

## **Press release From: Western Rail Trail Campaign**

Date: January 11th 2016: **FOR IMMEDIATE USE**

**Minister states “*little or none of the existing tracks and sleepers would be of value*”**

**Department “*supportive of the proposal to develop the disused Collooney to Claremorris rail line as a greenway*”**

**Safeguarding the route of the closed railway is the issue, not the scrap rails**

**Argument about routing a greenway alongside the old tracks is meaningless**

Opponents of the Western Rail Trail – a proposed greenway from Athenry in Galway to Collooney in Sligo on a disused rail route – have long argued for the symbolic retention of the decaying tracks, mistakenly considering them essential for future use. Opposition to the removal of the rusting rails has delayed the construction of a greenway, a project that ironically would best preserve the route for possible future rail development. Minister Pascal Donohoe has moved to clarify his Department’s position, and has dismissed the idea that the rotting infrastructure has any significance.

Brendan Quinn of the Western Rail Trail said “We received an email on October 14<sup>th</sup> last year from the Minister in which he stated:

*“As you know from our meetings, my Department is supportive of the proposal to develop the disused Collooney to Claremorris rail line as a greenway, provided the integrity of the rail line is safeguarded in the event that a decision is made at some point in the future to reopen it as a functioning rail link.” (Minister Paschal Donohoe email to Brendan Quinn on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015)”*

Aware that Irish Rail is only interested in the scrap value of the old rails, Quinn sought further clarification, asking whether the Minister was referring to the integrity of the rail tracks or the rail route. This is an important distinction; the rail route can best be protected by the construction of a greenway, whereas the symbolic retention of the scrap metal rails seems irrelevant. The Minister clarified the position this week in a follow-up letter to the greenway campaigners, coming down firmly in support of the greenway as a method of keeping the asset in public ownership until such time as a railway may be possible.

*“I refer further to your letter seeking clarification on what was meant by me in previous correspondence when referring to the safeguarding of the integrity of the rail line in the event of the Collooney to Claremorris route being opened as a greenway. I think it can be accepted that little or none of the existing tracks and sleepers would be of value should the route be reinstated as a functioning rail line at some stage in the future and that I was, as you correctly interpret, referring to the safeguarding of the route of the closed railway.” (Minister Paschal Donohoe email to Brendan Quinn on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2016).*

The Minister’s statement dismisses any argument for the retention in situ of scrap rails that are incapable of carrying rail traffic. Safeguarding the route in public ownership is the key issue for the Department of Transport if a railway is ever to be restored in the future, and the Department and Irish Rail have made it clear that a greenway on the route is the best way of achieving this. It is important now for Sligo, Mayo and Galway county councils to embrace what all the key stakeholders are saying and to grasp the opportunity to protect the route with a greenway.

Both emails are attached to this press release.

ENDS Words: body content 500 words Contacts: Brendan Quinn [REDACTED] d us on Facebook:  
sligomayogreenwaycampaign email [REDACTED]

**Picture Caption: “little or none of the existing tracks and sleepers would be of value” Minister Paschal Donohoe 11<sup>th</sup> January 2016**

**Below: Photo of closed railway near Kiltimagh county Mayo**







**Email received from Minister Paschal Donohoe on October 14<sup>th</sup> 2015:**

Our Ref: PD/15/10049

Dear Brendan

Thank you for your letter and attachment from the letters page of the Irish Times regarding the decline of rural Ireland.

As you know from our meetings, my Department is supportive of the proposal to develop the disused Collooney to Claremorris rail line as a greenway, provided the integrity of the rail line is safeguarded in the event that a decision is made at some point in the future to reopen it as a functioning rail link. However, I must reiterate that while my Department is supportive of this proposal, it is ultimately a matter for interested parties to work with the relevant local authority to progress and submit, if funding is required, a proposal for consideration to this Department. In the meantime, I would like to wish you well with your continued efforts to progress this project.

With best wishes,

Minister Paschal Donohoe

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport

**After seeking clarification on the phrase used by the Minister “the integrity of the rail line” the email below was sent to Brendan Quinn on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2016-01-11**

**From:** minister@dtas.ie [mailto:minister@dtas.ie] **Sent:** 11 January 2016 12:19

Our Ref: PD/15/10987

Dear Brendan

I refer further to your letter seeking clarification on what was meant by me in previous correspondence when referring to the safeguarding of the integrity of the rail line in the event of the Collooney to Claremorris route being opened as a greenway. I think it can be accepted that little or none of the existing tracks and sleepers would be of value should the route be reinstated as a functioning rail line at some stage in the future and that I was, as you correctly interpret, referring to the safeguarding of the route of the closed railway.

With best wishes,

Minister Paschal Donohoe

