

'Western Rail Trail' was dropped from Greenway Strategy

• Route from Athenry to Sligo was on initial list

By Jacqueline Hogge

A MAP identifying the Western Rail Corridor as a potential national greenway was removed from the government's Greenway Strategy, despite the route being listed as a strategic priority in earlier versions of the document.

The Western Rail Trail, from Athenry to Collooney, was included alongside the Dublin to Galway, Royal Canal, Grand Canal, Barrow Way, East Coast Trail, Shannon and Great Southern routes as suggested national greenways in earlier drafts of the strategy.

The inclusion of the Western Rail Trail route was dependent on the outcome of the rail review into the line between Athenry and Tuam.

However, the final draft published in July only made reference to the Dublin to Galway route. An accompanying map, which outlined the routes and their potential for connectivity and appeared in earlier drafts of the strategy, was also removed.

The map, which was drawn up by officials at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, was released to Brendan Quinn of the West on Trail Campaign, in response to a Freedom of Information request he submitted in October.

As part of the FOI request, Mr Quinn sought all copies of draft reports of the recently published National Greenway Strategy, along with maps contained in draft reports which showed potential national greenway routes.

He also requested copies of emails the department received from Oireachtas members seeking amendments to the final report.

In a comprehensive response, the department provided documentation that



in Galway greenway as well as connecting to a route through to Enniskillen from Collooney.

"In February and March 2018 the first few drafts of the greenway strategy clearly show the Quiet Man Greenway was part of the proposed national greenway structure," said Brendan Quinn.

"The map clearly reflected the department's thinking that this route was a pivotal link in connecting a national greenway route."

As part of the correspondence relating to the greenway strategy, Brendan Quinn also received a copy of the submit-

consistently opposed any greenway along the rail line, answered a series of questions on a departmental template relating to greenways.

His submission, made in July 2017, categorically stated that as State owned land, the Western Rail Corridor should not be considered for a greenway as there was 'a competing demand use.'

He elaborated on his opposition to the named route by saying that the Western Rail Corridor was not appropriate for a greenway. "The link for rail connectivity in the West of Ireland is this line. It is a vital

Cinney made his submission, over 600 people took part in a Greenway for A Day event in Tuam, calling for a feasibility study into the potential use of the rail line as a greenway.

Brendan Quinn said serious questions remained as to why the department's initial thinking changed.

"The department had mapped a really good all round structure for a greenway network, in the main utilising existing state owned land along tow paths and closed railways," he said.

"These draft versions of the strategy show how the depart-