

Public Transport Policy Division



Ruby McLaren
Inquiry Administrator
Planning & Water Appeals Commission
info@pacni.gov.uk

Ground Floor, Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
BELFAST, BT2 8GB
Tel: 028 9034 6247

Your reference: 2019/D001
Our reference:

25 April 2023

Dear Ms McLaren,

I understand a Public Inquiry into the A5 Western Transport Corridor Road Scheme is underway and that, as the Scheme's promoter, the Department for Infrastructure has been invited to provide evidence and facilitate the attendance of experts in relation to the various topics covered by the inquiry programme.

I have been invited, in my role as Director of Public Transport Policy, to attend on Wednesday 31 May 2023 to discuss the implications of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review (AISRR).

The AISRR report will not have been published by this time and, as such, it will not be possible to discuss its contents or the implications thereof on 31 May. I have included below a statement on the purpose, status and timing of the Review and would propose that the Inquiry considers this written information in lieu of my attendance on 31 May, given the circumstances.

Background and purpose

The All-Island Strategic Rail Review (AISRR) was launched in April 2021 by the Minister of Transport for the Irish Government, Eamon Ryan T.D., and the then Minister for Infrastructure for the Northern Irish Executive, Nichola Mallon MLA.

The Review has examined how the island's railways are currently used, what role rail could play in future, and how the island's railways could better serve the people of both jurisdictions.

It has considered how the rail network across the island could contribute to the decarbonisation of the island's transport systems, promote sustainable connectivity into and between major cities, enhance regional accessibility, and support balanced regional development. It has also considered the interactions between proposed improvements and existing, or planned, commuter rail services. The time horizon for this Review covers the period to 2050 to align with both jurisdictions' stated goals of achieving net zero carbon emissions by this milestone.

As part of the AISRR, six high-level goals for rail have been established. These are based on the relevant policy drivers for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. These high-level goals are to establish the optimum role of rail, as part of the transport system, to:

1. contribute to decarbonisation;
2. improve All Island connectivity between major cities;
3. enhance regional accessibility;
4. stimulate economic activity;
5. encourage sustainable mobility; and
6. achieve economic and financial feasibility.

A long list of potential rail sector interventions were considered as part of this study clustered under four main categories:

- New lines
- Infrastructure enhancements (of existing lines)
- Infrastructure enhancement in the form of new station
- Frequency improvements

The AISRR Report will present the final findings and recommendations from this Review. It is important to note that the Review will not be agreed policy or strategy, but rather will inform future policy and future strategy for the railways in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland in the context of wider multi-modal transport plans.

Current position and timing for publication

The Department has been working closely with colleagues in the Department of Transport in Dublin. Work on the Review is now at an advanced stage, with a draft final report expected in the coming weeks.

In Northern Ireland, *The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004* requires that, where a plan or programme is likely to

have significant environmental impact, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is completed. In Ireland, the same requirement exists under the *European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004* (as amended) and *The Planning and Development Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Regulations 2004* (as amended).

In order to determine whether or not a SEA is required, a screening process must be carried out. This work has been completed and, based on the pre-screening check and a review against the relevant environmental significance criteria, it has been determined that the AISRR does require a SEA.

A tender process was carried out by the Department of Transport in April, with the aim of appointing a consultant to complete the SEA; however, no bids were received. Officials are currently exploring alternative procurement routes to secure this necessary expertise as soon as possible.

It is hoped that a consultant can be appointed in the coming weeks and that the SEA can be produced by the end of the summer.

Following the completion of the SEA it will be published for the purposes of public consultation. The draft Review report will also be published at that time to facilitate the consultation process.

The Review will be finalised thereafter, with recommendations from the SEA process (if required) appropriately incorporated.

It is anticipated that the Minister of Transport and Government in Ireland as well as Minister for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland will then be asked to approve the Review before the finalised Report is published. Should there continue to be an absence of Ministers in the NI Executive, approval will be considered taking into account the decision-making framework set out in the *Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc.) Act 2022* or relevant legislation in place at the time.

Next Steps

As I have stated above, the AISRR is neither policy nor strategy in itself, but rather will provide a constructive, evidence-based approach for policymakers to consider as they develop investment plans for the future.

Any projects arising from the AISRR will be subject to the same processes and governance requirements as any other project including the necessary business case approvals.

I trust this update will provide the necessary information to inform the Inquiry in respect of the AISRR.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Robinson

Jackie Robinson

Director, Public Transport Policy Division



Planning & Water Appeals
Commission
4th Floor
92 Ann Street
Belfast
BT1 3HH

Phone: 02890 244 710 (switchboard)

Email: info@pacni.gov.uk

Website: www.pacni.gov.uk

Our Ref 2019/D001

DATE 9th May 2023

BY E-MAIL

Ms Jackie Robinson
Director, Public Transport Policy Division
Department for Infrastructure
Ground Floor
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
BELFAST
BT2 8GB

Dear Ms Robinson,

Public Local Inquiry into the A5 Western Transport Corridor Road Scheme

Thank you for your letter of 25th April 2023 concerning attendance at the A5 public inquiry.

As you may know, objections related to the All-Island Strategic Rail Review have been made to the proposed A5 WTC Scheme. It is likely that the contents of your letter will give rise to a discussion at the public inquiry.

The Commission considers it important that you are present in order to clarify any matters that may arise. It would not be sufficient to rely on your letter alone as the purpose of the inquiry is to debate and discuss matters.

The Commission therefore confirms its request for your attendance on Wednesday 31st May at 2pm in Omagh Enterprise Centre.

This correspondence will be placed on the Commission's website for the information of inquiry participants.

Yours sincerely

RUBY McLAREN
Inquiry Administrator

cc. Seamus Keenan, DFI Roads, County Hall, Omagh
