

## **JOINT OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS**

### **OPENING STATEMENT BY JIM MEADE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, IARNRÓD ÉIREANN**

#### **Iarnród Éireann update, including capital projects and operations**

Chairman, members of the committee,

Thank you for your invitation to attend the committee today, to provide you with an update on Iarnród Éireann's activities, including capital projects and operations.

We are at a time of great ambition and optimism for our rail services and network, and for Rosslare Europort, for which Iarnród Éireann is the Port Authority. Projects for all our cities and for the national network will ensure rail is the backbone of Ireland's sustainable transport network, and the "decade of delivery" we are working through will be genuinely transformative.

Passenger demand for 2023 saw 46.1 million journeys made across Intercity, DART and Commuter services, up 29% on 2022's total of 35.8 million, and with the pre-COVID record of over 50 million in sight.

With Intercity seeing particularly strong recovery, we introduced new services on routes including Cork, Limerick, Westport/Ballina and Carlow in our recent December 2023 timetable change, as well as enhanced Portlaoise and Drogheda Commuter services.

In the short term, we will begin the introduction of 41 new Intercity railcar carriages, which could not be more timely, and envisage further timetable improvements during 2024, particularly on the Galway and Belfast routes.

As well as building our service capacity, we continue to build the Customer Experience, and a restructured Train Operations division brings determined focus to ensuring we become a leader in Europe for customer care.

#### **Capital Projects**

Our major rail investment programme, funded by the National Transport Authority under Project Ireland 2040, will see significant, tangible progress in a range of projects during the year ahead. Our current planned fleet and network investment programme will exceed €4 billion during the life of the NDP, and will bring us to a new era for rail transport in Ireland.

As well as the Intercity railcar carriages mentioned above, the first of 185 DART+ carriages on order from Alstom will arrive in summer of 2024, to begin testing and commissioning ahead of entering service in 2025.

The transformative fleet is central to the DART+ Programme, an investment will allow more trains to operate on all routes on the rail network, provide greater standards of accessibility, and allow for

the decarbonisation of all Greater Dublin Area rail services. DART+ will double the capacity and treble the electrification of the Greater Dublin area rail network.

I have outlined for the Committee a status update for the DART+ Programme:

#### ***DART+ Programme project status***

<b>Project</b>	<b>Serving</b>	<b>Update</b>	<b>Next steps</b>
DART+ West	Maynooth/M3 Parkway to City, including new depot West of Maynooth	Railway Order Oral Hearing September to October 2023	Railway Order decision to be made by An Bord Pleanála
DART+South West	Hazelhatch to Heuston and Phoenix Park Tunnel	Railway Order application lodged with ABP March 2023	Railway Order Oral Hearing to be scheduled by An Bord Pleanála
DART+Coastal North	Connolly to Drogheda	Second public consultation complete	Railway Order application expected to lodge in with ABP Q2 2024
DART+Coastal South	Connolly to Greystones	Emerging preferred option being developed	Public consultation dates to be confirmed
DART+ Fleet	New trains for all DART+ routes above	185 DART+ carriages ordered	First carriages arrive 2024

We are also progressing, with Translink, a tender for a new Enterprise fleet, to ensure a sustainably-powered hourly service on the Dublin to Belfast route, and we are liaising with the Department of Transport and SEUPB on funding and timelines for this project.

#### **Regional cities**

All projects in the Cork Area Commuter Rail programme are underway, under the EU-funded Recovery and Resilience Plan, allowing Iarnród Éireann to treble the Cork commuter rail network's capacity through:

- Double-tracking Glounthaune to Midleton – Railway Order granted, and works commencing in 2024
- Developing a new through platform at Kent Station for through running for Mallow to Midleton/Cobh – works have commenced
- Resignalling the Cork commuter network – works have commenced

In Galway, funding under the Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF) includes:

- investment of €9.3 million for a second platform and passing railway loop at the existing Oranmore Train Station, which will allow the busy commuter link between Athenry and Galway to grow. A planning application is planned in early 2024.
- Ceannt Station will be regenerated as part of a major Galway City Council Transport Connectivity project – following a recent contract award, physical works began earlier this

month, which will deliver a five-platform station at the heart of an integrated transport hub, catering for future service growth.

In Limerick, the completion of the city's own transportation hub centred on Colbert Station will also boost services, and the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy has detailed the opportunities provided by the network of rail lines around Limerick City. Station studies are underway for both Moyross and Ballysimon Stations, and a capacity enhancement study for Limerick to Limerick Junction, and Ennis to Limerick.

Waterford's Plunkett Station is being relocated to be part of an integrated transport hub under the Waterford North Quays, and these works are also underway.

### **National Train Control Centre (NTCC)**

As you arrive and depart Heuston Station, you will also see the new NTCC. Its construction was completed in late 2022, and co-located Garda Síochána facilities opening in 2023.

It will control the entire national network, incorporating a new rail Traffic Management System (TMS), enhancing train performance, punctuality and customer information across the network, and will be fully operational by Autumn 2025.

We had targeted the end of 2024 for completion, but the impacts of COVID-19 and the Ukraine conflict did affect construction and TMS development timelines. However, we are working with the NTA as approving authority, and applying rigorous project oversight to ensure that we can – as planned – migrate from our existing Connolly CTC (Central Traffic Control) facility on a phased basis throughout mid-2025 gradually transferring our central railway control operations from Connolly CTC to Heuston NTCC for full operation.

### **Rail Freight 2040**

We are ambitious for our rail freight services to become a key part of Ireland's freight sector, and our Rail Freight 2040 strategy which sets out a clear path to make this happen. Rail Freight 2040 aims to achieve:

- A five-fold increase in the number of rail freight services, to include over 100 new weekly services across the rail network
- A resulting reduction of 25,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions annually, with rail freight emissions per unit as little as 16% of HGV emissions
- Avoiding the requirement for 140,000 HGV journeys on our roads annually, as well as helping the supply chain which is facing a shortage of HGV drivers

The Strategy outlines twenty-five initiatives and a cumulative investment of approximately €500 million, within five strategic pillars, which are:

- Enhancing connections with sea ports
- Developing a network of inland intermodal terminals

- Investment in new wagon fleets and bi-mode locomotives to allow for further decarbonisation of freight flows.
- Network developments including the connection of industrial sites directly to the rail network.
- Working with national, regional and European agencies to ensure a policy framework is in place to support a more favourable environment for rail freight, in line with European norms.

Works to reinstate the Limerick to Foynes rail line for freight services are underway following funding from the Department of Transport, a clear commitment to the goals of Rail Freight 2040, with a 2026 opening date planned.

## **Climate Action**

As well as providing sustainable transport alternatives for people and freight, this investment is part of our Climate Action Plan to reduce emissions by 51% by 2030.

The 51% emissions reduction will be achieved through:

- Reduced reliance on diesel through alternative fuels on existing fleets' with biofuels, HVO (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil) and green hydrogen programmes being pursued, and track maintenance vehicle and road fleet transition programmes underway
- Transitioning to electric-powered fleet: the DART+ fleet mentioned are the first orders from a framework contract for up to 750 carriages, which can also serve the Cork area, Wicklow and elsewhere subject to infrastructure investment
- Green energy generation, including PV solar panels and corporate purchasing power agreements
- Fleet and building works to reduce energy consumption, with existing ICR and Commuter fleets seeing hybrid power and other upgrades to reduce consumption, and building upgrades to improve energy efficiencies while protecting the heritage of our buildings

## **All-Island Strategic Rail Review**

Railways and other transport infrastructure are long-term national assets, and the publication by the Department of Transport in Ireland and Department of Infrastructure in Northern Ireland of the draft of the first All-Island Strategic Rail Review was extremely welcome in establishing the future strategic agenda for our sector.

It recommends improved speeds and frequency, electrification, new and enhanced routes and greater regional balance by developing a rail network that will sustainably serve a growing

population, significantly benefitting people, communities, businesses, the environment and economies across the island of Ireland, both north and south.

Iarnród Éireann strongly supports all recommendations in the draft Review and appreciates having had the opportunity to input to its preparation.

We look forward to collaborating with all stakeholders on next steps, and see it as part of the real momentum towards rail playing a stronger role in our transport and mobility solutions over the years and decades ahead. It is critical that we ensure a steady pipeline of projects to maintain our infrastructure development, and move away from stop – start patterns of the past.

### **Rosslare Europort**

Iarnród Éireann is Port Authority for Rosslare Europort, and its status as Ireland's Gateway to Europe has been confirmed with 36 services operating directly between the Port and Europe each week. As well as investment in the Port Masterplan, an ambitious €200 million plan to become one of Ireland's Renewable Energy Hubs to service the ORE sector is progressing, with the port uniquely placed to support the development of the industry in the Celtic and Irish Seas. The planning process for this key national and regional strategic investment will be progressed throughout 2024.

We are also supporting the Office of Public Works in its significant T7 investment programme, incorporating permanent Border Control facilities within our site at Rosslare Europort.

### **Our People**

We are also building a workplace to firmly establish Iarnród Éireann as an employer of choice. Ensuring the railway has the talent and skills across all roles needed to deliver on its ambitions is critical, and the company offers not just employment but full career opportunities across the company. In 2023, for the third year in a row, Iarnród Éireann was ranked as one of Ireland's five leading employers in the Sunday Independent Statista Best Employers research – third overall, and the leading Irish employer in the study.

Additionally, we have been awarded Apprenticeship Employer of the Year, with a commitment not only to excellent apprenticeships, but continued career opportunities.

It is a busy time, but an exciting one, and our team of over 4,500 colleagues across all business areas are working as one team to deliver on our ambitions. I thank the Committee for their continued support, and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**Jim Meade**

**Chief Executive**

**Iarnród Éireann**