

Senior Executive Officer  
Draft Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028  
Planning Department  
Carlow County Council  
Athy Road  
Carlow

30<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Dear Sir / Madam,

**Re: Draft Carlow County Development Plan 2022 – 2028**

Iarnród Éireann welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission at the preliminary consultation phase of the new Carlow County Development Plan [hereafter, “the Development Plan”] for the period 2022-2028. The new Development Plan comes at a critical juncture for the County in its adaptation to the challenges and opportunities of the ‘new-normal’ that emerges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Iarnród Éireann welcomes that the Council seeks to integrate land use and transport policies to achieve the delivery of a high quality, climate resilient and sustainable transport network for Carlow, during the period of the Development Plan.

The railway is a national transport asset which supports the economic and social development of the country as a whole by providing accessible and frequent transport to many key destinations. Investment in the railway offers more people a real alternative to the private car. This is essential to avoid the urban sprawl and subsequent growth in emissions which will occur without attractive alternative mobility options. It will contribute to Carlow’s continued development and competitiveness.

The National Planning Framework estimates that the population of Ireland will increase by 1 million between now and 2040. To support this, enhancing the attractiveness of sustainable modes of travel (walking, cycling, public transport) is vital to support the delivery of compact growth required in our towns and cities in the coming years.

## Introduction

It is recognised that interventions in the transport sector must be based on a long-term strategic vision for the sustainable mobility of people and goods. This is driven by the principle that policies of a structural character take a considerable time to implement and must be the subject of detailed advanced planning. The Development Plan presents an opportunity to develop the foundation, and begin the implementation, of a sustainable integrated transport system. The benefits of a sustainable integrated transport system to Carlow County includes;

- Providing a modern mobility system required to support the population and economic growth projected for Carlow.
- Increased interchange between modes at mobility hubs.
- Integrated ticketing across all modes, ensuring simple interchange and improved experience.
- Enables and encourages modal shift from the private car to more sustainable public transport and active modes through quality of service and frequency.
- Reduces the levels of congestion in Carlow by promoting and prioritising public transport and active modes over the private car.
- Improves the quality of life for citizens of Carlow by reducing emissions caused by private cars, increasing accessibility, and growing the labour catchment for employers, and employment opportunities for the labour force.
- Ensures mobility and accessibility to amenities for an aging population, with the number of people over the age of 65 is expected to reach 1.4 million nationally by 2040.
- Communicates that Carlow on a national and European level is committed to leading the sustainable mobility transformation in Ireland.

## Iarnród Éireann Core Objectives

Iarnród Éireann as the rail transport company of Ireland, provides Intercity, Dublin commuter (including DART), Cork commuter and regional passenger services, rail freight and Rosslare Europort. The company is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Córas Iompair Éireann (CIÉ) Group.

It is Iarnród Éireann's core objective to provide safe, accessible, and integrated rail services for Ireland, that contribute to sustainable environmental, economic, and social development in an efficient manner.

Our core objectives are:

- To put the customer at the heart of our business
- To maximise the railway's contribution to long term sustainable spatial development patterns

- To facilitate and encourage economic growth at both a regional and national level
- To contribute to the attractiveness of Ireland as a location to live and do business in
- To contribute to and be compatible with all local, regional, and national land-use transport planning policies
- To improve rail connectivity and integration in our towns and cities
- To facilitate a significant modal shift from the private motor car to public transport and thus to contribute to a significant reduction in road congestion and carbon emissions in line with policy objectives e.g. Smarter Travel, Climate Action Plan
- To maintain and renew rail infrastructure and assets to the highest safety standards
- To deliver the appropriate quantum of rail capacity to satisfy future needs which will be an attractive value proposition for our customers.

### Current Rail Service in Carlow

The main Dublin-Waterford Intercity railway line serving Carlow Town and Muine Bheag provides important rail connections linking County Carlow to Dublin and the south of the country with 9 services operating from Carlow Town to Dublin and 8 services operating from Dublin to Carlow Town each weekday. There are currently 7 return services from Carlow Town to Waterford each weekday. There are 7 return rail services operating from Muine Bheag to Dublin and Waterford each weekday.

### Need for Investment in Rail

Carlow is strategically located in the north of the Southern Region with strong links to the Midlands and the Greater Dublin Area. It borders counties Kildare, Laois, Kilkenny, Wexford and Wicklow.

The current population of County Carlow according to the 2016 Census is 56,932 which is a 4.1% increase in population from 2011. Within the County 48% of the population reside in urban areas. National and regional plans project a further 30% growth in the population of the County by 2040.

Pre-Covid19, rail passenger numbers on the main Dublin-Waterford rail line serving Carlow have risen steadily over the past 5 year period in line with a strong recovering economy and population growth. Dublin–Waterford mainline rail passenger numbers have increased by c.32% since 2015.

The majority of trips c.83% in the County are taken using private transport modes, predominantly by car. Approximately 1% of trips are taken using public transport. The Development Plan sets an objective of reducing private car modal share of trips to work/education from 28% (2016) to 23% by 2028. This will require investment in both public transport and active travel modes to deliver this objective.

Iarnród Éireann supports the Council's ambition for a modal shift away from private car. There is a significant opportunity to increase the rail mode share over the next Development Plan period and Iarnród

Éireann is planning for a major expansion of rail as set out in our transformative 2027 Strategic Plan [Iarnród Éireann Strategy 2027](#).

Iarnród Éireann is planning to significantly improve and upgrade our commuter, regional and Intercity offering by providing additional capacity, higher frequency of service and improved journey times across our range of services. The Iarnród Éireann 2027 Strategy strongly supports and complements the modal switch objectives of the council as set out in the Draft Development Plan.

Ireland is at a tipping point in terms of its approach to sustainable land-use and transport planning and tackling the environmental challenges of climate change. Investment in transport infrastructure is essential to fulfilling the Government's National Strategic Outcomes of Project Ireland 2040. Investment in the rail network would represent a significant investment in transport infrastructure by the State. An upgrade of the heavy rail network would provide a network of low emission, high frequency, high capacity rail services giving a growing population better access to opportunities and services across the County and improve inter-regional connectivity.

### How does investment in the railway align with National Strategic Policy?

Heavy rail can play a very positive role in supporting the sustainable growth and prosperity of the County, as recognised in the Draft County Development Plan, notably;

- The rail line serves a number of key population centres and provides important local and regional connectivity
- Heavy rail can transport large volumes of passengers, more than other modes of transport, enabling potential dense developments to be catered for by reliable frequent services
- Heavy rail is the only segregated transport system in Ireland, avoiding congestion and conflicts associated with road traffic, providing greater punctuality
- The average rail passenger km creates approximately 28g of greenhouse gases (GHGs) vs. 102g for road vehicles, proving a step change in improving air quality levels. Expansion of the railway has a proven track record in attracting people away from the private car which has important decongestion and environmental benefits and can contribute to the decarbonisation of the transport sector, a key objective of the Climate Action Plan.

Investment in the railway is supported in National, Regional and Local policy. Project Ireland 2040, launched by the Irish Government in 2018, comprises of the National Planning Framework (NPF), which sets out a spatial strategy for the next 20 years, and the National Development Plan (NDP), which sets out an investment strategy for the first 10 years of the National Planning Framework; 2018-2027. These documents, which are supported by the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region, provide strategic direction and a regional development framework to guide the change in population and economic growth to 2040 for Carlow and the surrounding area.

The RSES for the Southern Region seeks to build a strong, resilient sustainable region to be achieved through eleven key components one of which is ‘transforming our transport systems towards well-functioning, sustainable integrated public transport, walking, cycling and electric vehicles’. The RSES specifically supports the delivery of enhanced rail services. The Development Plan should seek harness these strategic objectives for Carlow.

The development of the railway in Carlow aligns with and strongly supports the following National Strategic Outcomes (NSO's) in Project Ireland 2040;

- **NSO 1: Compact Growth**
- **NSO 2: Enhanced Regional Accessibility**
- **NSO 4: Sustainable Mobility**
- **NSO 6: High-Quality International Connectivity**
- **NSO 8: Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society**

The population of Carlow is expected to grow by c.30% by 2040. While the timeline for this growth may be impacted by COVID-19, both economically and in terms of population, it will require public transport improvements and further integration, as well as the delivery of large-scale regeneration projects for the provision of new employment and housing. It is important that supporting infrastructure is in place to support these large-scale developments, and an integrated public transport network for Carlow is a crucial element of this.

Ireland's growing population and economy has resulted in increased journeys and thus emissions, with an unsustainable quantum of private cars. The Government is committed to a 2:1 ratio of expenditure between new public transport infrastructure and new roads over its lifetime. Now is the opportunity to ensure that Carlow makes the transition to more sustainable modes of transport, with public transport investment being central to this.

## Draft County Development Plan support for Heavy Rail/Sustainable Transport

Iarnród Éireann welcomes the Transport and Spatial Planning policies and objectives of Carlow County Council as set out in the Draft Development Plan which can be broadly summarised as follows;

- Promote the sustainable development of the County by supporting and guiding national agencies in delivering improvements to the public transport network/services including rail services and infrastructure at Bagenalstown and Carlow Town to ensure that public transport provides an attractive alternative to the private car.
- Support transport agencies in the provision of new public transport services and routes, enhancement of the quality, frequency and speed of existing train services including measures to facilitate access for all.
- Seek to generate additional demand for public transport services through integrated land use planning and maximising access to existing and planned public transport services throughout the network.
- Prepare a Local Transport Plan (LTP) for Carlow Town.
- Seek the delivery of a transport node in the immediate vicinity of Carlow Train Station facilitating integration of local bus services and private transport modes with the rail network.
- Promote and support the provision of 'park and ride' facilities at appropriate locations.
- Actively support sustainable modes of transport through appropriate land-use zonings and to encourage levels of development with mixed uses within walking distance of public transport nodes.
- Support a modal shift reduction in the use of private vehicles to access work/school/college from c.28% (2016) to 23% (2028).
- Support the development of rail freight.

It is noted that the Council also support any upgrade of the Limerick-Waterford-Wexford rail link in the future which could potentially support more sustainable travel patterns within Carlow and the Southern Region. This will be considered as part of the wider all-island Strategic Rail Review to be undertaken by DoT/DfI(NI) and Iarnród Éireann will consider the outputs of this Rail Review when completed. The Council's support for the Rail Review in the Draft Development Plan is noted. Iarnród Éireann as part of our Strategy 2027 referred to earlier is planning to enhance rail connectivity options to the north of Carlow at Kildare including onward opportunities to Dublin, the West and South West of the country and this should also be referenced in the Development plan.

Iarnród Éireann would appreciate being consulted by the Council in the preparation of the proposed LTP for Carlow Town and we are open to the possibility of making Carlow and Muine Bheag stations transport hubs with full integration of bus, bicycle, car and pedestrians and would be happy to discuss this further with the Council.

### Priorities for Development and Improvement to the Rail Service Offering in Carlow

Priorities for investment in rail in Carlow are determined by a number of factors including the;

- Need to provide additional capacity to meet population growth and to encourage modal shift
- Need to serve an expanding commuter belt
- Need to address bottlenecks / pinch points in the system
- Need to upgrade facilities in line with modern customer expectations and to provide for the appropriate levels of comfort / service
- Need to decarbonise transport and reduce emissions particularly road-based emissions in line with the objectives of the Climate Action Plan

The major strategic focus for Iarnród Éireann of relevance to the new County Carlow Development Plan is on the development of enhanced rail accessibility within the County as well as improved rail links to other regions, including Dublin.

#### **1. DART+ Programme**

The DART+ Programme represents the largest heavy rail investment scheme in the history of the State, providing a transformational increase in capacity and frequency of the existing system between Dublin City Centre and the areas of Maynooth, Celbridge, Dunboyne, Drogheda, and Greystones. The DART+ Programme, or simply DART+, is a cornerstone project of the Strategy and the Government's Project Ireland 2040 vision. DART+ is a central pillar in a future integrated sustainable transport system serving the GDA and the wider Eastern Region.

DART+ provides a transformational upgrade change to the future public transport network in two ways; firstly, through infrastructure improvements, including electrification, removal of level crossings, a new depot, and other works, and secondly; through additional rolling stock, combining to double the peak passenger capacity of the heavy rail system into Dublin City Centre from approximately 25,000 passengers per hour in 2019 to over 50,000 by 2028.

In terms of progress, the DART+ Programme is at Preliminary Business Case stage, a significant milestone to progress its implementation. Development is continuing on each of the infrastructure elements of DART+; DART+ West, DART+ South West, and DART+ Coastal, along with the procurement of new DART+ carriages to maximise the growth in capacity made available through the infrastructure enhancement. The schematic in Appendix 1 gives an indication of the extent of the DART+ programme.

In addition to the DART+ Programme, Iarnród Éireann is also undertaking a number of other essential infrastructure upgrade programmes as part of the National Development Plan investment. A new National Train Control Centre is currently under construction at Heuston Station and when completed will manage and regulate over 250,000 train movements annually across the Iarnród Éireann network. The control centre will enable the network expansion of the rail network to be managed efficiently and effectively. It will enable the integration of signalling and communications across the majority of the Iarnród Éireann network through a new Traffic Management System. This will improve train performance and reliability and provide customers with real-time customer information.

## **2. Commuter / Intercity Enhancement Options including longer-term Electrification**

There is potential to improve the Intercity and commuter rail services in the County.

By 2027 Iarnród Éireann is planning for the following service enhancements;

**100% increase in services to hourly all-day services on the Dublin-Waterford line via Carlow, with some improvement in journey times also planned**

**Commuter service enhancement with services from Dublin to Carlow every 20 minutes in peak periods and half hourly off peak**

In the longer term it is Iarnród Éireann's objective to electrify the Intercity lines which will not only provide significant environmental benefits but will also deliver further improvements to journey times. The environmental consequences of the unsustainable quantum of private cars on Ireland's road network will require action, in particular the air pollutant and greenhouse gas emissions produced. Ireland has set a target to develop a low/near zero carbon emission transport network by 2050. Heavy rail has a pivotal role to play based on the unique ability of electrified rail services to move large numbers of people quickly and safely. Heavy rail has reduced its overall emissions by 48% since 2005, significantly ahead of the EU 2020 target of 20%. There is an opportunity to continue this trajectory.

Intercity electrification forms part of a long-term strategy to de-carbonise the heavy rail network and provide the benefits of significant journey time savings, improved reliability, enhanced passenger quality and lower operating costs. The promotion and priority of electrified rail services should be supported in the

Development Plan to encourage and enable modal shift to greener modes of transport and reduce emissions.

### **3.Re-introduction of Rail Freight**

The Rail Freight market is expected to grow across Europe, and globally, over the coming decades. In the European Union, rail freight trends are anticipated to align with EU strategic objectives around the sustainable movement of goods with several ports along Europe's western seaboard recently investing in intermodal infrastructure. The current level of rail freight market share across Europe is approx. 18%, whereas the market share in Ireland is 1%. Iarnród Éireann believe the case for rail freight is increasing, given this context, along with the context of climate change and the environmental targets Ireland must achieve, both nationally and internationally. This is also set against a background of increasing road congestion. While the absolute future travel patterns post-COVID-19 are unknown, there will still be a necessity and demand for sustainable freight transportation across Ireland and rail can play an important role. Iarnród Éireann will therefore shortly publish its Rail Freight 2040 Strategy against the backdrop of the following:

- The Governments Project Ireland 2040, National Development Plan, National Mitigation Plan, Climate Change Action Plan, Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021
- The Strategic Masterplans of Ireland's Port Authorities
- Increasing Road Congestion
- Pressure on road freight markets e.g. driver shortages, Brexit
- Policy, demand, and sectoral analysis being undertaken to establish demand and opportunities for rail freight

Iarnród Éireann will continue its commitment to develop rail freight between key hubs across the country. In 2020, €1million was invested in upgrading facilities at our Ballina freight hub where current services operate to both Dublin and Waterford Port. In 2021, Iarnród Éireann and the major global logistics service provider XPO Logistics launched a new twice weekly container service from Ballina to Waterford Port which will strengthen the role of rail freight between the west of Ireland and the South East.

As part of the Rail Freight 2040 Strategy, a Strategic Inland Freight Terminal could be introduced at Limerick Junction, which is a gateway to all four points of the compass in terms of our network, including towards Dublin.

Freight transport and logistics will require a shift to more sustainable means of transport including rail. The RSES acknowledges the potential of Carlow and Kilkenny on the Carlow-Dublin M9/rail network, along a key north-south axis through the region, linking the Waterford Metropolitan Area, Kilkenny City and Carlow town with Dublin and the Eastern and Midlands Region. The rail network provides direct access from a

large inland area to the Port of Waterford with potential opportunities for more sustainable freight movements to the Port. I welcome the policy of the Council to promote the development of a logistical park within the County potentially served by rail freight.

Iarnród Éireann believe Carlow County Council should consider the findings of Iarnród Éireann's Rail Freight 2040 Strategy when finalising the new Development Plan, and it should support the continued operation and enhancement of rail freight services. Iarnród Éireann will also include the outcomes on rail freight from the all-island Strategic Rail Review by DoT/DfI(NI), referred to earlier in the submission, as part of this priority once they are known.

#### **4. Accessibility Programme**

Iarnród Éireann is progressing with its Accessibility Programme. The Development Plan should support the further expansion of our Accessibility Programme. By providing more accessible stations on the rail network, it enables and encourages journeys that would otherwise have to be taken by road-based transport, onto the rail network. This has sustainability benefits in terms of the reduction of emissions that result from it, while also ensuring that all who wish to use the railway can avail of its benefits in terms of frequency, reliability, and journey times.

#### **5. Customer Information Services**

Iarnród Éireann is developing a Customer Information Services (CIS) Strategy Report to create a strategic implementation framework for the development of enhanced information systems and information flow to our customers, staff, and third parties. Key amongst these requirements is the ability to provide reliable real time passenger information that is accessible to all, co-ordinated across the network in stations and on trains, and that is consistent across all media.

The development of Customer Information Services (CIS), should be supported by the Development Plan when developed and finalised as it is a vital customer experience capability required to both attract and retain customers using sustainable rail services and a wider integrated sustainable public transport network.

#### **6. Development of Multimodal Facilities - Sustainable Interchange Programme**

Iarnród Éireann aims to develop a Sustainable Interchange Programme which will enable more sustainable end-to-end journeys to be made by rail. The Sustainable Interchange Programme will include the provision of facilities within Iarnród Éireann's stations and local environs to provide for ease of interchange between rail and all other modes, prioritising those that are sustainable – cycling, electric charging, wayfinding and shared mobility. Iarnród Éireann's Sustainable Interchange Programme, when implemented, facilitates compact growth along railway corridors due to the improved sustainable mobility offering at each station. Commercial and residential developments can be supported through improved interchange with active

mode parking infrastructure, and car park spaces (including electric vehicles), increasing the attractiveness of rail and increasing the rationale for the location of compact developments. By providing more sustainable interchange and electric charging, along with bicycle and vehicle parking facilities at stations, it enables and encourages journeys that would otherwise have to be taken by road-based transport onto the rail network. It enhances the appeal of zero emissions active modes onto low emissions rail services.

The Sustainable Interchange Programme has the potential to promote the concept of Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) in the longer-term as digital platforms could be linked to sustainable mobility providers at either end of rail journeys as the interchange capability improves. If the railway does not enable better integration with other modes, passengers may lose out on benefits, and rail may lose prominence in the wider transport system as a result.

Iarnród Éireann believe the Development Plan should support the implementation of the Sustainable Interchange Programme.

#### **7. Park and Ride**

Linked to the above priority, Iarnród Éireann also wishes to grow the number of strategic Park and Ride sites across the network. Iarnród Éireann has seen success of Park and Ride's at sites such as M3 Parkway and believe it is a model that can attract car users, but the benefits of it are contingent on the level of demand. Iarnród Éireann is currently engaging with Councils and the National Transport Authority to develop a Park and Ride Strategy, which will be implemented in line with growing demand. The Development Plan should support the implementation of this Park and Ride Strategy when it is agreed by all parties.

#### **8. Level Crossings**

Iarnród Éireann works to reduce risk at level crossings, and to eliminate level crossings where possible on a risk-prioritised basis. We would welcome the continued support of Carlow County Council where it is identified that opportunities exist to eliminate level crossings, in order to enhance safety on both the rail and road network, and to local residents and landowners.

#### **9. Fleet Enhancement**

In terms of addressing the short term demands on rail services, approval of the business case for 41 intermediate intercity railcars (ICRs) was obtained in 2019. When delivered, the additional fleet will allow for improvements in capacity and frequency on suburban services in the Greater Dublin Area as well as on Intercity services enhancing local and regional connectivity in Carlow County.

## Benefits of Investment in the Railway

Investment in the railway in Carlow will deliver many key benefits to the economy, society and the environment as set out below.

- **Supports the recovery of economic and population growth impacted by COVID-19:** through the job creation during construction and the jobs and population growth it will maintain and create post-completion.
- **Enables and encourages modal shift to public transport:** reducing emissions caused by private cars, increasing accessibility, and growing the labour catchment for employers, and employment opportunities for the labour force.
- **Reduces the levels of congestion in Carlow County:** by promoting and prioritising public transport and active modes over the private car.
- **Increased rail frequencies to Dublin and the South and West of the country:** through the expected increase in service levels versus today's levels.
- **Supports Carlow County's ambition for further compact development:** a more frequent rail service will support the possibility of housing and commercial development along the rail corridor.
- **Alignment with projected population growth:** This would be hugely beneficial to the planned population increase in Carlow County.
- **Promotes the possibility for expanded rail freight:** This would be hugely beneficial to promote balanced regional development and provide the mobility shift of goods towards more sustainable modes, reducing the volume of HGVs on roads.

## Property Issues

In line with normal planning procedure any future measure or proposal by the Council which may impact on the property of the CIÉ Group must be fully discussed and agreed with the CIÉ Group Property Division in advance.

## Protected Structures

Iarnród Éireann has not received notice of any new structures to be added to the Register of Protected Structures and presume that there are no additions on railway property.

## Covid-19 Impact

Although it is not yet possible to determine the full impact on transportation, Covid-19 is likely to have profound implications for the way we live and move about. In the short to medium term, impacts will include a reduction in the number of people in employment, migration to remote and home working and a switch towards more individual modes of transport. In this new environment, the immediate priority for Iarnród Éireann will be to rebuild customer confidence in our services and develop flexibility in longer-term rail development plans to allow us respond quickly to emerging threats and opportunities. Iarnród Éireann will

continue to work with the National Transport Authority and other key stakeholders to manage railway capacity levels through the current pandemic and into the future.

Iarnród Éireann looks forward to working with you to achieve the positive outcomes the final Development Plan will bring for Carlow.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Meade", with a stylized flourish at the end.

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Jim Meade

**Chief Executive**

Figure 1 – Extent of DART+

