

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM FHORBAIRT TUAITHE AGUS POBAIL

JOINT COMMITTEE ON RURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Dé Céadaoin, 29 Bealtaine 2019

Wednesday, 29 May 2019

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 2.30 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 2.30 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Michael Collins,	Paudie Coffey,
Martin Kenny,	Maura Hopkins.
Niamh Smyth.	

I láthair / In attendance: Deputy Danny Healy-Rae and Senator Kieran O'Donnell.

Teachta / Deputy Joe Carey sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Flooding at Ballycar on Galway-Limerick Railway Line and Opportunities for Investment in Heavy Rail: Discussion (Resumed)

Chairman: Apologies have been received from Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív. I remind committee members, staff, witnesses and those in the Visitors Gallery to turn off their mobile phones as they interfere with the sound system and make it difficult for the parliamentary reporters to report the proceedings of the meeting. They also cause problems in broadcasting the proceedings on television and radio and in web streaming.

By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the joint committee. However, if they are directed by the Chairman to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official, either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

It is proposed that any opening statement, submission or other document supplied by witnesses or other bodies to the committee on the topic of this meeting be published on its website after the meeting. Is that agreed? Agreed.

We will have two sessions today, the first of which is on flooding at Ballycar on the Galway-Limerick railway line. It will be followed by a discussion on opportunities for investment in heavy rail. This is the third of our series of meetings on these topics.

The Galway-Limerick railway line is regularly under water at Ballycar. The flooding is frequent and persistent and, owing to climate change, will only get worse. It is an example of brown water flooding which also occurs elsewhere in Galway and in counties such as Roscommon, Mayo and Clare. The area is slow to flood and slow to drain. When the water inflow at Ballycar is greater than the outflow after persistent heavy rain, the turlough fills up. The water outflow could be augmented by a pipe running from the turlough, bypassing the bottleneck that is the sinkhole, draining water into Lough Ash and the Shannon Estuary. However, we need to ensure we do not increase other environmental and infrastructural risks.

Mitigating the flood risk at Ballycar requires a collaborative, multi-agency approach. We must avoid a silo mentality in that regard. While the Office of Public Works is the national lead agency for pluvial, alluvial and coastal flood risk mitigation measures, Geological Survey Ireland takes the lead in investigating brown water flooding. Clare County Council is responsible for flood risk mitigation in County Clare, while Irish Rail is the rail operator and responsible for railway infrastructure. The National Parks and Wildlife Service is concerned with special areas of conservation, SACs, while the Irish Aviation Authority has infrastructure which could be at risk from flooding. Addressing the flooding is important if confidence in the rail service

is to be maintained. Passengers need to know that the service is reliable. The committee sees the Galway-Limerick railway line as phase one of the western railway corridor project which we hope to see extended to Tuam and Claremorris and eventually Sligo.

The committee is delighted to meet representatives from the various bodies represented at what is our third meeting on this subject. I thank committee members for supporting me in bringing it forward. Prior to the intervention of the committee, the agencies involved were not talking to each another and there was some passing of the parcel, for want of a better term.

In his opening statement Mr. Hedderly will highlight the collaborative efforts of the various agencies involved. I am encouraged that the deadlines put forward last November have been lived up to and that serious work has been undertaken in a joint effort by the agencies. I invite Mr. Hedderly to make his opening statement on behalf of the various agencies involved.

Mr. Colin Hedderly: It was agreed by the four agencies concerned, Iarnród Éireann, Clare County Council, the Office of Public Works, OPW, and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NPWS, of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to deliver a joint opening statement to the committee. Collectively, we welcome the opportunity to update the committee on developments since November 2018 when we previously attended. As noted in November, Iarnród Éireann has engaged RPS Consulting Engineers to develop a feasible engineering solution to the flooding issue at Ballycar with an updated report due in spring 2019. A draft report has been prepared by RPS and was issued to Iarnród Éireann, Clare County Council and the OPW in early April. The report identified a preferred option for the alleviation of flooding on the Limerick to Galway railway line at Ballycar consisting of attenuation of some flows upstream of the railway line in Finn and Rosroe loughs, removal of the underground restriction between the swallow hole and spring downstream of Ballycar Lough, construction of a diversion pipeline and channel to divert excess flows around Newmarket-on-Fergus and Lough Gash, upgrading of existing stream channels and culverts, and construction of a flood protection embankment along the Irish Aviation Authority, IAA, infrastructure in Urlanmore. Following an initial review of the report, it was agreed that the option of diverting some flows to the Owengarney, or Ratty, river should be further investigated and the recommendations in the report updated as necessary. This requires the completion of additional topographical surveys and hydraulic modelling, which is being undertaken by RPS. Following the finalisation of this report, the most appropriate technically and environmentally feasible option to address the Ballycar flooding issue will be considered by the bodies and the appropriate route for the progression of the works, including funding, will be investigated.

This represents the joint position of the four bodies. We are committed to the concept of sustainability and to the delivery of optimum service of key strategic infrastructure and will continue to work together to resolve the problem on the rail line at Ballycar. We welcome any questions the committee may have.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Hedderly and invite Dr. McCormack to make his opening statement.

Dr. Ted McCormack: As outlined to the committee in November, Geological Survey Ireland, GSI, is a division of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and is Ireland's national geoscience organisation. GSI carries out its role as a key knowledge centre and data repository with a library, archives and extensive digital data holdings. It provides an extensive advisory service, particularly to local authorities, and has statutory roles as a national archive and consultee on planning in areas such as county development plans, wind farm development and foreshore licences. In addition to supporting Government and

local authorities, GSI provides data and advice to industry and research and acts as a project partner to all aspects of Irish geoscience, especially in European projects.

GSI has developed expertise in the area of groundwater flooding, especially in understanding complex karst systems, including turloughs, as they can be important pathways for pollution. The 2016 Programme for a Partnership Government, under the area of climate change and flooding, contained the following objective: “[in relation to] Turlough Systems: We will provide resources to the OPW to commission studies into individual problematic (prone to flooding) Turlough systems, if requested by a local authority or another relevant State agency.” GSI has been tasked with gathering historic and new information to deliver on this objective and initiated a new dedicated groundwater flooding project in collaboration with researchers at Trinity College Dublin and the Institute of Technology Carlow. The core objectives of the project are to establish a permanent monitoring network to provide long-term quantitative flood data as well as producing national historic and predictive groundwater flood maps.

Since the previous Oireachtas joint committee meeting, the GSI groundwater flooding programme has been focused on producing a national groundwater flood map while also installing and maintaining monitoring equipment at groundwater flood sites. A national maximum historic groundwater flood map was produced and supplied to the OPW in April this year. Work on a predictive flood map is ongoing and the map will be supplied to the OPW later this summer. The predictive map will present not just the likely extent of groundwater flooding, but also the probability of a given flood occurring at applicable sites. These maps will assist the OPW in fulfilling its obligations as required under the second implementation cycle of the EU floods directive. In addition, Geological Survey Ireland also recently had discussions with Met Éireann regarding potential groundwater flood forecasting capabilities.

In respect of Ballycar, Geological Survey Ireland has been taking part in the technical sub-committee meetings regarding the flooding in the area. Monitoring stations have been installed at Ballycar and Lough Gash turloughs. The stations record water level data at hourly intervals which are freely available upon request. In addition to these monitoring stations, Ballycar and other flood prone areas along the western railway corridor are being monitored using Copernicus satellite imagery.

Chairman: I want to recognise the presence of Mr. John Fitzgerald from the National Parks and Wildlife Service; from Clare County Council, Ms Carmel Kirby, director of physical development, and Mr. John Leahy, senior engineer, roads and transportation department; from the OPW, Mr. John Sydenham, commissioner, and Mr. Cian Ó Dónaill; Mr. Colin Hedderly and Mr. Barry Kenny from Iarnród Éireann; and Dr. Ted McCormack of GSI, who has just given us his opening statement.

I am very much encouraged by today’s opening statements. The key question, once this preferred option is put together, is how it will be funded. Has there been any discussion among the groups that are working together on the question of funding? What are the next steps that need to be taken? Will there be any public consultation on the preferred option that will emerge? Is there any timeframe for construction works on this scheme? Perhaps Mr. Kenny of Iarnród Éireann could answer those very easy questions.

Mr. Barry Kenny: I might just defer to my colleagues in terms of the detail of those engagements that have been taking place, if that is okay. I hope I am not passing the buck.

Ms Carmel Kirby: I will come in on this one. I will start by saying we have had excellent

collaboration between all the organisations, which has been very useful in arriving at a preferred solution. There is some survey work to be completed. It is ongoing at the moment and I suspect it will take another four or five weeks. After that, the report needs to be completed. I would prefer not to indicate what the project is likely to cost until we finalise the report. On the next steps after finalising the report, we then need to do a cost. The report will be able to indicate a cost for the project. Iarnród Éireann will do a cost-benefit analysis, at which stage we will need to find a funding mechanism for the project. After that, Iarnród Éireann would need to commission consultants to do a detailed design, an environmental impact assessment report, EIAR, and all of that. Any public consultation will come into play once we know the solution, and we are nearly at that point. When we get into environmental planning and all of that, there will obviously be public consultation at that stage.

Chairman: On funding, without naming a figure, does Ms Kirby believe all agencies will put in an element of funding? Have the witnesses as a collective discussed how this will be funded? Are there any ideas about it? Will there be a joint application to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, for example?

Mr. Colin Hedderly: A joint application is probably the route to go. The scale of the money is quite significant for the works involved. It would have to be a major infrastructure project.

Chairman: Could the witnesses see an element being covered by Iarnród Éireann, the OPW and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport? Is it just one application? Have those discussions started at all?

Mr. Colin Hedderly: It is possibly a bit premature. Obviously we understand there is going to be significant cost. However, it may be premature to have those discussions before we have nailed down the outline design and agreed on some kind of costing. It does need to happen. The scale of funding for that line is something Iarnród Éireann would have to look at. We would need to make an application for those kinds of funds for that line because it does not warrant that kind of expenditure as it is. That would be the way to proceed.

Senator Paudie Coffey: I welcome the witnesses to the meeting, which is just an update meeting as far as I can see. In November 2018 we had an in-depth discussion on the problems with the site at Ballycar and the impact it is having on national transport infrastructure. I welcome that this committee, with the Chairman driving it, has brought about collaboration between all the stakeholders involved, something we did not have prior to last year. The report is almost complete. I note that survey work will be complete within the next month or so. Then at least we will have a hard-copy report with recommendations for the best solutions. Of course, we will then have to deal with the biggest problem, which is funding.

I look forward to seeing the report. When it is published, the committee should get the opportunity to discuss it to see how we might assist in bringing forward the solution recommended. We know it will not be easy. It is a piece of national rail infrastructure. It behoves the Government and State agencies to do what they can to address the problem and this committee should work towards that. I thank the witnesses for the update. The hard work lies ahead now that the report is almost complete.

Chairman: I thank the witnesses for their attendance today and for their work on the report over recent months. We look forward to them reporting back to the committee. As Senator Coffey has said, we are here to assist. The committee will certainly come behind the report and assist in trying to draw down funding to implement it because it is badly needed. It is an issue

that has been overlooked for too long. We will assist the witnesses when the report is complete and a preferred option is identified.

Ms Carmel Kirby: We very much welcome that. We are all of the opinion that this is a really important piece of infrastructure. To meet the economic and social needs of the people using the rail line it is very important that we have a reliable service on that line. We welcome the committee's support in helping us to progress it.

Sitting suspended at 2.53 p.m. and resumed at 2.54 p.m.

Chairman: We resume our discussions on opportunities for heavy rail. This is our third session with representatives from Irish Rail. Officials from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, and the National Transport Authority, as well as other stakeholders, have already appeared before the committee. Failure to invest in public transport results in poorer interchange facilities, congestion and increasing burning of carbon. A relatively modest investment is clearly in the public interest. We must be careful to avoid analysis paralysis, always waiting for the next consultant's report while investment is held back by a kind of glass ceiling. The committee would be delighted to hear firm investment proposals from Irish Rail. I call on Mr. Barry Kenny, Irish Rail corporate communications manager, to make his opening statement.

Mr. Barry Kenny: I pass on the apologies of our chief executive, Mr. Jim Meade, who is unavailable to attend today. Mr. Meade has previously outlined to the committee 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 the developments since our November 2018 attendance, and how these will benefit the national heavy rail services we provide.

Our team of over 3,800 people maintain a network of 2,200 km; operate 4,900 train services each week; carry over 923,000 customers each week; operate 144 stations in 23 counties across the country; and transported almost 90 million tkm of freight by rail in 2018. As the port authority for Rosslare Europort, we bring 130,000 freight units, over 800,000 passengers and over 21,000 trade cars through annually. Once again over the past year, a record number of customers travelled on our services. Some 47.9 million passenger journeys were made, 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 interurban services. This is why our investment plans are so crucial, both to cater for existing demand and to allow us to expand the role we play in meeting transport needs. As the chief executive has told the committee 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 specifically, I wish to advise the committee of a significant development in the ongoing "steady state" funding for the organisation. We have previously mentioned that during the economic crisis, the company was significantly underfunded for many years. The NDP committed to resolving this shortfall by 2021. We are pleased that this year, 2019, has seen the shortfall resolved through the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, meaning we are now 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 and exploit the investment that is planned.

Rather than reiterate previous statements, I will focus on key investment developments

since we last appeared before the committee. However, I am happy to answer questions on all aspects of our investment programme.

As mentioned, we are experiencing record demand and to address this we need new trains, along with enhanced infrastructure capacity. On Monday of this week, 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 or battery-electric powered carriages over a ten-year timescale.

Under DART expansion, a €2 billion investment under Project Ireland 2040, the capacity of the rail network will be transformed through investment in up to 300 new carriages, electrification of lines within the commuter belt and key infrastructure works to allow more trains to operate across the entire national network.

The ambitious tender that commenced on Monday for up to 600 carriages allows for both the planned fleet expansion and replacement of the original DART fleet, which by the end of the current national development plan in 2027 will be almost 45 years old. That indicates the benefit of any train carriage asset that we order and will ensure that a framework is in place for more carriages to be ordered if further growth in demand occurs.

The tender notice appears in the *Official Journal of the European Union* and on eTenders. We expect virtually every major global train manufacturer to be attracted by this, 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 also provides for a possible first tranche of battery-electric hybrid trains. This is to ensure that, should funding or planning processes delay the electrification of the first of the lines beyond 2024, new trains will be available from that date to meet the surging demand from commuters.

However, the overall order will see the entire greater Dublin area, GDA, rail fleet and up to 80% of all heavy rail journeys in Ireland set for a potentially emissions-free future with electric power, 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 becoming available to boost frequency and capacity nationwide. We are also planning to convert the existing intercity rail car fleet, which is 234 carriages strong, 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 the record demand we are experiencing. With 47.9 million journeys in 2018 and capacity requirements becoming acute on national and urban routes at peak times, this includes negotiations under way between Iarnród Éireann and its supplier seeking to agree an order for at least 41 extra intercity rail car 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 under way 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.

This month, the NTA published 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 undertaken by the NTA 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.

I have mentioned Ballycar, which is on the 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 and current transport services, views on the extension of the western rail corridor to phases 2 and 3 and any other comments or observations. EY-DKM is 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 Department will then undertake an independent peer review of the report and its findings and recommendations to advise and inform policy decisions arising.

Iarnród Éireann has continued to liaise 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. 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.

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 being reviewed in co-operation 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 members may have.

Senator Maura Hopkins: I thank Mr. Kenny for his presentation. It is very clear that Irish Rail is doing a significant amount in terms of investment in infrastructure with a particular emphasis on environmental sustainability. This is very positive. There appears to be significant investment, which we were starved of for many years. I wish to raise the issue of the western

rail corridor, which was mentioned by Mr. Kenny, with regard to an appraisal involving value for money. I would like further comments regarding services for the west, both freight and commuter. I am especially familiar with the Westport line and believe there is definite under-utilisation of that line. We must also take the Galway and Sligo lines into account. What are the plans in terms of increasing the number of customers on that line and Irish Rail's significant focus on environmental sustainability with regard to freight? Commentary on those two issues would be helpful.

Mr. Barry Kenny: In terms of the western rail corridor, we are working to terms of reference established by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. I think people probably worry when they hear the phrase "value for money" and wonder whether it is a narrow financial assessment. It is not a narrow financial assessment at all. Infrastructure requires public support. It requires something that does not just mention the bottom line of an individual organisation. It looks at the economic return, the benefits to society and the connectivity it provides. They are the terms of reference to which EY-DKM will work when looking at the financial and wider economic benefits the extension would yield. The public consultation will allow people to express their opinions freely. We know there are many opinions on the topic. That opportunity will be there. We will advertise that extensively and ensure people in the region and beyond are fully aware that this consultation is taking place. Ultimately, after the Department's independent peer review, it will become a policy decision because, obviously, public funding will be required if the line is reinstated based on the outputs of that. That will be a decision at Department or political level but it will be a comprehensive and independent study. The terms of reference have been set out and EY-DKM will work to them and report to us and the Department.

Regarding wider services for the west, thankfully, the passenger growth I mentioned has continued in the west as well. Looking at last year as an example, the Dublin to Westport line grew further. It was relatively modest at 570,000 to 582,000 in the year. The Dublin to Galway line grew up to 1.4 million journeys through the year. With the various suite of figures, it would be 1.4 million journeys on the Dublin to Sligo line. The figure was 577,000 for the Westport to Ballina line. I got the Galway figure wrong. It was just two million journeys during 2018.

The growth we are seeing is spreading nationally. In the early days when passenger growth was coming back to us, it was driven at an urban level primarily but now it is growing nationally. Overall on intercity journeys, it outstripped DART and commuter growth last year by 8.5%. There is probably more capacity within the existing services on the intercity lines versus how it would be on the DART or commuter lines, but nonetheless we are coming up against the same constraints we have. That 41-carriage order, which is the shorter-term measure, will benefit both intercity and commuter routes. We will be looking at heavily loaded services in the peaks to provide additional capacity in the first instance on individual services. When we proceed to the bigger order, the trains start to come through and we increase our overall pool of trains, and with the works on infrastructure in areas closer to the city where infrastructural capacity is more at a premium, we will be allowed to operate more trains at the time in question. The first wave is about longer trains and the second about more trains. It will be late 2021 to 2022 when the longer trains become available. It will be 2024 and later before the expansion of services. In short, that is how we are working.

We have increased services. It is not long since there were three trains each way per day on the Dublin–Sligo line. There are now eight. The number on the Westport line has increased from three to five. We would like the frequency to increase further. We are updating our overall

strategy on intercity services to ensure there is clarity and direction to service frequency improvement. As evident from the Dublin-Cork line, which moved to an hourly service all day, we genuinely believe there is a genuine step change in the number of people who travel with us.

The Westport line, for example, has a connection off the Dublin-Galway line. With a mix of direct and changing services, there is no reason the Dublin-Galway and Dublin-Westport services could not be hourly, which would be transformative. Frequency is not just about more trains; it gives customers more flexibility and makes the overall service more attractive. While Sligo has more of its existing infrastructural capacity utilised, it is a matter of determining how we can grow it further. We see potential in this regard right around the network as the investment funding comes into play.

With regard to freight services, we have recently increased the volume of the Ballina-Dublin Port freight services. We continue to work with the likes of the Irish Exporters Association and freight forwarders to identify opportunities. Many of them tend to be linked to significant investment programmes. I refer to identifying traffic best suited to rail freight, tying in with planning processes. We have a number of options in this regard. We are probably in non-disclosure territory as we discuss the matter with potential customers. We are confident, however, that the scale of rail freight operation can continue to grow in the coming years. In the past couple of months, the Ballina-Dublin operation has increased. I hope that addresses the points made.

Senator Maura Hopkins: I thank Mr. Kenny for that. I am mindful that circumstances have improved. The last train to Westport from Heuston Station is at 6.15 p.m. The last to Cork leaves at 9 p.m. Mr. Kenny has acknowledged that the number of customers using that service has increased. We believe there is a lot more potential. Many have raised this issue with me because they are commuting. As he rightly said, service users need flexibility. Could Irish Rail be more mindful of the capacity of greater frequency to increase flexibility, particularly in terms of the service to the west?

Mr. Barry Kenny: On that point, after a prolonged recruitment embargo, we have a new intake of drivers. Driver training classes are taking place. As the driver pool grows, it will address one capacity limitation we have. It is an obvious next step. There are a number of routes, not only the Westport route, on which there is certainly an appetite for a later last service. One has to establish whether there is a firm business case but there is an appetite for later services. We will certainly consider this openly with the NTA.

Senator Paudie Coffey: I welcome the opportunity for the committee to engage with Irish Rail executives. I acknowledge the progress being made with the company. I acknowledge it has been through a number of difficult years but now business is growing. I need not tell the delegates that, with the increasing population and increase in tourism, Irish Rail has to be fit for purpose as a national transport provider. I know it is planning for this. On top of this, there is a greater appetite for sustainable travel. Rail is one of the most comfortable and sustainable types of travel. We need to support it.

Reference was made to the rolling stock and its renewal. I presume that much of the existing stock comprises diesel engines and that the company will make an investment to replace them with electric vehicles. Could we have some more detail on that and the plans over the next two to five years? It is a matter of public interest.

The NTA has a role. The frequency and timing of train travel to meet the needs of service

users, be they workers or college students, need to be reviewed to ensure service provision meets demand. What are Irish Rail's plans in this regard? Most important, how does it intend to attract new service users? There is great potential for Irish rail to exploit. People are becoming more conscious of the environment and sustainable travel. There are now opportunities for Irish Rail to attract new generations to using rail. Mr. Kenny might refer to that.

What I want to speak about next might seem a little parochial but it is a national issue. I refer to Plunkett Station, Waterford, and Waterford Port. The witnesses will be aware of the ambitious growth plans for Waterford city under Project Ireland 2040. They will also be aware of the importance of regional development, which is set down by Government policy, and the importance of regional access and connectivity. Taking all these into account, it is critical that we review where Waterford city and its rail services are currently and where they need to be over the next five to 20 years.

As we speak, even without Project Ireland 2040 and the demands of an increasing population, there are issues with Plunkett Station. There has been flooding on the track. From time to time, the station has to be closed. There is a cliff face above the station that makes it vulnerable. Remediation works had to be carried out. There is a serious disconnect with other modes of transport. The train station is not beside a bus station. Passengers who use the Waterford–Dublin service or Waterford–Limerick service have to walk across the bridge to avail themselves of other services. That is also unacceptable. The witnesses will be well aware of these. Even without increasing demand, all these issues have to be addressed.

The good news for Irish Rail - it is a challenge also but good news because there is an opportunity - is that with the arrival of the strategic development zone at the North Quays, there is an exciting development plan now being presented by Waterford City and County Council. The relocation of Plunkett Station is critical to the development plan. Much work has been done on an integrated transport hub for the North Quays. This could enhance rail services and connect them to all other modes of transport while eradicating many of the difficulties with the existing station. It is critical that Irish Rail be fully engaged in this project. It has the backing of the Government and the local authority.

It was said in the contribution that Irish Rail is liaising with Waterford City and County Council. Is Irish Rail working on the development plans? A planning application is to be made shortly. Without disputing it or interfering with that in any way, I make reference to the fact that there is a strategic development zone with the support of the local authority. It is critical that Irish Rail be supportive of the relocation plan for Plunkett Station. How deep is the engagement? Can further information on that be provided to the committee?

With regard to the frequency and timing of rail services, the Waterford–Limerick rail service is not used as much as we would like and as it should be but there is still potential for it if we can sell it and time trains to match work and college hours. The N24 is probably one of the worst national roads in the country. I often hear people who support rail travel complaining about how the good road is taking business away. This is ironic given that the Waterford–Limerick is one of the worst. I am sitting beside my colleague from Limerick. There should be increased use of the rail service. What is Irish Rail doing to sell that or to make it more attractive to rail users?

On heavy freight transport, as Mr. Kenny will know, the Port of Waterford has a railway service directly to the port with a lift-on lift-off service, which is important for the sustainability and viability of the port and getting business to the port because lorries are not needed, the ships

can berth and the cranes can lift directly from the ships onto the heavy freight train. Again, that is an asset that we are under-utilising. For the information of the committee, of all the freight transport that comes into Ireland through the UK landbridge from mainland Europe, over 80% of that goes through Dublin Port. There is potential for both Rosslare Europort and the Port of Waterford, especially with the onset of Brexit where we will have to have more direct links with mainland Europe. There are opportunities for these ports to expand and grow their services. The infrastructure is already there and the railway is already there and the Port of Waterford is on side in trying to develop that business. I am interested to know if Irish Rail has any deep engagements with the Port of Waterford to exploit those opportunities to increase its business and to increase the business of the Port of Waterford. The Port of Waterford estimated that there is the potential to treble or even quadruple the current business by using the lift-on lift-off rail service at the Port of Waterford if we can get direct access from the EU and access through the UK landbridge.

I know I have raised a lot of issues but most of them are about improving and enhancing rail services in the south east of the country, which is identified for substantial growth under Project Ireland 2040. I want to see infrastructure being put in place ahead of that growth and to attract new users. I am interested to hear the responses of the witnesses.

Mr. Barry Kenny: On the change of the fleet, outside of the Dublin-Cork and Dublin-Belfast routes, on the national network we predominantly operate our passenger services with diesel railcars. They are not locomotive-hauled, they have integral diesel engines in each carriage. That is a relatively young fleet. Thankfully, before the economic crisis hit we were in a position to replace the old orange trains which members will remember, which dated from the 1960s to the early 1980s, with these trains. We have 234 carriages in that fleet, which is our largest single fleet and that is the fleet to which we will be adding 41 carriages with those negotiations at the moment with the supplier. I alluded to the point earlier that as an asset, a train lasts a long time. It is not like a car or other vehicles in terms of their renewal. It is a good 30-year-plus asset in any circumstance.

We are working with Rolls-Royce MTU in trialling a hybrid unit on those trains in order that they would become diesel hybrid trains in due course. That would allow us to both reduce the cost of fuel and to reduce the emissions by a third. Those trials are ongoing. Ultimately, we are using some of those trains in the commuter belt because it is answering a need that we have right now, whereas they are more suited to intercity travel overall. As new trains come into our fleet, it will allow us to make sure they get to their more natural service and it will allow us to increase the frequency and capacity of individual services.

We also need to look at the line speeds around the network. It is fair to say that while we have competitive times, when the motorway network was developed it eroded the competitiveness. We are carrying out certain works and in recent years we have done much work on the main Dublin-Cork route, off which branch the Waterford, Limerick and Tralee routes, so it is the route that impacts more directly on most intercity customers. That has given us some moderate benefits in journey time by addressing the trackbed. It is something we need to move on with and we need to start re-railing on those lines. As well as that being a necessary safety investment, we could also yield journey time improvements from that.

Speed and frequency will be huge in attracting new users but we must also make the service easier to use. I am probably pre-empting Senator Kieran O'Donnell because I know he is a regular customer of ours. I refer to issues such as Wi-Fi and the ease of doing business on board. We are in the process of renewing the Wi-Fi equipment on board the services because it

can be a productive time when customers are on board.

We have completely recast our promotional fares and our booking system, which gives alternatives in flexibility. We all know that when we are looking at airline websites some people will just go for the low fare and the limited flexibility that they must travel on that service. Some people, business people in particular, need greater flexibility so we have three major ticketing types now to meet those different markets, namely, low fare; semi-flexible and fully flexible. We will soon begin the process of introducing barcode ticketing. Thankfully, after the under-investment we will now be able to do these things such as moving on from the collection of tickets at machines by having tickets on mobile phones.

On Waterford station, I have in-laws in Tramore so I hope for the usual dry days because they always tell me to walk across the bridge before they collect me at the far side because of the access into Plunkett Station so I am well familiar with the point the Senator is making there. We are very much engaged with the north quays development. It is not a matter of us answering when asked. We see the huge benefit that is there. Right now, as the Senator knows, post the rockfall which was experienced, we have a single track and a single platform operational. We have quite an old signalling system and that will need to be upgraded over the next five to ten years as well. We are looking at having double track alignments with two new platforms into the north quays site, which would integrate bus transport as well. That track layout would also provide for improved connectivity for rail freight to the Port of Waterford.

In Rosslare Europort, we are a roll-on roll-off port. The Senator mentioned that the Port of Waterford is a lift-on lift-off port so we can be complimentary to each other and Rosslare Europort, the Port of Waterford and New Ross Port Company have been working together. Brexit is obviously key. I am sure we would all agree that it seems there is a great amount of doubt again about what the ultimate outcome of that will be. We already have the various agencies operational at Rosslare Europort and they were ready for March 29 and there will be improved road access to Rosslare Europort for roll-on, roll-off.

We had a Ballina-Waterford container business but unfortunately the operator of that discontinued it. The volumes were not resulting for the operator but we continue to operate wood pulp from the west of Ireland to Waterford. While we have scope to grow now and are working with the exporters and others to identify those opportunities, for Plunkett Station the works and investments associated with the north quays site will allow for greater exploitation of that again into the future. We will be deepening our co-operation with the Port of Waterford and New Ross Port Company because the three ports effectively mean there is a network of ports in the south east that can meet the needs of business and the needs of those businesses operating through our ports, for whom connectivity to both mainland Europe and to Britain is so crucial.

Senator Paudie Coffey: I thank Mr. Kenny for his comprehensive response. On the north quays, it is such a critical piece and an opportunity to develop infrastructure, not just for the city but for the entire south-east region. I understand that planning permission is due to be sorted in the next few months and a private developer is working with the council to develop the site as well. This is something that is going to happen in a number of months, it is not just a plan or something that is sitting out there. Aside from Irish Rail's liaison and co-operation, is there a funding ask from Irish Rail on this or is it something with which it will be approaching the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport separately? As I said, if the North Quays project was not happening, Irish Rail would have to invest in Plunkett Station anyway due to the issues that are there with the track in its current location because of the rockfall from the cliff and the fact that it is only a one-platform station, as Mr. Kenny said. Investment is required there anyway.

Will Irish Rail be setting aside the proposed investment and putting it along with additional investment to relocate the station? It is a substantial ask and is a substantial project.

I do not want it being said that Irish Rail is a problem when the others are moving on. It is important that all stakeholders work together. This is an opportunity for Irish Rail. There will be growth in the population. We expect growth in tourism in the south east. I believe we can attract far more users to that service once we have an adequate train station and an adequate integrated transport hub, which is the plan. That will happen in a number of months rather than years. I am keen to hear as much as Mr. Kenny can tell me about the plans for the funding of that project.

Mr. Barry Kenny: There is significant private funding for the wider development. It has been indicated that it would cover the integrated transport hub, as well as including railway facilities. We have been setting out what our current operations are and what the benefits will be. As the Senator has said, there is considerable benefit to us. Ultimately, we will seek the funding source if it is the case that it is not within the footprint of the North Quays development. Clearly it is and this is probably on account of good planning heretofore. It is something we have seen in other parts of the country. Where public transport infrastructure is provided, it benefits the development materially. In turn, the development significantly helps to fund that situation. That is certainly the basis on which we are progressing as we recognise the benefit to our services from that integration.

We are looking at all aspects of it. I mentioned the track layout, platforms, freight access, signalling and rock cutting in terms of any necessary stabilisation that needs to take place there, as well as the alleviation of flooding. We have done some works, thankfully. In recent years we have seen a reduction in flooding but with climate issues we have to stay ahead of it. We know that from Ballycar. That is an area where we have increased the track level in years past. Yet, only a short number of years ago, notwithstanding repeated increases in the track level, we had our worst-ever flooding. We have to stay ahead of that.

Chairman: I want to pose some observations and questions. I wish to compliment Irish Rail on putting out that expression of interest to the global manufacturers of trains. It is ambitious and I wish to compliment Irish Rail on that. It is encouraging to hear that the expression has been made to help move into a greener form of transport in the country.

My next comment is on ticketing. Is it possible to get a through ticket using Luas and the bus services? Is that an area where Irish Rail could do more work, especially if we include through tickets to Northern Ireland?

I welcome the improvement works in Ennis. They will improve accessibility, especially for people with disabilities. Planning permission was recently granted by Clare County Council to Irish Rail to improve services at Ennis Station. This is very much welcomed. Can Mr. Barry give an overview of the works planned? Can he outline a timeframe for the delivery of this important project?

I have raised the issue of the need for a rail spur to Shannon Airport. I have put forward the suggestion that a light rail service would be beneficial for Shannon Airport and for the region. It would also provide connectivity to the national rail line. A short light rail service should be looked at between Shannon Airport and Sixmilebridge. A total of 10,000 people work in the industrial estate in Shannon. It is a major location for people and there is a great deal of employment there. Sixmilebridge is an expanding population centre too. There are opportunities

there. Would Irish Rail give consideration to putting together a feasibility study on that? Mr. Kenny might come back to me on that.

Irish Rail had some difficulties yesterday in Heuston Station with signalling. Can Mr. Kenny give an update on that issue?

I thank Mr. Kenny, the Irish Rail chief executive, Jim Meade, and Mr. Hedderly for their continuous engagement with this committee. I look forward to Mr. Kenny answering the questions that I posed.

Mr. Barry Kenny: We have through ticketing and cross-route ticketing available on our services. We also have the city centre add-on, as it is known. This covers the Luas and Dublin Bus services into the city. There is a wider Northern Ireland ticketing option. It does not only operate through the Enterprise service. There is through ticketing there. We do not have the full suite in some ticketing machines but we are expanding the number of tickets through our machines that are available at all times. Full integration is a different question. In urban areas, Leap has been established and it covers all modes. The investment and further expansion of Leap is the responsibility of the National Transport Authority.

Chairman: It is possible to book online too and everyone is moving to that kind of platform. Does Irish Rail have ideas to try to improve the service there?

Mr. Barry Kenny: Definitely. We are increasing the scope of the ticketing available. Certainly, our most popular cross-route tickets are available. Ultimately we want to get to a situation where point A to point B anywhere on the rail network will be covered.

The question of buses would probably need the involvement of the National Transport Authority, as would the question of all-mode ticketing, in particular because we have a range of licensed non-commercial services and licensed commercial services. Not all operate under the same model. The authority would need to ensure that where Luas or other bus operators come into play there is fair allocation. A considerable amount of back-office work would have to take place. That is why the NTA is the lead agency on that question. We have worked and successfully delivered in several parts of the country with the through-ticketing option. Anyway, I certainly take the point in terms of making website ticketing more comprehensive to cover all those cross routes and routes into Northern Ireland.

The stations in Ennis and Carlow have been in our investment programme for accessibility improvements needed on the national network. They have been top of our list for some time. Again, the NTA has provided for increased funding for accessibility works. The planning permission is there. I will get the precise timescales of the work but it will start later this year. We will see improvement delivered. It is crucial that as we invest generally, the service is accessible to everyone in society as much as possible. We had considerable progress in this area up to 2007 and 2008, but unfortunately the progress has not been what we would have wanted in the interim. Anyway, it is coming through again and it is being done on a prioritised basis. We target the stations where the works were not done before and where we have the highest throughput. Ennis and Carlow are progressing this year.

The suggestion for Shannon is not included in the current national development plan. The NDP provides for several studies, including the western rail corridor, which we have mentioned. The plan also provides for Navan to be assessed. The commitment is in place for 2021 there. It also provides for an examination of high-speed rail options rather than upgrading the

existing lines. The last major study for a Shannon link was probably ten years ago. It did not approach the cost-benefits needed. Ultimately, for there to be another study it would need to be funded. Sometimes there is a view that we have a discretionary pot and we can choose to pursue certain projects, but we would need funding to be specifically provided or it would have to be required of us to do such a study. It was a long way from being viable at the time, at the height of the Celtic tiger. I do not have anything more explicitly positive to offer the committee in that regard, but I will engage with our strategic planning manager and provide updated information on the issue.

On the issues at Heuston Station yesterday, first I must apologise to those affected. We experienced very significant disruption. We do a lot of ongoing maintenance work and upgrades of our existing signalling equipment. Investment will be made in a major national train control centre. The problem occurred at 5.38 a.m. yesterday. As morning peak services start to ramp up, it is one of the worst times of the day to lose signalling control on all lines to Heuston Station. There was a software issue. Upgrades of the equipment used were being carried out and there was a software fault. The company with which we are working in installing the new equipment brought in specialists. On the issue of resilience, we were able to have our backup local control panels staffed by 7.40 a.m. I do not want to say there is necessarily anything positive about what occurred, but it tested our resilience. The issue was resolved yesterday afternoon. We kept the local control panel staff on standby yesterday evening and this morning to ensure we would have people to deal with any recurrence of the issue. We are satisfied that it was resolved yesterday afternoon. All I can do is apologise to those who were affected by it.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: I welcome Mr. Kenny and Mr. Hedderly. Mr. Kenny knows me well as I have contacted him many times. I regularly travel to Dublin on the Limerick to Dublin railway line. I am a great believer in rail, which is my favourite mode of transport. I will begin with the positives.

Irish Rail has improved through the years I have used it. Punctuality is exemplary; staff service is very good and value for money and the range of tickets available has improved considerably, particularly if one books online in advance. Broadband coverage has improved but not sufficiently. Mobile coverage is disastrous, as I have mentioned to Mr. Kenny many times. I cannot understand why we do not have proper mobile coverage on trains. One cannot hold a telephone call that lasts more than two or three minutes. That is unacceptable in the modern age. One could survive with the current broadband service, but one cannot function with the current level of mobile coverage. If there was proper mobile coverage and enhanced broadband, rail would become the preferred mode of transport. Irish Rail offers first class tickets, but it could offer business class tickets, of which there would be a significant take-up. Travellers would be able to get work done during the journey. However, business travellers cannot use the train because the mobile coverage is so poor.

Another issue I have raised with Mr. Kenny is that the offering of food is not broad enough. The same food that was available on trains 20 years ago is offered - a sandwich and a cup of tea. A little diversity is required. Travelling by train is not conducive to maintaining a healthy diet.

What has Irish Rail done to enhance mobile coverage? The frequency of service is excellent and I have no issues in that regard. The number of people using trains has increased considerably in recent times. The big issue for me is mobile coverage, which is disastrous. We talk about bringing in various features on trains. If the mobile coverage issue is sorted out, the demand for investment will follow because many more people will want to use train services. What is the story on mobile coverage? I have raised the issue on many occasions with Mr.

Kenny, sometimes out of frustration while I am on the train.

Mr. Barry Kenny: It is welcome that the Senator uses our service so frequently that he can speak quite authoritatively about his experiences. I am grateful that he has noted the improvements in service. Our on-board Wi-Fi which the Senator noted has improved is based on an aggregation of mobile signals. I will not ask who is the Senator's mobile provider or whether there is any issue-----

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: It is O2.

Mr. Barry Kenny: The coverage is improving. We will improve the equipment on trains to enhance the Wi-Fi, but, ultimately, mobile coverage on trains is based on the mobile networks.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: It may seem simplistic, but, surely, the coverage on trains can be improved. In many cases, I know where mobile coverage will drop. If one is going through hills or valleys, it will disappear, but once one gets into an open area it is fine. If I have to make a phone call, I know where to make it to avoid being cut off. It is a hobby horse of mine because I passionately believe proper mobile coverage along the Dublin to Limerick line which is also the Cork line between Limerick Junction and Dublin would revolutionise the train as the preferred mode of transport. On some trains, I get from Colbert Station in Limerick to Heuston Station in two hours, which is phenomenal. One could not do that by car. Has Irish Rail looked at this issue? Could it link up with the mobile operators to investigate what must be done to sort out the problem of mobile coverage? Will Mr. Kenny commit to Irish Rail doing so?

Mr. Barry Kenny: I will raise the issue with my colleagues on the infrastructure side. The understanding of all other aspects of what-----

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: I ask that Irish Rail go further and engage with mobile operators on possible technical solutions. Can Mr. Kenny give me that commitment?

Mr. Barry Kenny: I commit to providing a technical note on the issues for the Senator and the committee.

On catering, new products have been offered on board for the past couple of weeks.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: That is good to hear.

Mr. Barry Kenny: They include yoghurt, granola and-----

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: I do not need anything that fancy. I ask Mr. Kenny to send me the menu.

Mr. Barry Kenny: There is a more diverse offering. We are engaged in a tender process for on-board catering services. They are clever businesses. They live and die by satisfying demand within the constraints of finite space and wastage issues.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: I accept that. There are many positives. I am just pointing to some of the issues.

Mr. Barry Kenny: The companies have undertaken a lot of research, given us feedback and are trialling new menu products. The Senator will see something a little different being offered on trains. The service has evolved.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: Deputy Carey who is from County Clare and Senator Coffey

who is from County Waterford are familiar with the Waterford to Limerick railway line. I acknowledge the commitment Mr. Kenny gave to my colleague, which I welcome. The Shannon to Limerick railway line has long been in the offing. Deputy Carey and I were members of the mid-west regional authority together and pushed this matter at the time. A feasibility study of the line was carried out by the authority in the mid-2000s. Mr. Kenny is probably aware of it and I am assuming it is purely an inadvertent oversight in his statement. He referred to Cork and Waterford. However, Limerick currently has a Limerick-Shannon metropolitan area transportation plan under way and I hope that as part of that when Irish Rail makes its contribution it would speak about it. Apart from the commuting aspect, and there is already a rail line in Sixmilebridge and Cratloe, having a rail line from Shannon to Limerick would allow Shannon Airport to enhance the offering with regard to both Galway and Limerick. There would be spur from a line. Perhaps Irish Rail would examine that. I believe it is a major element of infrastructure that is being missed. If one flies on any of the Ryanair flights worldwide the airports might be an hour from the destination but there is a rail link into the city. We would like to have the same for Limerick. Galway would benefit as well. Can we take it that Mr. Kenny might consider that? Jacobs Engineering Ireland Limited has been appointed as a consultant on it by Limerick City and County Council, which is the lead authority along with Clare County Council. It is the first time Limerick and Shannon have been linked as a metropolitan area. I assume Mr. Kenny is aware of that so can we take it-----

Mr. Barry Kenny: Yes, we would engage. The reason Cork was mentioned specifically was that it had been published since our previous appearance before the committee. We are very clear that there is a greater role for rail not only in Dublin, because people focus on congestion in Dublin, but in all our cities, as well as interlinking. That is why the CMADTS and its equivalents will be so important in terms of development of services. Ours is one of the agencies that will be statutorily required to be consulted. We will outline where the opportunities are, which is everything from additional passing loops to allow for more frequency on services to whether there are opportunities for new stations-----

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: Limerick to Shannon.

Mr. Barry Kenny: I am sure Limerick to Shannon is something that would be studied as part-----

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: I wish to expand from that. Mr. Kenny spoke about balanced regional development. There is a need for a high speed rail line from Limerick to Dublin. There is no reason that one should not be able to get from Limerick to Dublin in an hour. What would be involved in the infrastructure for something like that to happen? If we are talking about proper and balanced regional development, we do not want Dublin to be so congested. I do not have a problem with people living in Limerick and commuting to Dublin to work. I get the train from Limerick and I see many people are commuting, particularly from Thurles. Limerick is just a little further away. It is about linking the regions. Where does a high speed rail service between Limerick and Dublin fit within Irish Rail's strategic plan?

Mr. Barry Kenny: To deal first with facts, a study of high speed rail for Dublin to Cork and Dublin to Belfast is provided for in the NDP. That study will take place.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: Limerick is not in it.

Mr. Barry Kenny: No. High speed as it is understood in Europe, such as TGV in France, AVE in Spain and ICE in Germany, tend to have very significant urban centres as anchors at

either end, at a scale we do not have in Ireland, which obviously-----

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: When Mr. Kenny refers to a high speed rail link from Cork to Dublin, it is a relatively short spur from Limerick Junction to Limerick. We can meet that connection.

Mr. Barry Kenny: Our focus is on upgrading the existing network to ensure that it operates at optimum times. There is no reason that an upgraded Dublin to Cork line could not be a journey of under two hours. That gets one to a one hour and 30 minutes or one hour and 40 minutes journey to Limerick.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: Would that involve possibly a stop at the junction that will allow Limerick passengers-----

Mr. Barry Kenny: Absolutely. That is existing infrastructure. High speed rail as it is understood is the equivalent of upgrading the dual carriageway to building a brand new motorway. We are going to upgrade the dual carriageway.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: Okay. When will the train fleet be emission free?

Mr. Barry Kenny: The intercity rail car fleet was bought between 2000 and 2010 and one would expect it to have a 30 year life cycle, at a minimum. One is talking about 2040 to be completely emission free. However, if that full order of electric trains comes in by the end of the national development plan, 80% of journeys on our network would be on electric power trains. Ultimately it is about what is generating the electricity. The trend in electricity providers is towards more sustainable and emissions free generation but the direct emissions on 80% of journeys at that time will be gone. We will also have reduced the emissions of intercity journeys by a third because we are going to make those trains hybrid as well. Once we get the very urgent short-term extra intercity rail cars our strategy is that they are the last diesel trains we ever order.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: To finish my question about the high speed rail link, when Irish Rail is doing the upgrade of the rail line will that involve upgrading the rail link between Limerick Junction and Limerick? I always look at speeds. One can get the 5 p.m. train from Dublin on Thursday and it gets one to Limerick in under two hours. If it was cut down to an hour and a half that brings it within daily commuting times. What is the timeframe for getting to the dual carriageway with the rail lines? Will that include the Limerick Junction rail link?

Mr. Barry Kenny: We are putting forward the business case for the Dublin to Cork renewal because-----

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: That is substantively the Limerick to Dublin line as well.

Mr. Barry Kenny: Exactly. Incidentally, the Limerick Junction second platform is going to be very significant in terms of improving connection times there.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: Would Irish Rail consider putting a roof over it?

Mr. Barry Kenny: There will be a very convenient-----

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: One would want it on a winter's night.

Mr. Barry Kenny: -----lift and footbridge from the waiting areas. That will improve jour-

ney times as well.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: That is currently under construction.

Mr. Barry Kenny: Yes, it is. It is bit by bit but one is getting much more bang for one's buck by doing Dublin to Cork because Limerick, Kerry and, to a shorter extent, Waterford-----

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: When will that happen? What is the timescale for it?

Mr. Barry Kenny: The full renewal could take place over a seven year timescale.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: Would the upgrade of the Limerick to Limerick Junction line be included in that renewal?

Mr. Barry Kenny: We will be putting forward that business case in terms of ensuring that the funding is available for it. I will not make promises like that but I will check the status of Limerick to Limerick Junction for the Senator.

Senator Paudie Coffey: On foot of that, we are not seeking to have high speed rail to every parish in the country, only serious interconnectivity between the regional cities that have been identified for growth. Obviously, Dublin to Cork is vital but the other axis from Limerick to Waterford would also be vital. We should not give up on that. There is great potential for that in the future, even using the Limerick Junction platforms as Mr. Kenny mentioned.

Chairman: On behalf of the committee I thank Mr. Kenny and Mr. Hedderly for attending the meeting today and making their presentation in such a forthright manner. Give our best regards to the CEO, Mr. Jim Meade, who is a very good friend to this committee.

Mr. Barry Kenny: Thank you, Chairman.

The joint committee went into private session at 4 p.m. and adjourned at 4.05 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 12 June 2019.