

JOINT OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE ON RURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

OPENING STATEMENT BY JIM MEADE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, IARNRÓD ÉIREANN

Investment in Heavy Rail

As I advised the Committee in May, while the National Development Plan explicitly details funding of €2 billion for the DART Expansion Programme, this refers to the physical location of these works. The benefits of the programme are national and network-wide, giving more capacity for more services on all lines through improved infrastructure and a fleet expansion of almost 50%.

Rather than reiterate the scope of that investment, I wish to advise the Committee of developments in the meantime, and how these will benefit the national heavy rail services we provide.

Most importantly, the continuing improvement in our funding situation means that we may approach the “steady state funding scenario” targeted under the National Development Plan in 2021 two years ahead of schedule in 2019. This means we will be properly funded to maintain our network and fleet, protecting what are vital national infrastructure assets.

We will introduce an additional Dublin/Sligo service in each direction on weekdays from Monday 10th December, which we hope will mark the beginning of a period of Intercity frequency expansion.

Further service expansion on the Sligo and Westport lines would be desirable, to hourly on Dublin/Sligo and two-hourly on Dublin/Westport. Fleet investment under the National Development Plan, which will free up Intercity Railcars currently used in the Dublin Commuter area will assist in service expansion. However, further study would be required on infrastructure requirements.

On Rosslare/Dublin, there may be scope for additional daytime services to be modelled within the constraints of the existing intensively operated DART service. Strategically, we are also working with local authorities on the route to address the medium to long term strategies required to protect the line from coastal erosion, with 45% of the route in a coastal or estuarine environment.

Iarnród Éireann also has an ambition to increase frequency of Galway/Dublin services to hourly, and the National Transport Authority and Galway local authorities' Galway transport strategy does target that *"rail services will be increased in frequency, subject to passenger demand and usage."* This would encompass enhanced frequency of Galway/Athenry Commuter services. Double-tracking would facilitate this, with an interim measure of a passing loop and second platform at Oranmore to give a Commuter frequency of up to every 15 minutes.

This leads me to other service enhancements possible in our other regional cities. The National Transport Authority is also preparing a draft Cork transport study, which will include additional stations to be provided in tandem with development, and other measures to enhance frequency of services.

We have been working closely with Waterford City and County Council on the plans for the Waterford North Quays, which incorporate a relocated Plunkett Station, as part of an integrated transport hub. We are progressing signalling and station layout design to accommodate increased service frequency, and look forward to being part of an exciting development for the city, the region, and public transport services for both.

At Limerick, the transportation hub is targeted for completion, with rail services from Galway, Ennis, Limerick Junction and Dublin feeding in to this.

We are assisting the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in the preparation of a feasibility report / business study on the development of the Athenry to Claremorris line.

We are working to terms of reference established by the DTTaS. Iarnród Éireann has advertised for, and will appoint, a consultant to undertake a financial and economic appraisal. This appointment will be made, and the appraisal will commence, by early January. The study will take 20 weeks. Thereafter this will be subject to a peer review by the DTTaS to complete the overall study.

Work on our new National Train Control Centre has commenced. This will see a new operations control and customer information centre established in Heuston to cover the entire network, and through modern technology will ensure we have a Control Centre equipped to enhance service performance, and cater for the expansions in services planned over the coming decade and beyond.

We are also preparing plans for a comprehensive renewal of track on the Cork/Dublin route over the coming years. The objectives of the track relaying programme is to renew up to 220 miles of track so as to provide a reliable and sustainable track infrastructure to allow optimisation of the line speeds with an associated reduction in journey times where possible. This will further enhance Cork, Kerry and Limerick Intercity services.

A summary of the main benefits of this track relaying programme are:

- More reliable track infrastructure with an optimisation of line speeds to 160kph where possible facilitating reductions in journey times
- Replacement of aged infrastructure with a minimum life cycle of 30 years
- Future proofing for anticipated increased utilisation of the route in the short, medium and longer term
- Improved, sustainable and reliable infrastructure for our customers on a key commuter and Intercity route

This approach will provide a model for further asset renewal and journey time improvement around our network.

This is a summary of our plans for the Intercity and regional cities network, separate to the critical requirements in the Greater Dublin Area commuter belt, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Jim Meade,

Chief Executive,

Iarnród Éireann