

Forward Planning Section,
Mayo County Council,
Áras an Chontae,
The Mall,
Castlebar,
Co. Mayo

16th March 2021

Dear Sir / Madam,

Re: Draft Mayo County Development Plan 2021-2027 - Public Consultation

Iarnród Éireann welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to Mayo County Council's Draft County Development Plan 2021-2027 Public Consultation [hereafter "the Development Plan"]. The new Development Plan comes at a critical juncture for the County in its adaptation to the challenges and opportunities of the 'new-normal' that emerges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Draft Development Plan provides a roadmap for the overall planning and sustainable development of County Mayo over the plan period. Iarnród Éireann welcomes that the Strategic County Development Plan Objectives of the Development Plan include the aim of "Integrated Land Use and Transportation Planning" along with a "Low Carbon and Climate Resilient County".

It is important to recognise at the outset of this submission, that interventions in the transport sector should be based on a long-term strategic vision for the sustainable mobility of people and goods. This is driven by the principle that structural reform of policies takes a considerable time to implement and must be the subject of detailed advanced planning. The Development Plan enables this capability of advanced long-term vision and planning by providing foundations to 2027 and beyond, therefore making it an important document for the desired growth of sustainable mobility in Mayo. The review of the Development Plan allows it to be reassessed in the current context as we move towards a more sustainable integrated transport system, advanced local mobility hubs, and maximisation of the dynamic impact between housing and transport, all of which can greatly contribute to the economic, environmental, social and cultural progress of Mayo County.

Iarnród Éireann welcome the aligning of the Development Plan's growth strategy with that of National and Regional policy, concentrating on facilitating compact growth and the alignment of future development with public transport infrastructure. As noted in the Draft Development Plan, Sustainable mobility is a challenge for County Mayo which

has one of the highest usage rates of private cars (73.2%), compared to the national average (65.6%) and a predominantly rural dispersed settlement pattern that is characterised by low population density.

The impact of a significant population growth by 2040 under the National Planning Framework, the changing lifestyle habits as a result of COVID-19, and the impacts of climate change, necessitate a rethink of how citizens of Mayo and Ireland live. Mayo County Council has an opportunity in this Development Plan to facilitate a mindset shift for the County towards a mass transit sustainable mobility system integrated into a compact spatial planning framework for housing and commercial development.

The remaining parts of this submission will take the shape of Iarnród Éireann's core objective, our current rail provision in Mayo, the impact of existing projects, and our priorities for the future.

Iarnród Éireann - Core Objective and Benefits of Rail

It is Iarnród Éireann's core objective to provide safe, accessible and integrated rail services for Ireland, that contribute to sustainable environmental, economic and social development in an efficient manner. It is this key objective that informs our views regarding the future expansion of the rail network for Mayo County and the wider Northern and Western Region. It is our intention to deliver the following objectives over the Development Plan's period:

- To continue to put the Customer at the heart of our business
- To maximise the railway's contribution to long term sustainable spatial development patterns
- To facilitate and encourage economic growth at both a regional and national level
- To contribute to the attractiveness of Mayo as a location to live and do business in
- To contribute to and be compatible with all local, regional and national land-use transport planning policies
- To improve rail connectivity and integration in Mayo
- To facilitate a significant modal shift from the private motor car to public transport and thus to contribute to a significant reduction in road congestion and carbon emissions in line with policy objectives e.g. Smarter Travel, Climate Action Plan
- To maintain and renew rail infrastructure and assets to the highest safety standards
- To deliver the appropriate quantum of rail capacity to satisfy future needs which will be an attractive value proposition for our customers.

Iarnród Éireann believe that heavy rail can play an essential role in supporting the sustainable growth and prosperity of the Mayo County, providing numerous benefits notably;

- It is a key enabler of local sustainable transport in Mayo with the three Strategic Growth Centres of Castlebar, Westport, and Ballina served by inter-regional and Intercity services; which are important for connectivity and accessibility on a national level from the County. It also facilitates the continued accessibility and connectivity of the Self-Sustaining Growth Towns of Claremorris and Ballyhaunis.
- The current rail network in Mayo is an underutilised asset that can be developed with little impact on the road network, providing a step change in mobility with limited disruption to traffic flows.

- Heavy rail can operate comfortably transporting large volumes of passengers, more than any other mode, enabling potential compact dense development growth to be catered for by reliable frequent services.
- Heavy rail is largely segregated from other transport modes in the national transport network, avoiding congestion and conflicts associated with road traffic, providing greater punctuality and reliability for citizens of Mayo County.
- Rail can provide a step change in improving air quality levels in Mayo as the County aims to address climate change and emissions - the average rail passenger km creates approximately 28g of greenhouse gases (GHGs) vs. 102g for road vehicle.

Current Rail Provision in Mayo

Passenger Services

Iarnród Éireann operates Intercity services connecting Dublin to Ballina and Westport. These services provide important rail connections to and from the Mayo towns of Westport, Castlebar, Claremorris, Ballyhaunis, Ballina and Foxford. These rail services connect Mayo to Dublin, Athlone and the east of Ireland, and to Galway and the west of Ireland (via Athlone).

Freight Traffic

Iarnród Éireann operates a number of rail freight services to/from County Mayo, with the county playing a major role in our existing total freight flows. Our freight services in County Mayo currently consist of;

- 6 trains per week transporting containers from Ballina Beverages (Coca-Cola) in Ballina to Dublin Port for international export, and;
- 3 trains per week carrying pulpwood from Ballina and Westport to Waterford for the SMARTPLY plant at Belview Port.

Experience in other European jurisdictions clearly outlines the contribution of rail freight to an improved carbon footprint and a reduction in road congestion. The success of the container traffic in particular is a testament to the sustainability of rail freight in Mayo, with our 3,000th train operated in 2020 with logistics provider International Warehousing and Transport (IWT), taking 120,000 trucks off Mayo's roads during that period.

Impact of Existing Iarnród Éireann Projects

Iarnród Éireann is committed, subject to funding, to further expand and integrate the railway network, in accordance with national, regional, and local policy, in collaboration with Mayo County Council, the Department of Transport, and the National Transport Authority (NTA). Two key developments we are working on are the DART+ Programme and the enhancement of our fleet which will bring service benefits to citizens of Mayo;

1. DART+ Programme

The DART+ Programme represents the largest heavy rail investment scheme in the history of the State, providing a transformational increase in capacity and frequency of the existing system between Dublin City Centre and the areas of Maynooth, Celbridge, Dunboyne, Drogheda, and Greystones. The DART+ Programme, or simply DART+, is a

cornerstone project of the Strategy and the Government's Project Ireland 2040 vision. DART+ is a central pillar in a future integrated sustainable transport system serving the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), and the wider Eastern Region.

DART+ provides a transformational upgrade change to the future public transport network in two ways; firstly, through infrastructure improvements, including electrification, removal of level crossings, a new depot, and other works, and secondly; through additional rolling stock, combining to double the peak passenger capacity of the heavy rail system into Dublin City Centre from approximately 25,000 passengers per hour in 2019 to over 50,000 by 2028.

In terms of progress, the DART+ Programme is at Preliminary Business Case stage, a significant milestone to progress its implementation. Development is continuing on each of the infrastructure elements of DART+; DART+ West, DART+ South West, and DART+ Coastal, along with the procurement of new DART+ carriages to maximise the growth in capacity made available through the infrastructure enhancement.

While outside of Mayo County, it is important to note the impact of this transformational development of the GDA rail network on our wider national network. The operational capacity on the Kildare Line will be significantly expanded, with four tracks installed as part of the DART+ South West project between Park West station and Heuston station. This will have a significant benefit for services to and from Mayo County as it will not only improve commuter rail infrastructure capacity, but it will also improve Intercity and inter-regional infrastructure capacity, increasing both service levels into Heuston station. This will facilitate the desired increase in services to Mayo which Iarnród Éireann is striving for. The extent of the DART+ Programme and the various elements are summarised in Appendix A.

2. Non-DART Fleet Enhancement

In terms of addressing the short term demands on heavy rail services, approval of the business case for 41 intermediate intercity railcars (ICRs) was obtained in 2019. When delivered, the additional fleet will allow for improvements in capacity and frequency on commuter services in the Greater Dublin Area as well as on Intercity services, including to Westport, enhancing local and regional connectivity in Mayo.

Iarnród Éireann Priorities for the future

Iarnród Éireann will now outline its priorities for key expansion projects and enhancements to the rail network to 2027. Further detail on these plans and our wider company strategy can be found in our recently published [Iarnród Éireann Strategy 2027](#) document. Also in the context of wider national rail policy and development, it is worth the Council noting that the Department of Transport (DoT) and the Department of Infrastructure (Northern Ireland) (DfI(NI)) are in the process of agreeing terms on an all-Ireland strategic rail study on faster intercity connectivity, improved regional connectivity and freight. Iarnród Éireann will prioritise the outcomes of this study as part of its future plans upon completion of the study. The Development Plan should consider and support the outcomes of that study.

In looking ahead, Iarnród Éireann believe that the following high-level measures should be a priority for the revised Development Plan;

- Priority should be given to Public Transport and Active Travel schemes, with a particular focus on high capacity modes, such as rail, which are carbon efficient.

- Continue to expand heavy rail as a high capacity high frequency mode choice with proven ability to attract private car users.
- Promote Transit Orientated Development (TOD) with mixed-use high-density development at key rail nodes and along key rail corridors.
- Develop new rail stations in line with emerging spatial planning policy, subject to business case evaluation.
- Support ongoing investment in rail infrastructure to ensure its continued renewal, maintenance, and improvement to a high level to ensure a high quality of rail frequency, safety, service, accessibility and connectivity across Mayo County.
- Develop an integrated, user friendly, and highly connected public transport network.

Iarnród Éireann as part of its submission will now outline its priorities for key expansion projects and enhancements to the rail network of Mayo County.

Despite the impact the public transport sector and the wider economy and society is experiencing with COVID-19, it is imperative that the momentum shift towards sustainable public transport is not lost and that the important development of our public transport network and expansion of rail services continues. Iarnród Éireann believe that these proposals provide the opportunity to strengthen the Development Plan so that it will be fit for purpose well into the future.

1. Intercity Services

As part of our Strategy 2027 referred to earlier, Iarnród Éireann has set the objective to increase Intercity frequencies on all main lines serving Dublin. In terms of services to Mayo from Dublin, Iarnród Éireann's plan to enhance Dublin-Westport services within the period to 2027. This will see a 60% increase in Dublin-Westport services to two-hourly all day, with some improvement in journey times. This increase in services will be formed, in part, by services connecting at the Regional Growth Centre of Athlone for onward travel to Dublin. This increase in services to Athlone will also provide increased connections to the west towards Galway. This growth in passenger services will greatly support the Council's growth targets for the three Strategic Growth Centres of Castlebar, Westport, and Ballina which are each forecast to grow in population by 19.4% by 2027, totalling 5,353 additional citizens.

2. Rail Freight

Iarnród Éireann believe the case for rail freight is increasing, given the context of climate change and the environmental targets Ireland must achieve, both nationally and internationally. This is also set against a context of increasing road congestion. While the absolute future travel patterns post-COVID-19 are unknown, there will still be a necessity and demand for sustainable freight transportation across Ireland and rail can play an important role. Iarnród Éireann is in the final stages of developing a revised rail freight strategic plan in the context of;

- The Governments Project Ireland 2040, National Development Plan, National Mitigation Plan & Climate Change Action Plan
- The Strategic Masterplans of Ireland's Port Authorities
- Road Congestion
- Pressure on road freight markets e.g. driver shortages
- Policy, demand and sectoral analysis being undertaken to establish demand and opportunities for rail freight

Iarnród Éireann will continue its commitment to develop rail freight between key hubs across the country. In 2020, €1million was invested in upgrading facilities at our Ballina freight hub where current services operate to both Dublin and Waterford. Currently Iarnród Éireann are in advanced talks with a major global logistics service provider regarding a new twice weekly container service from Ballina to Waterford Port from May 2021 which will further strengthen the role of rail freight from the west of Ireland to key ports in the country. In terms of MTO number 15, the Council should note that Iarnród Éireann's freight facilities in Mayo are currently located in Westport and Ballina, and not Claremorris as indicated in this objective. Iarnród Éireann believe Mayo County should consider the findings of Iarnród Éireann's rail freight strategic plan when finalising the new Development Plan, and it should support the continued operation and enhancement of rail freight services.

3. Accessibility Programme

As noted earlier in this submission, Iarnród Éireann is progressing with its Accessibility Programme. The Development Plan should support the further expansion of our Accessibility Programme. By providing more accessible stations on the rail network, it enables and encourages journeys that would otherwise have to be taken by road-based transport, or perhaps even no journey, onto the rail network. This has sustainability benefits in terms of the reduction of emissions that result from it, while also ensuring that all who wish to use the railway and can avail of its benefits in terms of frequency, reliability, and journey time.

4. Customer Information Services

Iarnród Éireann is developing a Customer Information Services (CIS) Strategy Report to create a strategic implementation framework for the development of enhanced information systems and information flow to our customers, staff, and third parties. Key amongst these requirements is the ability to provide reliable real time passenger information that is accessible to all, co-ordinated across the network in stations and on trains, and that is consistent across all media.

The development of Customer Information Services (CIS), should be supported by the Development Plan when they are developed and finalised in 2021 as it is a vital customer experience capability required to both attract and retain customers using sustainable rail services and a wider integrated sustainable public transport network.

5. Multimodal Facilities for Sustainable Interchange Programme

Iarnród Éireann aim to provide an improvement of mobility options at its stations in line with the incremental passenger demand growth achieved through enhanced services. This in items such as car parking, cycle provision, electric charge points.

This upgrade of station facilities can be linked into Iarnród Éireann's Sustainable Interchange Programme, which aims to enable more sustainable end-to-end journeys to be made by rail. The Sustainable Interchange Programme includes the provision of facilities within Iarnród Éireann's stations and local environs to provide for ease of interchange between rail and all other modes, prioritising those that are sustainable – cycling, electric charging, wayfinding and shared mobility. Iarnród Éireann's Sustainable Interchange Programme when implemented facilitates compact growth along railway corridors due to the improved sustainable mobility offering at each station. Commercial

and residential developments can be supported through improved interchange with active mode parking infrastructure, and car park spaces (including electric vehicles), increasing the attractiveness of rail and increasing the rationale for the location of compact developments. By providing more sustainable interchange and electric charging, along with bicycle and vehicle parking facilities at stations, it enables and encourages journeys that would otherwise have to be taken by road-based transport onto the rail network. It enhances the appeal of zero emissions active modes onto low emissions rail services.

The Sustainable Interchange Programme has the potential to promote the concept of Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) in the longer-term as digital platforms could be linked to sustainable mobility providers at either end of rail journeys as the interchange capability improves. If the railway does not enable better integration with other modes, passengers may lose out on benefits, and rail may lose prominence in the wider transport system as a result.

Iarnród Éireann believe the Development Plan should support the implementation of the Sustainable Interchange Programme.

6. Electrification

Ireland has set a target to develop a low/near zero carbon emission transport network by 2050 and heavy rail has a pivotal role to play based on the unique ability of electrified rail services to move large numbers of people quickly and safely.

Intercity electrification also forms part of Iarnród Éireann's long-term strategy to de-carbonise the heavy rail network and provide the benefits of significant journey time savings, improved reliability, enhanced passenger quality and lower operating costs. Iarnród Éireann will include the outcomes on Intercity and inter-regional connectivity from the strategic rail study by DoT/DfI(NI) as part of this priority once they are known. The Development Plan should support the electrification of Intercity routes.

7. Western Rail Corridor

The National Development Plan 2018-2027 affirms that the Western Rail Corridor phase 2 from Athenry to Tuam, and phase 3 to Claremorris could play an important role in the development and sustainability of the Atlantic Economic Corridor. This strategic importance is also recognised in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the region.

In line with the Programme for Government, the NDP committed to an independent review of the Western Rail Corridor as a priority. An independent review has been undertaken by EY consultants and concluded that the economic case for reopening was currently very weak. An independent peer review by JASPERS concluded that the EY findings are not unreasonable and that the project in its current form is likely to present a very weak justification for investment. However as outlined earlier, the Council should note that an all-island rail study led by the DoT/DfI(NI) is proposed to formulate a strategy for the future development of Intercity and inter regional rail in an all island economic and planning context and will have a strong focus on regional development. IÉ will prioritise the outcomes of this study in its future plans and the new Mayo County Development Plan should consider and support the passenger rail and rail freight outcomes of this study when completed.

8. Greenway Development

Iarnród Éireann notes that the Council aim to support and facilitate the EuroVelo rail project on the Western Rail Corridor as an interim use for the rail line pending its reopening for passenger and rail freight. Iarnród Éireann will continue to provide conditional support for the development of a greenways in locations where the railway does not have a short to medium term viable business case for reintroduction of services. In terms of the Western Rail Corridor, this conditional support is subject to the section north of Claremorris. Greenways help to keep the asset in state ownership and keep the asset utilised, and then if there is a decision at some time in the future that it should go back to railway use, the licensing arrangement is such that it can do so.

9. Level Crossings

Iarnród Éireann works to reduce risk at level crossings, and to eliminate level crossings where possible on a risk-prioritised basis. We would welcome the continued support of Mayo County Council where it is identified that opportunities exist to eliminate level crossings, in order to enhance safety on both the rail and road network, and to local residents and landowners.

Impact of COVID-19

To conclude this submission, it is important to acknowledge that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has caused wide-ranging challenges and uncertainty throughout society on a global, European, and national level. It has altered some aspects of the way we live our lives and move about. It is likely to have an impact on the population and economic targets projected as part of the Project Ireland 2040 initiative, the levels of which, as of yet, still remain unclear, but are reasonably expected to last a number of years.

Although it is not yet possible to determine the full impact on the public transport sector, in the short to medium term, COVID-19 impacts will include a reduction in the number of people in employment, migration to remote and home working and a switch towards more individual modes of transport. In this new environment, Iarnród Éireann will continue to focus on rebuilding customer confidence in our services and develop flexibility and adaptability in our longer-term rail development plans to allow us respond quickly to emerging threats and opportunities.

From the perspective of developing a sustainable integrated transport system, COVID-19 does present an opportunity to change habits, resetting peoples method of travel, and the promotion and priority of sustainable transport can be a key driver for the recovery of growth, thus making its inclusion a priority in the Development Plan. The continued development of a sustainable integrated transport network for Mayo County and the wider Northern and Western Region can be a springboard to economic recovery through the jobs it creates during its implementation, and it sustains post-completion.

It is important to note that while development of public transport infrastructure and service can aid economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and demand is currently suppressed, it does not change the objectives of Iarnród Éireann nor the state, in that a modal shift from private cars to sustainable integrated public transport is a core outcome, and therefore Iarnród Éireann believe the demand is there and the benefits of our proposals are not limited to economic recovery.

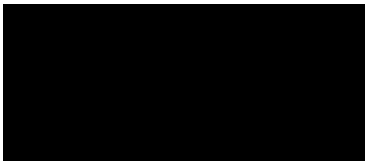
Concluding Comments

It is clear to us, that an essential pillar of any modern country is a sustainable public transport network, and there is a significant opportunity in the Development Plan to increase rail passenger and freight services, facilitating the growth to support Mayo's and Ireland's growth ambitions to 2040 and beyond. This increase will have a dual benefit of boosting the wider recovery from COVID-19. If long-term economic growth is to be regained and sustained, then investment in rail should be a priority.

The priorities identified in this submission, combined with the active projects and programmes ongoing, such as the DART+ Programme, will allow rail travel to meet the potential it offers in facilitating the projected population growth in the National Planning Framework. It is essential that the pre-COVID-19 mindset shift towards public and active transport is not lost, and that the private car does not become the first choice for citizens in the recovery from the pandemic.

Iarród Éireann looks forward to the publication of your final Development Plan and working with you to achieve the positive outcomes the final Development Plan will bring for Mayo.

Yours sincerely,



Jim Meade

Chief Executive

Appendix A

Extent of DART+

