

JOINT OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE ON RURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

OPENING STATEMENT BY BARRY KENNY, CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, IARNRÓD ÉIREANN

Investment in Heavy Rail

Chairman, members of the committee,

Thank you for your invitation to attend the committee today, to discuss opportunities for investment in heavy rail. Our Chief Executive Jim Meade regrets that he was unavailable to attend the committee today.

Mr Meade has previously outlined to the committee on our previous discussions about this issue the scale of our operations and our investment proposals. I will briefly recap on our operations, updated for the full year of 2018, and advise the Committee of investment developments since our November 2018 attendance, and how these will benefit the national heavy rail services we provide.

Our team of over 3,800 colleagues:

- Maintain a network of 2,200 kilometres
- Operate 4,900 train services each week
- Carry over 923,000 customers each week
- Operate 144 stations in 23 counties across the country
- Transport almost 90 million tonne kilometres of freight by rail
- Bring 130,000 freight units, over 800,000 passengers and over 21,000 trade cars through Rosslare Europort annually, for which we are Port Authority

Once again in 2018, a record number of customers travelled on Iarnród Éireann services – 47.9 million passenger journeys were made across our services, up from the previous high of 45.5 million journeys achieved in both 2007 and 2017.

This growth is most welcome, and is set to continue, but it also places acute pressure on our existing resources, across both urban and inter-urban services. This is why our investment plans are so crucial, both to cater for existing demand, and allowing us to expand the role we play in meeting transport needs. As the Chief Executive has said to you previously, we are ambitious for our rail service, for how it can deliver solutions to congestion and environmental sustainability for Ireland

Before I address progress in our investment programme in recent months, I wish to advise the committee of a significant development in the ongoing “steady state” funding for the organisation. As you know, throughout the economic crisis, the company was significantly underfunded. The NDP committed to resolving this shortfall by 2021. However, we are pleased to say that this year, 2019, has seen the shortfall resolved, meaning we are adequately funded to maintain the network and services we are contracted to provide. This ensures a solid foundation to play the fullest role possible in the future.

Investment developments

Rather than reiterate previous statements, I will focus on key developments since we last attended the committee. However, I am happy in questions to address any queries on other aspects of our investment programme.

New trains

As mentioned, we are experiencing record demand, and to address this we need new trains along with enhanced infrastructure capacity.

On Monday, the process to order the largest and greenest fleet in Irish public transport history began as Iarnród Éireann, supported by the National Transport Authority (NTA), sought expressions of interest from global train manufacturers for up to 600 electric / battery-electric powered carriages over a 10-year timescale.

DART Expansion, a €2 billion investment under Project Ireland 2040, will see the capacity of the rail network transformed through investment in up to 300 new carriages, electrification of lines to Maynooth, M3 Parkway, Hazelhatch and Drogheda, and key infrastructure works to allow more trains to operate across the entire network.

However, the ambitious tender for up to 600 carriages allows for the planned fleet expansion, replacement of the original DART fleet (the 76-carriage fleet will be almost 45 years old at the end of the current National Development Plan in 2027) and other carriages, and ensure that the framework is in place for more carriages to be ordered if further growth in demand occurs.

The tender notice in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) and on etenders is expected to attract the interest of virtually every major global train manufacturer, such is its scale. It will ensure customers on our rail network benefit from up-to-date facilities and technology, and that there are scale benefits in the competitive tendering for the NTA-funded investment.

While electricity-powered trains are expected to make up the overwhelming majority of train orders, the tender process is also providing for a possible first tranche of battery-electric hybrid trains. This is to ensure that, should funding or planning processes see the electrification of the first of the lines be completed beyond 2024, that new trains will be available from that date to meet the surging demand from commuters.

However, the overall order will see the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) total rail fleet, and up to 80% of all heavy rail journeys in Ireland, set for a potentially emissions-free future, as well as generating reductions in noise, and cost savings in train operations.

The full national network will benefit from this investment, with existing Intercity and Commuter trains currently utilised to meet GDA-demand then available to boost frequency and capacity nationwide. We are also planning to convert this fleet to diesel-electric hybrid, to reduce emissions on our national routes.

As well as this major order, Iarnród Éireann and the NTA are progressing shorter-term options to meet record demand on Ireland's railways. With 47.9 million journeys in 2018, and capacity requirements becoming acute at peak times, this includes:

- Negotiations are underway between Iarnród Éireann and its supplier seeking to agree an order for at least 41 extra Intercity railcar carriages, adding to an existing fleet of 234 vehicles, to enter service from late 2021. This will allow us to increase capacity on key peak Intercity and Commuter services, ahead of the service expansion facilitated by the major order detailed above.
- A tender process is underway by the NTA for the possible purchase or lease of pre-owned trains, which also would involve modifications to fleet, particularly as Ireland's track gauge differs from that of other railways.

Cork Commuter

The NTA has published this month the Cork Metropolitan Area Draft Transport Strategy, which sets out an exciting vision for sustainable transport in the Cork area.

Included is a strategy for the future of Cork Commuter rail, which includes:

- Eight new stations on the Mallow, Cobh and Midleton lines
- Double-tracking of the Midleton line
- DART-style frequency on all three Cork Commuter lines
- Future electrification
- Through running at Kent Station, and improved integration with other modes

The strategy will now be the subject of public consultation, with which Iarnród Éireann will engage. It envisages a Cork Commuter network with the capacity for 16 million journeys annually, a genuinely transformative scale of modal shift.

Western Rail Corridor

As the committee will know, both the current programme for Government and the National Development Plan committed to a financial and economic appraisal of proposals to extend the Western Rail Corridor.

Working to terms of reference specified by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Iarnród Éireann has appointed consultants EY-DKM to undertake the independent appraisal and public and stakeholder consultation. The purpose of the appraisal is to establish if the proposed extension from Athenry to Tuam (phase 2) and from Tuam to Claremorris (phase 3) represents value for money.

We expect to commence the public consultation process next week, and will invite members of the public and interested organisations to participate in this process.

We will seek information and views on current transport usage, current transport services, views on the extension of the Western Rail Corridor to phase 2 and 3, and any other comments or observations.

EY-DKM are due to complete the appraisal and present the report including findings and recommendations to Iarnród Éireann and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport by the end of September 2019. The DTTAS will then undertake an independent peer review of the report and its findings and recommendations, to advise and inform policy decisions arising.

Waterford Station and North Quays development

Iarnród Éireann has continued to liaise with Waterford City and County Council (WCCC) on the plans for the Waterford North Quays, which incorporate a relocated Plunkett Station, as part of an integrated transport hub. As well as progressing our own signalling and station layout design to accommodate increased service frequency, and freight operations, we are facilitating all necessary site investigation and studies for the wider North Quays project.

Summary

Beyond this, the infrastructure studies necessary for detailed design to enhance capacity in the central Dublin area, and thus overall national capacity, are progressing, and plans for station facilities including but not limited to additional car parking, accessibility and customer information are also being reviewed, in cooperation with the NTA.

It is clear that as a country and a society, the sustainability of our economy into the future and the impacts on our environment are becoming a greater concern for our citizens and our customers.

As the most sustainable public transport mode, we see an investment programme that will not only effect modal shift from private to public transport, but minimise further the impact on the environment of each journey made with us. With an accelerated electrification programme, this will also have cost benefits to our operations, thus yielding a return to our economy and society by all measures.

I welcome the committee's continuing support for these goals, and am happy to take any questions you may have.

Barry Kenny

Corporate Communications Manager

Iarnród Éireann