

Southern Regional Assembly

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 11th May 2018

Presiding: Cllr. Larry O'Brien, Cathaoirleach

Present: Cllr. R. Beasley, Cllr. J. Bourke, Cllr. P. Breen, Cllr. J. Brennan, Cllr. J. Carroll, Cllr. H. Cremin, Cllr. D. Foley, Cllr. D. Geoghegan, Cllr. N. Gleeson, Cllr. T. Kinsella, Cllr. J. Leddin, Cllr. M. Lowry, Cllr. T. McEllistrim, Cllr. H. McGrath, Cllr. P. McMahon, Cllr. P. Millea, Cllr. Gerard Murphy, Cllr. M. Murphy, Cllr. M. Ryan, Cllr. J. Sheahan.

Apologies: Cllr. M. Shields, Cllr. O. Walsh, Mr. T. Lucey, Cllr. Deirdre O'Brien

Officials Present: Mr. Brian Wylie, Senior Transport Planner, Irish Rail; Mr. Stephen Blair, Director; Mr David Kelly, Asst. Director; Ms. Sharon Murray, PE; Mr. Dominic Walsh, A/Snr. Planner; Ms. Elaine Gallagher, C.O.; Ms. Orla Kelly, EU PO; Ms. Breda Curran, DO. Ms. Oonagh Messette, C.O

1. Presentation on "Iarnród Éireann Network Plans for the Southern Region" **by Bryan Wylie, Infrastructure Manager Division, Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail)**

Mr Brian Wylie gave a comprehensive presentation on Iarnród Éireann's network plans for the Southern Region, covering the following;

1. Iarnród Éireann Background, including its Network and Assets and the Rail Network Passenger Demand Profile.
2. Role in the Southern Region
3. Challenges – including overcoming over-reliance on car and congestion levels in cities, climate change, strong population/employment growth forecast for the Region, Inadequate funding, improved journey times.

Opportunities – Additional fleet, support programme of Rail Station Improvement and Development, potential new commuter rails stations, develop Park & Ride facilities

4. Future Strategic Rail Network Plans and Investment Priorities 2018-2027

Cllr. Larry O'Brien thanked Brian for his presentation and the information supplied and invited comments from the Assembly Members.

Cllr. Pip Breen thanked Brian for his comprehensive review. He stated that he was disappointed on the emphasis from Foynes to Rosslare. He asked if it was possible to streamline the railway from Rosslare to Dublin as there is no freight service anymore. He said that it is important to look after Rosslare especially as Brexit is on the doorstep. He voiced his concerns regarding the proposed relocation of Plunkett Train Station to the northside docklands in Waterford, as this would not be suitable for people working on the southside of Waterford, particularly students attending WIT and schools.

Cllr. Gearóid Murphy thanked Brian for his excellent presentation which brought attention to a lot of issues. He asked if there are any plans for commuter services in the southern region as there is a demand for commuter services rather than long distance. He referred to the Cork City/Midleton

commuter route as an example of a successful commuter service operating for the past ten years. He asked if there were any specific plans for Cork City?

Cllr. Murphy then stated that there is great potential for introduction of commuter fares/leap cards on the Mallow to Cork City train route, particularly with so many school/college students and workers using this line daily. He asked if there are any plans to use high speed electrification of the long-distance line from Dublin to Cork or any other high-speed measures and, if so, what potential time savings could be achieved? Cllr. Murphy also asked about the Corporate structure of Irish Rail and who the shareholders are.

Cllr. Kevin Conway commented that the presentation reads well but lacks specifics. He asked if there is potential to reconnect North Esc as there has been no freight from there for 40 years. He also queried the timeframe for the expansion of Kent Station in Cork City and asked if a light rail service connection has ever been looked at between Kent Station (located on the North side of Cork) and the City, as all of the major services i.e. university and hospital are located on the western end of the City.

In response to the queries raised, Mr. Brian Wylie outlined that he is not aware of plans for the Wexford lines, however, there are significant possibilities and he stated that there is a strategic review of Rosslare being carried out as it has tremendous potential, however, it requires investment particularly in terms of Brexit. Mr. Wylie confirmed that he will speak to his colleagues to obtain answers to the questions raised.

In relation to the Cork to Cobh line, Mr. Wylie stated that this line is very successful in terms of the number of passengers per annum using the service, with over 1 million passengers per annum.

In terms of development in Cork, Mr. Wylie confirmed that the publication of the Cork Strategy by the National Transport Authority highlights opportunities to reconnect old lines. He also agreed that a connection from Kent Train Station to the west of the City needs to be progressed.

Cllr. Terry Shannon welcomed the plans, stating that funding may be an issue and if there is no capital budget, improvement plans won't happen. He asked if it is possible to show budget priorities under the National Development Plan? Cllr. Shannon welcomed the upgrade to Kent Station, highlighting the problem of the huge gap between the train and the platform there at present. He also welcomed the Cork-Dublin-Belfast high speed train line. He stated that it was a shame that the tram lines in Cork were disengaged in the last 50 years and won't be constructed again. In relation to the Kent Station and Docklands redevelopment, he stated that he would like to see a light rail service being provided. Cllr. Shannon stated that the price of fares from Cork to Dublin is an issue at €65 one way and he also outlined that the Iarnród Éireann website is difficult to navigate. He queried if a policy could be put in place to put freight back onto railway lines and take major dangers off the road.

Cllr. John Sheahan stated that all of the development seems to be in Cork and that Limerick is missing out at the moment.

Cllr. Seamus Cosáí Fitzgerald stated that there is a train every three hours from Mallow to Tralee. He asked if it was possible to get a closer railway line as Killarney and Kerry South West are the two main destinations. He highlighted that the fares are quite astronomical at €72 return and asked if it was possible to maintain the service but lower the fares, bringing the fares in line with competitors i.e. bus.

Cllr. Robert Beasley commented that Iarnród Éireann's plans are excellent for big towns and hubs but not for rural Ireland i.e. Kerry. He outlined that there is no train service in North Kerry and the bus service is disappointing, particularly for students. He highlighted that as North Kerry's freight is tourism, transport improvements are needed in that area.

Cllr. Michael Murphy asked for information on the Clonmel/North Tipperary train service. He then asked the Director Stephen Blair how the Assembly members can influence Iarnród Éireann's strategy through the RSES. He requested can Brian provide contact details as to where to report issues to, for example, faults on the line, antisocial behaviour, station issues, etc.

Mr. Wylie responded to the queries raised, confirming that a lot of the issues raised pertain to operational issues and service plan issues whereby the scope and scale of services is determined by Government. He agreed with comments raised that in the past, trains and trams were forgotten about when cars arrived, but Cities are now investing hugely in putting trams back in operation, e.g. Dublin and Belfast. Mr. Wylie outlined that he is aware of the gap issues between train and platform, however, this is an operational issue. He confirmed that the National Planning Framework plans for high speed train services is only to Belfast/Dublin/Cork and not Limerick, confirming that in recent years the Belfast track has had major refurbishment and this will in time be replaced with an electric train for the future.

In relation to the issues raised in Kerry, Mr Wylie confirmed that these issues are valid but are mainly relating to bus service issues which is managed by the National Transport Authority. He agreed with the comments made about Kerry's freight being tourism.

In relation to the Limerick Ballybrophy line, Mr. Wylie outlined that the future plans are with the Department of Transport at present.

Mr. Wylie agreed that Iarnród Éireann's website is not up to standard and that they are aware of this and are currently undertaking a complete overhaul of the website.

Cllr. William Paton asked if there are any plans to upgrade the train platform in Carlow Train Station as it is presently unusable for the elderly and wheelchair users.

Cllr. Noel Gleeson commented that other parts of the country also need to be given thought to besides Cork City, particularly as industry needs to be spread out more in an attempt to keep people working within their own localities. He outlined that connectivity has a big bearing on people using the railway service bus connection services therefore need to be improved, as do timetables. He outlined that commuters from Kerry to Limerick have no other way of commuting other than by car and this leads to congestion and pollution.

Cllr. Thomas McEllistrim stated that the Tralee to Killarney service needs to be maintained and expanded especially during peak tourist season. He also mentioned the Mallow to Tralee service which should be prioritised.

Cllr. Deirdre Forde stated that the plans are mainly strategic and without investment it cannot grow. She reiterated as has been previously discussed that freight is a great issue, that it's important to have connectivity from ports. Cllr. Forde asked what potential growth is envisaged for freight in the next 10 years? She stated that the Jack Lynch tunnel is very congested and there are current connectivity issues in Cork City, for example, from Kent Station to the southside of the City. Cllr. Forde agreed with Cllr. Shannon that the Irish Rail website is very difficult to navigate and off-putting for customers. She also pointed out that feeder buses for larger urban areas need to be considered.

Cllr. Mattie Ryan welcomed the presentation from Iarnród Éireann, stating that the Limerick to Ballybrophy train is not being used to its full potential as the train timetable is currently not satisfactory and that this line would be used by students if the times were changes. He suggested to run a pilot scheme on the line. He acknowledged the excellent train service being provided to Thurles.

Cllr. Bill Slattery stated that West Clare railway has no connection to Ennis and there is little connection from Ennis to Galway. He asked if there are any prospects of a train connection from Ennis to Galway.

Cllr. Thomas Kinsella stated that the Waterford to Dublin 7.55am train doesn't stop in Bagenalstown which is a major inconvenience for commuters from that area, as they have to drive to Carlow instead. He outlined that the earlier 6.55am train which does stop is too early for elderly people that have hospital appointments in Dublin. He asked if the 7.55am train from Waterford can stop in Bagenalstown?

Cllr. Pat Millea stated that the Ballybrophy Train Station needs to be upgraded and an evaluation is necessary to make the most out of this station. He thanked Brian for a great service.

Cllr. Henry Cremin queried why there aren't more regular trains running from Cork to Connolly Station in Dublin on match days as Heuston Station is very busy with long queues for the LUAS line and connecting buses.

The Cathaoirleach Cllr. Larry O'Brien stated that members discussion at the meeting presented a good representation of views from the southern region. He highlighted the importance of having Brian attend the meeting on behalf of Iarnród Éireann and asked Brian what will happen with all of the information gathered at the Assembly meeting today?

Cllr. O'Brien then queried the Wexford to Waterford train line, which in the past had huge demand, stating that it would be beneficial to use this line to take trucks off the roads. He asked Brian how he would suggest that the Regional Assembly can work to promote this?

Mr. Brian Wylie thanked everyone again for an interesting discussion. He acknowledged that some infrastructure plans can be frustrating for members but he provided confirmation that he would discuss the issues raised with his colleagues in Iarnród Éireann and revert to the Assembly with answers to the questions raised.

In relation to previous questions raised, Mr. Wylie agreed that the Limerick to Ballybrophy line should be run better and that there is potential there and marketing would be looked at. He stated that a pilot scheme may have operated a few years ago.

In relation to the Ennis to Galway line, Mr. Wylie agreed that it is not acceptable that the train line is not operational year on year with flooding issues and Irish Rail engineers have highlighted the problems.

In relation to improving line speeds, Mr. Wylie confirmed that higher speed trains all come from investment.

Mr. Wylie agreed with Cllr. Forde that there is great potential for freight services.

In relation to Cllr. Cremin's query on the train service from Cork to Connolly Station on match days, Mr. Wylie stated that this is an excellent idea, however, unfortunately only a certain amount of trains can get through Connolly Station on a regular day, therefore, the service is not feasible on a

permanent basis. He highlighted that since Irish Rail opened the Phoenix Park line it has been a huge success for commuters into the City.

The Director, Stephen Blair thanked the members for their contributions to the meeting. He mentioned the relationship between Irish Rail and the adoption of the RSES. He reiterated that, as Mr. Wylie mentioned, Iarnród Éireann doesn't work in isolation but they work closely with the National Transport Authority.

Cllr. Larry O'Brien thanked Mr. Wylie for attending the meeting.

2. Adoption of Minutes of Meeting held on 20th April 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on the 20th April 2018 were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. Mattie Ryan and seconded by Cllr. Bill Slattery.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Proposed revised dates for SPA meetings & additional Members Workshop on RSES in June

The Director outlined that the Assembly is trying to put in place an efficient way of working through the SPA structure. The 8th of May was confirmed for short discussion, with a full day workshop planned for 22nd of June. A draft submission will be presented to the Assembly at the July meeting.

5. Any other business

One-minute silence was observed to pay respect on the recent death of Thomas McEllistrim's Mother, Marie.

Cllr. John Sheahan outlined that he is the Chairperson of the Mid-West SPA and that they had a meeting last week about briefing on workshops and queried the time scales in relation to production of Draft RSES and the notice period. He then outlined that the Mid-West region feel disadvantaged by the National Planning Framework. He proposed for the Director to visit each of the councils involved. He outlined his particular concern that there is no mention of agriculture, which is the biggest industry, also the Wild Atlantic Way and Shannon Estuary.

Mr. Stephen Blair thanked the Cathaoirleach and the members. He outlined that the timetable is dictated in two ways (a) requirement of Government, and, (b) members elections are considered. He confirmed that all statutory processes will be completed by the very latest in February 2019. The first period of consultation commences in the Summer, with 10 weeks, then any material amendments are made, and a further period of consultation begins, where it goes back to the members at this stage. He confirmed that there has been fantastic engagement and sharing of knowledge to date and he is reasonably confident that the timelines can be achieved. He stated that funding will follow policy and for the first time, state agencies want to participate and engage with the Assemblies. With regard to the specific questions on population, Mr. Blair confirmed that the population is projected to grow quite strongly by approx. 350,000 and over in the next 20 years. Every county in the south has potential for growth and guidance will be provided to the ten local authorities in the region within the strategy. Every LA represented is happy with the level of engagement to date. Three cities have gained a lot of attention on the NPF. RSES will have extensive chapters dealing with other parts of the region. The Assembly has set out a minimum number of meetings needed to work through the process, however, Mr. Blair confirmed that the Assembly will certainly facilitate additional meetings, if required.

Cllr. Gearóid Murphy asked if the South-West SPA Workshop date can be changed from Thursday 31st to Tuesday 29th at 11.00 a.m. – Dominic Walsh to confirm same.

The Director, Stephen Blair informed the Assembly that he is retiring from his position in July. He outlined that he enjoyed his time working in the Assembly and confirmed his commitment to getting the RSES in shape to present to the members in July.

Cllr. Larry O'Brien acknowledged Stephen's retirement and commented that he would be sadly missed. He asked the members to postpone discussion on this until the next meeting.

Cllr. Pat McMahon requested that Planning officials be available after the SPA meeting on 18th May for an additional meeting.

6. Confirm date for next meeting

The date of the next Assembly meeting was confirmed for Friday 08th June 2018.

Signed: _____

Cllr. Larry O'Brien
Cathaoirleach

Date: _____