

Western Rail Trail Greenway Reinvention not Resurrection

Presentation document to Joint Committee on Transport and
Communications in consideration of the
All-Island National Rail Review 2022
Western Rail Trail Greenway Campaign

7th March 2022

The All-Island rail review needs to clearly state that protecting this route as a greenway now supports the long term aim of installing a railway with greenway alongside in the future.

Purpose of this document for the committee on transport and communications

This document has been written as a support document to present the ideas and thoughts of the Western Rail Trail campaign which supports the simple idea of a greenway on the closed railway from Athenry to Collooney until such time as a railway is possible. **The campaign is not against the idea of a railway on part or all of the route.** The idea of re-opening the railway has been the subject of political promises and commitments that have not been met for decades.

The campaign is against the idea that this important asset be left lying in waste for another 30 years or more on the promise that one day in the distant future a railway might be re-opened some time.

The campaign is focused on making good use of the asset of the route as a greenway now until such time as a railway might be possible. An idea supported by thousands upon thousands of people in the West of Ireland.

This document explains our vision of what could be achieved. We examine some key issues that need to be discussed and challenge some of the accepted thinking.

What is critical is that there needs to be clear direction from the All-Island National Rail review.

There is huge public support for the simple idea of a greenway on the route now until such time as a railway might be possible. An idea supported by Irish Rail the Regional Strategies and both Galway and Sligo County Councils. Mayo County Council is committed to the findings of the rail review and is looking for direction from the All island national rail review

What we are asking for is clear:

The All-Island rail review needs to clearly state that protecting this route as a greenway now supports the long term aim of installing a railway with greenway alongside in the future. We cannot have another twenty years of empty debate of “will there won’t there” be a railway or greenway built. Clear direction is needed.

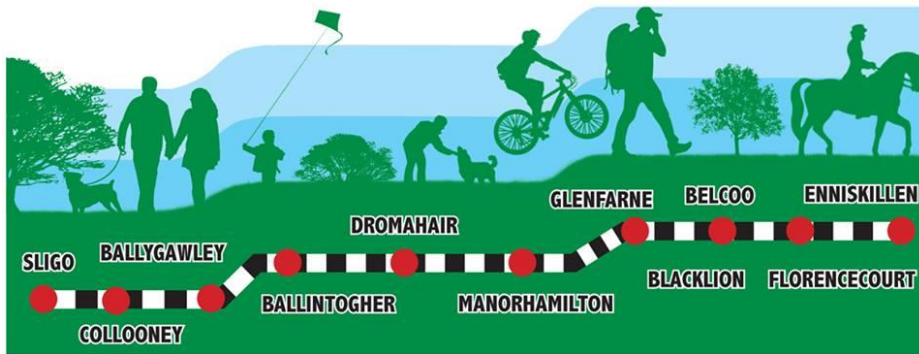
If the railway is going to be built from Athenry to Claremorris then commit to a greenway alongside it now or build a greenway now until such time as a railway is possible.

North of Claremorris is examined in further detail in this document. There is simply no rational reason to block a greenway on this route from happening.

Thank you on behalf of the thousands of people in the West of Ireland who support our campaign for allowing us the space and time to present our thinking.

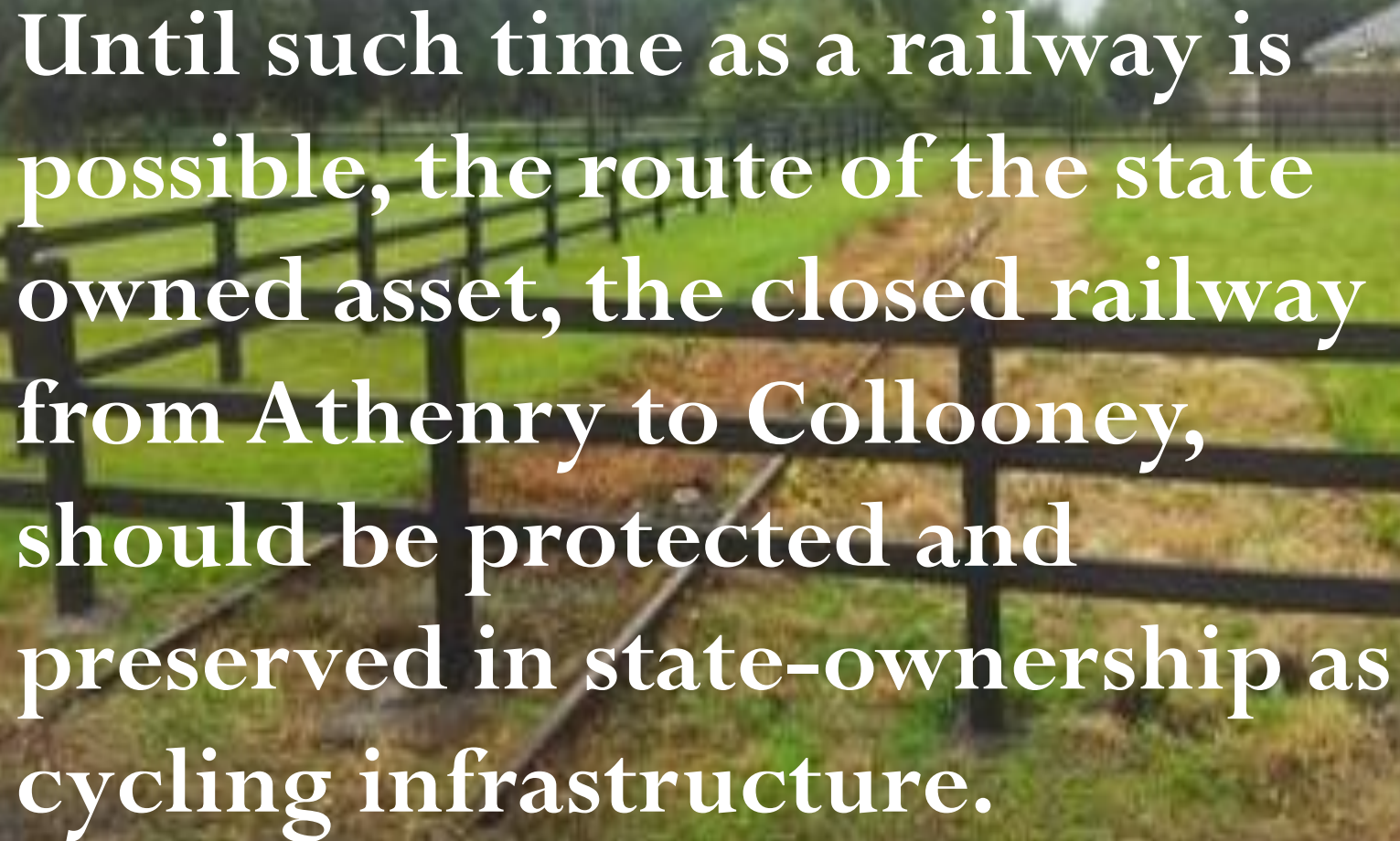
Western Rail Trail Campaign: An alliance of campaigns in the west of Ireland

Sligo North Leitrim Greenway Group



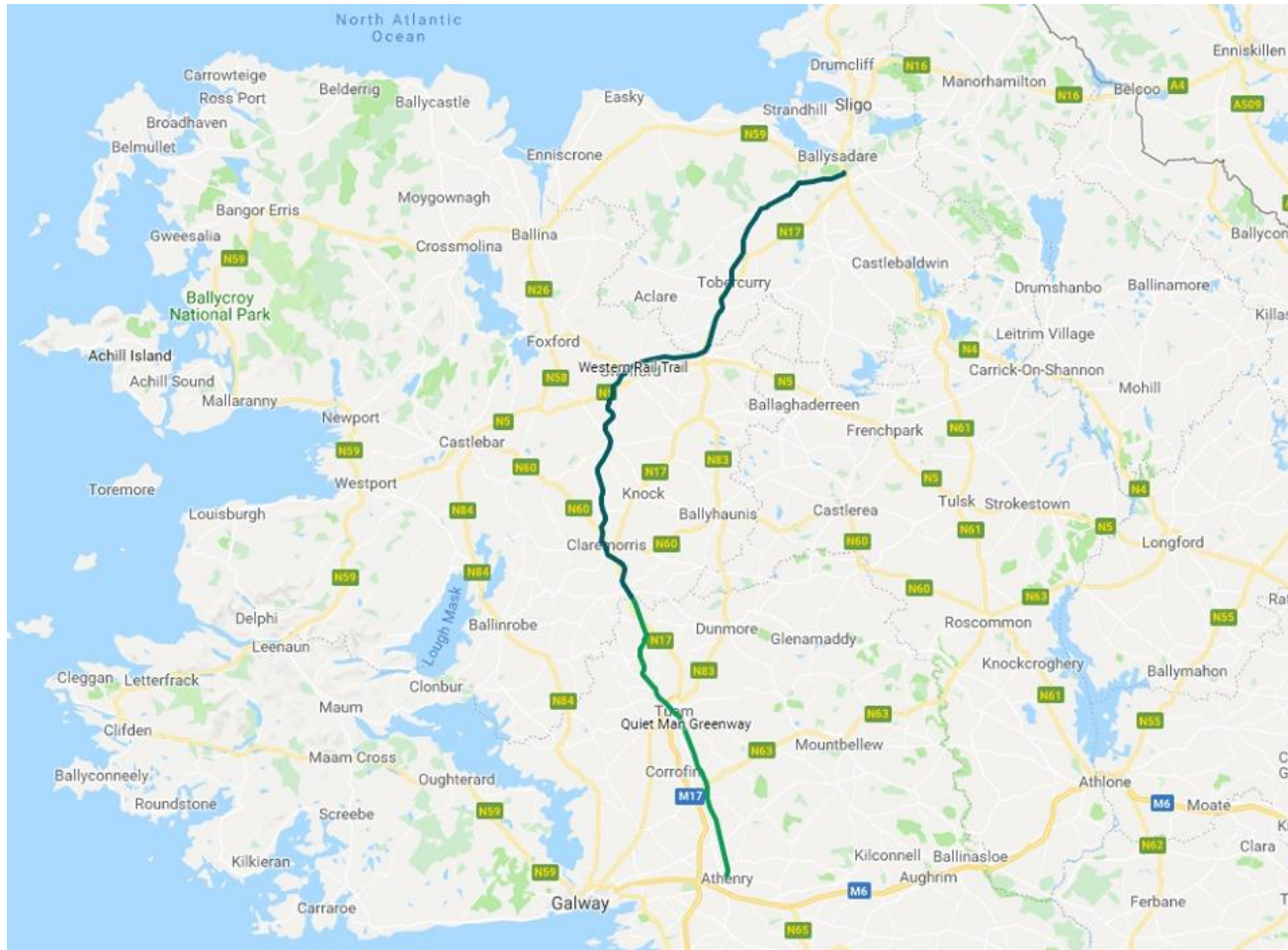
The All-Island rail review needs to clearly state that protecting this route as a greenway now supports the long term aim of installing a railway with greenway alongside in the future.

Western Rail Trail: Our Vision



Until such time as a railway is possible, the route of the state owned asset, the closed railway from Athenry to Collooney, should be protected and preserved in state-ownership as cycling infrastructure.

Western Rail Trail Athenry to Collooney utilizing closed railway:



The All-Island rail review needs to clearly state that protecting this route as a greenway now supports the long term aim of installing a railway with greenway alongside in the future.

Now Next Later: A realistic option



Now:
Dereliction and
encroachment

Next: A Greenway



Later: Maybe



The All-Island rail review needs to clearly state that protecting this route as a greenway now supports the long term aim of installing a railway with greenway alongside in the future.

Barry Kenny (Irish Rail): Newstalk August 2nd 2013

“We will licence the routes to local authorities so they can develop cycleways and greenways on them, because there is no doubt they are fantastic tourism opportunity and it protects the alignment in the longer term and

they are then protected by the very existence of the cycleways, should we need them for railways in the future, Irish Rail will support this licensed arrangement to local authorities”

Source: Newstalk broadcasting Barry Kenny interviewed by George Hook August 2nd 2013

The All-Island rail review needs to clearly state that protecting this route as a greenway now supports the long term aim of installing a railway with greenway alongside in the future.

Jim Meade current CEO Irish Rail: Oireachtas Transport Committee meeting on February 17th 2021

Mr. Jim Meade CEO of Irish rail to an Oireachtas Transport Committee meeting on February 17th 2021 said this about greenways on closed railways:

[Irish rail CEO explains to oireachtas committee irish rail policy on greenways on closed railways Feb 16 2021](#)

“The greenway is a win win, I think for both because it keeps the asset in state ownership, it keeps the asset utilized and then if there is a decision at some time in the future that it has to go back into public transport mode, the licensing arrangement is such that it can do so.”

Source: www.oir.ie

Public opinion: The Western Rail Trail has huge public support

- Over 25,000 on line petitioners on change.org
- 3,000 marched in support September 2018 Tuam
- Thousands of submissions on County and National Development plans
- Social Media 2000 East Mayo & 9000 Quiet Man Greenway members on Facebook, Sligo Mayo Greenway 10k followers
- 1,000+ paid up shareholders of Sligo Greenway Co-op
- 800 submissions to NWRA



Over 25,000 sign petition asking for greenway on closed railway from Sligo to Athenry

It is very important for The Committee on Transport and Communications and for the working party considering the All Island Rail Review to understand the level of public opinion that supports the greenway now railway when it becomes possible argument.

The display of public opinion is well shown in the on line petition set up on the highly respected on line petition portal change.org. The petition has been submitted for consideration by the EU public petitions committee of the EU parliament. It will soon be submitted to the Oireachtas public petitions portal.

We ask that all members of The Committee on Transport and Communications consider this petition which is signed in the main by petitioners from Counties in the West of Ireland. This is a huge expression of public opinion. The petition can be found at this embedded link:

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

The All-Island rail review needs to clearly state that protecting this route as a greenway now supports the long term aim of installing a railway with greenway alongside in the future.

*The Things politicians have said about greenway now
railway when it is possible*

“We need to get cycling” :

Alastair McKinstry 17/3/18

Green Party Councilor Alastair McKinstry signed the Greenway petition on 17th March 2018 he left this comment in support of the Western Rail Trail

Alastair McKinstry	Galway, Ireland	2018-03-17	"We need to get cycling!"
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Thousands of people have left a legacy of comments on this petition asking for this route to be part of our cycling infrastructure

“Should we use the section of the railway line north of Claremorris as a walkway and cycleway while it is not open as railway?”

Eamon O’Cuiv May 2009 Claremorris West on Track conference

- **Mayo:** North of Claremorris no plans to re-open railway.
- It was not on the EY consulting agenda
- Claremorris to Charlestown would connect to The Great Western Greenway and Sligo greenway to Enniskillen
- Huge on the ground support in East Mayo for the route to be part of our cycling infrastructure
- **Sligo/Leitrim.** Fully supported by county councils.
- Northern Ireland Executive: cross border support €800,000 allocated for ready to go to construction
- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies named project in Regional Strategies



News

“Railway reopen? It’s more likely a spaceship will visit”

By John Bromley

THERE was as much chance of a spaceship coming to the county as the disused railway between Collooney and Bellaghy being reopened. It was suggested at a meeting of Sligo County Council.

The remark was made by one councillor in the course of a lengthy discussion at the special meeting to examine proposed variations to the county development plan.

Concerns were expressed by some councillors that changes to the plan being proposed in a submission from the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) could delay progress on plans for a greenway on the closed section of the former Western Rail Corridor in Sligo.

In the course of its submission the NWRA suggested that Sligo’s development plan “should reflect the overwhelming support given to the reopening of the Western Rail Corridor as a priority” in the NWRA’s regional plan.

That submission and one from the Department of Transport drew attention to an impact in relation to a financial and economic appraisal of a proposed reopening of Phases 2 and 3 of the Western Rail Corridor commissioned by Iarróid Éireann.

It stated that in recent weeks a final copy of the report has been received by the Department of Transport. The department has been reviewing the documentation and engaging with Iarróid Éireann and the consultants who prepared it and once that review was complete the matter would then be brought to Government for its decision and the report published “as soon as practical thereafter”.

Cllr Casserly was concerned that a variation in the county development plan could jeopardise progress on the development of a greenway along the route.

She proposed a motion which read: “Until such time as the railway is possible in line with national policy and in line with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy that the closed railway route from Collooney to the county border at Bellaghy, Charlestown will be supported by Sligo County Council as a greenway until such time as the objective of achieving the re-opening of the line is achievable.”

Cllr Declan Bree questioned whether there was a need for the motion.

He said that it was already in the county plan that there was an objective of “hopefully in time” seeing the reopening of the Western Rail Corridor and there was also an objective of having a greenway between Collooney and Bellaghy.

Council chief executive Claran Hayes said the development plan made provision for a greenway on or alongside the existing railway line.

Senior planner Frank Moylan said that the variation to the plan was

not proposing any change in relation to the greenway or the railway nor did they think that any variation was necessary.

Cllr Casserly said that she did not want the greenway project as it stood to be delayed, “not when it has gone so far”.

She asked Mr Moylan if there was anything that was being proposed that would “delay the progress of the greenway, even by a day”.

Mr Moylan said that it could be argued that the variation being proposed by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly, in relation to priority to be given to the extension of the railway from Athlery to Sligo, could be giving priority to the reopening of the Western Rail Corridor over the greenway.

Cllr Thomas Walsh was sceptical about the railway ever reopening. “I believe there is as much chance of a spaceship coming to this county as the railway coming back.”

He was concerned that there would be no “watering down of the greenway” and said: “I don’t think I will ever see the railway in my lifetime but this could put in jeopardy one, if not two, greenways in the county.”

Cllr Paul Taylor said that he found it hard to believe that as a council that they “would not support the greenway”.

“The progress of the greenway is absolutely vital for this county. It is a no-brainer that we support the greenway in every way that we can.”

Cllr Bree said he was “surprised to hear government councillors that are opposed to the reopening of the Western Rail Corridor”.

“My impression is that it is government policy to see progress on reopening the Western Rail Corridor, which I also support.”

He said that the councillors lack of support for this was a “wordy aspect”.

“I think that the vast majority of people living along the railway look forward to the day that the Western Rail Corridor is reopened.”

Cllr Bree said that he also supported the concept of a greenway and felt that they “should not be trying to play one off against the other.”

Mr Hayes agreed that they should not be playing one off against the other.

He said the situation as of now was that the government had a policy in relation to the greenway and had advanced significant funding towards it.



The disused railway between Collooney and Bellaghy



Cllr Marie Casserly, above, and Cllr Thomas Walsh, below.

Cllr Thomas Walsh, below, said that he never said that he did not support the reopening of the railway but he said that “anybody with common sense would see that the greenway has to be priority”.

Cllr Casserly said that she did not want to see them “throwing away” money that was being allocated for a greenway.

She pointed that Irish Rail accepted that a greenway would protect the railway route until such time as a railway might be possible and she said this had happened in other parts of the country. She added: “If there is something done this day that delays the greenway it is a shame on every single one of us.”

Cllr Casserly also said that it was estimated that it would cost €300 million to put trains back on the line and asked: “Is anybody going to give us that money?”

Director services Dorothy Clarke said that in the last couple of years they had met with Irish Rail on three occasions and she said that they would have no problem in “giving us a licence agreement to develop a greenway on that portion of the line from Collooney to Bellaghy”.

She also said that the recommendation from the chief executive for the county development gave equal prominence to both the greenway and the railway.

After some further discussion Cllr Casserly’s motion was agreed.

COUNTY SLIGO LEADER PARTNERSHIP CLG

Calling all Community Groups IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

AREA	CLUSTER NAME	TOWNS & VILLAGES	DEP'S IN CLUSTER
1	West Sligo	Aughlin/Templeton, Droineer West, Rathlee, Eskay, Eniscrone, Castleconnor, Corbally	Kilglin, Castleconnor WEST, Castleconnor East, Mullaghlin Templeboy South, Templeboy North, Skene, Tobarackin E, Tobarackin West, Aughlin, E Buncrow, Rathmacruagh, E West
2	South East Sligo	Ballylougher, Riverstown, Geavagh, Sooy, Ballygatway	Ballylougher East, Ballylougher West, Ballynaki, Drumcolur Shanough, Riverstown, Laki Kildoon, Kilmacranagh, Ball
3	South West Sligo	Tabbercurry, Moylough, Curry, Bellaghy, Banada, Tourlestrane, Cloonacool, Laveagh, Achony, Coolaney, Sreen	Drumard East, Drumard West, Coolaney, Carnwonskeagh, Branchfield, Carlon, Stream Cloonacool, Glendarragh, Breencroagh, Kilmacraige, Banada, Achony West, Ach East, Tobarony, Leitlin, O'K
4	North Sligo	Mullaghmore, Clifflony, Ballinrilly, Grange, Ballyconnell, Strredagh, Maughelaw, Carrig, Rathcroghan, Druncill, Carrig, Rosses Point, Calry	Clifflony North, Clifflony South, Rossinivee East, Rossinivee West, Lisadell East, Lisadell West, Carrig, Druncill V, Druncill East, Calry
5	Sligo Town	Borough of Sligo town	Carlon, Ballyvivan, Fortill side, Ballinodis, Maughelaw, Rathcroghan, Merville, Carr etc.

Sligo LEADER Partnership County currently has a vacancy for a board member from each area listed above. We are seeking nominations for these roles by **Friday, 06th November**. All interested parties must be:

- Proposed by the respective Community Group and must be a member of same for no less than 12 months
- The Community Group must be a registered member of Sligo PPN for a minimum of 12 months
- The nominated individual must be seconded by another Community Group (also registered member of Sligo PPN)
- In the event of more than one eligible nominee an election by ballot will be held
- The successful nominees should have the relevant necessary experience to represent on local community issues and should be of sound character

For applications and any queries please email: info@sligoleader.co.uk
Closing date: **Friday, 06th November** Canvassing will disqualify

LCDE

Funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development

October 2020 debate in Sligo County council what the members said

“The progress of the greenway is absolutely vital for this county it is a no brainer we support it every way we can” Cllr Paul Taylor

“I believe there is as much chance of a spaceship coming to this county as the railway coming back” Cllr Thomas Walsh

Source Sligo Weekender 22/10/2020

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Marian Harkin TD – how good ideas can change politicians’ minds.

- “25 years ago, I was Chair of Developing the West together, one of our flagship projects was the Western Rail Corridor.
- However, in more recent times, with the success of Greenways, it has become clear that the Greenway Projects will deliver much more added value, particularly to the communities along the route and also to the wider public as a piece of recreational infrastructure.
- However, I didn’t just change my view, I acted on it.
- Pat McCarrick (chair of Sligo Greenway Co-op) John Mulligan, Marie Casserly and myself met senior Department officials to lobby for feasibility funding for Greenways to get them ‘shovel ready’”
- **Source: Marian Harkin Facebook announcement showing her support for the Western Rail Trail 18th January 2020**
- **Both Marc MacSharry and Frank Feighan support WRT.**

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Micheal Martin, Leo Varadkar, Paschal Donohoe

What they have said about the closed railway:

Micheal Martin July 2017 described the (greenway) project as a “no brainer” and “couldn’t envisage the return of railway services on the line, given the lack of a strong economic case to support this”.

Leo Varadkar: February 28th 2014 on RTE Primetime “*The Western Rail corridor was built for political reasons it never stacked up on economic grounds and it never stacked up on Transport policy grounds*” and in Email to Brendan Quinn July 2013 “*the Government has no plans to extend the western rail corridor nor any other heavy rail line in the state*”.

Paschal Donohoe (Minister of Transport 2015) Email to Brendan Quinn on October 14th 2015 “*As you know from our meetings, my Department is supportive of the proposal to develop the disused Collooney to Claremorris rail line as a greenway.*”

The
Tuam Herald

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News

Greenway boost as FF leader doesn't foresee return of railway

Wednesday, 26th July, 2017 9:54am

Story by Jacqueline Hogge

Jump to comments

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16 Oct 2020

Invest in a driveway that will impress on

Athenry to Claremorris The Quiet Man Greenway or another 30 years of waste?

- It is Important for the Rail Review to understand the difference between Athenry to Claremorris and north of Claremorris to Collooney. The so called Western Rail Corridor has to be considered in segments
- EY and Jaspers only considered Athenry to Claremorris as a potential line to re-open and concluded no economic or demographic case for railway at this point in time.
- The Quiet Man Greenway was identified as a project in the Regional Strategies by The North West Assembly to protect the route in public ownership, so why not let it happen?
- The Quiet Man Greenway has huge public support, including a march of 3,000 people on the streets of Tuam in September 2018
- Galway County Council received over 1,500 submissions on the recent county plan asking for the Quiet Man Greenway to happen.
- The rail review needs to be clear. The railway is either going to be built or it is not. If a railway is going to be built then fine, but due to public support for a greenway a greenway should be placed alongside any new railway.
- If it is not going to be built in the next 5 years then put a greenway in now to protect the route.

Claremorris to Collooney: The East Mayo Greenway and the Sligo Greenway. A clear direction is needed. Greenway now Railway maybe in the future (1)

- The so called Western Rail Corridor has to be considered in segments. Claremorris to Collooney is a different segment and needs to be radically considered.
- When the WRC was first considered for re-opening in the 2005 McCann Report Claremorris/Collooney was identified as being difficult to recommend. The alignment of the route and number of easement crossings (almost 400) and the fact it was built to light railway standard made it impossible to recommend its reopening as a modern railway. A radical rethink is needed on this section. All of the historic documentation and reports need to be looked at.
- The demographics really don't stack up either. In the case of this route looking at other options may be the best recommendation of the rail review. For example, consideration for a railway parallel with the alignment of the new N17? Or a totally new alignment? We urge the rail review to consider radical options for this potential rail route due to the engineering and sheer practical reasons we believe makes considering the viability of the old rail route as very slim indeed.
- The case for a greenway now to protect the route in public ownership, and a possible long term rail plan in the future supports the view of both Irish Rail and The Department of Transport.
- However, the Rail Review needs to be clear on the need to include the ideas put forward by Irish Rail and The Department of Transport to Mayo County Council.
- If a clear direction is not given by the Rail Review the quagmire of arguing for one thing or another will continue for decades and nothing will be achieved.
- The All-Island rail review needs to clearly state that protecting this route as a greenway now supports the long term aim of installing a railway with greenway alongside in the future.

Claremorris to Collooney: The East Mayo Greenway and the Sligo Greenway. Clear direction is needed.

Greenway now Railway maybe in the future? (2)

- It is very important for the Rail Review Team to understand the attitude towards north of Claremorris to Collooney.
- Sligo county council fully supports a greenway on this route and is actively progressing with the Sligo Greenway project from Collooney (Sligo) to Charlestown (Mayo). This project has received €350k in seed funding and has the full backing of the Minister of Transport.
- The section of the line from Claremorris to Charlestown is under the authority of Mayo County Council (MCC). MCC received over 1,000 submissions on the new county plan asking MCC to extend the Sligo Greenway from Charlestown to Claremorris.
- In addition to overwhelming public support in County Mayo, MCC also received submissions in March 2021 on the new county plan from **Irish Rail and the Department of Transport** asking MCC to include the idea of a greenway in the county plan along this route
- MCC response has been that they will follow the direction of the Rail Review which is why it is critical that the Rail Review clearly states a greenway is acceptable as an interim policy objective on the route north of Claremorris.

Claremorris to Collooney: The East Mayo Greenway and the Sligo Greenway. Clear direction is needed.

Greenway now Railway maybe in the future? (3)

- We are asking members of the committee to look at what Irish Rail and the Department of Transport said in submissions on the new Mayo county plan in March 2021:
- **Irish Rail said this in their March 2021 submission on the Mayo county plan to Mayo county council** *“support for the development of 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.”*
- **Department of Transport said this in their March 2021 submission on the Mayo county plan to Mayo county council** *“welcome the protection of the Western Rail Corridor as a “Transport Corridor rather than solely as a railway line” and “that consideration could be given at a future time for the construction of a greenway on or beside the alignment of the railway line. This would be particularly welcome from Claremorris to Charlestown.”*
- *Source www.Mayococo.ie*

Regional Strategies: North West RSES 2019

Railway and Greenway get equal recognition

NWRA see the route as part of national cycling infrastructure; this what the RSES say about railway and greenway

Railway

- The EY consulting report is pivotal to regional Strategies
- 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.

Greenway

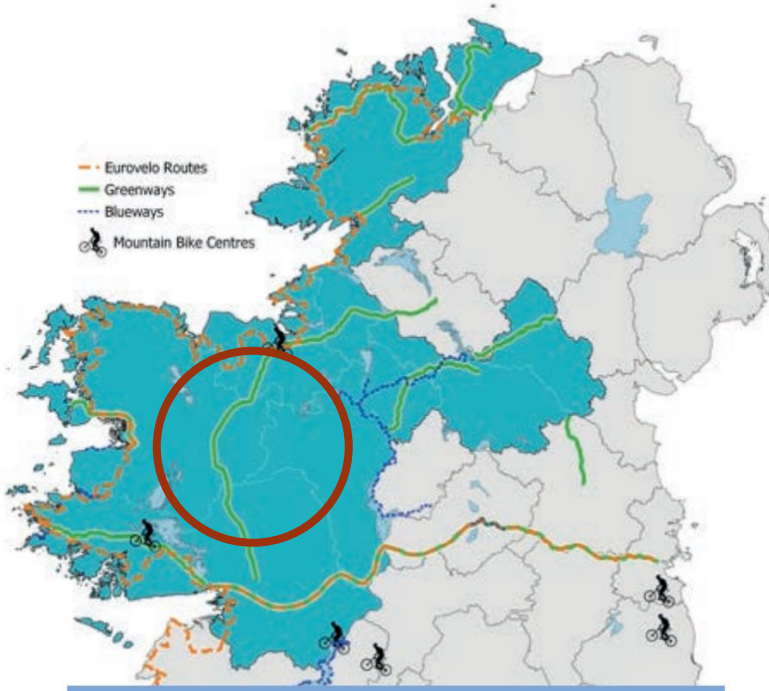
- Greenway Projects that are in operation, or in planning on an All Island basis, which includes the following key projects:
- SLNCR (Sligo Leitrim Northern Counties Railway) Greenway.
- Collooney to Athenry Greenway (aka Quiet Man Greenway)

Source: Regional Spatial Economic Strategies 2019 approved by NWRA

The All-Island rail review needs to clearly state that protecting this route as a greenway now supports the long term aim of installing a railway with greenway alongside in the future.

North West Regional Strategies: What the RSES actually says about the WRC/Greenway option (it is not just about a railway)

Our Natural Networks (Greenways and Blueways)




Legend:

- Eurovelo Routes
- Greenways
- Blueways
- 🚲 Mountain Bike Centres

GREENWAYS

OUR WAY: INTERREG



OUR WAY is an INTERREG project that aims to contribute to conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage in using **Greenways** as sustainable and smart transportation links in rural areas. The NWRA intends to improve coordination among the different key actors; to develop governance systems to manage **Greenways**; to identify models and good practices for the protection and maintenance of **Greenways**; to identify financial instruments and funding for **Greenways** and

The graphic above is taken directly from the RSES published in 2019. The circled route on the map, is the exact route of the closed railway which the RSES is proposing as a greenway until such time as a railway is possible. The RSES also names the Quiet Man Greenway as a project in planning.

The All-Island rail review needs to clearly state that protecting this route as a greenway now supports the long term aim of installing a railway with greenway alongside in the future.

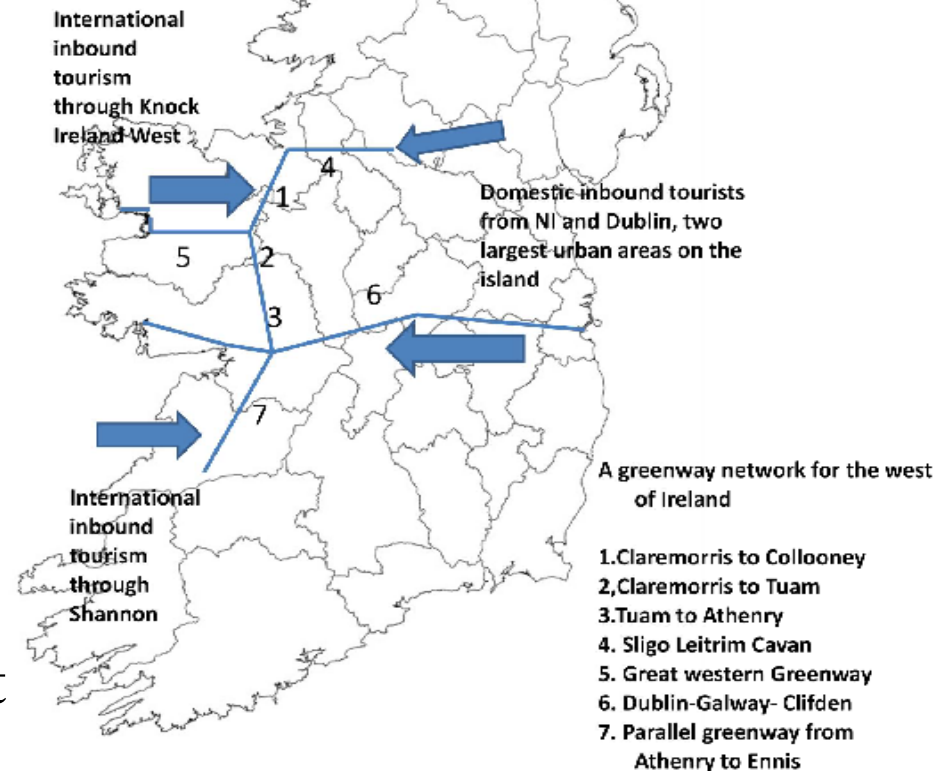
The Atlantic Economic Corridor - united by tourism

- The single most important economic activity from Donegal to Kerry is Tourism
- Cycling tourism: 2012- 2017 grew from 371K to 1.8 million, In 2018 46% of all overseas tourists engaged in walking and cycling as a holiday experience (Failte Ireland)
- The advent of long distance greenways has given rise to a new type of tourism economics – as seen in Waterford and elsewhere.



Developing a connected greenway network in the west and north west will reinvent tourism economics in the region in the same way as it is revolutionizing tourism economics in the Waterford and South East region.

A greenway network for the west of Ireland to benefit local outdoor recreation and West of Ireland share of domestic and international tourism
Sligo Mayo Greenway Campaign promoting tourism and leisure jobs in the West of Ireland



The All-Island rail review needs to clearly state that protecting this route as a greenway now supports the long term aim of installing a railway with greenway alongside in the future.

Reinvention not Resurrection

- An economic and business case cannot be made to re-open the railway north of Athenry at this point in time – but
- Route needs to be protected
- Existing tracks only have scrap value.
- International best practice to protect such a route, providing a social and economic amenity now, would be the low cost conversion of the route to a greenway under a licensed arrangement with Irish Rail

Thousands of people in the West of Ireland support the Western Rail Trail and want to see it happen:

We have tried to lay out simple arguments in this document about our vision and the reason for our thinking. We know our ideas make sense and don't block the railway from happening sometime in the future. There is no point producing a rail strategy that cannot be implemented in the **near** future. It is important to listen to what people actually want. The Western Rail Corridor is not a key issue for people in the West of Ireland; delivering the N17 is. Providing facilities that will help tourism grow and create jobs from "greenway-nomics" is far more relevant.

The idea is simple. Utilize the route until such time as a railway is possible. It is an idea that has been used around the world and is being implemented all over Ireland now: Navan Kingscourt, Middleton and Youghal, Waterford Greenway, Great Western Greenway, Sligo – Leitrim – Enniskillen greenway, all greenways on closed railways.

Why not the Western Rail Trail from Athenry to Collooney? And a railway and greenway alongside it in later years? Let's achieve something not nothing, let's stop kicking the can down the road and make a decision.

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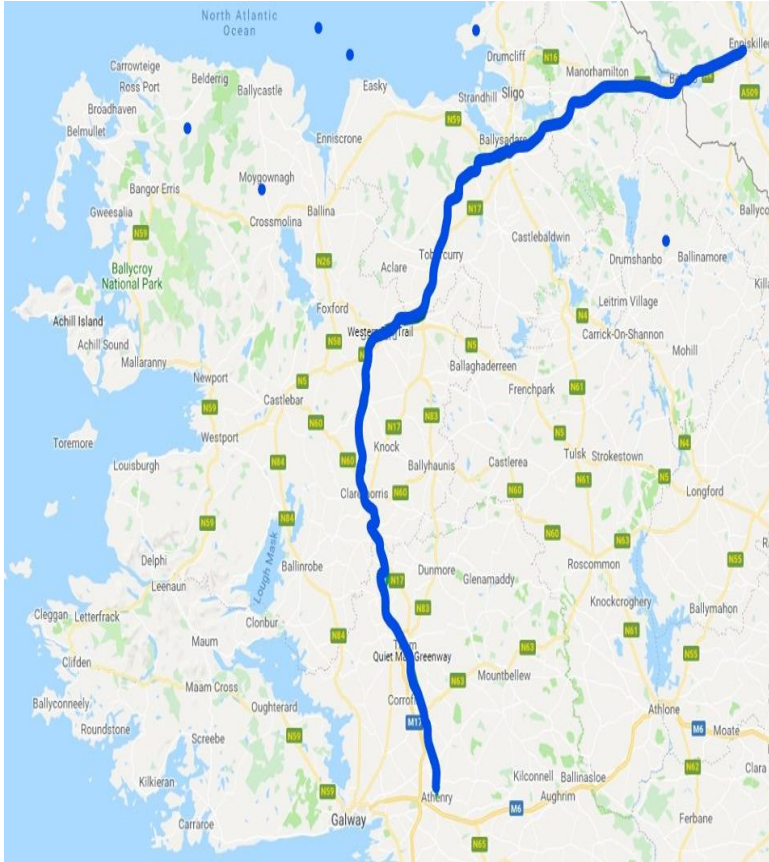


Why waste the asset for another ten to twenty years? Greenway now Railway when it is feasible.

26

The All-Island rail review needs to clearly state that protecting this route as a greenway now supports the long term aim of installing a railway with greenway alongside in the future.

Thank you for considering our thoughts and listening to our thousands of supporters



The All-Island rail review needs to clearly state that protecting this route as a greenway now supports the long term aim of installing a railway with greenway alongside in the future.