



Up-dates summary following meeting with NWRA, Feb 4th 2019.

Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

Please accept the following summary as an up-date to our original submissions.

1) Our starting point was to identify the public capital project which would best help in the recovery of South Sligo following the recession. That was how we arrived at the greenway project which according to a New Zealand study adds one local job equivalent per kilometer.

2) We then concluded that in South Sligo the greenway should run the 35km route of the disused rail corridor from Bellaghy to Colooney, for the following reasons;

a) It would, after being in disuse for two generations, secure the corridor against adverse possession, for other public uses including when and if appropriate the restoration of a rail service.

b) It would link many of our existing villages and small towns and through the large number of crossings ensure access from and to every parish and cultural and sporting amenity in its catchment

c) It would therefore add to the quality of life for locals and offer otherwise unavailable links between the many cultural amenities of this region. It would also create a deeper cultural experience for visitors.

We envisage links from Colooney to Sligo town and to the Erne waterway through the development of the SLNCR rail corridor at the northern end and to Connacht International airport at the southern end. These links are now part of Sligo Co Council's broader greenway development plan.

These positions were subsequently borne out by the economic feasibility study commissioned by the Tubbercurry REDZ project which showed a payback of less than two years on such a project. We then entered into a Memorandum of understanding with Sligo Co Council which in turn led to the commissioning of a technical feasibility study and proceeding to planning and funding applications for the project

3) We believe that the regional spatial strategy now being prepared for the period on to 2030 should support this development as being the best incremental amenity for its catchment and the one which is most likely to bring the spinoff benefits of rural tourism into every town and village in the NorthWest.

4) The reasons why it is particularly appropriate for a NW greenway network to use the existing disused rail corridors are;

- This spatial strategy covers the period to 2030. The Public Capital programme Rebuilding Ireland covers the period 2040 and does not include provision for

Sligo Greenway Co-op, Lavagh, Ballymote, Co Sligo. F56 EH60

sligogreenway@gmail.com

www.sligogreenway.com



recreating a rail service in the region.

- Even if following the Rail Review this were to change this review does not include the corridor north of Claremorris, so there is no question mark over its immediate use as a greenway
- The Irish Rail Licence agreement under which any such greenways will operate is immediately revokable if the corridor is required for a rail service
- The payback on a greenway is such that even taking full account of this caveat would not justify keeping these corridors idle pending redevelopment for rail service
- The law on adverse possession requires that to safeguard these valuable public corridors for any and all possible future uses they are brought back into public use as soon as possible and in any event within the horizon of this spatial strategy

Additionally...

Two further reasons for having greenways on the rail corridor is economics and timeliness.

To minimise the cost and environmental impact of a greenway as well as to integrate it with existing settlement patterns demands that disused rail corridors should be given first and the highest consideration because;

- it has least impact on livestock movement and therefore on farming patterns
- It obviates the need to acquire lands or rights of ways, even assuming they would be voluntarily available
- rail corridors are essentially brownfield sites requiring minimum repurposing to be used as a greenway. The main cost arises at road crossings or where bridges or culverts are in disrepair. These repairs borne by the greenway project equally serve all purposes to which the corridor might be applied at a future date. Using such a site is altogether more cost effective than a green field alternative even where that is already in public ownership
- All of these considerations and the ready availability of an Irish Rail licence to a local authority means that the lead time to a shovel ready project will be much shorter on a rail corridor than any greenfield site
- Irish Rail licencing of disused rail corridors helps them avoid contingency costs and obligations which are essentially a further saving on the State where disused rail corridors are used for greenways. Irish Rail have publicly stated that they have a fiduciary responsibility to protect these assets but no financial means to meet those obligations. Hence the attractiveness for them of issuing such licences.

Pat McCarrick – Chairperson, on behalf of Sligo Greenway Co-op

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