

PLANNING FOR GLOBAL CHANGE, PLANNING FOR IRELAND'S FUTURE:

The world is changing and Ireland is changing too. The best way for our country to address the changes that we will continue to face, is to plan for that change....The effects of these changes are reshaping the way in which local communities and regions develop.

Climate change is an issue facing the world in the 21st Century and now, more than at any time before, we are aware of the importance of looking after the physical and natural environment around us and its influence on our long-term health and well-being.....

Our country is well positioned to deal with change, but it is important for us to better understand and prepare for change, so we can take the opportunity to shape Ireland for our long-term benefit, which is why the Government has prepared Ireland 2040.

We admire the aspirations outlined above in the Preface (P.14) to the *National Planning Framework Document: Ireland 2040: Our Plan (NPF 2040)*.

However, our submission to the *NPF 2040* would like to draw the framers' attention to the urgent need for a specific strategy addressing public transport infrastructure within this document. There is currently no reference to how a plan for public transport will deal with the changes and challenges outlined above. There is no specific mention of the specific role of our national rail network, for example, outside of a reference to the electrification of rail, which would be a very welcome development and one which only enhances the argument for rail as a sustainable mode of public transport into the future.

There are multiple references within the *NPF 2040* to the challenges of *climate change* and to the *need to protect and enhance the environment* but there is no direct or meaningful reference whatsoever to addressing a major cause of pollution in this country and a major reason why we are failing to meet our international obligations on environmental targets: car usage.

P.108 Chapter 8 of the NPF 2040: Realising Our Sustainable Future manages to explore the sustainability issue under the following headings:

8.1 Environmental and Sustainability Goals

p.108 8.2 Resource Efficiency and Transition to a Low Carbon Economy

p110 8.3 Protecting Conserving and Enhancing our Natural Capital

p114 8.4 Creating a Cleaner Environment for a Healthy Society...

....all without once referring to cars or their emissions as a major source of our environmental pollution; without once referring to our nation's over reliance on cars as an issue that urgently needs addressing if we are to create a sustainable transport system; one which can meet increasing demand due to significant population increases over the next twenty years - an issue which needs addressing immediately if Ireland is to meet its

European Environmental targets for 2020, as well as its ongoing environmental obligations under the Paris climate change agreement and other international climate treaties up to 2040 and beyond.

Public transport including the train has been publicly acknowledged by Transport Minister Shane Ross as being a solution to environmental concerns:

'I share the view that public transport is, obviously, the main channel, and a very important channel, to getting people out of their cars to free up the roads and improve the environment'¹.

...yet our national over reliance on the car and, alternatively, the viability and sustainability of rail is not specifically addressed at all within this document. As a vision of Ireland's future over the next two decades which purports to meet the challenges of climate change and provide for a sustainable future, this seems like an extraordinary omission.

Rather than examining the role of public transport in addressing significant environmental challenges, there are instead several references in this document to *improving road journey times*:

NPF 2040 p.57 : Key future growth enablers for Limerick include:

.....enhanced road connectivity to Shannon-Foynes Port, including local by-passes. Enhanced regional connectivity through improved average journey times by road to Cork and Waterford.

Whilst there are few specifics on a vision for public transport there are however specific statements that **more roads** are required from certain city to city routes, which would seem to fly in the face of all environmental aspirations outlined in the rest of the document and contradict related public policy statements on the urban and rural environment.

NPF 2040 p.60: (Cities) Waterford:

The City is located between Dublin and Cork and is well-served by motorway and rail links to Dublin, but does require improved road links to other regional cities, and in particular Cork and Limerick, and also within the region to towns that aren't served by motorway.

We would argue that rather than adding to the pollution and environmental degradation caused by further intensive road building, that improving and enhancing the rail networks is absolutely key to the ongoing sustainability of our public transport needs within the context of the environmental and carbon footprint factors outlined as *Key Point 4* in the introduction to the current NPF 2040 document:

P.9 Key Point 4. Supported by Strengthened and more Environmentally Focused Planning at Local Level

...The future planning and development of our communities at local level will be refocused to tackle Ireland's higher than average (45%) carbon-intensity per capita and enabling a national transition to a competitive low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050, through harnessing our country's prodigious renewable energy potential and electrification of much of our mobility and energy systems.

The rail network, including the rural rail network, is as an obvious core means of dealing with the issues of population growth, meeting increasing service demand, encouraging economic growth and rural regeneration, whilst decreasing carbon emissions and meeting environmental targets effectively into the future.

The national over reliance on the car is a core issue which clearly needs to be addressed specifically within the *NPF 2040* and has been addressed in many Government originated documents in the recent past, including in the *National Transport Authority's Public Consultation Document on The Role of Rail in Ireland and Funding its Delivery, Nov 2016* :

2.3 Rail's contribution to transport in Ireland:

*The current strengths of the heavy rail network are in providing for travel demand within Ireland's largest urban area (Dublin) serving densely populated areas generating high levels of demand for commuting and in providing for strategic inter-urban links between Dublin and the other cities and regional towns. **As demand for travel increases driven by economic and demographic growth, the contribution of rail to meeting this demand sustainably will rise.***

Rail also provides wider benefits for society. Rail travel contributes to the control of national greenhouse gas emissions by providing a sustainable and attractive alternative to car travel. It permits greater intensity of land development in cities and towns, enabling more sustainable settlement patterns to evolve.

Rail travel is a particularly important facilitator of the development of national tourism. Rail also supports economic activity by linking key cities and enabling efficient business-related travel.

Persuading car-owners to use public transport is a core objective of transport policy at national and European level. The maintenance of a well-funded nationwide rail network is key to delivering on this policy.

In this time of climate change and major threats to our environment, improving the train network is an essential part of Ireland's obligations under international agreements to improve public transport infrastructure. We are supposed to be improving such services, not dismantling them. We lag behind most countries in Europe with regard to investment in this

area; Ireland will in fact be penalised for its multiple failures to meet national public transport infrastructure obligations under global environmental treaty obligations by 2020.

It is worth noting that Irish Rail is in agreement with many of the above assertions. As part of their response to the public consultation for the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport's *Strategic Framework for Investment in Land Transport* Irish Rail (IR) stated the following:

'Rail as a mode of transport is uniquely placed to support existing Irish and European policies relating to sustainability of transport and environmental policies and targets such as reducing emissions across passenger and freight transport.'

Rail also supports other Irish and European policies outlined in the framework, including safety; social inclusion; sustainable regional development; population health; as well as general economic benefits and supporting tourism.

Environmentally, Rail travel is a highly energy-efficient mode of travel, with relatively low emissions: 60g of greenhouse gases per passenger-km, vs 210g for road vehicles (RR2016, p.23). It is also amenable, as indicated in the NPF 2040 document, to electrification. The potential for transferring bulky freight transportation from road to rail also cannot be overlooked.

According to IR's own website¹: 'Rail transport offers great potential for solving the "mobility or environment" dilemma in view of its recognised environmental advantages over other modes of transport. Trains are more energy-efficient than other modes and, by using electricity, can easily adapt to different sources of energy, in particular those that are renewable and less polluting. Trains have a better ratio of CO2 emissions to traffic when compared to other modes.'

It is our view that:

- Rail travel is more energy-efficient than any other mode of powered travel and generates lower emissions.
- Energy efficiency factors are of major and growing importance in a world facing the environmental challenges of sustainability, peak oil and global warming.
- There is clear evidence that environmental considerations are a significant driver in the decisions of many users to travel by rail, even where a car is available and would be cheaper, quicker or more flexible.

¹ <http://www.irishrail.ie/about-us/environment>

- There is a growing focus on ethical tourism. However, many people also take ethical issues into account in making everyday travel decisions.

There is a marked divergence between both existing and proposed funding levels for rail transport in Ireland and typical Western European funding levels, including from those countries identified as having infrastructure which yields economic advantage. This runs counter to European policy on the development of Trans-European Networks and the Shift2Rail objectives. Rail accounts for almost 40% of land transport investment on average in Western Europe, compared to 18% in Ireland.

The multiple benefits of integrated rail services necessitate the funding of Irish Rail to the norms prevailing in other advanced countries. Unfortunately, there has been a short sighted approach to date and an overwhelming focus on existing funding costs and national demand levels for rail, with only a brief acknowledgement of benefits and how past policy failings have facilitated continued car dependency. Future policy, as stated in the NPF 2040, should support and develop the role of railways in meeting economic and other policy goals, and in generating economic benefit for the State.

Public transport can alleviate pressure on cities by allowing people to move to areas of lower density where there is less competition for resources such as housing and water (the current proposal to divert water from Lough Derg to the service the requirements of Dublin is just one example of the challenges created by population centralisation).

The NPF 2040 also states that ‘access to social infrastructure and services, is a key determinant of the quality of life of people and as a consequence is also an important factor in attracting investment to an area’. The NPF 2040 also identifies the implications for sectoral investment strategies ‘in terms of both the connectedness of cities and strategic towns nationally and the accessibility of rural areas’.

We firmly believe that rail services provide economic, environmental and social benefits to entire communities. The social and economic benefits of rail travel have a much greater impact in smaller communities where a rail service supports rural regeneration as well as enhancing socio-economic development. And according to IR² ‘The railway provides a social fabric to our community that links people and places [...] For any organisation must be about more than just the commercial and service relationship between the company and its customers. We have a rich heritage of playing a vital role in the lives of communities, and we understand the wish from those communities for us to continue this and indeed strengthen our involvement in their lives.’

We see that decades of failure to invest in rural infrastructure have resulted in seriously inadequate train services in rural areas. We in the North Tipperary Rail Community (NTRC)

² <http://www.irishrail.ie/blog/post?a=567>

have been engaging with Irish Rail to advocate for better and more frequent services; in campaigning for better services on our line we have been cooperating with local businesses, for whom the line is a potential source of tourism and revenue. To take the town of Cloughjordan as an example: the census indicates the population is growing, businesses are getting established, tourism is burgeoning and, despite the poor services, train users have been increasing in numbers in recent years; all of which indicates future potential for growth rather than rural decline. The social, environmental and economic benefits of rail travel have a much greater impact in smaller communities like ours where a rail service supports rural regeneration as well as enhancing socio-economic development: our line is an example of how rail services provide these benefits to entire communities.

At a time when we are attempting to move from silo-based solutions to those that represent a holistic approach to the challenges that face society, the viable environmental, social and economic solution that the railway provides is an obvious solution to future public transport needs.

Given all the above, we ask that the issue of reducing reliance on the car and, more pertinently, a specific plan for an enhanced and improved public transport infrastructure be outlined within the final current draft of the NPF 2040 as a distinct topic, with a particular emphasis on outlining the role of rail as a potential key solution to future transport needs and we ask that this entire issue is addressed in much more specific and substantial terms in the final draft.

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