

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

Date: December 18th 2015: **FOR IMMEDIATE USE**

- **Western Development Commission Report on Rail Freight acknowledges potential use of Western Rail Corridor as Greenway**
- **Report states “proposals exist to establish a greenway for pedestrians and cyclists” on line closed since 1975**
- **Campaigners welcome recognition of greenway potential of Western Rail Corridor in WDC report**
- **Report forecasts two levels of freight increase, one based on realism and one on speculation.**
- **Speculative forecasts unrealistic**

Western Rail Trail Campaigners have warmly welcomed the recognition for the potential of a greenway on the closed railway from Athenry to Collooney as stated in a report published by the Western Development Commission this week.

The WDC commissioned the report into Rail Freight and the Western Region in March of this year at a cost of €17,000. The report was produced by a UK based rail consultant Intermodality which has been involved in several rail freight projects in the UK. The report was released on the WDC.ie website on 17<sup>th</sup> December <http://www.wdc.ie/publications/reports-and-papers/>

Brendan Quinn of the Western Rail Trail campaign said. The most encouraging comments in the report as far as the Western Rail Trail Campaign is concerned is the acknowledgement that “proposals exist to establish a greenway for pedestrians and cyclists” on the closed railway line from Collooney to Athenry which has been closed since 1975. (page 42 item 4.2.5).

Quinn added “Intermodality the consulting company which wrote the report, is very well respected in this field and the findings of the report are very interesting. Clearly the potential for rail investment in the existing rail routes to help freight is paramount. However, there is nothing in the report that suggests that rail freight from the West of Ireland will demand more railway lines. The report certainly highlighted the need for longer freight trains to make freight more competitive which would require infrastructural investment. For example, better and longer passing loops on our existing railway lines would help the case for more freight in and out of the West of Ireland. The Western Rail Trail campaign would fully support the upgrading of our existing network to make freight more efficient to service from the West of Ireland, and the report does make some excellent recommendations in this respect”

### **Two levels of Forecast on future freight volumes: Realistic and Speculative**

The report highlights the number of freight trains per day going in and out of the West of Ireland at about 4 per day (4.3.17 page 46, 2 inbound trains 2 outbound), which is hardly enough to justify new railway lines. It is what the report says about the future that is more interesting says Quinn.

Extensive “bottom up” analysis involved trade research with industry in the region showed that there is potential for about another 2 freight trains per day in and out of the region. The report also covers what is called “speculative freight increase” to a level of 10-14 freight trains a day by 2050. Quinn said, this kind of speculation has to be taken for what it is, pure speculation, there is no realistic reason to accept that rail freight to and from the West of Ireland is going to

increase fourfold anytime in the near to medium future. There is a concern though that this speculation may lead to optimism from those who still believe in the Western Rail Corridor concept; however, as was clearly shown this week, Galway councillors in Tuam voted in favour of a Greenway on the closed railway as they see a greenway as having far greater opportunity for the regional economy in the immediate future.

Quinn stated “Even with the realistic potential increase in volume it would be hard to justify new railway lines and we feel sure it will not lead to any further investment in new freight routes. However, if the potential does exist in the future, the importance of protecting the route of the closed railway from Collooney to Athenry, ideally with a greenway is now paramount.” “We think this report will really confirm Government policy not to re-open the Western Rail Corridor, as the realistic forecasts for Rail Freight are still quite low and the speculative forecasts really have no foundation apart from pure speculation.”

Quinn added “ The greenway campaign would also support upgrading existing railway routes with better and longer passing loops allowing longer freight trains to and from the Western Region, and rail freight hubs to ensure the existing routes are fully utilised for freight and intermodal transport. This kind of rail investment is probably realistic and will help increase rail freight to and from the West”

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**Picture Caption: End of the line for Rail corridor as Rail Freight report says “proposals exist to establish a greenway for pedestrians and**

**cyclists” on closed since 1975 railway line from Sligo to Athenry.**

