

Planning Department  
Leitrim County Council  
Áras an Chontae,  
St. George's Terrace  
Carrick-on-Shannon,  
Co. Leitrim  
N41 PF67

27<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Dear Sir / Madam,

**Re: Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-2029**

Iarnród Éireann welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission at the draft consultation phase of the new Leitrim County Development Plan [hereafter, "the Development Plan"] for the period 2023-2029. 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 the strategic aim of the Council to integrate land use and transport policies to achieve the delivery of a high quality, climate resilient and sustainable transport network for Leitrim, during the period of the Development Plan. This places a requirement on both the transport and settlement strategies to be mutually consistent, as per National, regional, and local transport and spatial planning policy.

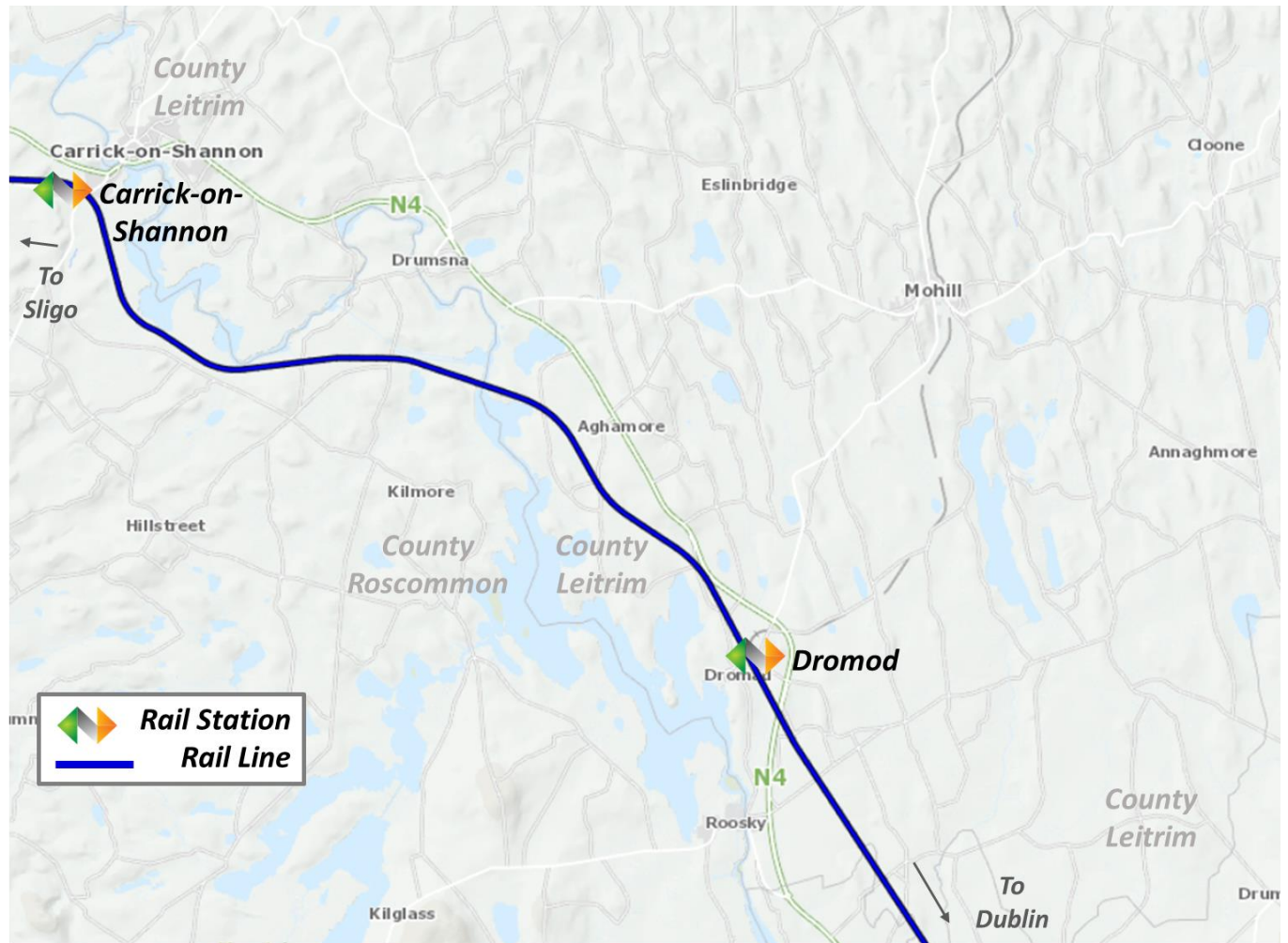
The railway is a national transport asset which supports the economic and social development of the country as a whole by providing accessible, reliable, and frequent sustainable connectivity to many key destinations. Investment in the railway offers more people a real alternative to the private car. This investment, combined with an increased focus growing compact residential and commercial developments along transport corridors, is essential to avoid the urban sprawl and subsequent growth in emissions which will occur without attractive alternative mobility options and the density to support it. It will contribute to Leitrim's continued development and competitiveness and promote green tourism within the County.

The Governments National Planning Framework (2018) estimates that the population of Ireland will increase by 1 million between 2018 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.

### Current rail provision in Leitrim

The county is well served by the main Dublin to Sligo line with Intercity trains serving Carrick-On-Shannon<sup>1</sup> and Dromod stations providing important east-west rail connectivity through the county and connecting to Sligo/Dublin and a number of key intermediate towns in between. A map of the current rail network and areas served is in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Current rail line and stations serving County Leitrim<sup>2</sup>**



In terms of current service levels, the following Dublin-Sligo rail services serve Leitrim County:

- **16 Dublin-Sligo Passenger Services on each Weekday<sup>3</sup> (8 return services)**
- **12 Dublin-Sligo Passenger Services Sundays (6 return services)**

<sup>1</sup> Carrick-on-Shannon station is situated in County Roscommon but serves the town in County Leitrim

<sup>2</sup> Carrick-on-Shannon station is situated in County Roscommon but serves the town in County Leitrim

<sup>3</sup> \*20:50 ex-Connolly operates only Mon-Fri

## **Need for Investment in Rail**

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 County Leitrim include:

- Providing a modern mobility system required to support the population and economic growth projected for Leitrim.
- 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 Leitrim by promoting and prioritising public transport and active modes over the private car.
- Improves the quality of life for citizens of Leitrim 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 Leitrim on a national and European level is committed to leading the sustainable mobility transformation in Ireland.

## **County Development Plan – Rail / Related Transport Objectives**

As one of the most rural counties in Ireland, County Leitrim has one of the highest car dependency rates in the country with 69.1% of commuters travelling to work by car or as a car passenger, compared to 65.5% nationally. Only 1.1% of commuters avail of public transport (bus and rail) compared to a national average of 9.3%.

Iarnród Éireann welcomes the support of Leitrim County Council for the railway and the integration of transport modes including walking and cycling. This will deliver a more sustainable public transport and integrated active mode network which will encourage people to switch from car to alternative greener modes with resultant decongestion and environmental benefits. We also welcome the emphasis in the Development Plan to encourage sustainable and compact forms of development to reduce the need to travel, reduce car dependency and associated carbon emissions.

In particular I welcome PT Pol 4 which affirms the Council's support for the implementation of Iarnród Éireann's Strategy 2027 to deliver high-capacity sustainable public transport solutions to cater for the increase in travel resulting from the anticipated population and employment growth and in the upgrading of the Dublin – Sligo route and frequency/capacity of service. We set out in more detail our key rail priorities for Leitrim in the next section of this submission.

Iarnród Éireann welcomes Objective MSSM OBJ 1 to prepare a Local Transport Plan for the key town of Carrick-on-Shannon and to consult with all relevant stakeholders. I would request that Iarnród Éireann be fully consulted by the Council during the consultation phase of the Transport Plan. I also welcome WC Objective 2 to enhance placemaking and improve pedestrian and cycle connectivity to existing train stations and improve interchange and we will work with the Council and key stakeholders to improve the rail service including access and interchange opportunities at our stations.

### **Key Rail Priorities for Leitrim**

There is a significant opportunity in Leitrim to increase the rail mode share over the next Development Plan period and Iarnród Éireann is planning for a major expansion of the railway as set out in our transformative [Iarnród Éireann Strategy 2020-2027](#). Iarnród Éireann is planning to significantly improve and upgrade its 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 to sustainable modes objectives of the Council as set out in the Draft Development Plan. Iarnród Éireann welcomes the support of the Council in PT Policy 4 for the implementation of our 2027 Strategy.

#### **1. Intercity and Regional Enhancement Ambitions - including longer-term Electrification**

There is potential to improve the Intercity rail services on the mainline running through the County. An increase of service on the Dublin-Sligo line to two-hourly all day forms part of our Strategy 2027, with hourly peak services along part of the line, from Longford to Dublin also planned. The improvements to the infrastructure and frequency of trains on the Dublin-Sligo route will be an important contributory element to achieving use of sustainable alternative transport modes in County Leitrim. This will be complemented by a clock-face timetable for Intercity routes to deliver a service pattern where services depart at regular intervals.

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.

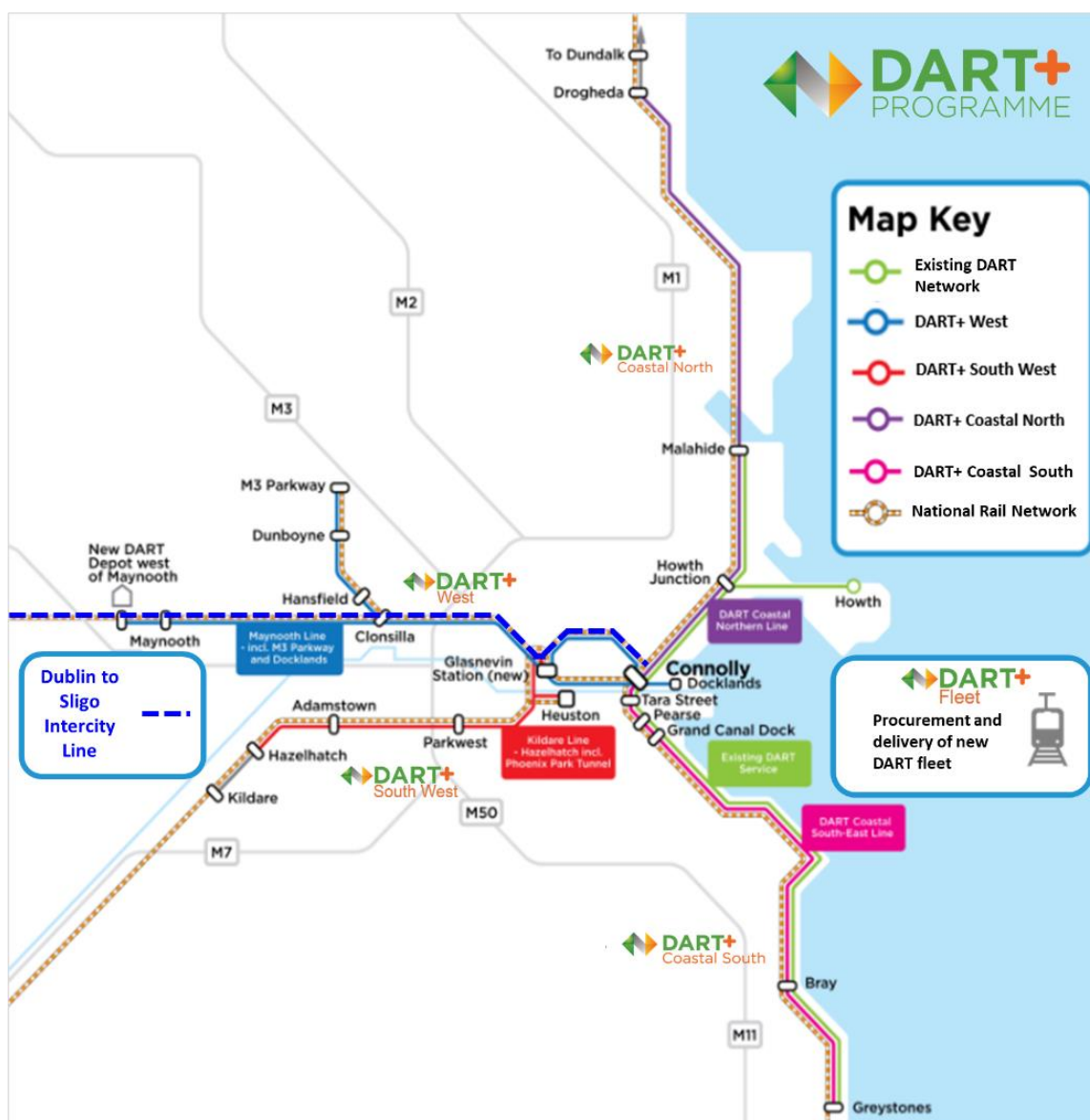
#### **2. Impact of Other Existing Projects on Dublin-Sligo Services via Leitrim**

The DART+ Programme represents the largest 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 Drogheda, Maynooth, Dunboyne, Celbridge and Greystones.

It is important to note the impact of this game-changing development of the GDA rail network on our wider national network in terms of increased access to Dublin. The operational capacity at the congested Dublin end of the Sligo Line will be significantly expanded under the DART+ West Project. This will have a significant benefit for Intercity services to and from Sligo and the outer suburban services to Longford which use this section of track as it will not only improve suburban rail infrastructure capacity, but it will also improve Intercity and inter-regional infrastructure capacity, increasing both service type's capacity levels into Dublin.

This will facilitate the ambition to increase services to Sligo over time which Iarnród Éireann is also striving for. The extent of the DART+ Programme and its various elements, along with the Sligo Intercity services overlap with the project are summarised in Figure 2 below

**Figure 2 Extent of the DART+ Programme and Sligo Line services overlap**



Consideration of any further interventions to enhance capacity on the Dublin-Sligo line will be addressed in the [All-Island Strategic Rail Review](#) which is currently being undertaken jointly by the Department of Transport (DoT) and the Department of Infrastructure (Northern Ireland) and further detail on this important rail review is outlined later in this submission.

### 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 having recently invested 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 the context of climate change and environmental targets Ireland must achieve, both nationally and internationally. This is also set against a context of increasing road congestion, alterations to the pattern of freight movements brought about by Brexit and uncertainties created by Covid. While the absolute future travel patterns are unknown, there will be an increasing necessity to transition to use of sustainable freight transport solutions across Ireland with stakeholders recognising that rail has a more significant role to play. Iarnród Éireann have developed a [Rail Freight Strategy 2040](#) in the context of:

- 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
- Anticipated demand growth over the medium to long term, leading to increasing Road Congestion especially on core city corridors
- Pressure on road freight markets e.g. driver shortages, Brexit, fuel costs
- Policy, demand, and sectoral analysis being undertaken to establish demand and opportunities for rail freight
- A growing demand amongst international distributors and other stakeholders that rail be an integral part of a sustainable freight transport system

To realise the objectives of the strategy and fulfil on the ambitious vision for rail freight nationally, Rail Freight 2040 has been developed around five key pillars which can be found in Table 1. These pillars focus on internal and external aspects of the rail freight business and when pursued as part of a cohesive strategy will result in wide ranging transformation of rail freight in Ireland.

**Table 1: Iarnród Éireann Rail Freight 2040 Strategy – Five Key Pillars**

Five Key Pillars of Rail Freight 2040 Strategy	High-level description
<p>Enhancing connections with seaports</p> 	<p>Irish port traffic accounts for over 90% of annual imports and exports. The importance of port freight traffic underlines the need for modern and effective freight infrastructure to facilitate the movement of goods and materials in and out of the island of Ireland. Central to Rail Freight 2040 are initiatives to have all Tier 1 Ports connected to the rail network. This degree of connectivity will establish an expansive freight network which provides the options and resilience required by modern supply chains and potential customers.</p>



<p><b>Addressing Rolling Stock Requirements</b></p>		<p>The expansion of rail freight services will be facilitated by the identification of new markets and customers as well as improvements in operational efficiencies. Servicing this will require new fleet with a large proportion of the existing stock near life expired, necessitating high levels of maintenance and limiting the ability to serve new customers.</p> <p>Investment in new rolling stock would be sequenced to take place on agreement for new traffic flows thus linking cashflow requirements to committed business contracts. The core requirements consist of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investing in the intermodal wagon fleet</li> <li>• Investing in new bulk wagons</li> <li>• Investing in bi-mode locomotives</li> </ul>
<p><b>Developing intermodal port network</b></p>		<p>To realise the potential demand for rail freight services additional infrastructure is required to provide an attractive network of facilities and a freight service offering which is a viable alternative to road, for existing and potential new customers. In time, this investment will provide an expansive network of inland rail freight terminals establishing rail freight in each of the regions and providing strong national coverage.</p>
<p><b>Network developments</b></p>		<p>The connection of industrial sites directly to the rail network has the potential to realise large volumes of repeat business and establish long standing relationships with large organisations. This offers greater resilience within the network which increases the attractiveness of rail freight to customers. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connecting to industrial sites</li> <li>• Development of passing loops</li> <li>• Dedicated freight paths</li> </ul>
<p><b>Policy initiatives</b></p>		<p>The utilisation of rail freight in Ireland lags significantly behind that of other European countries. A lack of supporting policies has hindered the growth of the sector and led to a drastic decline in the volume of goods and materials transported by rail over the last two decades. While investment in new infrastructure and rolling stock is needed to increase rail freight services in line with European norms, there are also a number of policy initiatives required to establish a more favourable environment for rail freight and put in place the supports necessary to realise the potential for the sector in Ireland, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for environmental benefits</li> </ul>

- EU funding
- Track access charges (TAC's)
- Incentive programmes
- Alternative sources of funding (e.g. private finance)
- Policy input
- Re-establishing cross border services

A key element of the infrastructure investment is a series of intermodal rail freight terminals across the country to improve access to the rail network for goods which can be seen in Figure 3.

The North West of Ireland has operational and successful rail terminals for containers and for timber in Ballina, County Mayo. Currently Iarnród Éireann operate a total of 2-3 trains per week carrying pulpwood from Ballina and Westport to Waterford for Coillte. A new rail freight service with XPO Logistics was also launched in 2021 operating rail freight services from Ballina to Waterford Port. Container rail services also operate between Ballina and Dublin Port. There is an opportunity to develop an equivalent for Sligo using the Dublin-Sligo rail line via Leitrim.

Notwithstanding the relatively low levels of freight at present, the distances from the North West of Ireland to Dublin or Waterford are such that rail can compete on costs and journey times.

Iarnród Éireann believe that Leitrim 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 re-commencement of rail freight services on the Sligo line and support development opportunities to connect freight to rail. Iarnród Éireann will also include the outcomes on rail freight from the all-island Strategic Rail Review by DoT/DfI(NI) described later in this submission as part of this priority once they are known.

**Figure 3: Rail Freight 2040 Freight terminal network**





#### **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 Multi-Modal Interchange Strategy**

Iarnród Éireann aims to develop a multi-modal interchange strategy which will enable more sustainable end-to-end journeys to be made by rail. The multi-modal interchange strategy 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 multi-modal interchange strategy, 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 multi-modal interchange strategy 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 Council could consider supporting the implementation of the multi-modal interchange strategy when developed in its final Development Plan.

## **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.

### **All Island Rail Review**

In the context of wider national rail policy and development, it is worth the Council noting that the Department of Transport (DoT) and the Department of Infrastructure (Northern Ireland) (DfI(NI)) have commenced an [All-Island Strategic Rail Review](#) with faster Intercity connectivity, improved regional connectivity, and rail freight forming key elements. Iarnród Éireann will prioritise the outcomes of this Review as part of its future plans upon completion of the study.

### **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 the 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.

### **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.

### **Track and Structures**

Any proposals to add railway structures, including but not limited to bridges, to the Register of Protected Structures should be notified to the Senior Track and Structures Engineer, Iarnród Éireann, CCE Dept, Old Railway Station, Grace Road, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, N37 C573.

### **Concluding Remarks**

To conclude this submission, it is important to acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused wide-ranging challenges and uncertainty throughout society on a global, European, and national level. It continues to alter some

aspects of the way we live our lives and move about. It is likely to have an impact on the population and economic targets projected as part of the Project Ireland 2040 initiative, the levels of which, as of yet, are unclear.

From the perspective of developing a sustainable integrated transport system, COVID-19 does present an opportunity to change habits, and the promotion and priority of sustainable transport can be a key driver for the recovery of growth, thus making the Leitrim County Development Plan a key strategic document for the North-West Region. The development of a sustainable integrated transport network for the Leitrim County can be a springboard to economic recovery through the jobs it creates during its implementation, and it sustains post-completion. This is crucial for the North-West Region to maintain competitiveness internationally and promote regional balance in the national recovery.

Notwithstanding the tremendous challenges ahead due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I hope that this gives you a good indication of the potential rail developments that could be delivered by Iarnród Éireann over the next County Development Plan period and beyond. This can significantly enhance rail access within County Leitrim and adjoining Regions in the future.

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

Yours sincerely,



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Jim Meade

**Chief Executive**