



Subject:	All-Island Strategic Rail Review
Date:	13 September 2023
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration & Development
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Members on the draft report of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review (AISRR) currently out for consultation and to agree the draft response to be submitted from Belfast City Council.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to:

	<p>I. Note the content of this report in relation to the All-Island Strategic Rail Review that is currently out for consultation.</p> <p>II. Approve the Council’s draft consultation response to the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and the Department of Transport’s on the AISRR and associated environmental documents as enclosed with this report in Appendix 2, noting that in line with the consultation closing date of 29 September, that this will be submitted as draft and will be subject to ratification by Council on 2 October and any further comments or amends at Council will be forwarded to the Department.</p>
3.0	Main report
	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>3.1 The All-Island Strategic Rail Review (AISRR) (Appendix 1) was launched jointly in 2021 by the Minister for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland and the Minister for Transport in Ireland. DfI, in conjunction with the DfT, are now seeking opinions on the Review’s draft report, and on the reports accompanying the associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process.</p> <p>3.2 The AISRR is the first All-Island Strategic Review of this nature. It will inform investment in the rail sector in both jurisdictions to 2050, with the aim of supporting de-carbonisation of the transport sector in line with both governments’ net-zero commitments.</p> <p>3.3 This paper provides background on the report, its recommendations, and the outcomes for the island if the recommendations were all to be carried out. It also provides an overview of Council’s draft consultation response (Appendix 2).</p> <p>3.4 <u>Context</u> The Review was launched in April 2021 by Eamon Ryan, Minister for Transport Ireland, and Nichola Mallon, then Minister at the Department for Infrastructure, Northern Ireland. It has now been published alongside the associated Strategic Environmental Assessment for consultation and is expected to be finalised by the end of this year.</p> <p>3.5 As part of the preparation of the AISRR, and in accordance with statutory requirements, it was necessary for the Departments to carry out a screening exercise to establish whether a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process was applicable to the AISRR. The Screening Report determined that an environmental assessment was required to identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the AISRR, and reasonable alternatives, taking account of the objectives and the geographical</p>

	scope of the AISRR. Consultation on the AISRR and associated environmental documents opened on Tuesday 25 July and will run until Friday 29 September 2023.
3.6	The Review sets out thirty recommendations for developing a rail network that could significantly benefit commuters, communities, businesses, the environment and economies, both north and south. If the recommendations are implemented in full it could transform the rail system in the coming decades with electrification, faster speeds and greatly improved frequency, opening a number of new routes particularly across the West and North of the island, and widening accessibility and connectivity across the island.
3.7	The AISRR focuses on how the rail network across the island could contribute to the decarbonisation of its transport systems, promote sustainable connectivity into and between major cities, enhance regional accessibility and support balanced regional development. Thirty recommendations have been put forward to achieve these goals. To implement the recommendations of the AISRR, a range of projects/schemes would be required and each of these will be subject to appropriate feasibility, options, funding and environmental assessments at project level, where required.
3.8	The draft review was commissioned and overseen by both Departments and carried out by engineering firm Arup. Recommendations which are based around six goals (Contributing to decarbonisation, improving All-Ireland connectivity between major cities, enhancing regional and rural accessibility, encouraging sustainable mobility, fostering economic activity and achieving economic and financial feasibility), are proposed to be delivered over the coming 25 years, aligning with net-zero commitments in both jurisdictions. Among the key recommendations are:
3.9	<p>Decarbonisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decarbonise the rail network, including an electrified intercity network as well as hybrid, hydrogen and electric rolling stock.
3.10	<p>Intercity Speed and Frequency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrade the core intercity railway network (Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Waterford) to top speeds of 200km/h ensuring that train journeys are faster than the car.

3.11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade the cross-country rail network to a dual-track railway (and four-track in places) and increase intercity service frequencies to hourly between the main city pairs.
3.11	<p>New Regional Connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase regional and rural lines speeds to at least 120 km/h. • Reinstate the Western Rail Corridor between Claremorris and Athenry. • Extend the railway into Tyrone (from Portadown to Dungannon, Omagh, Strabane) Derry- Londonderry, and onto Donegal (Letterkenny) • Reinstate the South Wexford Railway, connecting to Waterford • Develop the railway to boost connectivity in the North Midlands, from Mullingar to Cavan, Monaghan, Armagh and Portadown
3.12	<p>Sustainable Cities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect Dublin, Belfast International and Shannon Airport to the railway and improve existing rail-airport connections. • Segregate long-distance and fast services from stopping services, ensuring quicker times on city approaches
3.13	<p>Transforming Freight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen rail connectivity to the island’s busiest ports and reduce Track Access Charges for freight. • Develop first-mile-last-mile rail access for Dublin Port
3.14	<p>Prioritising Customers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve service quality, provide on-board catering, ‘clock-face’ timetable, better integration with other transport options, and cross-border structures to streamline travel north and south.
3.15	<p>If the review’s recommendations are implemented in full across the coming decades, the capital cost is estimated to be €36.8bn / £30.7bn based on 2023 cost estimates. If all the recommendations in this Review were delivered it is envisioned that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rail network would be decarbonised • 700,000 more people would live within 5km of a railway station • Rail journey times between some major cities could be halved

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services on busiest intercity routes could run every 30 minutes in some cases • Rail passenger numbers could double • 90% of aviation passengers could travel to the airport by rail • Two thirds of freight tonnage would pass through ports served by rail • The island’s economy could be boosted by €20 billion
3.16	<p>The Review’s recommendations provide policy makers and Ministers in both jurisdictions with an evidence-based framework to inform future investment decisions. More detailed work will be needed to test the feasibility and affordability of many of the recommendations to inform decision making.</p>
3.17	<p><u>Belfast City Council Draft Consultation Response</u></p> <p>Members are asked to consider and provide comment on the Council’s draft consultation response prior to approving submission to the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Transport’s consultants on the AISRR and associated environmental documents, enclosed with this report at Appendix 2. Members will note that in line with the consultation closing date of 29 September, that this will be submitted as draft and will be subject to ratification by Council on 2 October and any further comments or amends at Council will be forwarded to the Department.</p>
3.18	<p>The draft response sets out the Council’s general support for the ambitions and recommendations made in the AISRR. It notes that the AISRR will make a contribution to meeting the targets set out for the city in the NI Climate Action Plan 2022, the Belfast Agenda, Local Development Plan (LDP), Bolder Vision and the Net Zero Carbon Roadmap. Whilst the response is supportive, it outlines that consideration should be given to ensure any development is in line with the requirements set out within DfI’s new Eastern Transport Plan, the LDP and should align with the ambitions of A Bolder Vision. Specifically, it notes that the implementation of future rail infrastructure should ensure that it does not create physical barriers between communities but instead improve the connectivity between each other and the city centre.</p>
3.19	<p>In recognition of a potential future population of between 8.5-10 million people on the island by 2050 there is a need to develop and connect urban areas and provide infrastructure fit to serve a growing and diverse population. Consideration of the costs and delivery of enabling infrastructure requirements such as bridges, tunnels, additional tracks, Overhead Line Equipment and hydrogen production and storage locations as well as building in sustainable</p>

	multi-modal options for first and last mile journeys such as active travel routes should be considered at this early stage.
3.20	Taking a Transit Oriented Development approach could provide population densification in strategic locations and contribute to economic, social and environmental benefits, not least the increase of housing in these areas and corridors and support the potential clustering of employment opportunities. Efficient rail links between urban centres will bring added benefits in terms of spreading economic and population growth, support additional FDI and support indigenous investment and new supply chains to emerge, drive tourism and leisure opportunities and ultimately support sustainability goals and reduced emissions.
3.21	It is perhaps somewhat disappointing that the potential contribution of rail freight has largely been discounted when it comes to the Port of Belfast. Despite being the second largest port* on the island the review considers that any options to improve linkages to the Port of Belfast would be very costly and disruptive and would encourage freight traffic to use parts of the railway that are already quite congested.
3.22	This approach would seem contradict Recommendation 23 of the report which looks to “strengthen rail connectivity to the island’s busiest ports” and misses an opportunity to contribute towards the decarbonisation of the island’s transport system as well as reducing congestion both locally and regionally (Some sources suggest that one freight train can remove up to 76 HGVs from the road).
3.23	With a current baseline of having no regular rail freight operations it would seem that with the necessary governments’ commitment and investment there are clear economic and environmental benefits that could be delivered through improved rail freight linkages beyond what is currently proposed in the draft Report.
3.24	Additionally, it is felt that the AISRR should increase its ambitions in terms of journey times which will bring added advantages and enhance the quality of life for residents which brings benefits in terms of health and well-being, access to public services, reduced congestion, and connectivity to leisure opportunities including the unrivalled natural heritage of the island. Such an approach creates the conditions that could also support ‘returners’ to the island and drive inward migration and support sustainable lifestyles in line with the Net Zero targets.
3.25	<u>Next Steps</u>

	<p>Subject to approval at this committee, Belfast City Council will formally submit its draft response (Appendix 2) to Arup as the agent for the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Transport's consideration. Officers will highlight that in line with the consultation closing date of 29 September, that the submission is a draft response which will be subject to ratification by Council on 2 October and any further comments or amends at Council will be forwarded to the Department.</p>
3.26	<p>Following the consultation period, the Minister for Transport and Government in Ireland as well as Minister for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland, will be asked to approve the final Review incorporating any changes as a result of the SEA consultation process. It is anticipated, subject to those approvals, that the final Review will be published in the Winter of 2023. Should there continue to be an absence of Ministers in the NI Executive, approval will be considered taking into account the relevant legislation in place at the time.</p>
3.27	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
3.28	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The implications of the Equality or Goods Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessments will need to be undertaken by the Department for Infrastructure and the Department for Transport in line with their own policy positions and prior to undertaking implementation.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1: Department of Transport and Department for Infrastructure, All-Island Strategic Rail Review Draft Report for Strategic Environmental Assessment Consultation 25 July 2023. All-Island Strategic Rail Review - Strategic Environmental Assessment and Draft Report Department for Infrastructure (infrastructure-ni.gov.uk)</p> <p>Appendix 2: All-Island Strategic Rail Review Draft Report for Strategic Environmental Assessment Consultation: Belfast City Council draft response submission.</p>