

## WEST=on=TRACK



### Submission by West=on=Track to the National Planning Framework – November 2017

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In March of this year, as part of the original consultation process for the NPF, many groups and bodies from across the west and north-west of Ireland made submissions which referred to the importance of developing infrastructure for the future, including rail. These bodies included the North West Regional Authority (353), the Atlantic Economic Corridor group (460), and the Western Inter-County Railway Committee (282), representing local authorities in the region. Our submission was number 424.

All of these submissions referred specifically to the importance of developing our rail infrastructure, and in particular to the development of *existing* rail assets. However, the draft NPF, subsequently issued, contains no reference to either strengthening or developing rail west of the Shannon. Instead, it envisages that public transport for the people for this region should be 'bus-based' while at the same time recommending that rail projects of all kinds should be prioritized for the greater Dublin Area and the eastern Belfast-Dublin-Cork corridor.

That recommendations from key stakeholders concerning such a key element of infrastructure appear to have been arbitrarily ignored is a matter of serious concern and exemplifies the extent to which planning in Ireland is completely out of touch with reality and with the views of the people. The new NPF must redress this imbalance.

Equally disconcerting is the absence of *any* reference to mainline rail or rail-freight in the National Mitigation Plan despite the fact that current rail freight between Mayo and the ports of Waterford and Dublin displaces 7-million truck kilometres without any subsidy. Indeed, now more than ever, the environmental importance of rail, highlighted in our original submission, needs to be addressed.

Over the past weekend a total of 98 per cent of Citizens' Assembly members voted yes to the proposition that climate change '**should be at the centre of policymaking in Ireland**'.

Members also voted by a margin of 68 in support of the proposition that '**the State should spend at least twice as much on the funding of public transport as they do on the road infrastructure**'.

Currently Ireland is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions in 2020 by 20 per cent from the 2005 baseline, a European Union target.

However, Prof John FitzGerald, chair of the Climate Change Advisory Council, told assembly members that Ireland was going to miss its 2020 emissions targets by a greater margin than

expected and that Ireland's emissions were set to rise instead of fall between now and 2020, leading to fines from the EU.

As a consequence, Ireland was also a "very long way from our target" of reducing carbon emissions by 80 per cent by 2050, he said. He criticized the recently published National Mitigation Plan as lacking commitment to concrete new policies and measures that would reduce emissions. "We are a laggard, not a leader," he added. Prof FitzGerald said successive governments could have taken measures in the past decade to mitigate Ireland's carbon emissions.

Regrettably, the draft NPF is equally out of touch. Given these repeated warnings about our inability to meet our transport climate targets the creation of sustainable commuter zones for our large towns and cities must now be urgently addressed. In the case of Galway, for example, where large segments of the working population are forced to commute daily by car from Tuam and Claremorris the existing rail line should be urgently renewed. This is a shovel-ready project of the kind that will show that the NPF is about action and delivery. In Limerick the Foynes link offers similar possibilities. Developing these routes will also allow for the free movement of rail freight through the western region to the ports of Foynes and Waterford, relieving Dublin and encouraging economic growth throughout the sector. For example, Waterford Port has recently indicated that it needs the rail link to the West to expand and develop its operations and to attract new business.

#### Key Points

- We are disappointed that our original submission and others have been disregarded.
- We reiterate that we cannot be discriminated against as a bus only served community from a public transport perspective.
- While we welcome the recognition of the North West City Region, we are disappointed with its apparent second class status. It should be inserted in the same chapter and given the same status as the other five city regions.
- The draft plan ignores the carbon saving benefits nationally of railways.
- If a "Hard Border" results from Brexit, Sligo should be considered the fulcrum for the North West City Region with the rail corridor to the ports of Waterford, Cork and potentially Foynes, employed to allow exports a direct route to Europe.
- We respectfully request the courtesy of being included in planning the future vision of our country, regarding public transport planning and delivery.