming for all necessary aspects to be considered in the EIA.

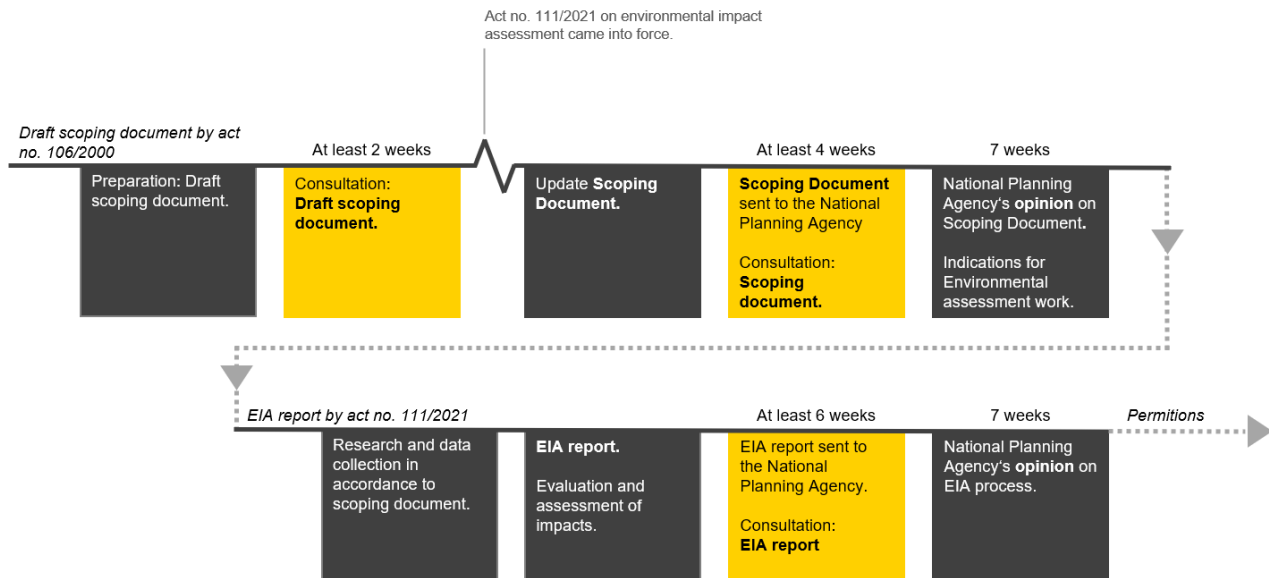


Figure 1 – The process of the EIA, currently the scoping document is in consultation by the National Planning Agency.

In the next stage of the assessment process, further data is collected, the environmental impact of the project is assessed based on the scoping document and results of the evaluation reported in an EIA report. The report includes for example an account of the main environmental impacts of the options, research results, compliance of options with existing plans and proposals for mitigation measures and monitoring. Based on the results of the environmental assessment and a comparison of options, Vegagerðin decides and justifies the option he considers most desirable.

The EIA report then undertakes a formal consultation process at National Planning Agency, which involves reviews from professional institution and licensors. The report will also be available on the project's and Vegagerðin webpages. Everyone is given the opportunity to make remarks on the outcome of the assessment.

The assessment process completes with the opinion of the National Planning Agency on the EIA report. Once the opinion is available, it is possible to carry on with the application process for permits.

Options of Road Alignments

Since the master plan of Mýrdalshreppur was approved in 2013, traffic on the Ring Road west of Reynisfjall almost quadrupled and east of Vík has more than quintupled.

When examining the options in figure 2 it is necessary to keep the objectives of the project in mind, but they are following:

- Agility or pass ability in the wintertime for all traffic.
- Improved road and traffic safety.
 - Road alignment.
 - Visual distances.
 - Curves and bends.
 - Slopes.
 - Road connections.
- Main road out of urban areas.
- Shortening of the Ring Road

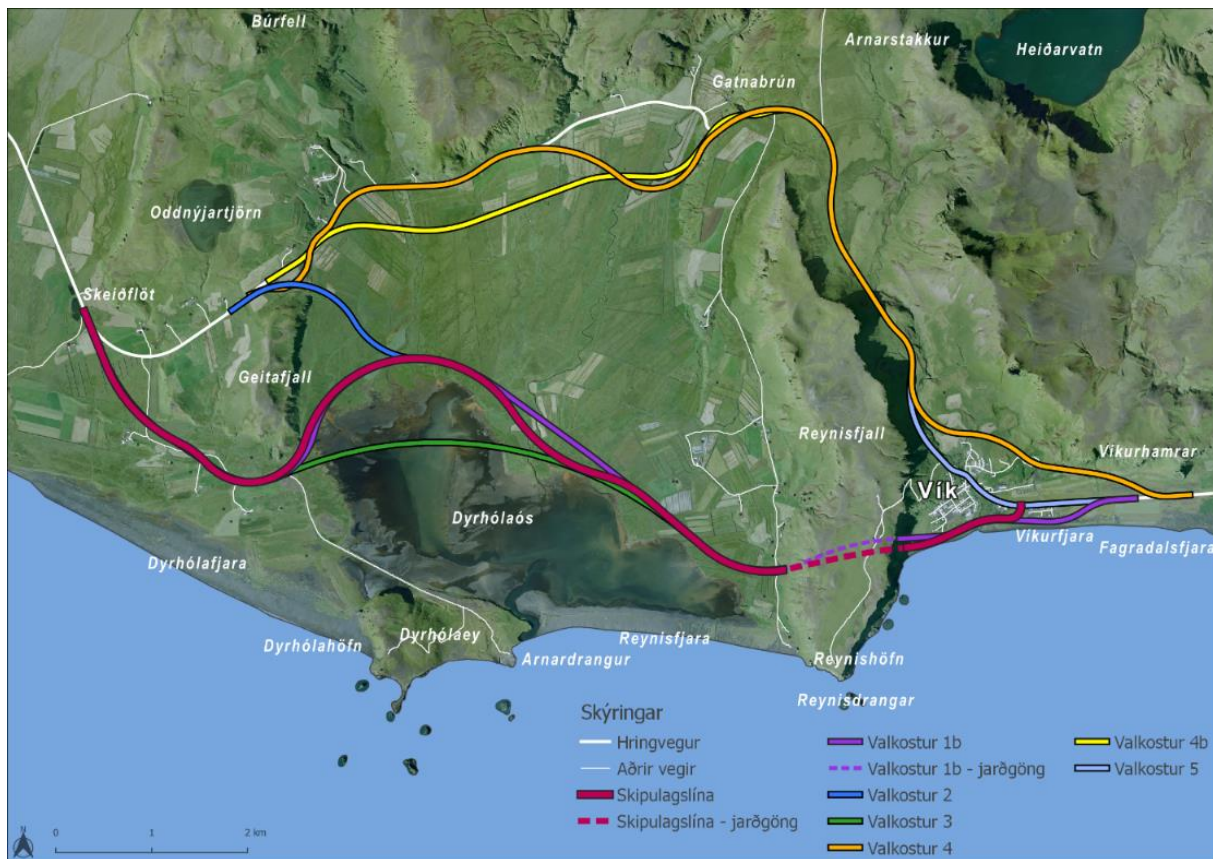


Figure 2 – Options of road alignments in the scoping document.

The Act on EIA states that other realistic options that may be considered should be accounted for and compared regarding environmental impact. In the scoping document five options are shown to be compared (figure 2):

Option 1 – according to the master plan / pink line

The road alignment is south of Geitafjall on the west side, along Dyrhólaós, and in tunnels in the south part of Reynisfjall. East of Reynisfjall, the route runs along the shore and joins the current road in Vík.

Option 1b – adjusted road line from the master plan / purple line

In parallel with the pre-design, the master plan road alignment has been adjusted in several places due to road technical issues. It is also considered to move the road connection to the current Ring Road further east, to avoid the main road going into the township of Vík.

Option 2 – north of Geitafjall / blue line

The road alignment is north of Geitafjall but joins the alignment of option 1 above the estuary.

Option 3 – crosses Dyrhólaós / green line

The road is partly comparable to option 1, but instead of going north of the Dyrhólaós estuary, the estuary is partly crossed.



Option 4 – improvements to existing road / orange line

The option includes improvements to the current road with the objectives of the project in mind. Improvements are made by Geitafjall and Gatnabrún, as well as the road is taken north of the town in Vík.

Option 4b – improvements to existing road / yellow line

The option is in parallel with option 4, but a new road will be placed south of the current Ring Road that will be used as a side road with multiple connections. This option was added after remarks to the draft scoping document published in December 2020.

Option 5 – adjusted zero option

The option follows options 4 and 4b on the west side of Reynisfjall but follows current road on the east side. This option was added after remarks to the draft scoping document published in December 2020, and in consultation with National Planning Agency and the municipality Mýrdalshreppur.

The option is not considered optimal regarding traffic safety and the policy of moving the Ring Road out of the urban area. Therefore it is primarily intended for comparison in the EIA.

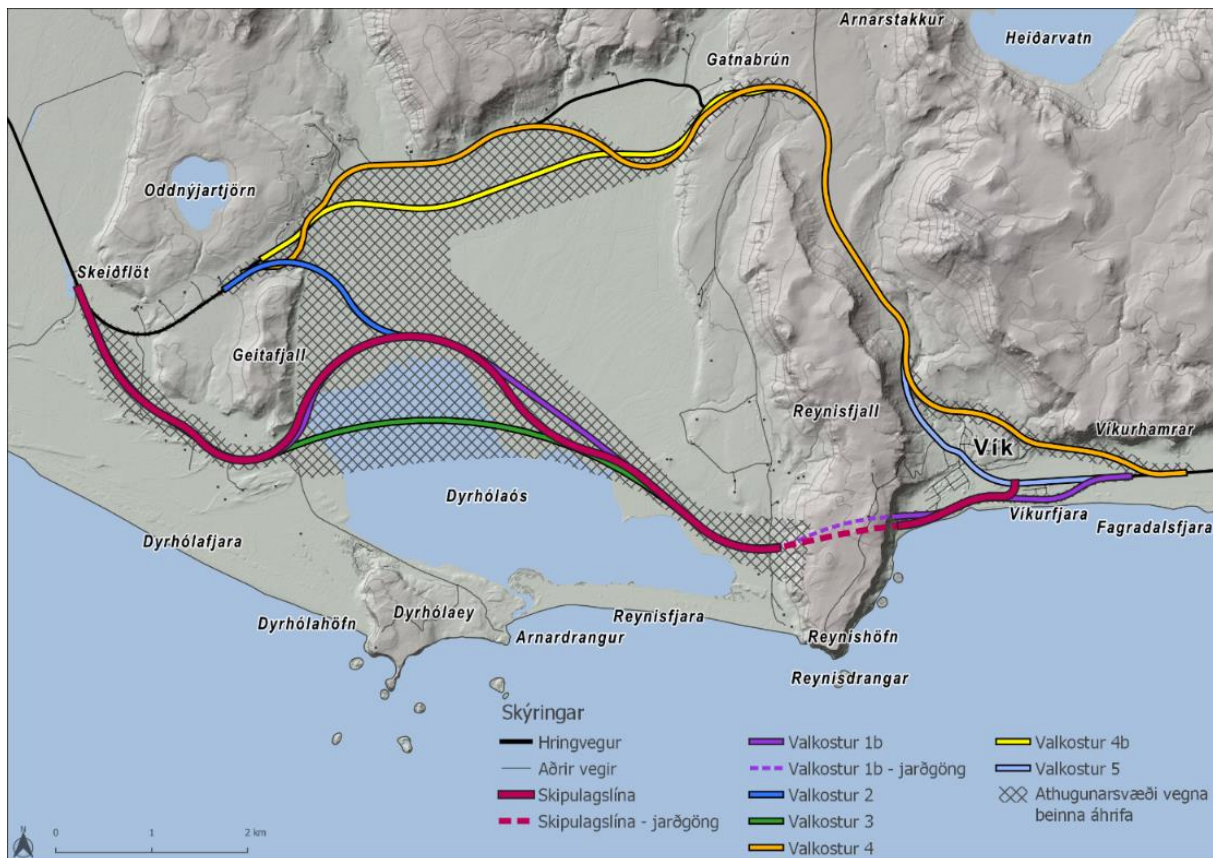


Figure 3 – The hatched area is the research reference area.



Zero option

The option involves unchanged condition, where there are steep slopes, number of road connections, sharp bends and the Ring Road going through an urban area.

An EIA will be carried out in parallel with the pre-design of the road. In the assessment, the observation or reference area will be extensive (figure 3), in the purpose of being able to alter the design if the results of the environmental assessment or other factors warrant it.

Vegagerðin will select its main option based on the following items:

- Requirements for road technology and traffic safety.
- The strategy of the municipal master plan.
- The governments transportation strategy.
- Cost.
- Environmental aspects.
- Community perspectives.

As mentioned, Vegagerðin is going to undergo a comprehensive assessment as the road is planned on a sensitive area (figure 4).

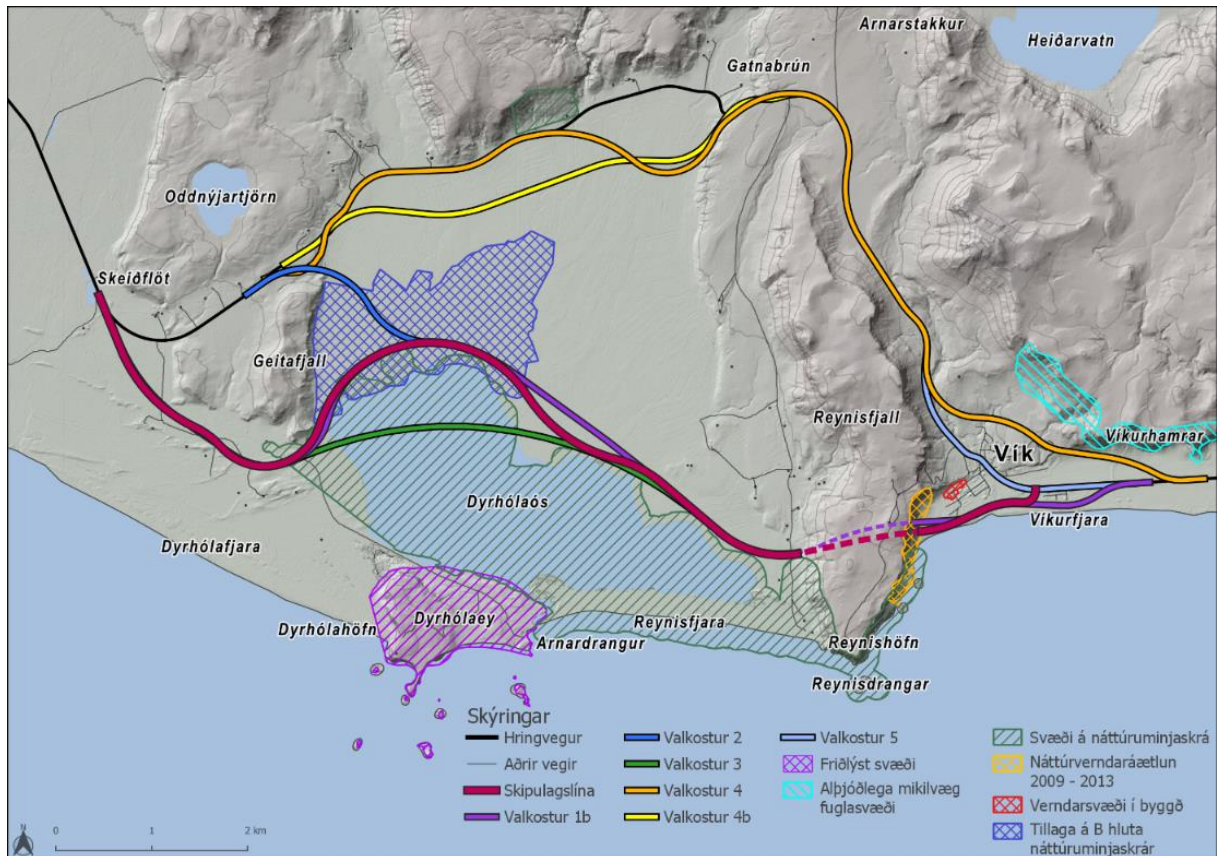


Figure 4 – Options of road alignments in the scoping document and nature conservation areas.

The environmental factors that will be assessed in the EIA are presented in figure 4. For each environmental factor, assessment questions are formulated and account for in the research plan and to assess the environmental impact of the project.



Environmental factors and research plan

Vegetation and habitats	New research	Cultural relics	New registration
Birdlife	New research	Tourism and outdoor activities	New research
Aquatic ecosystem	New research	Landscape and appearance	Analysis + photos
Other ecosystem	New research	Land use and transport	Data collection
Water protection	Data collection	Air quality	Data collection
Geological formations	Data collection	Climate	Data collection
Noise	New calculations	Natural disaster	Data collection

Figure 4 – The environmental factors and research to be undertaken in the EIA.

Vegagerðin intends to go further than the law on EIA requires in consultation. Along with a formal consultation time, open meetings with residents and other stakeholders will be held on a regular basis as well as progress meetings while working on the EIA report. In figure 5 estimated consultation plan through the EIA work can be viewed.

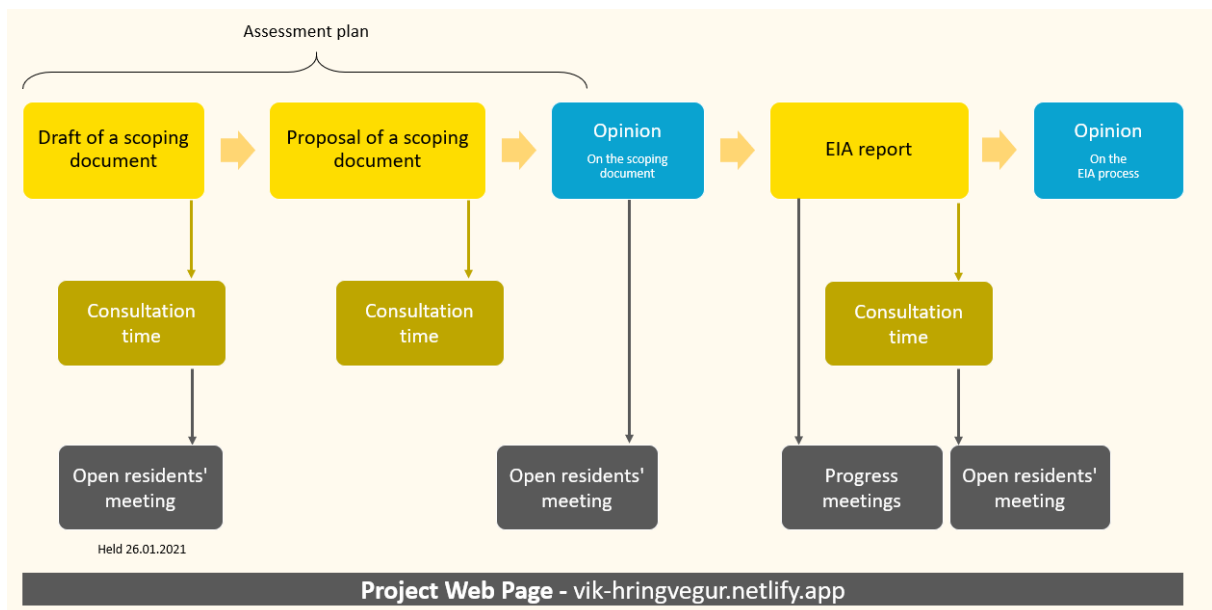


Figure 5 – Estimated consultation through the EIA process.

The consultation time for the scoping document is until 27th January 2022. Comments and remarks on the document must be in writing and sent to the National Planning Agency by letter or by email (skipulag@skipulag.is).