



Limerick CHAMBER

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Limerick Chamber Submission Public Consultation on Rail Review 2016

Limerick Chamber represents over 500 businesses in Limerick City, Limerick County, Shannon and South East Clare and is the largest chamber in the Mid-West region. An important factor in affecting the performance of the regional economy is maintaining reliable and resilient connections between the regions and key cities, as well as between the regions and international markets. Appropriate transport infrastructure aids the competitiveness of the enterprise base, facilitates regional development and leads to better environmental outcomes.

Rail transport is particularly important for business users. It is well recognised that rail travel contributes to improved productivity by allowing users to undertake work on rail journeys, reducing travel times and allowing direct travel between central business districts. Limerick rail passenger demand is strongest on the Dublin route and it was noted in the 2030 Rail Network Strategy Review that this route performs relatively close to its full potential. It is estimated that approximately 30% of travel on the Limerick- Dublin line are business users¹.

The Strategic Framework for Investment in Land Transport and this call for Submission recognise the need for an updated rail policy with value for money as a fundamental feature as well as consideration on how to focus rail investment on where rail has, or will have, its greatest strength in transport, social and environmental terms. In responding to this consultation process, Limerick Chamber recognises the need to provide value for money to the exchequer and supports the use of evidence analysis in identifying investment priorities. However, it must also be recognised that rail investment also has a role to play in supporting other government policy, particularly around regional development and labour market policies. Irish Rail and the NTA, recognise that there is a need for a coordinated approach to policy and that the role of public transport, including the rail network, should to be clearly acknowledged in the forthcoming National Planning Framework.

The latest indications for the forthcoming National Planning Framework are that cities will be the focus of growth. Recent comments from Minister Simon Coveney suggest that the new national planning framework will attempt to ensure that regional cities will see greater population growth, more jobs and increased investment in transport links². Against this backdrop, the rail network should play a key role in supporting the growth of our regional cities, taking account of the growing demand arising from their economic development. Limerick Chamber views as positive the recognition in this consultation document of the *regionalisation of employment* and the need for rail to stay relevant to these emerging trends. The Mid West Action Plan for Jobs also identified the need for improvement of sustainable transport links into Limerick including the Limerick to Waterford line.

¹2030 Rail Network Strategy Review, page 59

² <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/cities-to-be-focus-of-growth-under-simon-coveney-plan-1.2917908>

It is well accepted that the intercity rail network is facing increasing competition from the road network. The completion of the Major Inter-Urban Motorway programme has seen significant reductions in journey times for road transport with the result that car and bus travel is becoming increasingly competitive relative to Rail. It is noted in the Review document that currently, car travel between Limerick and Dublin takes approximately 142 minutes while rail travel takes between 145-162 minutes³. Fast and reliable travel times are particularly important for business commuters. Improving the travel times from Dublin to Limerick will increase the attractiveness of rail travel for business, commuter and leisure users, and would improve the service offering of Irish Rail. Limerick Chamber views as positive the recognition by Irish Rail of the need to improve travel times on InterCity routes, most notably a reduction in journey time to at least 1:30 hours on the Dublin to Limerick route. Given the positive impact on revenue +€1million coupled with the fact that the incremental capital cost is negligible this improvement should be facilitated as soon as possible.

However, of the 18 services from Limerick to Dublin, only four are direct while the rest connect with the Dublin to Cork train. The requirement to interchange at Limerick Junction is accepted as a barrier to travel. In fact, the 2030 Rail Network Strategy Review employed the National Rail Model and found that that the rail market share for the Limerick to Dublin route was *'hampered by the requirement for interchange at Limerick Junction'*. It was also noted in the study that the interchange poses additional delays to the Dublin – Cork services. Arising from this finding, the 2030 Rail Network Strategy Review proposed the introduction of bi-hourly direct services from Dublin and to facilitate connections from Dublin – Cork trains only every 2 hours. The AECOM analysis of this proposal resulted in a NPV of €171 million and a benefit cost ratio of 3.1⁴. The study suggested that these *'investments should be carried out in conjunction with the equivalent investments in the Dublin Cork service'*.

These proposed initiatives now appear at odds with the Rail Review document which identifies the possibilities of having all Limerick to Dublin services interchanging at Limerick Junction as an area for future consideration. If this proposal is to form part of future investment considerations so too should the possibility of introducing bi hourly direct services as suggested in the Rail Network Strategy Review. Furthermore, for those train services that will still require interchange at Limerick Junction, upgrading the station will facilitate improved transfers and which was estimated to yield a benefit cost ratio of 4.1. The proposal by Irish Rail to undertake further analysis on the potential to optimise network connections at Limerick Junction is a positive development, however, it is imperative that this analysis is expedited as soon as possible in order to increase patronage on the rail network.

Limerick Chamber believes it is necessary to ensure that rail projects are based on robust analysis of future business and population needs. As previously highlighted the National Planning Framework will focus growth on the regional cities. It is well recognised that cities will play a key role in the economic development of regions, and thus, a safe and reliable transport system is vital. There is also a need to recognise that in the long term economic growth and a greater concern with sustainability will result in a greater demand for public transport. Whilst it is recognised that the low levels of patronage pose difficulties for future investment it is important that in the long term the potential of rail to cater for commuter travel is considered.

In the context of Limerick, it is recognised that significant commuter rail travel is currently not a dominant mode of travel, however efforts should be made to further encourage commuter rail. In particular, the timetabling of services should be in line with the needs of business and commuter travel and facilitates such as reliable WiFi should be ensured. It is also worth noting that the Limerick Ballybrophy line, which has been mooted for closure, transits the village of Annacotty in close proximity to the National Technology Park and the University of Limerick. Consideration should be given to the potential of commuter travel on this line if a station could be located in close proximity to key education and employment centres. Any analysis should take account of the need for

³ Rail Review page 11

⁴ 2030 Rail Network Strategy Review page 173

interchanges with other forms public transport as well as park and ride facilities. Likewise, the proposed reinstatement of the Foynes to Limerick freight line also transits the towns of Adare and Patrickswell and runs nearby to the Raheen Business Park which could offer additional future rail potential for the City and region.

Ends.

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