

## **National Planning Framework**

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**From:** dcrooks@eircom.net  
**Sent:** 13 October 2017 15:01  
**To:** National Planning Framework  
**Attachments:** SUBMISSION ON BEHALF OF WEST ULSTER RAIL INITIATIVE.docx

Dear Sir,

Please find attached, a submission from West Ulster Rail Initiative in connection with the Government's Planning Framework 2040.

With every good wish,

Rev D W T Crooks,  
Chairman, WURI



## SUBMISSION ON BEHALF OF WEST ULSTER RAIL INITIATIVE

One only has to have the most cursory glance at a map of Ireland, to observe the fact that the triangle formed by joining together Derry, Dublin, Sligo and Derry, is completely void of motorways and railways.

Over the last twenty five years, an excellent system of motorways has been built in parts of Ireland, mainly in the east, south, and even in the west.

The M50 has been created from scratch within the environs of a major European city since 1990, and even more recently, been widened into six lanes for almost its entire length. The connection with the M50, to the M1, M4/M6 and M7/M8/M9 systems is to the highest European standards.

The M1 was created in stages from Dublin to Dundalk, and on as motorway standard dual carriageway northwards to link our two largest cities, Belfast and Dublin.

The M11 has been extended southwards from the M50 almost as far as Enniscorthy, including the recent completion of the section joining and bypassing Wicklow and Arklow. There is no doubt that this will soon be extended to Wexford and Rosslare.

The M2 starts at Finglas and extends beyond Ashbourne, and the M3 extends towards Cavan through Co Meath.

The M4 feeds off the M50 towards Mullingar and at Athlone becomes the M6 to Galway.

The M7 continues from the motorway standard N7 from Naas all the way to Limerick. From it, there is the M9 to Waterford, serving Carlow and Kilkenny, and the M8 to Cork.

In Limerick, there is a three way motorway junction – the M20 which at present goes to Adare, but which will eventually be extended to Cork. The M7 at this junction, goes straight to Dublin, and the M18 extends northwards. The M18 bypasses Ennis (from which incidentally, a superb dual carriageway goes into the town), and then becomes the very recently opened M17 to Tuam, crossing the M6 Dublin to Galway motorway, bypassing Galway.

In the 1960s, when motorways were being built in the north, the Republic seemed to be a backwater with poor roads. The road from Derry to Strabane and on to Aghnacloy, now the A5, in 1964 was considered to be a European standards highway. Now, the reverse is the case.

Now let us look at the scene as if on a journey from the north-west, Derry/Letterkenny to Dublin. The N14 Letterkenny to Lifford road from the end of the Manorcunningham roundabout, is narrow and bendy. The A5 from Derry to Strabane through New Buildings and Magheramason and Ballymagorry is likewise hilly and bendy with very few opportunities to overtake tractors and lorries. The motorist has to crawl through Lifford and Strabane, then on a very bendy road through Sion Mills, on to Newtownstewart, now bypassed, and then through Omagh, including two major bottleneck junctions. We eventually come to Aghnacloy, and then Emy Vale and Monaghan, now bypassed. The road from Monaghan to Ardee is good and broad, much better than what has gone before, but is still single carriageway, apart from the 2/1 section joining and bypassing Castleblayney and Carrickmacross.

To bring this whole road, N2, A5 and N14 up to the standard of the new roads in the rest of the country, the M2 motorway must be extended from Ashbourne to Letterkenny and Derry, bypassing Ardee, Carrickmacross, Castleblayney, Monaghan, Emy Vale, Aughnacloy, Omagh, Sion Mills, Strabane and Lifford, and branch at Strabane for Derry.

Travelling from Letterkenny/Derry to Dublin on this road is very frustrating, especially on a wet day, stuck for miles behind a tractor or a string of lorries. In Emy Vale, one can have to sit aside while half a dozen 44 tonne trucks thunder through the village. The people of Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway would not tolerate being stuck in small villages along the route like this.

Admittedly over the years, substantial improvements have been made to the N2 Monaghan to Ardee road. It has been straightened and widened, but apart from that 2/1 section already mentioned, it is still single carriageway. A small amount of work was done recently on the Monaghan to Aughnacloy road, mainly widening, but not straightening out some bad bends, and Emy Vale has not been bypassed – remember, this is the main road between Dublin and Ireland's fourth largest city, Derry, and Donegal.

Some years ago, the sum of €500 million was allocated by the Irish Government for the road from Letterkenny and Derry to Dublin. This money was withdrawn when the recession started, but has since been spent on the M18/M17 from Limerick to Tuam, and the M11 Wicklow to Arklow. Small amounts are now being allocated for some work on the road to the south of Derry towards Dublin, but over a three year period. Just bear in mind the speed with which the M8 developed from a bypass of Cashel and Fermoy into the Cork to Portlaoise motorway.

There was once upon a time a promise that there would be a Letterkenny to Cork and Waterford motorway. Well actually, substantial progress on this has now been made – Adare to Tuam. When will the M20 extend to Cork and the M17 extend northwards to Sligo, and as the M15 from Sligo to Letterkenny and M13 to Derry? We have been promised a bypass of Stranorlar and Ballybofey for ages. A small amount of work was done on the road just south of Ballybofey recently, but not much has improved. Why was the Ballyshannon/Bundoran bypass not part of this motorway? Also, the N13 road from Derry to Letterkenny needs to be upgraded to the same standard as the Limerick to Ennis road.

In conversation with one of our TDs recently, we were informed that these road improvements were indeed going ahead. However, when we asked if the new roads from Letterkenny/Derry to Dublin, and southwards through Donegal to the M17 would be motorway, we were told, probably no, only 2/1 or widened single carriageway. This will not be good enough. We must have motorways from Derry/Letterkenny to Dublin and Cork, just as they have everywhere else.

All this of course, leaves us in the north-west feeling like second class citizens, as if we matter less than tax payers in the rest of the country.

We are making this submission on behalf of the West Ulster Rail Initiative, one of three campaign groups. We are working in close co-operation with West on Track. The other group, Into the West has been largely successful in getting the Coleraine to Derry line upgraded, with the result that use of the Derry Belfast line is enjoying huge passenger growth, hourly trains from Derry to Belfast return.

West on Track wants the railway line extended from Galway to Sligo, and we want it extended from Sligo to Letterkenny and Derry, and we all want it extended from Limerick via Charleville and Mallow to Cork. This would create a grand western rail corridor linking Derry and Cork. Given the astonishing success of the Limerick to Athenry/Galway line, re-opened in 2010, one can only imagine what a huge advantage a Derry to Cork line would be.

Also, the building of the LUAS system in Dublin, and the near completion of the joining up of the two sections of it is a major achievement. However, the refusal to contemplate the building of railways in the north-west, is another indication that everything has to centre around Dublin and that the west and north-west don't matter. We will resist this attitude by an unrelenting campaign, urging our TDs to get up in the Dail and keep on demanding a level playing field for all of us.

There is no argument in asserting that rail does not pay. Maybe passenger fares do not meet the overheads of maintenance, staff salaries, fuel, insurance etc., but there are invisible factors which more than compensate, so that rail is extremely profitable, for it attracts tourism and industry, and saves wear and tear on the roads. Ask the people of Killarney and Westport how they would react if their lines were threatened with closure.

Also, there needs to be a rail connection between Derry and Letterkenny, and from both Letterkenny and Derry to Dublin via Lifford, Omagh, Monaghan and Dundalk. A high speed connection between the north-west and our capital city would be of incalculable advantage to us all. It would prevent Dublin sprawling and attract growth into the west and north-west. We are deeply disturbed to see that the plans for Ireland by 2040, are trying to encourage development towards Dublin, Waterford, Cork, Limerick and Galway, but what about Sligo and Donegal?

There also needs to be a rail connection to Enniskillen and Cavan, linking those important towns into the Irish rail system.

The West on track campaigners are submitting a comprehensive argument for the development of the existing Irish rail network, and it is the hope of all of us that you will take their points and take them seriously. There is no need for us to do other than endorse all they are saying with regard to the north-west.

So, asking for a realistic road and rail infrastructure as outlined in this submission may seem a lot to ask, but it is no more than has been spent on all the lovely new motorways that have been created surprisingly quickly around the rest of Ireland. We are asking for proper, efficient, road and rail services in this region. Not only the north-west, but the whole of Ireland will benefit enormously.

There is EU funding for this, so it will not cost that much – let's go for it, and bring the whole country up to date with proper road and rail infrastructures.

## ROAD RAIL

### What about AIRPORT

Shannon airport serves the south-west of Ireland. American tourists landing there are encouraged to tour Bunnah Castle, Limerick and the lakes of Killarney and the ring of Kerry.

The Lonely Planet Guide, and other similar guide books devote fifty to sixty pages to the Kerry/Killarney/ Cork area, and only five or six pages to Donegal/Derry. We have seen such guide books on sale in New York and Philadelphia and other American cities. That is a bias which within this country's tourism system cannot be tolerated. How can our Tourism authorities think that they can make a profit for the country in tourism by promoting tourism in one area and not another area, which has the same potential .- Donegal along with Kerry.

What about Swilly International Airport between Letterkenny and Derry (same size as Ennis and Limerick)? This would bring tourists in from North America and the Continent, to visit the beautiful north-west of Ireland, just as Shannon brings tourists into Limerick and Kerry. Come on – let's have it.

The lack of proper tourism facilities in the north-west, and the bias of the Government to the development of rail and motorway everywhere in Ireland, except in the north-west is unacceptable. We pay our taxes to.

The coast of Donegal is just as beautiful as, if not more so than the Dingle peninsula and the ring of Kerry. Derry has every bit as much history as Limerick. Letterkenny is the same size as Tralee. Tralee has a railway station, Letterkenny has not.

Tourists have rail and motorway and air access to the south-west. We in the north-west have none of this.

We in the north-west protest at this infrastructural imbalance. We have every right to have the same facilities, motorway, rail and airport, so that the beautiful counties of Donegal, Derry and Antrim can be easily reached by tourists, bringing in the same tourist and industrial and economic benefits to this region, as well as saving our roads from expensive wear and tear from freight that can be carried by rail.

Finally, both Sligo and Letterkenny have Institutes of Technology. Both have major acute hospitals and are also major education centres. Sligo, for so long the "regional capital" of the north-west, in for example, tourism, can no longer replace Letterkenny in such areas. On Wikipedia, the populations of the two towns are almost identical. With regard to Letterkenny, and the same may be true of other towns, large parts of towns like Letterkenny are not actually included in the urban conurbation area. Therefore, the "greater Letterkenny" area actually has a population which is probably more likely to be in the region of 30,000+

The north-west of Ireland has for decades been hampered by the border. This region in general, and Letterkenny in particular, should be allowed to develop naturally, and cease to be prevented from future growth as an integral part of the whole of Ireland. Towns, cities and the countryside in both jurisdictions can prosper together. The border could be an asset, not a problem, especially as Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council have formed a partnership which has been endorsed by both Governments through the North South Ministerial Council.

We expect substantial progress towards seeing this part of the country brought up to the standards which exist everywhere else in Ireland.

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