



**Submission from East Mayo Greenway Group to Mayo County Council (hereafter MCC) in regard to the draft Mayo county development plan 2021 – 2027.**

**March 15<sup>th</sup> 2021**

This submission is being made on behalf of the 1235 (at time of writing 15<sup>th</sup> march 2021) members of the East Mayo Greenway Group (hereafter EMGG).

**East Mayo Greenway Group.** Who are we? What are our credentials? How many people support us in East Mayo?

EMGG was formed in 2019 after the Kiltimagh Greenway Group took the decision to rename itself to give a county wide focus to the campaign to utilize the closed railway which runs from Charlestown to Claremorris as a greenway until such time as a railway might be possible. The group is currently arranging to register as a formal community group with Mayo County Council as part of the Public Participation Network, being part of the PPN will place the group on a level of recognized community status with MCC.

Our membership is defined as members of the East Mayo Greenway Group on Facebook the social media platform we chose to communicate with our membership about our desires and aspirations. Through social media channels the group has asked its members to make personal submissions to MCC on the EMG issue.

EMG facilitated group members with an easy to use submissions card which laid out some of our detailed arguments and rationale as to why MCC should adopt the EMG project as an achievable objective in the new county plan. MCC will be familiar with the many individual submissions made by members of the public using this medium.

EMGG fully expects MCC to fully consider the points on that card raised by literally hundreds of submissions MCC has now received. These are individual people making the effort to participate in their democratic right to have their view heard. To help MCC members understand the level of membership we have here are some statistics taken from our Facebook page which are up to date on March 15<sup>th</sup> 2021. EMGG has 1235 members registered as group members.

Of those 1235 members, 849 live in county Mayo. Facebook allows downloads of certain levels of granular information about group memberships from the Facebook platform. The following two tables should be of interest to the council members reading this submission:

**Table 1.0 EMG Mayo Members:**

Where EMG Mayo members live	Number
Kiltimagh, Ireland	254
Swinford, Ireland	183
Charlestown, Ireland	70
Claremorris, Ireland	65
Ballyhaunis, Ireland	59
Castlebar, Ireland	57
Knock, Ireland	48
Mayo, Ireland	35
Ballina, Ireland	16
Foxford, Ireland	14
Westport, Ireland	14
Balla, Ireland	12
Ballinrobe, Ireland	9
Newport, Ireland	4
Belmullet, Ireland	4
Crossmolina, Ireland	3
Killala, Ireland	2
Total	849

**Table 2.0 The membership of the whole group in terms of age and gender is:**

Age range	Women	% women	Men	% men
13-17	0	0%	3	0.2%
18-24	19	1.4%	21	1.6%
25-34	82	6.2%	63	4.8%
35-44	211	16%	171	13%
45-54	241	18.3%	152	11.5%
55-64	112	8.5%	98	7.4%
65+	93	7.1%	49	3.7%
	758	57%	557	43%

There is only one word to describe people over the age of 18: **VOTERS**.

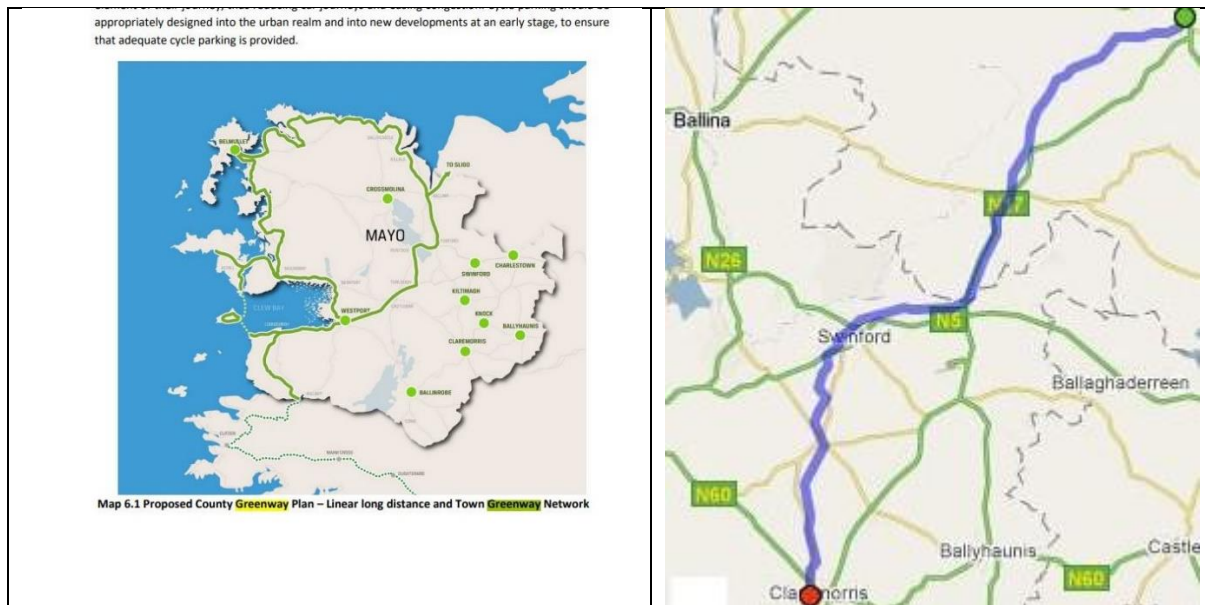
With a total Mayo membership of 849 this accounts for 69% of the group members. Membership of the group is primarily Mayo residents or diaspora who have a close association with East Mayo living in Ireland and overseas. We hope this places our group in context in terms of expressing our view on the closed railway, as a local East Mayo issue. Equally we hope council members will take note of these numbers.

## **2 Our Vision and the county plan.**

Our vision is quite simple. After over 40 years of living with a closed railway the communities of Charlestown, Swinford, Kiltimagh and Claremorris want to join the greenway revolution that is taking place across Ireland. Local communities have been re-invented by greenways using closed railways. The community of East Mayo wants to join and enjoy that revolution, utilising the closed railway from Charlestown to Claremorris until such time as a railway might ever become a possibility again.

### 3 Fairness and Equality. East Mayo wants to be part of the national cycle network.

MCC will be familiar with the issue raised in the postcard submissions from the general public. One of the most striking visual images of the county plan is Map 6.1 on page 116 shown along with a side by side comparison of how the EMG will connect the green dot towns in the East of the county.



Whilst it is recognized the county plan does make a commitment to local town greenways and walks in the East Mayo, the lack of connectivity of these towns on a greenway network is simply not acceptable. The closed railway provides a shovel-ready option to connect the green dots in East Mayo; the side by side comparison is glaringly obvious

### 3 Regional Spatial Economic Strategies: (RSES)

The county plan must not go beyond the limits of its authority.

Some MCC council members have expressed a view to our group that the county plan has to adhere to the RSES and have often quoted to EMGG one, and only one, part of the RSES, namely RPO 6.13, as the reason they will try and stop the EMG from happening. We would remind the Planning executive that the county plan cannot go beyond the limits of its authority and cannot show bias in formulating policy. In only considering RPO 6.13 from the RSES the county plan is showing bias.

The county plan must also consider RPO6.11 and RPO 5.18 and most important of all the map, Figure 55 on page 202 of the RSES, to arrive at a balanced interpretation of the Regional Strategies.

RPO 6.13 states (a) It shall be an objective to deliver an Athenry - Tuam - Claremorris - Sligo Railway to an appropriate level of service and to a standard capable of facilitating passenger and freight transport.

We repeat the phrase, ***the county plan must not go beyond the limits of its authority***. Regarding RPO 6.13, County Councils will never deliver a railway; that is not part of the function of the county council. The role of delivering railways lies with the Department of Transport, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, Irish Rail and the Minister of Transport.

The county plan can certainly support the long term of re-opening the western rail corridor as a long term objective, but this cannot be at the exclusion of all other uses until such time as a railway is possible. It is outside the remit of the county council to deliver a railway, the county

plan cannot therefore fulfil RPO 6.13. It is irrelevant for the council members to use it as a reference point for the county plan.

The county plan may express an aspiration for the closed railway to be re-opened, and equally support the idea of using the closed railway for interim leisure purposes before a railway is reinstalled, providing the route is maintained in the ownership of Irish Rail and under a license arrangement whereby it will always be returned to Irish Rail if needed for railway in the future.

MCC has already set the precedent for this latter course of action with the extensive support for the velorail project 6km north and south of Kiltimagh. In fact, MCC has entered into a license arrangement with Irish Rail to this effect for the velorail project. MCC is fully aware of the legal position with regard to closed railways and the interim use of the closed railway for leisure purposes.

Irish Rail is fully supportive of using closed railways as greenways, and as many submissions on the county plan have already pointed out, Jim Meade, CEO of Irish Rail explained to an Oireachtas committee as recently as February 2021 that Irish Rail policy welcome the use of closed railways as greenways until such time as a railway is possible, describing it as a “win/win” situation. MCC may have been unaware of Irish Rail policy at the time the draft plan was written. Now MCC is aware of Irish Rail policy the county plan can reflect that policy of greenway on closed railways being a “win/win”

If the members of the chamber use the argument that RPO 6.13 makes it illegal for the county plan to support a greenway on the closed railway route until such time as a railway is open, then the support for the Velorail will also be illegal. The county council has already endorsed the change of use of the closed railway for leisure purposes as a velorail in the Part 8 planning application for the velorail which the planning department brought to members in Q4 2019. The change of use planning application was required following an An Bord Pleanála ruling on April 17<sup>th</sup> 2019. The change of use of the closed railway for leisure purposes is already well established in the planning files of MCC.

If MCC is going to refer to RPO 6.13 as the reason it will not support a greenway on the closed railway from Charlestown to Claremorris, this could be deemed as biased and selective use of the Regional Plan. To use selective parts of the RSES to support the “no greenway” argument would be biased and unacceptable.

We are sure MCC will be familiar of the basic principles of public decision-making which are:

- The decision-maker must have authority to make the decision. If the decision-maker has the authority to make the decision, it must not go beyond the limits of its authority.
- The decision-maker must not be biased
- The decision-maker must comply with all legal requirements governing the decision and its making.

In the case of the county plan the “decision maker” is the MCC planning executive and members of the council. The above principles must be adhered to.

The first regional planning objective for railways in the RSES is RPO 6.11. This RPO needs to be given equal weight to any other RPO.

*RPO 6.11: To seek commencement and completion of the review of the Western Rail Corridor project as a priority for passenger and freight transport.*

The deliverable of RPO 6.11 was completed with the delivery of reports by EY Consulting and JASPERS (European Central Bank) in January 2021. The findings of these reports, as deliverables of both the National Development plan and the Regional Spatial Economic Strategies need to be accepted by the county councils covered by the North West Regional Assembly area.

The independent reviews were also a deliverable of the National Development Plan Ireland 2040 which stated on page 42 of the National Development Plan (with reference to the closed railway from Athenry to Tuam and Tuam to Claremorris) the following statement: *“Programme for Government, an independent review will be undertaken immediately. If the findings of the review are approved by Government, the project will be prioritised during this plan.”*

The conclusions of both the EY Report and the JASPERS report delivered under RSES RPO 6.11 and the NDP are both unequivocal in their conclusions, the conclusions of these reports now have to be accepted as part of both the Regional plans and the county plans in Mayo and Galway. The reports did not even consider nor examine the route north of Claremorris towards Charlestown.

There is no recommendation in either the EY report or JASPERS report for Phase 2 or Phase 3 of the Western Rail Corridor to be completed during the time of this county plan. The findings of these reports were a deliverable of a Regional Planning Objective; MCC is legally obliged to accept the findings of these reports as deliverables of both the RSES and the National Development Plan.

EMGG also asks that in the interests of fair public decision making the new county development plan will give equal measure to objective RPO 5.18 adopted in the Regional Spatial Economic Strategy adopted in 2020:

To remind you this is what RPO 5.18 states:

**RPO 5.18:** The Regional Assembly shall collaborate with Local Authorities, Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, DTAS, and other relevant stakeholders in developing an integrated network of Greenways across the region’s catchments. To support, and enable the development of sustainable Greenway projects, the NWRA will encourage and promote: (a) The advancement and growth of Greenways through several Key National and Regional Greenway Projects, which are high capacity, and which can in the medium/long term be extended and interlinked across County Boundaries and with Local Greenways, and other cycling/walking infrastructure. (b) Prioritisation of Greenways of scale and appropriate standard that have significant potential to deliver an increase in activity tourism to the region and are regularly used by overseas and domestic visitors, and locals, thereby contributing to a healthier society through increased physical activity. (c) The appropriate development of local businesses, and start-ups in the vicinity of Greenway Projects. (d) The development of Greenways in accordance with an agreed code of practice. (e) Collaborative development of Greenways and Blueways, including feasibility and route selection studies to minimise impacts on environmentally sensitive areas.

In Figure 55 on page 202 of the RSES which includes RPO 5.18, the entire route of the closed railway from Collooney to Charlestown, (Sligo section of the route) Charlestown to Claremorris (Mayo section) and Claremorris to Athenry (Mayo/Galway section) is clearly marked as a potential Greenway route. This illustration is embedded in this document below.

The Collooney to Athenry Greenway is clearly mentioned as an existing greenway project in the text below Fig 6.1 of the RSES and this whole section of graphic and text is linked to and directly associated with RPO 5.18 which appears on the next page of the final approved and published RSES. ([www.nwra.ie/RSES](http://www.nwra.ie/RSES))

RPO 5.18 and the map associated with it (Figure 55) reproduced and embedded in this submission is being fully respected by Sligo County Council and by Galway County council. The greenway section of the closed railway from Charlestown/Bellaghy to Collooney is being project managed by Sligo County council. The Sligo county council project is in full compliance with the RSES. At the time and date of this submission the Sligo Greenway project is at the advanced stages of planning to be taken to shovel ready construction in 2022.

If Mayo County Council members are going to claim the East Mayo Greenway on the closed railway would be illegal, but on the other hand will support the velorail on the closed railway near Kiltimagh and at the same time watch Sligo coco build a greenway as far as Bellaghy/Charlestown it will be considered **unfair and biased decision making** by MCC. Any such biased decision would only serve to

force community groups to have to crowd-fund a judicial review of the process; the decision must be fair and must respect the process.

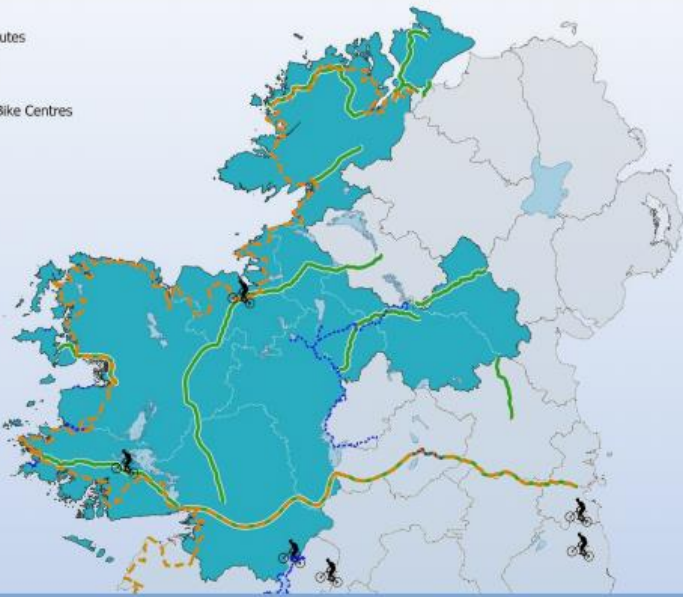
MCC cannot deny the existence of Figure 55 in the RSES and the commentary attached to it in considering the county plan.

The Quiet Man Greenway project on the closed railway from the Galway/Mayo border at Milltown running south through to Athenry is being project managed by Galway County Council, this project is also in compliance with the RSES. A feasibility study is currently being undertaken which will include consideration of the closed railway as a greenway until such time as a railway is possible, this will be fully compliant with RSES RPO 5.18 and Figure 55 from the RSES reproduced below.

key%20working%20files%20backed%20up/western%20rail%20corridor%20documents/mayoc%20county%20plan:

— + ↻ ↺ | Page view | Read aloud

**Figure 55: Our Natural Networks (Greenways and Blueways)**



The SFDNRG will provide the framework for the future development of Greenways and enable the best outcomes for state investment in this area. It should be acknowledged that presently there are no dedicated long-distance, or short distance, cycling/greenway routes which link Northern Ireland with the Republic. A Regional and intra-Regional cycleway network would support the expansion of the Western and Northern Region as an attractive destination for tourists, potentially linking and extending several existing Greenway Projects (see Figure 55) that are in operation, or in planning on an All Island basis, which includes the following key projects:

- > The Great Western Greenway (Mayo County Council): 42km Westport – Achill. Stage: Operational, Constructed along disused Balfour Railway Line.
- > SLNCR (Sligo Leitrim Northern Counties Railway) Greenway.
- > Collooney to Athenry Greenway (aka **Quiet Man** Greenway).
- > The Ulster Canal Greenway, (Monaghan County Council, Cavan County Council, Mid-Ulster Borough Council, Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Omagh and Fermanagh District Council): 4.2km route open. Work in progress (Phase 2, Smithboro – Middletown, 22km, in progress – Planning Stage).
- > North-West Greenway Network (Donegal County Council and Derry County Council): Derry – Buncrana. Stage: At Public Consultation stage (route options). Overall route, 32km via Tooban and Bridgend.
- > Letterkenny to Burtonport Greenway, (primarily former rail-line).
- > Donegal Town – Ballybofey (along former rail-line).
- > Connemara Greenway: 6km of route open, overall route 72km from Galway City to Clifden. Oughterard – Clifden section: Planning Permission granted.
- > Cavan and Leitrim Railway Greenway.
- > Public Galway National Greenway

Windows taskbar: File Explorer, Chrome, Firefox, Outlook, Sky, Mail, Photos, Word

The only part of the greenway route on the closed railway as identified in Figure 55 reproduced above from the RSES that has not yet commenced as a greenway project is the Mayo section of the route from Charlestown to Claremorris.

As this project has been clearly identified in the RSES the EMGG is fully expectant that Mayo County Council will now include the greenway option for Mayo in the county plan, clearly shown on Figure 55 of the RSES into the county plan in accordance with the Regional Strategies. The inclusion of the greenway option is entirely compliant with Irish Rail Policy that fully supports greenways on closed railways until such time as a railway might be possible, so this idea does not conflict with RPO 6.13 in the RSES. The railway can remain a long term objective, but over the lifetime of this plan a greenway would clearly meet the terms of the Regional Strategies.

The National Development Plan has precedence over the Regional Strategies, and the Regional Strategies have precedence over the County Plan. The reports on the closed railway were delivered as part of the National Development Plan and the Regional Strategies, they have to be accepted regardless of any personal preferences of any individual within the Council.

#### **Local views, Local issues, local opinion and a Local recommendation:**

Public support for a greenway on this route has been expressed in many ways. MCC need to review and take note of the groundswell of public opinion in favour of a greenway on the closed railway.

Public Opinion needs to be reflected in public policy documents such as the Mayo County plan.

The county planning executive has an obligation to present this evidence in public policy documents such as the county plan which the county council members are then obliged to make a decision on, MCC will be familiar with the evidence below of significant public opinion in East Mayo that supports the greenway.

#### **1. Swinford Area Action Plan 2013 – 2018**

This document will be familiar to Mayo County Council as it was part of community consultation programme with the residents of the Swinford Area prior to the last county development plan. In total, over 900 local residents supported the option of a greenway on the closed railway. The document said this:

**Outdoor Amenities:** Swinford will develop its walking and cycling routes incorporating the Ox Mountains and River Moy. ***The Old Railway line will be turned into a cycle path similar to The Greenway in Mulranny.*** The stream that rings the town will be exposed and cleaned up providing an attractive area to sit and relax.

**Outcome:** effectively ignored by Mayo county council and the recommendation was not acted upon by Mayo County Council

#### **2. Mayo county plan 2013-2020:** 287 submissions on the most recent expired county plan asked for a greenway on the closed railway from Charlestown to Claremorris

**Outcome:** Despite accounting for almost 90% of all submissions on the county plan in 2013, MCC opted for the option of a velorail on the closed railway for which there had not been a single submission on the county plan.

#### **3. North West Regional Spatial Economic Strategies:** Over 800 submissions predominately from counties Galway and Mayo were made on new NWRA RSES for the period 2019/2029 as part of Ireland 2040. The route of the closed railway was identified as a greenway project route on page 161 of the RSES. It stated “potentially linking and extending several existing Greenway Projects that are in operation, or in planning on an All Island basis, which includes the following key projects:..... .....Collooney to Athenry Greenway (aka Quiet Man Greenway) “

**Outcome:** Yet to be established. Sligo County Council is pushing ahead with the Sligo section of the greenway on the closed railway in Sligo. Galway County Council has commissioned a feasibility study

for a greenway on the closed railway from Athenry to the county border with Galway/Mayo. The potential exists for greenway to be developed on the closed railway in Sligo and in Galway. Mayo county council has not yet acted on the Regional strategies for a greenway on the East Mayo section of the closed railway.

Mayo county council is legally obliged to adhere to the RSES.

#### **4. Public petition asking for Greenway from Athenry to Sligo**

A public petition on the petitions website **change.org** started in 2017, asking for a greenway on the closed railway from Athenry to Sligo has attracted over 25,000 signatures. 8,000 of which come from residents of county Mayo. Regular updates on this petition are sent to Mayo county council.

<https://www.change.org/p/western-rail-trail-campaign-create-a-walking-and-cycling-greenway-on-the-closed-railway-from-sligo-to-athenry>

**Outcome:** So far the petition has been ignored by Mayo county council it now stands at 25,880 signatures the major of which are west of Ireland residents.

#### **5. Public petition asking for parallel greenway on closed railway being used for Kiltimagh Velorail project**

A public petition on the petitions website change.org started in 2017 asking for a greenway parallel with the closed railway proposed to be used as a velorail project at Kiltimagh. The petition was closed at 1,000 signatures to keep it local. A document detailing the people who signed the petition was sent to Mayo county council in May 2017, it was felt this message in such strong numbers would finally mean MCC would listen, but sadly this was not the case.

<https://www.change.org/p/peter-hynes-mayo-county-manager-put-a-walking-and-cycling-path-for-everyone-to-enjoy-parallel-with-kiltimagh-velorail>

**Outcome:** The petition was ignored by MCC at the time although the idea of a parallel greenway is being considered in the Kiltimagh Community Futures.

**6. 2018. Over 100 submissions on the application for planning permission for the Velorail project** after MCC lost a case with An Bord Pleanala claiming the project did not need planning permission for change of use of the closed railway to velorail. A high volume of submissions on the planning application asked for a greenway alongside velorail for a number of reasons including safety.

**Outcome:** Despite huge safety concerns expressed in submissions MCC rejected the plea from the public for a path alongside the velorail dismissing over 100 submissions from the public mainly local residents. The issue of safety remains a concern and the potential for a public liability insurance 'own goal' on this matter should now be a serious concern for MCC, having been publically warned of a potential safety liability on the closed railway being used as a velorail without a safety path alongside.

#### **7. Kiltimagh Community futures 2019**

Following a community meeting and open day in 2019 one of the most strongly supported projects by the community was the idea to have a greenway run alongside the velorail project.

**Outcome:** see page 13 of the Kiltimagh Community Action plan which clearly identified the potential for a parallel greenway on the closed railway

#### **8. Public petition asking for greenway on closed railway from Swinford to Charlestown**

This localized version of the petition on change.org asking for a greenway from Swinford to



Charlestown has received 600 signatures about 80% are from the immediate vicinity of East Mayo. The petition has been closed to keep it local.

<https://www.change.org/p/peter-hynes-county-manager-greenway-on-the-closed-for-40-years-railway-line-from-swinford-to-charlestown-now-please>

**Outcome:** Members of MCC have been sent this petition but nothing has been done about it.

#### **9. Number of submissions being received by Mayo county council on the current draft development plan.**

It is clear from the number of submissions made on the new county plan that the greenway on the closed railway has huge public support in East Mayo

Outcome: To be decided by MCC. The public will either be listened to, or ignored as in the past. However, frustration with the lack of representation means that people in East Mayo are no longer prepared to go away quietly and accept the kind of treatment that was given in 2013 by those asking for a greenway.

#### **10. The number of active members of public involved in Railway to Greenway campaigns.**

The East Mayo greenway group on Facebook has just over 1,200 members, of which 61% live in East Mayo. The group is primarily made up of people who have an association with the area and have constant debates on the Facebook pages in support of the idea of a greenway on the route.

EMGG will not accept any proposals to extend the velorail concept north of the N5. The public of Swinford and Charlestown want to be part of the national greenway network, so do the public in Kiltimagh. Any suggestions to extend the velorail north of the N5 to use the closed railway as velorail on the section from Swinford to Charlestown will not be accepted by the citizens of Swinford and Charlestown. We have two words to Mayo County Council if this idea is even suggested.

**Forget it. We will not accept this idea.**

#### **What will the council do about this issue? (our proposal to advance the process).**

The EMGG is well aware of the level and detailed quality of submissions MCC have received on this subject, and many more pages of arguments could be laid out in front of MCC planners in this submission.

There is no point in repeating the arguments ad nauseum. What is needed is a solution.

The draft county plan is unacceptable to the citizens of East Mayo on the issue of using the closed railway as a greenway until such time as a railway is possible. That position has to be changed.

MCC needs to find a way to resolve this issue about what to do with the closed railway north of Claremorris. Do nothing is no longer an option, and presenting false arguments about the legality of a greenway on the route when a velorail has been allowed are no longer acceptable. Irish Rail will accept a greenway to protect the route, the existing railway and sleepers only have scrap value. There is currently no railway on this route.

EMGG confirms that its members do not want to see the velorail extended north of the N5 to the section of closed railway between Swinford and Charlestown. The velorail beyond its current extent has no public support.

The matter has to be addressed in the revised county plan. MCC can no longer decide to simply ignore the weight of public opinion on this matter. If the submission process is to have credibility, or to meet an acceptable level of governance, then these submissions cannot simply be set aside as they were the past.

Sligo County Council came under immense public pressure to add the Sligo greenway project on the closed railway route when the last SCC county plan was being drafted. There was opposition from some Sligo councillors. After due consideration the following objective was submitted and adopted in the county plan and now MCC needs to do something similar:

*Sligo County Plan 2017-2023 page 146 O-CW-5 Seek the development of a footway and cycleway (greenway) on or alongside the closed railway line from Collooney to Bellaghy (Sligo/Mayo county boundary) insofar as such route does not compromise the reopening of the Western Rail Corridor, if reopening the railway line is deemed feasible.*

The 'alongside' issue was examined by a feasibility study (Meehan Tully) and found to be a lot more expensive. The preferred option now supported by SCC and Irish rail is to lift the scrap tracks and place a greenway on the route. Irish Rail have publically declared the actual tracks, the sleepers the rails are only of scrap value and will have to come up in any event. Irish Rail fully supports the Sligo Greenway project and has signed a lease with SCC to the effect that the route can be used as a greenway. Irish Rail has also given additional support by making all engineering records available to the greenway project team.

The "alongside" option is only relevant on the velorail section of the closed railway.

In the last Mayo County Plan it was argued that the velorail preserved the railway line for future use. This was a false assumption, based on a belief that what was there was a railway; it wasn't. The rails, sleepers and ballast in situ are scrap and have no relevance to any future rail use, and attempting to preserve them by means of an ever-extending velorail project is abject nonsense. Despite a strongly held belief by a small number of Councillors, there is currently no railway on this route; what is there is not a railway. It is also now an established and accepted fact that a velorail no more protects the route than a greenway does, and the argument used in the 2013 county plan is no longer acceptable to stop the public's preferred option of a greenway on the route.

### **The Mayo section of the closed railway can be considered in two sections.**

1. Section from the Galway county border at Milltown to Claremorris. This is part of the phase 2 and phase 3 sections of the Western Rail Corridor project, despite the fact the two independent reports found that the WRC from Athenry to Tuam and Tuam to Claremorris could not be justified under any circumstances, this part of the closed railway is still under consideration as part of the national rail review and may yet be re-opened as a railway at some time in the future.
2. The section of the closed railway from Claremorris to Collooney which is not being considered as part of the national rail review, it was not considered as part of the independent WRC review by EY consulting and Jaspers. There is already conversion of this route taking place for leisure purposes to prevent any further encroachment on the route. MCC has approved the Velorail project and got section 8 planning approval for the change of use and SCC is progressing with the Sligo Greenway project from Collooney to Bellaghy. MCC is facing the very real prospect of seeing a greenway terminate in Charlestown and nothing happening beyond Charlestown. All that will that achieve for East Mayo is that families in Charlestown, and visitors to the town will go to Sligo to enjoy the benefits of this infrastructure.

### **EMG proposes the following solution for the Mayo section of the closed railway from Charlestown to Claremorris.**

1. Sligo County Council have already secured funding of €300,000 to take the Sligo Greenway project to a shovel ready fully planned status. Funding for construction is expected in late 2021.

2. Mayo county council needs to play catch-up with Sligo with an objective to have the Sligo project and a greenway from Charlestown to Swinford on the route of the closed railway fast tracked as a joint Sligo and Mayo county council project. Once this idea is written into the county plan, a simple letter to the Minister of Transport could potentially get approval for this phase one of the East Mayo Greenway on a fast track basis.
3. The section of the closed railway running 6km north and 6 km south of Kiltimagh planned to be used as Velorail should immediately become the subject of a feasibility study to have a parallel greenway/safety track running alongside the velorail section. EMGG believe the width of the band of land owned by Irish Rail would be sufficient to allow this with some degree of creativity needed at pinch points such as bridge road crossings etc. The people of Kiltimagh have made it abundantly clear to MCC and Kiltimagh IRD this is what they want to see.
4. Linking the parallel Kiltimagh greenway section with the Charlestown to Swinford section of the greenway may be more complicated with the need to resolve encroachment issues and a foot/cycle bridge to cross the N5.
5. Kiltimagh to Claremorris on the section of the closed railway not used for velorail should be fairly straightforward in terms of planning for a greenway.
6. Finally, this final idea adds significant value to the East Mayo Greenway project/idea. The EMGG recognises the massive value to Mayo tourism projects such as the Western Greenway have created. Imagination is needed to take this one giant leap forward. The Sligo greenway is planned to extend through county Leitrim and Fermanagh to Enniskillen, and from Enniskillen through Cavan and to the East Coast Greenway. Just imagine if Charlestown was connected to Swinford and if a greenway could be created in the few miles from Swinford to Turlough House already connected to Castlebar. In a few years' time, Achill could be connected to the East Coast by Greenway. **Imagine this idea in action.** In the event that the WRC does not get approval in the national railway review, and Galway county council has the Quiet Man Greenway built from Athenry to Milltown. Imagine if this extended to Claremorris and the Quiet Man Greenway was connected to the Dublin-Galway greenway. A great deal is made of the Western Rail Corridor being the saviour of the West of Ireland and being so important for the Atlantic Economic Corridor. There is simply no economic proof to argue the case for the railway benefiting the AEC. Nothing has been produced except waffle. The most important industry along the Atlantic Economic Corridor is tourism, which of these two ideas will do more for tourism on the Atlantic Economic Corridor? Quite simply it is the long distance greenway idea.

The East Mayo Greenway group is campaigning for a local facility that will make a local impact in terms of quality of life in East Mayo; but a regional and national impact in terms of the value of this greenway network to the tourism of the Atlantic Economic Corridor.

**What needs to happen?** These ideas are simple and they are achievable. The EMGG is confident the planning executive and county management will fully support them and see the opportunities they will bring the entire county not just East Mayo.

In truth, it is just the application of common sense.

**However**, in a democracy these ideas have to be presented to the elected members. All we are asking is that our ideas are incorporated in the new revised draft county plan.

There are a lot of members of the East Mayo Greenway Group who want to see what the councilors will decide, to see if they are on the side of the people or not.

We ask that our ideas are not rejected out of hand, that they be incorporated in the new county plan as a new vision for the closed railway.

Give our ideas to the council in the revised the county plan and let us see if the council members have the vision to embrace what their colleagues in Sligo and in Galway are already doing.

Many thanks.

East Mayo Greenway Committee on behalf of Group members  
March 16<sup>th</sup> 2021

David Malee – Chairman  
Michael Maye – PRO  
Elizabeth Moore – Executive Secretary  
Tom Lavin – Financial Officer.  
eastmayogreenway@gmail.com

