

**Mayo County Council Opening Statement to the
Joint Committee on Public Petitions and the Ombudsmen**

on

**Petition Titled – Create a walking and cycling greenway on
the closed railway from Sligo to Athenry**

April 2024

Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Kevin Kelly, Chief Executive, Mayo County Council

I am accompanied here today by Mr John McMyler Senior Planner , Mayo County Council

I would like to thank the committee for its invitation to contribute to the discussions regarding the petition titled - Create a walking and cycling greenway on the closed railway from Sligo to Athenry.

The Committee will be aware that the issue of the Western Rail Corridor and its future potential has been the subject of much reporting and debate over many years. In this regard it is considered useful to reflect on the policy in respect of this rail line as outlined in relevant policy documents at National, Regional and Local level.

Synopsis

The current National Development Plan refers to the Strategic Rail Review (All-Island Rail Review) indicating that the Western Rail Corridor has the potential to revitalise the West of Ireland and that the strategic review would examine how it would be delivered. The SEA consultation report for All Island Rail Review was published in July 2023 and it would appear from that document that is strong support for the opening of the rail link between Claremorris and Athenry but not for the section to the north of Claremorris at this time.

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032 in objective RPO 6.13 supports the delivery of the railway line from Athenry-Tuam-Claremorris-Sligo for both passenger and freight and expresses the view that the Western Rail Corridor is of strategic importance as it represents a piece of key enabling and sustainable transport infrastructure for the

region that presents an opportunity to effect 'transformational change' in the realisation of the Atlantic Economic Corridor. It can link the economies of three major centres in this part of the region (Limerick, Galway and Sligo) and IWAK SDZ.

The potential of this infrastructure is also recognised in the narrative and policies/objectives of successive Mayo County Development Plans since 1978 and the current Mayo County Development Plan 2022-2028 together with preceding plans contain clear policies supporting the re-opening of the Western Rail Corridor while seeking to protect the line from other uses in the interim.

In addition it is noted that Galway County Council in its County Development Plan states that the disused rail line between Athenry and Claremorris via Tuam provides the potential for additional rail services to the North of the county and the extension of the Western Rail Corridor to provide rail access to the north west of the country. The current Galway County Development Plan includes an objective to support the opening of the Western Rail Corridor from Athenry, through Tuam, Claremorris to Collooney as an option for passenger and cargo transportation.

Conclusion

The policy of Mayo County Council in respect of the Western Rail Corridor as guided by the Elected Members and as outlined in the County Development Plan has been consistent and unequivocal over a long period of time and has been adopted by successive Councils in Mayo. The Members have adopted an approach of seeking to have the Western Rail Corridor in its entirety from Athenry to Sligo reopened for both passenger and freight traffic. They have also clearly sought to protect the future potential of this route from any other development which might be proposed as an interim use pending this re-opening. They have made a deliberate decision to support the use of a section of the railway at Kiltimagh for a Velorail project pending its re-opening for passenger and rail traffic. The 2014 to 2020 County Development made specific reference to protecting and safeguarding the route from development for non transport related purposes while the current County Development Plan adopts the position that the route should be removed from any feasibility study for a proposed Greenway.