

27 September 2023

Re: All-Island Strategic Rail Review Consultation

To whom it concerns,

Cork Chamber represents 1,200 members together employing over 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.

Connectivity is the cornerstone of a successful country and is key to the future economy of Cork as it continues to grow and as we strive to become one of Europe's first climate neutral cities by 2030. Enhancing our transportation system and connectivity within the Cork region and between other cities, towns and villages is a top priority for our members.

Cork is on the cusp of transformation. As the voice of business in Cork, we are determined to work with government and all stakeholders to accelerate this agenda and ensure a sustainable, inclusive and affordable transport network for our city region. We ask that our recommendations and comments below are fully considered, and we remain at your disposal for any additional insights from our membership.

Yours sincerely,

Sincerely,



Conor Healy

CEO

Decarbonisation

In representing business in Cork, Cork Chamber welcomes the decarbonisation recommendations within this draft report but advises that consideration be given to Cork to accelerate this process.

The electrification of rail lines throughout the country would be transformative and contribute significantly to reducing Ireland's carbon footprint. Cork's designation as a 2030 EU Climate-Neutral mission city by 2030 places a particular impetus to see this transformation occur in the region at an accelerated rate. A Cork City Council study recently found that 29% of the city's carbon emissions are related to road transport¹. Cork's population is also growing rapidly, according to the most recent Census the region's population increased by 8.5%, surpassing the national average of 8.1%².

As our city region continues to exude strategic economic importance in terms of FDI, indigenous local enterprises and nationally recognised universities, it is essential that the accelerated investment in the electrification of Cork's suburban rail network to meet the need for €300 million in rail electrification infrastructure works is allocated to Cork by the end of this year. These works need to be completed by the end of 2025 so that new electric trains arriving in Ireland can run on Cork's suburban lines. This includes twin tracking and the construction of eight new stations to deliver faster, more frequent, more sustainable services.

As an EU mission city for carbon neutrality by 2030, Cork should be receiving substantially increased funding in the next seven years to meet that goal. A dedicated fund for our two cities should be established by central government to fund this transition to meet that target for both Cork and Dublin by 2030. The benefits of this fund would be felt in areas such as infrastructure and public transport, *inter alia*, thus contributing to decarbonisation of rail in Cork. We hope similar prioritisation in the context of this plan.

Intercity Spine

Cork Chamber is in full support of a sustainable solution that is delivered in the most cost-effective manner that will deliver the needed increase in frequency of services and journey times across intercity services to facilitate a modal shift while also not causing any additional adverse effects to the environment or an increase in our carbon footprint. We would also like to note that the recent announcement from Irish rail to provide a two hour and fourteen-minute service between Cork and Dublin has been very welcome and we are in full support of additional decreases to this journey time in a sustainable matter. We urge that Irish Rail to aim for a two-hour service in the medium term, with the long-term goal of achieving a 90-minute service on this key route connecting Ireland's two largest major cities.

The recommendations within the draft report to enhance intercity services are very welcome. Cork Chamber would be particularly supportive of direct services between Cork and Belfast and Cork to Dublin Airport. There is, however, a current connectivity deficit between Cork and Limerick city. By car it takes about one hour and thirty minutes to travel between Cork Kent Station and Limerick Colbert Train Station. By train the journey time is approximately one hour and forty minutes and this includes a change over at Limerick junction. While electrification and infrastructure improvements detailed in this report will eventually speed up these services, to rapidly see a modal shift away from

¹ <https://www.corkcity.ie/en/council-services/services/environment/climate-change/cork-city-baseline-emissions-inventory.pdf>

² <https://data.cso.ie/table/FY003A>

cars to public transport it needs to be made as easy as possible. Thus, we strongly advise that a direct service from Cork to Limerick Colbert be explored and implemented through this plan.

Regional and Rural

It is of utmost importance that connectivity in regional and rural areas is restored and developed, not only for the areas themselves but also for overall economic development, environmental sustainability, and social inclusivity. This Review grouped all options into four geographical regions: Northern Ireland, West Coast, South Coast, and North Midlands.

In relation to the recommendations suggested in Northern Ireland it is positive to see a focus being placed on boosting connectivity between Northern Ireland and other areas across the country. If actioned these recommendations will create and enhance further opportunities for trade and tourism. Meanwhile electrifying much of the network in this region would be of great benefit long term.

In the West Coast the recommendation to restore the rail line between Athenry and Claremorris would allow a direct route for freight from Ballina and Westport to ports on the South Coast. It is crucial that this plan envisions a future that includes freight transportation as an integral part of rail development. There is a focus also in the West Coast on improving services between Galway and Dublin, Limerick, Cork and Waterford. This is of critical importance to the future profile of the country for FDI. Intercity connectivity will benefit all regions and has been an area of deficiency for many years. It is of utmost importance that this approach is kept at the top of the agenda when considering each of the four geographical regions.

While it is disappointing that a more direct route between Cork and Waterford was found to be impractical due to the geography of this corridor, it is very positive to see the recommendation to install a curve at Limerick Junction which would enable trains leaving the Cork-Dublin line to join the Limerick-Waterford line.

It is crucial that the North Midlands region is better connected via rail and that the towns within it have access to Dublin and Belfast. This will also promote interregional connectivity across the northern part of the country. It is welcome to see an emphasis on the possibilities of alternative freight paths to Northern Ireland with the installation of lines in North Midlands which would remove congestion from some of the areas in Dublin, which will benefit the entire country.

Overall Cork Chamber welcomes the recommendation to ensure regional and rural lines have at least one train per two hours and hourly services between Galway, Limerick, Cork, and Waterford. Increasing speeds on these lines is also of vital importance as rail must be seen as a more efficient option to other forms of transport. Upgrading the Limerick Junction and the Limerick Junction – Waterford line is of utmost importance to the Southern region, as it will enhance intercity connectivity which at the moment is not up to standard.

Planned improvements in the suburban rail offering in Cork are very welcome and will see a great enhancement of rail services to Cobh, Midleton and Mallow. This is the response needed to facilitate the population growth in the region and the desire to live in locations with convenient commuting access to Cork City. The recent surge in rail passenger growth has propelled the success of recent investments in the city and it is therefore essential that this plan aims to ensure the momentum of both intercity (previously mentioned) and suburban rail services that enhance connectivity in Cork as the demand and appetite for rail continues to increase. This plan can ensure continued progress on various elements of the Cork commuter network to ensure that, as quickly as possible, Cork can have

a high frequency, reliable, quality suburban rail system in Cork. It is crucial that progressing the suburban rail system in Cork is included in this plan. Additionally, to encourage those living in suburban areas to choose public transport over private cars, the suburban rail services contained within CMATS, including the six new train stations at Monard, Blackpool, Tivoli, Carrigtwohill West, Waterrock and Ballynoe along the existing Cork-Mallow and Cork-Midleton rail lines, must be delivered at an accelerated rate.

Sustainable Cities

Cork's public transportation system is on the cusp of major transformation under the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (CMATS) which looks set to enhance the public transport offering in Cork. The electrification of the suburban rail line is essential to move towards a more sustainable future for Cork, and the establishment of several new stations and improved frequencies will further increase Cork's attractiveness as place to live and work. The planned addition of a tram line will propel Cork to further success as a city and a region.

Plans under CMATS for the establishment of a tram line in Cork are acknowledged in this draft plan, however it is imperative it is addressed in a more meaningful way. If Cork is to facilitate its growing population and achieve climate neutral status by 2030 a light rail option for Cork will be needed in the immediate future. There is potential to accelerate the delivery timeline of Cork Light Rail and this plan can help in shortening the current projected timelines for the project, we would strongly recommend that Cork light rail is included in the scope of this plan.

The plan aims to connect Dublin, Belfast International, and Shannon Airport to the railway. It is disappointing that Cork has been omitted from this plan, and we would strongly recommend that this is reconsidered. Cork Airport is forecast to have its busiest year in its history in terms of international passengers with 2.7 million set to fly in and out of the airport this year. Cork Airport is the country's second busiest and best-connected international airport and is the international gateway to the South of Ireland and is uniquely positioned at the start of two tourism trails: Ireland's Ancient East and the Wild Atlantic Way. It would be a missed opportunity, not only for the Cork region but for the wider economy, not to include plans to link Cork airport to railway.

Freight

The opportunity to develop Ireland's freight network is significant, as highlighted within this draft report. We strongly advise that Marino Point in the Port of Cork be included as a location for the development of rail-based port freight transport infrastructure, in alignment with the Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028 and the Port of Cork's Masterplan 2050, which are both pivotal to the strategic development of the Port and the Cork region.

Conclusion

Overall, the draft All-Island Strategic Rail Review and the recommendations within are welcomed by Cork Chamber.

We would like to draw attention to our key recommendations:

- The electrification of rail lines in Cork should be completed at an accelerated rate, with the required investment for enabling works being allocated by the end of 2023.
- The development of a direct service between Cork Kent and Limerick Colbert should be considered.

- The plan for Cork's light rail system should be accelerated and delivered by around 2030.
- Cork Airport should be included in any plans to connect airports to rail lines, under the current draft plan it is currently omitted.
- Marino Point should be included in the plan as a key location for freight transport.

As our population continues to grow so too will the need for increased capacity and frequency of rail services. Thus, it is critical that these needs and this report be continually reviewed to ensure we can keep up with demand in a sustainable manner.