

## **Opening Statement to Joint Oireachtas Transport Committee**

### **Frank Allen, Chairperson Designate, Iarnród Éireann**

Chair, members of the committee,

I am honoured to have been nominated by Minister Ryan for reappointment as Chairperson of Iarnród Éireann.

Before addressing the main issues facing Iarnród Éireann today, I will outline my own background to the Committee.

My professional background is in infrastructure finance. I studied at University College, Cork and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology before joining the World Bank in Washington, DC. When I returned to work in Ireland, I led the international infrastructure finance team at KBC Bank and I was appointed as the first Chief Executive of the Railway Procurement Agency, which planned and implemented Luas.

Since completing my term as RPA Chief Executive in 2012, I have advised clients on the financing and management of infrastructure projects. I am currently assisting the World Bank and the Government of Indonesia in planning a light rail project in Bandung, Indonesia and I am working with the World Bank on urban mobility projects in Uzbekistan. I serve on the board of a renewable energy company and on the board of Depaul Housing Association, which provides long-term accommodation to people who have experienced homelessness.

In 2013, Minister Varadkar appointed me to the board of Iarnród Éireann and Minister Ross appointed me as Chairperson in late 2017.

The highest priority for the Board and Management of Iarnród Éireann, at this stage of the pandemic, is to ensure that we provide a safe travelling and work environment for customers and colleagues respectively. We also continue to support the wider network of public transport operators in procuring PPE, hand sanitisers, dispensers and other materials for all PSO operators.

I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the efforts of over 4,000 Iarnród Éireann colleagues for their efforts since March 2020. At a time of national crisis, the ethos of public service has been and continues to be to the fore, and this has also been supported by our trade unions. I also wish to recognise the critical support of the Minister for Transport, Department of Transport officials and the National Transport Authority who have ensured that we are financially supported to maintain essential services.

Through this crisis, we continue to focus on how rail can maximise its contribution to a sustainable future for Ireland, within an integrated transport network. We know that travel patterns and customer expectations will change as a result of the pandemic and we need to ensure that we can provide the capacity and quality of service that the public will demand when current restrictions are relaxed. .

Iarnród Éireann's Strategy 2027 sets out our priorities. These include:

- Delivering the transformative DART+ Programme, to double the capacity and treble the electrification of the Greater Dublin Area rail network.
- Increasing capacity for inter-urban rail services, as we improve journey times and timetable offerings between our cities.
- Developing commuter rail services to meet the transport needs in our regional cities – Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford – and complement this through Transport Oriented Development with our colleagues in CIÉ Group Property
- Investing in rail freight as a sustainable and commercially attractive alternative to road haulage for a range of sectors. We will shortly announce a revised Rail Freight Strategy to deliver on this.
- Continuing to improve accessibility for passengers with disability, on vehicles and at stations.

The reviews of the National Development Plan and NTA's Greater Dublin Area Strategy, as well as the instigation of the all-island rail review by the Department of Transport here and Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland, allow us to shape a sustainable future, accelerating decarbonisation of transport. We are confident that rail can make an enormous contribution to the National Planning Framework's ambition to achieve balanced regional development, with rail's links to towns and cities and to our ports.

As the committee knows, Iarnród Éireann is also Port Authority for Rosslare Europort. The Port has faced the twin challenges of Brexit and Covid-19, and the strategic role Rosslare can

play for Irish industry has been ably demonstrated in the rapid expansion of direct services to a range of destinations in Continental Europe, as well as to the UK.

With up to 34 services now operating weekly between Rosslare and Continental Europe, the Port has emerged as the foremost RoRo port connecting Ireland to Europe.

Our €35 million Master-plan for the port is developing infrastructure and technology to ensure continued growth for shipping. However, we also believe that Rosslare is uniquely positioned to be an Offshore Wind-Energy Hub for Ireland, for development of the industry in the Irish Sea and Celtic Sea. There are key strategic decisions to be made, and we look forward to working with national and local government, and private and public enterprise to support these strategic developments.

Finally, public transport is about people – those who use it, those who are connected by it, and those who deliver it. Our strategies for infrastructure, service delivery and sustainability are supported by a new People Strategy, ensuring that we have the skills to deliver our services, to attract, retain and develop the best talent, and to build a more diverse workforce. We are particularly keen to encourage more women to pursue careers in rail.

The Board and Management of Iarnród Éireann recognise that we face challenges in attracting passengers back to public transport, in securing funding for our investment and in getting large volumes of goods off the road and on to rail. However, the benefits of placing rail at the heart of mobility, for our economy, our communities and our environment, are enormous. I would be happy to take any questions the committee may have.

20 April 2021