

**White Paper
European Transport Policy for 2010 –
Time to Decide**

Submission from the

Western Development Commission

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1. Introduction

The Western Development Commission (WDC) welcomes the invitation from the Department of Public Enterprise (DPE) to submit views on the EU Commission White Paper, *European Transport Policy for 2010 – Time to Decide*, which was adopted in September 2001.

The Western Development Commission is a statutory agency with responsibility for promoting and fostering economic and social development in the seven western counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway and Clare¹.

The Western Region is on the periphery of Ireland, which in turn is on the periphery of Western Europe. In addition, Ireland as an island, is the only country in the EU without a land link to mainland Europe. This has important implications for transport policy both internally and externally. From an economic perspective, Ireland is a small open economy with a heavy reliance on external trade, particularly with the UK and EU. Consequently, transport linkages are vital.

The EU White Paper has several key objectives including restoring the balance between different modes of transport and developing intermodality, combating congestion and improving the safety and quality of services. The Department of Public Enterprise has requested that the submissions focus particularly on;

- A. Particular effects of the proposals on Ireland and the policies and measures we should pursue in Ireland's interest.
- B. Modal Shift Initiatives and proposals related to infrastructure charging.
- C. Improved passenger and freight linkages to the EU and how they should be developed in an EU context.

1.1 European Transport Policy and Ireland

The WDC recognises the relevance and application of EU transportation policy to Ireland's external transport networks. The impact on Ireland's indigenous transport linkages will be somewhat limited for two reasons.

Firstly, the development of transport policy is primarily a function of the national policies of each member state and the priorities that they choose. In Ireland's case it is only in recent decades that significant investment has been made in different transport modes, notably roads and more latterly rail and other forms of public transport.

Secondly, the geographical position of Ireland and the absence of a land link to the European mainland limit the potential for European transport initiatives designed to improve intra-European movement. Much of the focus of European Transport Policy is on the links between states and is largely land-based. Ireland's relatively small size, in terms of the level of demand, is also a limiting factor.

Of course, substantial EU support in the form of funding from the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Funds has had a very significant impact on

¹ The term Western Region is used to delineate these seven western counties within the remit of the Western Development Commission.

transport investment in Ireland. More recently, funding for road and rail investment has also been available under the Trans European Network Programme. There are several routes in this Trans European Road Network in the Western Region, namely the N4, N6, N13, N15, N17, and N18. The WDC very much welcome this support and its major contribution to upgrading transport infrastructure which is essential to regional development.

The different EU Member States rely on various transport modes to a greater or lesser degree. In mainland Europe water based transport is of much more significance than in Ireland. Rail transport is also much more widely used. Within Ireland, road transport is the most important mode both nationally and regionally. Air transport provides vital external and internal links. Rail is less significant in terms of current usage. Maritime transport is important in terms of external trade. Use of inland waterways is confined to tourism and leisure use.

In this submission we will only examine transport issues that are of particular relevance to Ireland generally and the Western Region in particular.

2. Shifting the Balance between modes of transport

2.1 Improving Quality in the Road Sector

From both a national and regional perspective, road transport is the most important mode of transport in Ireland. According to the National Development Plan (NDP), the road network accounts for 96 per cent of passenger traffic and 90 per cent of freight transport². The quality of this network is, by EU standards, still relatively poor and major investment is required to redress this deficit. In less developed regions such as the Western Region rapid upgrading of the road infrastructure is crucial to its ability to attract inward investment and support from the Structural and Cohesion Funds in this context is very important.

2.2 Revitalising the Railways

While the WDC supports the promotion of the railways, it recognises that some advantages of rail as a mode of transport are less applicable to the Irish situation because Ireland is geographically very small and inter-city rail journeys are shorter than most inter-city services in Europe. Economies of scale are lost over shorter distances and Ireland's lack of a land link with the European mainland limits the potential for trans-European linkages. As a consequence, improving the quality of the road network in the peripheral regions will remain a priority.

It is only in recent years that the railways have received investment after years of neglect. Much of this infrastructure investment has been received in the form of grant assistance from both the EU Cohesion³ and Structural Funds. The WDC very much welcomes this long overdue support for the rail network. Our recent submission to the Strategic Rail Study, being conducted by the Department of Public Enterprise

² The National Development Plan, p.50.

³ Ireland's allocation from the Cohesion Fund for 2000-2003 amounts to €557 million. Approximately 50% of this funding is to be spent on transport projects, specifically the completion of the main roads network, which was started under the previous round of funding and on rail, the completion of track and signalling improvement works on mainline and suburban lines which also commenced under the previous round of funding.

examines rail transport in the Western Region in detail (see attached document). Here we will refer to rail in general and freight in particular.

Rail transport has several advantages over road-based alternatives, particularly its environmental superiority. These include better energy efficiency, lower emissions, reduced congestion costs and a better safety record. The WDC supports the idea of revitalising the railways particularly given the presence of the existing network, much of which could be up-graded and extended for use without the need for new networks. The upgrading of the railway infrastructure could also significantly reduce the spatial peripherality of much of the Western Region. Major improvements in terms of new rolling stock, additional services, better timetabling and increased speeds on the radial inter-city services between the Western Region and Dublin are required.

The proposals to develop new and existing infrastructure is very much welcomed.

Within Ireland the proportion of goods transported by rail was 9.3 per cent in 1989. It rose steadily to 10.9 per cent in 1992 but thereafter declined to 7.3 per cent in 1998 and has remained at around 7 per cent since then. The WDC believes that further investigation of proposals for a Western Rail Corridor (WRC) that would allow rail transport from Sligo and Ballina in the North West, through to Galway and onwards to Limerick and the ports of Cork and Rosslare is worthy of serious consideration. It has been noted that *there are significant road freight movements along a western corridor from the south-west region to the west and north-west*⁴. The WDC would very much welcome EU support for investigation of the feasibility of such a rail link.

The WDC particularly welcomes the commitment to and proposed measures to improve safety. Although much of the current NDP investment is designed to upgrade and improve safety standards, safety will remain of paramount importance.

The WDC also welcomes the proposed measures which will safeguard the quality of rail services and users' rights, particularly measures to address delays or failure to meet service obligations along with measures to develop service quality indicators, terms of contract and transparency of information for passengers.

2.3 Controlling the Growth in Air Transport

The WDC supports the proposed debate on the future of airports. This debate and the proposals such as making better use of existing capacity, reviewing the airport charges systems, integrating air transport with other modes and determining what new infrastructure is required are all key issues that have a critical bearing on facilitating development for the more peripheral member states and also the more marginal regions within member states. The WDC recommends that consideration of the future of airports be conducted in the context of balanced regional development and pay particular attention to the implications for more peripheral regions.

2.4 Linking up the Modes of Transport

The WDC supports efforts to link different transport modes, particularly linking the waterways with rail. In this regard the development of rail freight facilities to ports and at ports is crucial.

⁴ Goodbody Economic Consultants (2000) Transport Demand. p.15.

In the last decade there has been a dramatic growth in freight exports via Irish ports. However most of this increase (259%)⁵ has been in roll-on/roll-off (Ro/Ro) traffic most of which is transported internally on the road network. Lift-on/lift-off (Lo/Lo) traffic is container traffic which travels by rail. Ro/Ro traffic has been increasing at a faster rate than Lo/Lo traffic both because of time and cost savings and flexibility (door-to-door service) and this is in line with trends across Europe.

Ireland has limited potential to increase use of rail freight without significant investment particularly at ports. Moreover, freight users would need some encouragement to shift to rail and this would be likely to require the introduction of subsidies as is the case in other European states. Such subventions/grants could be directed at the consumer rather than the rail operator.

3. Placing users at the heart of transport policy

3.1 Unsafe Roads

The latest accident statistics reveal that a total of 415 persons were killed in 362 fatal accidents on Irish roads in 2000⁶. Ireland's rate of road deaths was 11.0 per 100,000 population, which ranks Ireland joint seventh out of the EU 15 member states⁷. The economic cost of reported road accidents in 2000, based on fatalities and injuries sustained is estimated at approximately €762 million⁸.

Within the Western Region, there were 91 fatalities in 79 different accidents in 2000, which represents approximately 22 per cent of Ireland's total⁹. The WDC welcomes and strongly endorses all the proposed measures in relation to improving road safety which include

- Reducing road deaths.
- Harmonising rules in relation to speeding and drink-driving. Ireland's National Roads Authority statistics show that, in 2000, 33 per cent of fatal accidents were single vehicle only collisions and these collisions are strongly associated with excessive speeding and/or alcohol.
- Identifying 'black spots' and harmonise signposting.
- The proposed requirement for coach manufacturers to fit seat belts on all vehicles produced.
- The promotion of training and education schemes aimed to tackle dangerous driving.
- Continuing efforts to combat drink-driving and drugs misuse.
- Developing a methodology to encourage independent technical investigations of road safety issues..

3.2 Rights and Obligations of Users

In the context of air transport the WDC would very much welcome any easing of the rules governing the public service obligations (PSOs) on links to the Community's outlying regions and small islands. Any easing of the rules which would allow the

⁵ Atkins McCarthy, (2000), p.6.

⁶ National Roads Authority, (2001), p.v.

⁷ *ibid.* This ranking is for 1999, the latest year for which international comparisons are available.

⁸ NRA website (2002).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.36.

service to become more user friendly from a providers' point of view is to be welcomed. The PSO has been very successful in allowing air operators provide a service from regional locations and airports in the Western Region. From a regional development perspective, regional airports provide a very important function. They are important in providing an alternative to road transport both in terms of accessing international connections at Dublin, but also to allow business users easy access to Dublin, the UK and mainland Europe. As such, the WDC would be concerned that any proposals to review and amend the airport charges systems and infrastructure charging would take account of and support the public service obligation which applies to regional airports.

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