

Consultation Form

1. Of the goals listed below, please rank them in terms of importance to you (by clicking and dragging), with the first being most important and the last least important.

1. Improve All Island Connectivity Between Major Cities
2. Foster economic activity
3. Contribute to Decarbonisation
4. Encourage sustainable mobility
5. Achieve economic and financial feasibility
6. Enhance Regional and Rural Accessibility

2.1 Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of a group/organisation?

Organisation

2.2 What is your organisational vision for the future of rail in your area, or across the island?

Our vision for the future of rail is a high-speed network that enhances inter-city and regional connectivity on the island of Ireland that will enhance our economy whilst advancing our decarbonisation goals and bring about sustainable mobility. There will be increased frequency of rail services and reduced journey times on the Belfast – Dublin Enterprise line that will greatly improve the economic attractiveness and integration across the Belfast - Dublin region. This will bring benefits to the wider economic corridor and greatly expand the access to markets and manpower resources employers across the region and especially within the well-connected cities and hubs.

Our vision is for the region to have a comprehensive, integrated, frequent, reliable and high-speed rail network that will maximise the economic, social and environmental benefits for our residents, workforce, visitors and investors. It should ensure we will have rail infrastructure that supports inward investment into Belfast, building on the social, economic and environmental advantages of a high-speed rail network between the islands two principal cities, enhancing opportunities for economic growth, employment and homes, creating attractive environments for businesses and residents.

2.3 Are there any key gaps in rail provision in in your area, or elsewhere where you would like to travel by rail?

Belfast – Dublin Higher Speed Rail

Five Local Authorities (Belfast City Council, Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, Louth County Council, and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council) co-commissioned a study into a potential strategic economic benefit of a high-speed rail connection between Belfast and Dublin. In July 2019 ARUP published the policy paper entitled *Accelerating Economic Growth and Environmental Change through Investment in Rail -Transforming Connectivity between Belfast and Dublin*. The policy paper is enclosed with this submission at Appendix 1. It included the following findings on the Eastern Economic Corridor:

- The Enterprise train service is slow and infrequent. The vision of a 60-minute journey time with up to two trains per hour would put the Belfast-Dublin corridor on a par with Frankfurt-Cologne
- The overall market for intercity travel along this corridor is around 5m journeys per year. The rail service currently captures less than 20% of this market
- The Belfast to Dublin corridor accounts for more than 1million jobs and is expected to grow to c.3.3M by 2031. Belfast has a target to add 46,000 jobs in the period 2020-35

- With over 3.1m car journeys per annum along the Dublin to Belfast corridor, representing 67% of the market share, increasing the mode share of rail travel on this corridor could greatly reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality in the island of Ireland
- Improved rail connectivity would boost access to jobs, employees and customers. Many more locations would become feasible for households and businesses, allowing growth to be more evenly distributed
- Improved rail links can also facilitate better matching between employers and employees which will support economic growth and bring closer together the island's top three universities
- Improving access to Dublin airport will enhance the overall connectivity benefits along the Belfast to Dublin corridor, ensuring a larger part of the island benefits from international links

Urban Rail Capacity

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI), in conjunction with Translink, published the *Railway Investment Prioritisation Strategy (2014)* to set out the strategic direction for future railway investment over the next 20 years and the high-level initiatives that need to be delivered to support the Strategy. To increase urban rail capacity in Belfast the strategy identified a number of key projects:

- A third track between Adelaide to Great Victoria Street would enable additional timetabling of trains on this section of line
- Dualling of the Dargan Viaduct would improve timetabling on the Derry and Larne lines and facilitate a possible Gamble Street / Donegall Quay Halt more effectively integrated with the northern city centre.
- A third line between Lagan Junction to Central Station could relieve future pressures on this heavily trafficked section of track and result in improved timetabling of services into Belfast linking with the TEN-T Core Network which is being considered in the Translink 2021 Network Utilisation Strategy.

Belfast International Airport Rail Link

The Railway Investment Prioritisation Strategy acknowledged that a re-opened Antrim to Knockmore/Lisburn line could present an opportunity to establish a rail link to Belfast International Airport, although such investment is less likely to be fully economically viable without further airport passenger growth or the more sustainable spatial development and planning of the area that could be serviced by the reopened route.

Gamble Street Halt

A new railway station on Gamble Street, near Corporation Street, is a long-term ambition to create an additional public transport node in the northern part of the city centre, within the high accessibility zone identified in *Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) 2015*. The *Greater Clarendon & Sailortown Masterplan (2016)* strongly recommends a new rail halt at Gamble Street, or the general area. The Masterplan Delivery Framework (April 2018) suggested that there may be important engineering issues that could impact on the viability of a Gamble Street Rail Halt.

Shore Road

Despite there being a two-way rail corridor along the Shore Road that leads to Yorkgate station and later to all rail stations in the city, there are no stations between Yorkgate and Whiteabbey. The rail line along Shore Road is barely accessible for those living in the area. Plans to increase rail service

frequency already exist as part of the Transport Hub initiative and should be applied to the section of rail along Shore Road, together with new stations that would allow Shore Road residents to use it.

It is recognised that a modern, integrated, well-connected and reliable public transport network is key for Belfast. The success of Belfast Rapid Transit (Glider) Phase 1 has already started to enhance the image of public transport travel in Belfast, and it is acknowledged that significant increases in patronage levels along the BRT corridors of the East, West and Titanic Quarter has been achieved.

BRT Phase 2 is one of several strategically important projects that will be introduced within the City Centre over the next several years, including vital public sector projects and initiatives such as The Belfast Region City Deal, the Belfast Transport Hub, Belfast Streets Ahead 3 & 5, and York Street Interchange. These projects are critically important elements within the ongoing development of a green, walkable, cyclable network of streets and places that will improve health for all, revitalise the City's economy and restore a sense of collective pride in the centre of the City by the communities within and around it.

An increase in frequency on this section could be achieved with an intermediate terminus around the Ulster University Jordanstown campus which would extend the project's benefits to students as well as residents of Whiteabbey. This leverages existing infrastructure efficiently and has the potential to create an excellent transit improvement with greater capacity for those in the North of the City and adjoining council areas.

Wider Railway Improvements

In terms of the wider region the rail network coverage maps enclosed with the consultation document show a glaring omission of rail provision in the North West. It is imperative that step-change measures towards rail provision in the North West are brought forward in the form of enhanced services for other modes that provide the accessibility and options in the short to medium term.

The DfI commissioned a feasibility study in November 2020 to consider half-hourly train services on the Derry - Belfast railway line. The 2021 review of the Network Utilisation Strategy by Translink reviewed the benefits of investment in re-instated rail routes such as the potential Armagh to Portadown link or other strategic dualling or passing loop along existing corridors.

The journey time to Dublin city centre from Belfast currently exceeds two hours and needs to be reduced with a potential connection to Dublin airport. The number of services provided on some rail lines is constrained due to the need for some services to share the same track and therefore a new heavy gauge line potentially bypassing the busy DART service between the city centre and Malahide could increase the number of intercity services that could be provided and simultaneously reduce journey times.

The Belfast to Dublin Higher Speed Rail project aspires to achieve a 60-minute journey time with provision of at least two trains per hour: one fast and one semi-fast, delivering good end to end connectivity and opportunities for other locations in the corridor. The Derry - Portadown line via Omagh could provide a vital and viable connecting service to an upgraded Enterprise. The network enhancement to cover the three airports with the reopened Crumlin line would further supplement network penetration and integration across different modes. However, such investment is less likely to be fully economically viable without further airport passenger growth or the more sustainable spatial development and planning of the area that could be serviced by the reopened route.

3.1 Would you consider the area of your main place of residence:

N/A

3.2 Would you consider the area of your main place of work:

N/A

4. Please select your Council/Council Area:

Belfast City Council and Belfast – Dublin Economic Corridor

5. If you have any further comments, which have not yet been captured that you feel may be of value in the development of Review, please add them below:

Belfast City Council asks that the following comments and observations be taken into consideration as part of the development of the Review:

- The **Belfast Region City Deal** points to investment in infrastructure as a key tenet of connecting our region and beyond. For a region to be successful, modern and world class infrastructure needs to be in place. This enables economic growth, builds the connections to markets and opportunities and is a key consideration for inward investors. As such, investing in the extension and enhancement of our rail infrastructure is seen as a priority linked in delivering balanced economic growth and making sure the job opportunities that we create can be accessed by all communities.
- Belfast City Council would like to see the enhancement of the potential and **use of existing infrastructure** as a priority linked to the GVA and opportunities for sustainable economic growth across the island. Where feasible, however, when looking at the Belfast – Dublin Rail corridor, alternative routes will need to be explored to ensure maximum efficiency and impact of the service. In particular, there is potential to build a more resilient network of low carbon rail services that would contribute significantly to our decarbonisation targets.

Rail is a key enabler of decarbonisation in the transport sector and we welcome the proposed electrification of Enterprise rolling stock under the planned improvements to the rail network. We understand the recent trainsets purchased by Translink can be converted into electric units which is what we want to see in terms of future-proofing for electrification.

- **Frequency of service and integration** are obviously a hugely important considerations in the context of rail service provision and especially crucial within the metropolitan network. Arguably we should be aspiring to frequencies not exceeding 10 minutes at peak times. With the provision of additional stops, particularly in the North of the city, this would see public transport become genuine viable alternative to the less sustainable forms of transport.
- **Freight considerations** are not clear as part of the consultation and are not currently part of network in NI and issue in relation to connectivity to ports, mineral and manufacturing centres etc. The potential to use the railway system for freight transport on an all-Island basis could support more effective use of existing and proposed infrastructure thereby contributing to longer term goals around climate change and sustainability. This potential therefore requires clear appraisal as part of any Review.

- **The timescale** for the review and actual outputs or options for the next stages is critical. There will be real issues around potential viability, both financially and in terms of the enhanced connectivity they can deliver in the medium to long term.
- The consultation paper does not provide any clarity on how the **infrastructure capacity** of the current network or any protected corridors from previous lines have been assessed or will be considered taking account of projected viability from an operational or service perspective.
- **Integration is critical** and this review should not be seen as review of rail services in isolation from all other modes of public transport provision. The provision of integrated public transport services in Northern Ireland is significantly inferior to the connectivity, frequency and quality of rail, tram and bus services provided in other parts of the UK and Ireland. It will be important to future-proof the development of our strategic transport services, both rail and bus, through the integration with local transport networks.

In the consideration of all proposals the opportunities for enhanced access to the transport network at our railway halts should be a key consideration. As an example, the absence of the rail linked Park and Ride facility at Templepatrick reduces the potential for interchange and passenger choice in terms of access to the network and multi modal trips.

- It is not clear how this review will feed into the **Transport Plans** or RDS processes. Regional and sub-regional hubs appear to have a narrow interpretation whereas these are critical in relation to other modes and broader connectivity.
- Clarity is needed in respect of the hierarchy and the **purposes of rail network in the different areas** – short distance commuting, longer distance connectivity and regeneration potential from new connections linked to spatial development priorities. Again, freight and enhanced use of the infrastructure may be important in this regard in respect of the longer-term viability or business cases.

[Ends]