

An Taoiseach
Micheál Martin TD
Department of the Taoiseach
Government Buildings
Merrion Street Upper
Dublin 2
D02 R583

9th June 2022

RE: Irish Rail network funding

Dear Taoiseach,

Cork Chamber represents 1,200 members together employing 100,000 people throughout the city, metropolitan area and county. Our vision is to be a world-leading Chamber of Commerce, delivering on a progressive economic, social and sustainability agenda at the heart of a vibrant business community. Our direction is guided by our formal pledge to uphold the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, five of which have been identified by the Chambers Ireland network.

It is very positive to see progress being made and funding being allocated to support transport infrastructure improvements in Cork. The funding drawdown from the EU Recovery and Resilience Fund to upgrade and electrify Cork's commuter rail network has been most welcome and is another step towards a sustainable future for Cork's public transport system and the realisation of a key element of the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (CMATS).

With the 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities designation recently awarded to Cork and to facilitate the population and economic growth set out in the National Planning Framework, there are a number of key investments within the Cork Metropolitan rail network that require further support.

Cork Suburban Rail

Cork's biggest and most impactful opportunity to achieve real positive change in our transport system and contribute to the 2030 climate-neutral target is the delivery of upgrades and projects in our Suburban Rail network. The eight new train stations contained within CMATS must be delivered in the short term to encourage those living in suburban areas to choose public transport over private cars. Under the accelerated programme, which aims to deliver high priority stations by the end of 2026, the Chamber would request the needed funding be secured for all eight stations to be developed in the accelerated programme in the immediate term.

Growing population in these areas requires this level of development to ease congestion, reduce emissions and meet climate targets, and cut journey times for vehicles of all types entering and travelling around the city. The Dunkettle interchange has become a bottleneck for all types of commuter, freight and longer distance traffic. Along with the works that will divert traffic away from the interchange, sustainable transport options that reduce the overall volume of vehicles on this important artery are crucial. Moving commuters from cars to trains is key to cutting transport greenhouse gas emissions and ensuring affordable sustainable transport options are available in the face of rising oil prices and inflation. The current macroeconomic environment offers an opportunity to shift a significant portion of the population on to public transport for their journey to work with rising petrol and diesel prices, and reduced public transport fares. In a Cork metropolitan area

context that opportunity needs to be grasped by delivering suburban rail services that offer the general public that option.

In Cork's suburban context, a 10-minute rail service is central to delivery of an offering that can get people out of their cars and relieve congestion from key commuter towns such as Blarney and Midleton. Again, electrification will be required to deliver a service with 10-minute frequency and the Chamber is aware that a procurement order is already in place to supply the new carriages and electric engines. We would urge that movement on deployment of new electric and battery electric trains and associated needed infrastructure (including a new depot) be made a strategic priority and funding allocated in the current budget for deployment.

In the short term the biggest opportunity to create a modal shift is through suburban rail given that most of the infrastructure is already in place and additional infrastructure delivery has a much shorter timeframe than the other major transport initiatives due to land ownership and planning and consent issues.

Cork to Dublin Line

The Cork-Dublin line is a key transport axis for the Irish economy and post-Covid is a key component of developing balanced regional development. Reducing journey times on the line continues to be a key requirement to decarbonise intercity transport and help Ireland meet its climate targets by moving people out of private vehicles for intercity travel and on to public transport.

In that context, financing and funding for electrification of the route is key to bringing a higher speed service that can bring journey times towards the 90-minute mark that has to be our short to medium target. The Chamber is aware that funds have not yet been committed to electrification, and it is essential that government take this key step to commit funding to electrification to develop the future-fit service that Cork's businesses and people require.

Already travel demand on the route is close to reaching pre-Covid levels, despite new remote work and meeting patterns. It demonstrates a continuing and growing appetite for intercity rail travel that will soon outstrip capacity. Key to meeting this demand and decarbonising intercity transport is the more frequent services and shorter journey times that electrification can bring. As passenger growth continues, increased capacity and frequency and reduced journey times on this route must be facilitated. To achieve a journey time of under two hours and to maximize our infrastructure capacity, immediate approval of funding for the electrification of this route is vital.

Finally, delivery of all aspects and pieces of infrastructure in CMATS, including active travel, Bus Connects, Light Rail and Suburban Rail are critical to supporting Cork's ambition to be a climate-neutral smart-city by 2030, and to building a reputation as a sustainable, accessible city region of choice.

I ask that funding be allocated to these rail projects at the earliest available opportunity to allow them to progress.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely,



Conor Healy
CEO

CC: Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Michael McGrath TD; Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan TD.