

Submission to the National Planning Framework 2040

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1. **Overview :**

Craoibhin Community Centre, is a not for profit community group located in Termon, Co. Donegal. Our aim to support the long term viability of the community through the provision of sustainable employment for our staff and to provide relevant services to our customers to improve the quality of life in our rural area. We wish to take this opportunity to respond to the draft framework 'Ireland 2040 –Our Plan'.

A feasibility study has been concluded in March 2017 by Sustrans in respect of the development of a linear Greenway between Burtonport to Letterkenny - the Burtonport extension of the disused railway track of the Lough Swilly and Londonderry Railway (approximately 70-80km). This in turn forms part of the larger network of the Burtonport to Derry disused Railway line (total of 160km approx). This type of development would promote

- Tourism - combined with the Wild Atlantic Way a greenway would be a much needed form of sustainable tourism in the region.
- Safety - off-road cycling, walking and other fitness activities
- the development of a substantial leisure facility by enhancing existing community assets (old railway line).
- Entrepreneurship – Bike Hire, Bike Repair, Restaurants, Bars, Accommodation, Adventure activities, Camping, etc.
- People's Health and Well-Being – reinforcing the connection between spatial planning and health and quality of life. Reference should be made to the document 'Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Well-Being 2013- 2025'.

2. **Overall Recommendation to the Draft Report. - A Donegal-Derry Greenway** Site of the Londonderry-Loughswilly Old Railway Line

We believe a specific mention in 'Ireland 2040- Our Plan' to create an interconnected network of pedestrian and cycling paths that will connect Burtonport to neighbouring Dungloe, Creeslough, and Falcarragh, through to Letterkenny and Derry, in order to promote economic development, entrepreneurship, health and well being in the region. Effectively, this will contribute to a Donegal-Derry Greenway.

The recreational use of the old railway line, located in part in the rural Gaeltacht area will be used by tourists, walking clubs, local cycling clubs, the local schools, off-road running for local Sports Clubs (Soccer and GAA), local community and the broader community. This will encourage healthy outdoor and more importantly safe pursuits for people of all ages including the very young and the elderly.

Cycle tourism will however be one of the main focuses and will have very positive socio-economic implications for the Rural and Gaeltacht regions through which it passes. This will additionally the Island communities. Burtonport is the main access point to the nearby Island of Arranmore which includes a car ferry. This will improve life in these rural communities both in terms of enhancing local trade and offering business opportunities. It is an environmentally sustainable form of tourism and will have very little if any impact on the environment and can help reduce traffic congestion.

3.Summary of Objectives for a Donegal-Derry Greenway.

- 3.1 *Social Inclusion* - Ensure that residents of all gender, socio-economic group, age including the young and the elderly have access to the trail.
- 3.2 *Expand the local Economy and Employment* by promoting economic activity in the rural and Gaeltacht regions by attracting tourism to the regions. This trail should increase the number of visitors using existing recreational facilities such as Glenveagh National Park and encourage increased numbers using the Wild Atlantic Way. The potential for entrepreneurial development is huge as evidenced by the Mayo Greenway. It will also foster economic activity in the region generally by encouraging other entrepreneurship activity in terms of bike hire businesses, bike repairs, retail shops, food markets, and food and drink establishments both in towns along the tracks and other inter-connected towns. In particular increases should be seen in the cycling economy output and employment.
- 3.3 Protect and expand the old railway network as a *community asset*
- 3.4 *Health & Safety*: Enhance safety by promoting the use of the non-motorised route for cycling for the local and broader community. Provide safe walking environment for children in local schools and the local community without fear or worry. Create a healthy lifestyle by encouraging the use of route for walking, cycling, and running
- 3.5 Promote the use of the route for *educational* purposes by using it as a nature walk way through plant and animal habitats. Encouraging and educating children to understand their natural environment linking with local schools primary school in the region. Educate residents regarding the natural, recreational, historical and cultural features within the greenway corridor.

- 3.6 Raise awareness of the regional context and local identity of individual areas along the track with area stakeholders and recreational groups, such as walking clubs, cycling clubs, running clubs and other informal groups.
- 3.7 To promote awareness and interest in the *Irish language* as the project is based in the Donegal Gaeltacht.
- 3.8 *Share Space and Vibrancy*. This will help promote good community relations, whilst uniting small towns in the vicinity. This will be particularly positive in the context of cross-border cooperation if the greenway runs to Derry. This will have a very positive experience for both border communities.
- 3.9 Promote a *sustainable travel policy*

3. **Summary**

Interestingly, before the railway track opened it was used as a pedestrian route to monthly fairs, which proved a habit the railway company found hard to break, even after the trains began to run (Sustrans, 2017). This peaceful off-route option was always preferred and it would be an absolute asset to see if reinstated again as an off-road amenity.

The track has seen some development in recent times by various community groups with four separate sections opened and waymarked as Siúlóid An tSean Bhóthar Iarainn, “The Burtonport Railway Walk”. (Sustrans, 2017). Work has also commenced by our community group in Termon, Co. Donegal.

The Wild Atlantic Way as evidenced by the Great Western Greenway in Co. Mayo both compliments and promotes the greenway network as an attraction along the tourism trail and this will apply equally to Donegal if work was to proceed. The Wild Atlantic Way bisects the Greenway at three points – Burtonport, Crolly, and Cresslough. This means that linking routes and access points will be easily developed (Sustrans, 2017).

In addition the European Cycling Federation has developed a network of trans-European routes, known as Euro Velo. Euro Velo Route 1 “The Atlantic Route” stretches from Scandinavia to Portugal and includes now the City of Derry before crossing into Donegal for 200km.

The preferred option as recommended by Sustrans for the Burtonport-Letterkenny section is that 58% of the original track could be utilized. It is also proposed that a signature capital project bringing users over the Owencarrow River Valley and Barnes Gap via a disused original viaduct is included in the renovation. The estimated cost of the project varies from €3.9million - €8.5million depending on the level of traffic free routes that would be required. The estimated tourist-related economic benefits of the €8.5million project is €26.5million approximately whilst the option with a higher level of traffic is €13.2 million (Sustrans, 2017)