

Press release

From: Sligo Mayo Greenway campaign

Date: July 19th 2013:

- **Varadkar says railway will not be extended.**
- **Public supports a Greenway on disused Rail line.**
- **Is this the end of the line for the so-called 'Western Rail Corridor'?**

In a recent email (appended) to the Sligo-Mayo Greenway Campaign, Minister Leo Varadkar said *"the Government has no plans to extend the western rail corridor nor any other heavy rail line in the state"*. The minister has effectively drawn a line under the campaign to build a railway line from Limerick to Sligo, stating *"We do not have the funds [and] our priority is to keep the existing lines open."*

Referring to alternative uses for the route, the Minister said: *"With regard to greenways, my Department and its agencies are very supportive of greenways."*

Mayo County Council recently received almost 300 individual submissions during April and May in relation to the new county development plan asking for a greenway on what remains of the 'Western Rail Corridor' route in Mayo. In addition, a survey conducted in late 2012 of almost 1,300 people in Swinford under the 'Vision for the future' project revealed overwhelming support for a greenway on the disused light rail line from Claremorris to Collooney.

Following the communication from Minister Varadkar, Greenway campaigners were invited to meet with Alan Kelly (Minister for Sustainable Transport) on July 2nd. Minister Kelly said that he has no issues with the proposal to build a greenway on the Claremorris-Collooney section of the line, and he voiced full support for Minister Varadkar's comments. He added that he could not see any other part of the so-called 'Western Rail Corridor' being considered for re-opening for at least ten years. He also supported the idea of protecting the route against encroachment and adverse possession by using it as a cycling and walking route in the interim.

Minister Kelly said "a lot of County Councils are competing for Greenway funding", suggesting that local authorities in the West will need to promote tourism and amenity projects on the disused rail line if such funds are to be

attracted to the region. Sligo Mayo Greenway has found out that funding could be available for such a project, creating construction jobs in both counties and delivering long-term sustainable jobs associated with greenways elsewhere.

Regarding the public lobbying of the councils, Minister Kelly said it was good the public had embraced the democratic process in making their feelings heard. He welcomed the clear change in public opinion in the West.

Sligo Mayo Greenway campaign says “the time has now come for local politicians to accept that public opinion and local businesses support the practical use of this asset over the undeliverable aspiration for a railway. A greenway is a cost-effective way of using the land and protecting the route in public ownership forever” “with regard to local businesses Sligo Mayo Greenway has spoken to many businesses along the route who are in favour of the greenway, they can see the potential it will bring into the area.” In addition, “There is national and European funding available for Greenway projects and Sligo and Mayo County Councils should be doing their utmost to secure this money given that such projects have the backing of Government. The railway project clearly has no government support so why are the Councils unwilling to accept things have changed and the greenway represents a new opportunity? We trust the councils will have the vision to see this and not turn their backs on an opportunity, and we hope both local authorities will now actively support the Sligo Mayo Greenway plan; it is what the people and local businesses want, and what can be realistically achieved.”

ENDS

Copy of Varadkar email below.

Words: body content 578

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From: MINISTER'S OFFICE [mailto:minister@dttas.ie]
Sent: 21 June 2013 13:13
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Our Ref MLVC 13/1621

Our Ref MLVC 13/1621

21st June 2013

Dear Mr Quinn,

I refer to your recent correspondence requesting a meeting.

Currently, the Government has no plans to extend the western rail corridor nor any other heavy rail line in the state. We do not have the funds. Our priority is to keep the existing lines open. I have not met with West on Track for almost two years.

With regard to greenways, my Department and its agencies are very supportive of greenways. However, there are many more proposals for greenways than we can possibly facilitate, assist or support financially. For that reason, we only consider them where the local authority and the leader company etc. are on board already.

The granting of access to the alignment is a property matter for Irish Rail / CIE and I have no function in this regard.

For these reasons, I do not believe a meeting would serve any purpose.

Yours sincerely

Leo Varadkar
Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport