



Transport & Mobility Forum

Iarnród Éireann

CACR Community, Liaison Officer
1 Horgan's Quay
Waterfront Square
Cork. T23 PPT8

*Via online consultation portal/
Email to cacr@irishrail.ie*

Transport and Mobility Forum, Cork
www.transportandmobilityforum.com
tmfcork@gmail.com

c/o The Environmental Forum
Bernadette Connolly
Mount Carmel, Kilcolman
Enniskeane, Co. Cork
P47 C578

23rd July 2025

Public Consultation – Response

Cork Area Commuter Rail – Phase 2 Emerging Preferred Options (EPO)

<https://www.irishrail.ie/en-ie/about-us/iarnrod-eireann-projects-and-investments/cork-area-commuter-rail#public-consultation-materials>

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for giving the general public and stakeholders the opportunity to feed into the public consultation on the Cork Area Commuter Rail project – Phase 2 (CACR 2), Emerging Preferred Option (EPO).

The Transport and Mobility Forum, Cork (TMF) is a cross-sectoral representative group of organisations who have a common interest in sustainable travel *. The TMF fully supports measures and policies promoting sustainable and active travel. Sustainable and Active Travel (cycling and walking) helps to reduce congestion on roads, improve air quality, supports a low carbon economy, reduces noise pollution and improves public health, as well as the general quality of life in the city.

As such it is the TMF's aim to support the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Overview

The TMF is very supportive of the overall plans for significantly upgrading the Cork Area Commuter Rail system (CACR).

A future proof public transport system for Cork must have a strong backbone of rail commuting, independent from and resilient to traffic congestion on the roads in and out of the City. Along with BusConnects and the plans for LUAS Cork light-rail, the Commuter Rail will play an important part in a fully integrated PT system, particularly connecting the northern and eastern hinterlands of the Cork Metropolitan Area (CMA) to the City. As reliability is a key factor for the uptake of public transport, the rail lines are an invaluable asset to the entire system.

The twin tracking of the Midleton branch and the through platform in Kent Station (Phase 1), along with the undergoing electrification and fleet renewal and expansion, are laying the foundation for higher frequency services.

The now present Phase 2 will see the addition of up to 8 new stations along the lines. This will **make the CACR much better accessible for a far wider part of the CMA's population.**

Business and retail hotspots like Blackpool will become directly accessible from e.g. Midleton or the new Dunkettle P+R, Mallow will see direct trains to employment centres like Little Island, and cruise ship passengers can find a direct train to Blarney just from alongside their ship in Cobh. And – as a very important element – Blarney will see the much-needed strategic Park+Ride facility in the north of the city.

Even within the City, residents of the new Tivoli quarter will get to offices in Blackpool within 10-15 minutes by PT, with trains every 10 minutes, which will transform the Cork commuter trains into a DART-like system.

As with all public transport networks ensuring that the greatest possible population/number of services/workplaces are within easy walking distance of a stop is of the upmost importance. Increasing the number of stations on an existing railway while ensuring, good permeability and high density land use in a vicinity of stations is one of the easiest and most efficient ways to improve this metric.

Observations

Please find below a number of observations that we hope will contribute to further improve the plans, primarily regarding accessibility of the stations and integration of the Commuter Rail into the overall PT and mobility system.

Transport & Mobility Forum

Trackwork:

We note that other than announced in the past, the **electrification** of the network will be delivered by **continuous overhead line** (25kV AC), and not by the deployment of battery electric trains.

Number of platform tracks

While Mallow station will be extended by a 3rd platform, to eventually have 5 tracks, in parts of the documentation (End-to-End drawings Mallow-Kent part 2) the rest of the line to Cork Kent Stn is shown be twin track only, including the stations. Only exception is the proposed passing loop at Rathduff , between Mallow and Blarney stations.

However, in the 'Emerging Preferred Options 1' document, **Blarney/Stoneview station** is shown to have a **3rd platform track** with a siding to the north.

We deem this **3rd platform track essential** to have the option of operating short running trains that (coming from Cork Kent) end at Blarney, as this is the end of the Cork City Metro area and location of the strategic P+R site, hence passenger demand can be expected to be lower between Blarney and Mallow.

This 3rd platform is also essential to not block the through tracks, esp. considering the passing Cork-Dublin intercity services, operating on the same line.

Station layouts:

Blarney / Stoneview

The forecourt of Blarney station will have the **large-scale Park+Ride facility**, aiming to serve motor traffic from the N/M20 corridor, and from surrounding communities like Braney, Tower etc. and let car users change over to continue into the City by rail.

This P+R facility and interchange is much needed and should have the **highest priority for delivery** in the entire CACR project.

While trains into Cork City will primarily serve the city centre (given the location of Kent Station), and later Blackpool, reaching **the employment hot-spots in the west of the City** (MTU, CUH, County Hall or UCC) would require P+R passengers to have another interchange to the bus or – later – LUAS to reach their destination. Where motorists were used to travel directly to their workplace, now the travel chain would be broken TWICE.

In this context, a **direct bus service from Blarney P+R to the west of the city** via Tower, serving the large employers there, could make P+R far more attractive for many.

Transport & Mobility Forum

While the provision of such a service is outside the scope of this project, **station / forecourt layout**, should ensure **space is earmarked enough for additional bus stops** and lay-by facilities to cater for the possible provision of such services or other unforeseen bus links in the future.

The **location of the bus stops** in the current plans appears a bit peripheral to the station entrance, while the set-down area is located closest to the platforms. Also, there are no **bus shelters** shown. This should be reconsidered in order to create a high-quality PT interchange. A small taxi rank might also be added.

As Blarney station will become a **transport node** with the strategic P+R site, the **absence of any commercial unit** (newsagent, convenience store, ...) is surprising. Rather than reducing the site to a purely functional interchange facility, Blarney station / P+R should become more of a 'place' and offer add-on services for the hundreds of car users that will change here from car to train, or train to bus. P+R must be a pleasant experience at an attractive site.

The same would apply to Dunkettle station / P+R.

Monard

The design of the access road does not have the facility to turn around from the exit lane and stay inside the car park. A small turning curve, also capable to carry a bus, should be added where entry and exit lanes split.

Blackpool/Kilbarry

At the proposed new Blackpool/Kilbarry station, the terrain is significantly rising from Blackpool shopping centre towards the (north-)east / Dublin Hill direction. The platform level will be ca. 15m above street level of the main trip attracting area. Today, the area east of the station (Dublin Hill) is connected towards the city with a quite steep and narrow 2 lane underpass under the railway, and a one-side only narrow footpath.

Vehicular access to the new station (set-down, smaller scale parking) will be from the east, while the most footfall of passengers for the station can be expected to be to the west (Shopping Centre, offices etc.).

Access to the station from the west (Redforge Rd/ shopping centre) will be via a lift and a set of serpentine stairs to the western (Mallow-bound) platform. Connection from here to the eastern platform and forecourt will be via a bridge (stairs, lifts) across the tracks.

While the **location** of the station is characterised by **significant topographic level differences**, we feel the proposed lay-out of the station does not take advantage of it but rather exacerbates the situation. **Vertical movements of passengers** imposed by significant level differences are a challenge: climbing

Transport & Mobility Forum

stairs is a discomfort, and universal access requires additional lifts. So the need for level changes imposed on passengers should be kept to a minimum.

As the main flow of passengers to/from the station will come from ca. 15m below platform level, crossing the tracks by an **underpass would make sense** to take advantage of the already existing level difference. But instead, passengers are supposed to get even higher across an overpassing bridge to get to the opposite platform, adding to unnecessary discomfort for the passengers.

We see this as a **missed opportunity to take advantage of the topographic situation** by connecting both platforms with an underpass. This underpass could also be developed as a public walkway to create a **high-quality active travel connection** between Dublin Hill and the busy Blackpool shopping centre area.

Further, for promoting an integrated PT network, the location of any bus stops serving Blackpool/Kilbarry station is not shown. The eastern forecourt does not show a bus stop. We commend, however, the location of bicycle parking nearest to the entrance from Dublin Hill.

We feel here, within the established urban area of the city, unlike in Stoneview or Dunkettle, car parking should not be a priority. With bus access, cycle parking and high density residential and commercial development to be prioritised over low density car parking with in easy walking distance of an urban station.

We acknowledge that creating an underpass would require a far more complex construction process and would compromise train operations during the construction phase. Nevertheless, we feel that a combined project with Cork City Council here would give the opportunity to largely improve connectivity for active and sustainable travel modes in the area.

As a **side comment**, but related to the above, when **Little Island station** was recently refurbished, a similar **opportunity was missed** to improve and shorten access ways for passengers coming across the N25 road bridge. If the new platform overpass bridge had slightly been extended to meet the ramped access walk to the southern platform (along the N25 slip road), passengers to or from the northern platform would be able to save ca. 100m of walking back and forth and climbing one flight of stairs to/from the overpass. In such cases, where the **lay-out would be adapted to local conditions** with reasonable additional effort, passengers could lastingly benefit from improved access, compared to just implementing a standard solution.

Tivoli

At the heart of a new city quarter that is supposed to be highly PT oriented, there should be bus stops planned outside the station. This applies predominantly to the southern (Tivoli development) side, but also to the north (N8 side). Access to a possible future bus stop should be facilitated on the N8, and

Transport & Mobility Forum

foot access to the northern side of the N8 should be considered. At a first step, the overpass bridge should be prepared for a later extension to also cross the N8 dual carriageway (Lower Glanmire Rd).

Dunkettle

As at Blarney station, the large-scale P+R facility will not only serve onward travel by train. For reaching the **large employers in the West of the City** (UCC, CUH, MTU), but also the **Mahon area** office parks directly via the N40 South Ring, change over to **bus services** will also be important. While 2 bus stops are planned right at the station entrance, more room should be earmarked (e.g. for lay-by bays) to allow the possible future provision of a number of additional bus routes calling here. A rain sheltered area would be essential for passengers.

Given the **high numbers of vehicle movements** in and out to be expected (with bulking likely in the pm peak when trains arrive), **capacity of the exit road** might become an issue. For reliable bus services in and out of the station forecourt, the need for a **bus lane** should be assessed, and room earmarked in the initial design to add one if needed.

We commend the high amount of bicycle lockers at the station. Given its location, the **bikes** will likely be used for the **tail end of the train trip**, for onward travel the large employers spread out around Little Island. So secure bicycle overnight parking will play an important role here.

As Blarney station, **Dunkettle will eventually be a major mobility hub**. This should also be reflected by adding space for a few **services** (news agent/coffee shop, parcel pick-up station etc.).

Carrigtwohill West

Access to station appears to be one sided only, as an isolated spur from the south (main road, Killahora L3004), and not providing direct access e.g. from the south-east, serving the extended facilities of 'Stryker' there in the adjoining business park. Further, there seems to be no entrance planned from the north with an extended industrial facility just north of the rail line (GSK, Gilead, and again Stryker further east). The train station should be **accessible in the most direct way possible from all directions**, as it will be in the middle of an extended industrial/business park with a high concentration of jobs.

Waterrock

Access from both sides of the rail line (incl. later from the south) should be prepared.

Ballynoe:

As the new Ballynoe station will be off-set from the nearest residential areas (up the hill), the car park lay-out should provide the **option for a bus to come in and turn**. The radii should be planned for accordingly, and a potential bus stop earmarked. This would physically facilitate the operation of a feeder bus into the station, as it might be hard to turn a bus elsewhere nearby.

A few trees and a rain shelter (for passenger pick-up) would be desirable.

Transport & Mobility Forum

Station access in general:

For the sake of **optimum accessibility of the stations / rail services**, access to the platforms should be possible from **both sides of the railway line**. Where development is only existing (or currently planned for) to one side – like e.g. Waterrock – preparations should be in place to add a second entrance at a later stage when needed.

Every effort should be taking to both maximise the area within both easy and reasonable walking distance and to ensure that the highest possible intensity of uses are prioritised within this area, high density residential or office for example rather than low intensity trip generators such as car parking or storage.

As we understand from one of the consultation events, access to the overpasses / platforms will be without physical ticket barriers, so the overpass bridges can also serve to link both sides of the railway line for pedestrians. This would be welcome to improve local connectivity across the rail line.

Other topics

Combination with cycle traffic

To better facilitate the integration of sustainable travel modes, the combination of train travel and cycle traffic shall receive special attention. Good and comfortable cycle access to the stations can multiply the catchment area of the commuter rail stations.

We commend the planned provision of larger scale cycle parking facilities at the new stations. An upgrade of the existing stations should go along with it.

For using Bike+Ride for the daily commute, i.e. leaving the bicycle at the station 10 hrs/day, 5 days a week, the availability of **secure and ideally locked cycle parking would be essential**, particularly with the further proliferation of more expensive electric bicycles. The parking of cargo-bikes should also be catered for.

Extended **options of carrying bicycles on the commuter trains** should also be made available. Apart from having dedicated **spaces on the trains**, the sufficient **size of lifts** at the stations would be essential here.

Experiences in other countries show that the combination of cycling and trains (also at the tail end of the journey) offers unbeatable flexibility and journey time reliability.

Trees and surfaces

We commend the use of permeable paving for the car spaces outside the stations, and storm water collecting green surfaces in the car parks.

Transport & Mobility Forum

We positively note the proposed larger scale planting of trees in the car parks. We feel, however, that their numbers can still be increased, e.g. around the perimeters of the larger car parks (Blarney, Monard, Dunkettle, Carrigtwohill West)

Conclusion

We strongly support the proposed scheme as it will dramatically increase the number of people who are served by the existing rail line. The proposal addresses the challenge in ensuring that the station's act as focus points for communities around which the activities which generate the highest number of trips are clustered becoming a focus of the community ensuring that the maximum number of people are able to use the rail line for the maximum number of trips. Furthermore, stations which are nodes of a holistic integrated transport system can greatly increase the catchment area of the rail line, integration with other modes (car, bus, bicycle, pedestrians) will be essential and must be catered for from the start. We hope our comments can assist in realising this ambition.

We would be obliged to further participate in the discourse and planning processes around this and other Active and Sustainable Travel improvement schemes as we feel that TMF can provide valuable input into the process. Please do not hesitate to contact us at any time at tmfcork@gmail.com.

Kind regards

Stephan Koch

Transport and Mobility Forum – Acting Chair

Darren McAdam-O'Connell

Transport and Mobility Forum – Coordinator

Note: *The comments within this submission are solely the view of the Transport and Mobility Forum (TMF) as a whole and not the opinion or view of any individual partner of the TMF.*

**) A full list of partners in the Transport and Mobility Forum can be found at*

<https://transportandmobilityforum.com/partners/>