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## Western Development Commission (WDC) Response to Draft All Island Rail Review 2023

Dear Arup,

The Western Development Commission<sup>1</sup> (WDC) welcomes this opportunity to make a short response to the above consultation on the Draft All Island Rail Review (AISSR) published 25 July 2023.

The WDC is a statutory body with a remit to promote and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region (counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Galway, Roscommon, and Clare) see [here](#). It operates under the aegis of the Department of Rural and Community Development.

The WDC welcomes the overall ambition for rail transport, both passenger and freight, contained within the Draft All Island Rail Review. This ambition is warranted from a sustainability perspective as well as responding to the significant intercensal population growth across all regions of Ireland including the Western Region and this is projected to increase further.

The WDC regards the provision of quality rail services as a key element in providing transport accessibility between the Western Region and other regions and increasingly within the Region.

Much of the West/North West has relatively poor road accessibility documented and mapped by Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in its annual National Roads Indicators Report, which was recently discussed [here](#). The TII report concludes. *Despite the above, peripheral areas in North-West, West and South-West and South-East still tend to suffer from poor accessibility to jobs (p.31).*

The WDC restates the views expressed in its original Submission of January 2022, which in the interests of brevity is available [here](#). Furthermore, we wish to make the following broad observations following the publication of the Draft Review.

### **1. Frequency of services**

The proposal for increased frequencies is welcome, however the interregional routes as they are termed will be served with much lower frequencies (one train every two hours) compared to the intercity routes (hourly services). Apart from Galway-Dublin, the routes serving the Western Region are all interregional routes and will therefore have much lower frequencies.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Western Development Commission see [www.westerndevelopment.ie](http://www.westerndevelopment.ie)



While the level of passenger demand is likely to be lower from the smaller urban centres these should be accommodated by similar frequencies but possibly fewer carriages.

## **2. Journey times & Line Speeds**

The Review argues that journey times *'should be materially faster than car journeys'*, which is a welcome objective to increase patronage levels and encourage more sustainable transport. As the cities are served by the intercity motorway network, their car-based journey times are already faster than similar length journeys to centres such as Sligo and Castlebar.

The recommended improvements in line speeds suggest that those intercity routes which already have the better transport links (motorways and higher line speeds) will achieve significantly faster speeds (top speed of 200km/h) compared to other routes (top speed of 120km/h).

The effect will be that the routes serving the largest urban centres in the West and North West, those same regions designated for stronger growth under Project Ireland 2040, will have the slowest speeds. This suggests a lack of ambition for line speed improvements on those lines and a lack of consistency with Project Ireland 2040.

## **3. Commuter journeys/ Intra-regional Commuting**

Increased frequencies will promote more extensive use of the rail network for shorter commutes on the network. While recommendations supporting commuter rail traffic around the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) is evident within the Review it may not be fully appreciated the extent to which rail is increasingly serving a commuting to work population across the Western Region. Large employers in Sligo and the North West are increasingly looking to the rail service to support the commuting patterns of their employees. Improved frequencies and journey times on the Sligo line serving stations as far as Mullingar would prove attractive to those commuting to employment in Sligo. Similar improvements on the Westport/ Ballina and Galway-Limerick services will promote much greater passenger take-up.

## **4. Potential proposed change to Sligo-Connolly to Sligo- Heuston**

The proposal to change the Dublin-Sligo service to terminate in Heuston rather than Connolly will be a dis-improvement in this service adding unnecessary extra time to a lengthy journey. The line between Adamstown and Maynooth/Kilcock is to *enable Sligo trains to access Heuston (and potentially a new cross-Dublin tunnel) as an alternative to Connolly ...may be needed if (as planned) the frequency of DART services increases on the route between Maynooth and Connolly... p.101.*

The Review clearly suggests that this proposal is designed to serve the needs of commuters in the GDA, which while important, should not be at the expense of an inter-regional long distance route such as Sligo-Dublin. In the context of Project Ireland 2040 objectives of rebalancing growth to the Northern & Western and Southern Regions, primacy should be given to supporting the rail routes and services to and within those Regions.



## **5. New lines and re-instatement of lines**

The WDC welcomes the Recommendation to reopen the line from Claremorris to Tuam to Athenry in the short term. However as the Review points out, rail journey times ‘need to be materially faster than the car’ to be successful. This is particularly true of the line from Tuam to Galway given its route via Athenry. Separate analysis from the WDC has shown that there is a significant passenger commuter traffic from north Galway-South Mayo and Tuam to Galway every day. To accommodate this, journey times will need to be competitive with the road based alternatives.

As the WDC noted in its original submission to the Review, in considering investment in new lines/ reinstatement of lines and services, a key route that should be considered is Derry-Letterkenny-Sligo-Claremorris-Tuam-Galway and onwards to existing services to Limerick, Cork and Waterford. As already noted, there is a legacy of relatively weak transport links in the north west. Accessibility to parts of the West and North west by road is poor relative to other parts of the country. Improved transport infrastructure here will support the Government policy goals in Project Ireland 2040 and the population and employment growth targets for the NWRA region see [here](#).

### **Conclusion**

The WDC recognises that investment in rail transport infrastructure will not achieve regional growth by itself, but quality transport infrastructure is a necessary element of any strategy for regional growth. To achieve the vision of Project Ireland 2040, regional and rural accessibility must be enhanced. The rail network is a very important mode in delivering this. Improvements in services and journey times and the development of new services are needed for better accessibility and connectivity which are vital for growth.

The WDC is pleased to make this submission to the Draft All Island Rail Review published in July 2023. If there are any queries concerning this submission, please contact me or my colleague Deirdre Frost [deirdrefrost@wdc.ie](mailto:deirdrefrost@wdc.ie).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allan Mulrooney".

Allan Mulrooney  
CEO  
Western Development Commission