

## **Cork Chamber Response to the Public Consultation on the Cork Area Commuter Rail (CACR) Programme**

### **1. Do you support the principal objective of the CACR Programme?**

Cork Chamber strongly supports the principal objective of the CACR Programme, that is the addition of new stations and improvements to existing ones, in support of compact urban growth and enhancement of the existing heavy rail system.

The proposed upgrades align with Cork Chamber's vision for a connected, sustainable, and liveable city region. Facilitating rail connectivity to newly developing residential zones such as Water-Rock in Midleton and the western side of Carrigtwohill will make public transport a viable and attractive commuting option. A 10-minute service frequency has the potential to significantly reduce private car use, easing congestion and reducing emissions.

We commend the proactive approach in planning new stations in advance of major housing delivery in several areas. Building the infrastructure now ensures readiness for future demand, rather than reacting retrospectively. Areas like Monard, Blarney, Water-Rock, and Carrigtwohill are all earmarked for substantial housing delivery in the coming years as per the population growth targets established in the National Planning Framework.

The aim to deliver five of the stations (Blarney, Water-Rock, Kilbarry/Blackpool, Carrigtwohill West and Dunkettle) by 2030 is welcome and should yield significant benefits in the context of the development of new homes and commercial developments in these areas. It will also relieve pressure on housing demand in the city centre, which is needed due to existing capacity constraints and limited space for new developments.

The integration of the upgraded rail network with other transport modes through a hub at Kent Station, including connections with BusConnects, Luas Cork, and enhanced cycling infrastructure, is vital for its success and will help facilitate economic growth and mobility across the wider metropolitan area.

Cork City has been awarded a Mission Label in the EU's Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission. This label recognises Cork's strong leadership and ambitious climate action plans. The city aims to achieve climate neutrality by 2030, reducing carbon emissions by 80%. The further rollout of sustainable travel and the electrification of the rail network will significantly boost Cork's climate credentials and encourage commuters, residents and visitors to the city to opt for greener travel options.

Improved rail connectivity will support talent attraction and foreign direct investment, bolstering existing areas, such as Little Island, Cork city centre and parts of East Cork which enjoy this already, and enhancing that prospect in new areas along the expanded rail network.

## 2. What aspects of the CACR Programme are of most interest to you?

Several aspects of the CACR Programme are of particular interest to Cork Chamber:

- **Electrification of the Network:** As a UN SDG Champion, Cork Chamber fully endorses the electrification of the rail system as a critical step towards decarbonising transport. With transport currently accounting for a significant share of national emissions, urgent investment in low-emission infrastructure is essential. Cork's status as an EU Mission City further underscores the importance of sustainable, low-carbon transport solutions to meet our climate targets by 2030.
- **Accessibility Upgrades:** Planned upgrades at Cobh, Midleton, Mallow and Little Island (with new lifts and bridges) are welcome developments. These must be replicated across the network to ensure public transport is accessible to all, including those with reduced mobility, people with prams, and elderly passengers.
- **Station Design:** All new and upgraded stations should incorporate:
  - High-quality lighting and visibility for early morning/late evening users
  - Secure and covered bicycle storage
  - Real-time service information displays
  - Futureproofing for capacity expansion
- **New Station Locations:**
  - **Blarney/Stoneview:** Serves a high-growth area and major tourist attraction; strong park-and-ride potential. This station will provide the opportunity for cruise liner passengers to board a train in Cobh and travel directly to Blarney as part of their visit to Cork.
  - **Monard:** Aligned with a major new housing zone; opportunity to embed sustainable travel habits from the outset.
  - **Blackpool:** Will serve a densely populated inner-city community and commercial hub.
  - **Tivoli:** Strategically located to serve future residential developments, including the redevelopment of the Port of Cork site, which could yield 2,500 new homes.
  - **Dunkettle:** Excellent multi-modal interchange potential; park-and-ride option could relieve pressure on the Jack Lynch Tunnel. Proximity to Little Island, a major employment zone, is beneficial too as commuters may be able to choose alternative routes to work for all or part of their journey.
  - **Carrigtwohill West:** Important for new residential areas but requires improved permeability into the adjacent commercial park.
  - **Water-Rock:** A key growth area for new homes; essential that rail access is in place early in its development cycle. When fully developed, the Water-Rock area

will accommodate 2,500 homes, three schools, and 50,000 sq m of enterprise and employment space. Rail connectivity is vital to offset the vehicular traffic this could generate.

### **3. Do you have any comments, suggestions and/or ideas on the Emerging Preferred Option being presented?**

Cork Chamber offers the following suggestions:

- **Expand Park and Ride Facilities:** Particularly at Blarney and Dunkettle to encourage mixed-mode commuting.
- **Timely Delivery of Rolling Stock:** Additional carriages must be available in line with new station openings to meet expected demand. Peak days, such as those coinciding with cruise ship arrivals in Cobh, will require special capacity planning.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Continuous engagement with local communities and businesses is essential to ensure access, permeability, and safety features are appropriate at each station.
- **Supporting Infrastructure:** Rail success depends on integrated bus services, safe cycling routes, and walkability to stations. Without this, modal shift will be limited.

### **4. Please share any additional comments and feedback you have on the CACR Programme.**

- **First and Last Mile Connectivity:** New and upgraded rail services must be supported by reliable bus links, safe cycling infrastructure, and pedestrian access. This is particularly important in more peripheral areas like Water-Rock and Blarney. Bus timetables should align with train schedules to ensure seamless travel.
- **Cycling Infrastructure:** Large communities lie within 3–5 km of many stations. Protected cycle lanes and secure bicycle parking are vital to encourage cycling as part of a multi-modal journey.
- **Permeability and Topography Concerns:**
  - **Carrigtwohill West:** Access to the commercial park is limited under the current design.
  - **Blackpool:** Topographical constraints (steep gradients) and a single-lane drop-off at the station are problematic. Better connectivity to the shopping centre, retail and residential development nearby should be incorporated.
  - **Tivoli and Ballynoe:** Careful planning is required to ensure usability due to existing topography and potential access challenges.
- **Equity of Access:** The CACR Programme should prioritise connectivity to lower-income areas and transport-poor neighbourhoods, ensuring no communities are left behind. Stations must offer step-free access and real-time information.

## 5. Will the additional stations, improvements to existing stations and associated general line works encourage you to change your mode of transport from private car to public transport?

Cork Chamber believes the proposals will significantly encourage modal shift away from private cars to sustainable transport options provided key conditions are met:

- **Frequency and Reliability:** The proposed 10–15 minute frequency is critical. However, this ambition hinges on timely investment in rail cars, staff, and supporting services. It is essential that this frequency is maintained during off-peak and evening periods to serve a wide range of users.
- **Timely Delivery:** The timeline for delivery of new carriages and stations is pivotal. A more ambitious delivery schedule would ensure residents in growing suburbs such as Water-Rock and Monard can establish sustainable travel habits from the outset.
- **Geographical Coverage:** The expanded network serves both existing urban centres and new growth zones, particularly to the **north, northwest, and east** of the city, increasing the reach of public transport.
- **Member Feedback:** Cork Chamber's members have consistently raised concerns about limited public transport options. This programme, if fully delivered, should address many of these concerns and offer a realistic alternative to car dependency.

## Conclusion

The CACR Programme represents a transformative opportunity for the Cork metropolitan area to enhance its public transport network in line with climate, economic, and social objectives.

The benefits of the swift delivery of the key elements of phase 1 of the CACR Programme, including the through platform at Kent station, the signalling and communications upgrade, and the twin-tracking of the Glounthaune to Midleton section of the line, are already evident in the increase in passenger numbers on the commuter network.

The timely delivery of these elements also gives confidence that the key aspects of phase 2 can be delivered on time and on budget in order to reap the full benefits of the plan.

Cork Chamber encourages the swift and comprehensive implementation of the programme and looks forward to continued engagement to ensure its success.