

Western Inter-County Railway Committee Submission to the National Planning Framework – November 2017.

The Western Inter-County Railway Committee is a joint committee of 5 local authorities in the West of Ireland committed to the establishment of a rail service between Limerick and Sligo via Clare, Galway and Mayo.

From Cllr. Michael Connolly, Chairman WIRC, Moyloughmore, Moylough Co. Galway

1. I refer to our submission of last March to the NPF consultation process.

From our analysis of the most recent draft NPF, produced in September, it appears that our submission has not been considered.

We are at a loss to understand the reason for this.

Our submission was prepared with the National Planning Framework process in mind and is founded on the principles of the NPF and is aimed at addressing the questions posed in the NPF consultation process.

2. There appears to be a two-tiered vision for Ireland which is clearly illustrated in the draft NPF vision for physical connectivity between city regions.

This is clearly illustrated, in the draft, by high-speed rail connections being envisaged between Dublin - Belfast and Dublin - Cork compared with a bus-based road transport vision for public transport between Waterford – Limerick – Galway and the North West City regions.

Dublin - Cork high-speed train travel of c. 2 hours is envisaged compared with a 5 hour bus-based road service between the equi-distant Galway City and the North West City Region.

If the draft NPF view that ***“our success will be measured by the legacy we bestow onto future generations of Irish citizens, who will inherit the outcomes of the choices we make now”***, is to be meaningful, a radical change is required to the vision for public transport connectivity between Ireland’s cities separate from Dublin. This was specifically referred to in the draft NPF, regarding ***“Elements of the Strategy – Our Regions and Rural Strategy”*** as;

“to create access to the North West from Dublin and from the other cities to the South” and to create “access between Irelands cities separate from Dublin”. Page 30.

It also is in keeping with the National Strategic Outcome as noted on page 135:

Expand attractive public transport alternatives to car transport to reduce congestion and emissions and enable the transport sector to cater for the demands associated with longer term population and employment growth in a sustainable manner through the following measures;
-to strengthen public transport connectivity between cities and large growth towns in Ireland and Northern Ireland with improved services and reliable journey times.

The draft NPF reference to ***improving accessibility in the Mid- Border and North Western Counties*** is inconsistent with a bus-based public transport vision - as a high speed rail-based solution can be provided on what is an 85 mile long unused railway alignment at present between Galway and Sligo.

3. On the island of Ireland, perceived distances are large between centres of population because we have allowed the perception to grow that the fastest land transport available to us is 120kph in a car or 100kph on a bus. We pay scant attention to the fact that railways have the capacity to move people at twice these speeds – reducing travel times by half.

- This ease of connectivity would accommodate the needs of business, tourism, students, an ageing population, and leisure seekers.
- It would improve the quality of life and spread the attractiveness of housing in a more dispersed structure, and support the creation of connected and sustainable communities, where future jobs will be located.
- An enhanced European level of commitment to rail transport will also make public amenities more accessible and provide a means to grow carbon friendly rail freight traffic to and from Ports.
- Railways are a strategic infrastructure that must be prioritised.
- There are obvious environmental benefits, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the consequences of climate change as well as transitioning to a low carbon sustainable economy and society.
- The governance structures of our national transport infrastructure will need to adapt to address these national challenges.
- The National Policy Objective No.66 that “*Statutory arrangements between spatial and transport planning in the Greater Dublin Area will be extended to other cities*”, should be amended to being “*extended nationwide*”. The restricted role of the National Transport Authority to strategic transport planning in the Greater Dublin Area alone, must be addressed as the reference to “National” in the authorities title is totally misleading at present, while the lack of co-ordination in strategic transport planning outside the GDA is impacting negatively on economic recovery and growth in the regions.

The National Planning Framework process is a key opportunity to influence the spatial pattern of development throughout Ireland for the benefit of the Country as a whole, over the next twenty years and beyond.

The opportunity to make our railways a core element of this framework must not be lost.

4. Since our earlier submission;

- **A Department of Transport National Mitigation Plan ignored our national rail network outside Dublin and failed to make a single reference to rail freight which is acknowledged throughout the world as a major contributor to carbon savings.**
- **Rail freight between Mayo and Dublin/Waterford Ports has increased by 50% displacing 7million truck kms per annum.**
- **Passenger numbers on Galway – Limerick train services have exceeded the business case projections by 50%.**
- **The M18 Gort to Tuam motorway has opened and is a very welcome addition to the regions infrastructure. Traffic congestion in Galway City and its environs continues to grow and it is increasingly evident that the under-used railway network to the East, South and North of the City could make a major contribution to commuter, business and social travel if it received the relatively modest investment required.**

We look forward to the NPF reflecting a vision which includes the railway network as part of inter-regional high quality public transport along the Atlantic Economic Corridor as per the adopted Regional Planning Guidelines for the Border, West and Mid-West Regions.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Connolly

Chairman

Western Inter-County Railway Committee

10th November 2017