



Transport & Mobility Forum

Iarnród Éireann

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*Via online consultation portal/
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Public Consultation – Response

Cork Area Commuter Rail

Preferred Option

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

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, Preferred Option.

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).

1 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.

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

Connecting train stations with all other modes of transport, light-rail, bus routes, DRT feeder services or Park + Ride / Bike + Ride with seamless interchanges is key to successfully shift commuting to a fully integrated sustainable transport network.

The provision of large-scale Park + Ride infrastructure at Dunkettle and Blarney stations and delivering a significant volume of high-density transit-oriented development around Blarney, Water-Rock and, in particular, Monard stations is strategically important to the future development and sustainable transport infrastructure of the Cork Metropolitan Region.

2 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.

2.1 Trackwork:

Additional tracks

Operational flexibility regarding the track infrastructure is key to reliable high frequency services on the rail line that also carries the Cork-Dublin (and possibly future Cork-Limerick) intercity services. In this context we welcome the additional platform in Mallow station, and the 3rd (and earmarked 4th) track at Blarney / Stoneview station.

In Blarney / Stoneview, this allows for higher frequency services to link Kent station with Blarney P+R, with extra services terminating here, preferably on the southernmost platform with comfortable level access from the P+R site / bus stops.

Electrical infrastructure

We note that a considerable number of the constraints referenced in the report concern the challenges, difficulties and sacrifices required to provide continuous overhead electrical infrastructure past or through existing infrastructure (in most cases overpass road bridges) which are often of an historic nature. We question the necessity of providing continuous overhead electrical infrastructure rather than using small batteries on trains to bridge short gaps in the overhead electrical infrastructure. Such small batteries also provide the rolling stock with a level of resilience to faults in the powering infrastructure which can positively affect reliability.

Consideration should be given to the cost benefit analysis of discontinuous rather than absolutely continuous overhead infrastructure.

2.2 Lay-out of Stations and their Surroundings

A key consideration must always be ensuring that the greatest possible population/number of services/workplaces are within easy walking distance of a station.

This may be a less central concern in cases where there is an established station site in an existing urban context, such as Cork Kent station, Mallow, and Midelton stations, where these considerations are more properly the concern of the local authority's spatial development and urban planning processes. In this context it is still important to ensure that station entrances provide direct access from both sides of the track, and, in this context, we strongly support the proposed alterations to Mallow station. We would however suggest the addition of a small amount of bike parking in the vicinity of the new western entrance.

2.2.1 Necessity of Park + Ride (P+R) – Early Delivery and Dunkettle

As commuters to Cork City often start their journey from far beyond the walkable catchment of the rail lines, multi-modal travel is required to reduce the amount of car traffic into the city. The required interchange facilities (Park + Ride) at the rail stations are of utmost importance here. At present, however, P+R sites of relevant (medium) size only exist at Mallow and Midleton stations, leaving the population between those and the city with little alternatives to travelling into Cork City by car. The only sizable – bus based – P+R site today is Black Ash, on the southern edge of Cork.

We welcome the fast tracking of the Dunkettle station with its strategic P+R and Mobility Hub in the strongest possible terms. The Blarney/Stoneview station and associated strategic P+R site should also be fast tracked, however unlike Dunkettle, Blarney should not only serve as a dedicated P+R station.

These and other Park + Ride facilities are urgently needed, as to date, there is only one public P+R facility in Cork City, the Black Ash P+R at the N40 Kinsale Rd interchange at the southern city edge. This location, however, is far too close to the city centre, and does not capture motor traffic coming from the North or East. With the forthcoming substantial re-distribution of road space in the city along its main arteries (see BusConnects Sustainable Transport Corridors STC, and the LUAS line) in favour of reliable PT and high-quality Active Travel, the number of car journeys inside the city needs to be reduced. Incoming car traffic from the hinterland, underserved with public transport, hence needs to have interchange facilities at the city edges or even further out to enable drivers to change from car to public transport, in relation to this submission: to the train.

These P+R interchange facilities are urgently needed and should ideally be operational when roadworks in the city start for BusConnects and the LUAS. We feel that Cork City cannot wait another 10 years to have a substantial P+R site on its Northern and Eastern sides available.

Dunkettle station

An exception to the general rule, that the key consideration should be ensuring that the greatest possible population/number of services/workplaces are within easy walking distance of a station is the proposed Dunkettle station which is best thought of as dedicated Park + Ride station. This P+R location is uniquely appropriate due to the proximity of the station to a major road interchange. This makes it both particularly accessible for motor traffic, but also effectively landlocks the area to the South of the station, as it lies between the railway and major roadways making both inaccessible for pedestrians and an unsuitable location for housing or employment. In this context maximizing the number of parking spaces available is

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a priority while also giving due consideration to providing suitable infrastructure to allow the P+R to function as a proper multimodal transport hub, including access to bus interchange and Bike + Ride facilities.

We therefore welcome the proposed provision of bike parking and e-bike lockers both North and South of the tracks. Consideration should also be given to an active travel link south of the transport hub to Little Island as this station serves a large employment cluster, which at present is extremely challenging to access by active travel or public transport.

In our EPO stage submission, we suggested a bus shuttle from Dunkettle along the N40 South Ring to directly serve large employers in the west of the City (UCC, MTU, CUH). Further local feeder / distributor buses into Little Island should start from Dunkettle station. We further highlighted and want to mention again, that *'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.'* (TMF submission of 23/07/2025, pg 6)

We are aware that Dunkettle station and P+R are not subject to this present public consultation and welcome that it has been separated from the CACR Phase 2 project (together with Blackpool / Kilbarry station) in order to fast-track its approval process and delivery.

Blarney / Stoneview station

Blarney / Stoneview station with its strategic P+R facility is of equal importance to the City as Dunkettle P+R, as it is the only forthcoming P+R site to the north of the City where today there is no offer for car commuters to change to public transport.

While the primary use is supposedly a change over from car to train services into Kent station and beyond, it should also serve a function as multi-modal hub, including bus services to Blarney village and Tower and to the west of Cork City and Ballincollig. For commuters to the large employers and educational campuses in the West, like UCC, MTU, CUH and County Hall, a direct bus shuttle from Blarney P+R via Tower and Carrigrohane would avoid another change of mode, to travel from Kent station across the city to their final destination.

In this context we welcome the much increased capacity of Blarney / Stoneview P+R in the PO plans. However, we suggest again that interchange from car to buses be better catered for in the P+R lay-out, with stops and lay-by bays included in the plans.

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As Blarney / Stoneview P+R will be an interchange point of major significance, this should be reflected in the design of the place, e.g. with a larger scale roofing for weather protection and space for passenger services like a newsagent, coffee-shop etc.

Blarney / Stoneview station, its approval process and delivery, should subsequently be of similar priority as is Dunkettle P+R. As fast-tracking here would be most welcome.

2.2.2 General considerations for New Green Field Stations

A key factor, determining the future level of use and the level of benefit of the Commuter rail system to the future development of the metropolitan area, is maximizing development within a walking distance of stations. It is vital that these areas are developed at high density with good permeability to ensure the maximum number of residents, of workers, and of services are within walking distance of each station. Due to the existing low-density character and poor permeability of many existing areas of the metropolitan area and the commuter belt in particular. Most aspects of ensuring this is achieved are outside the scope of this consultation under more properly addressed as part of the city or county development plan.

However, the green-field stations such as Water-rock, Blarney and particularly Monard (and to a lesser extent Ballynoe & Carrigtwohill West) are free from these constraints. Monard station is intending to be the centre and focal point of a new town of 13,000 residents. The placement and orientation of these stations and how they connect to the existing and future street network is a key importance in not only, allowing the optimization of future urban development to allow this high-density permeable development to take place, but also setting the tone for the prosed development of new communities.

We are particularly concerned to avoid poor examples of the siting and access arrangement for newly constructed stations in Ireland which prevent the development of a residential or office space in close vicinity to the station hence severely limiting the population which can be served. For example, the M3 Parkway station outside Dunboyne, County Meath (which has its own station) is placed between the motorway and a limited access distributor road blocking pedestrian access from 3 sides and hence preventing any residential or commercial development to address the station.

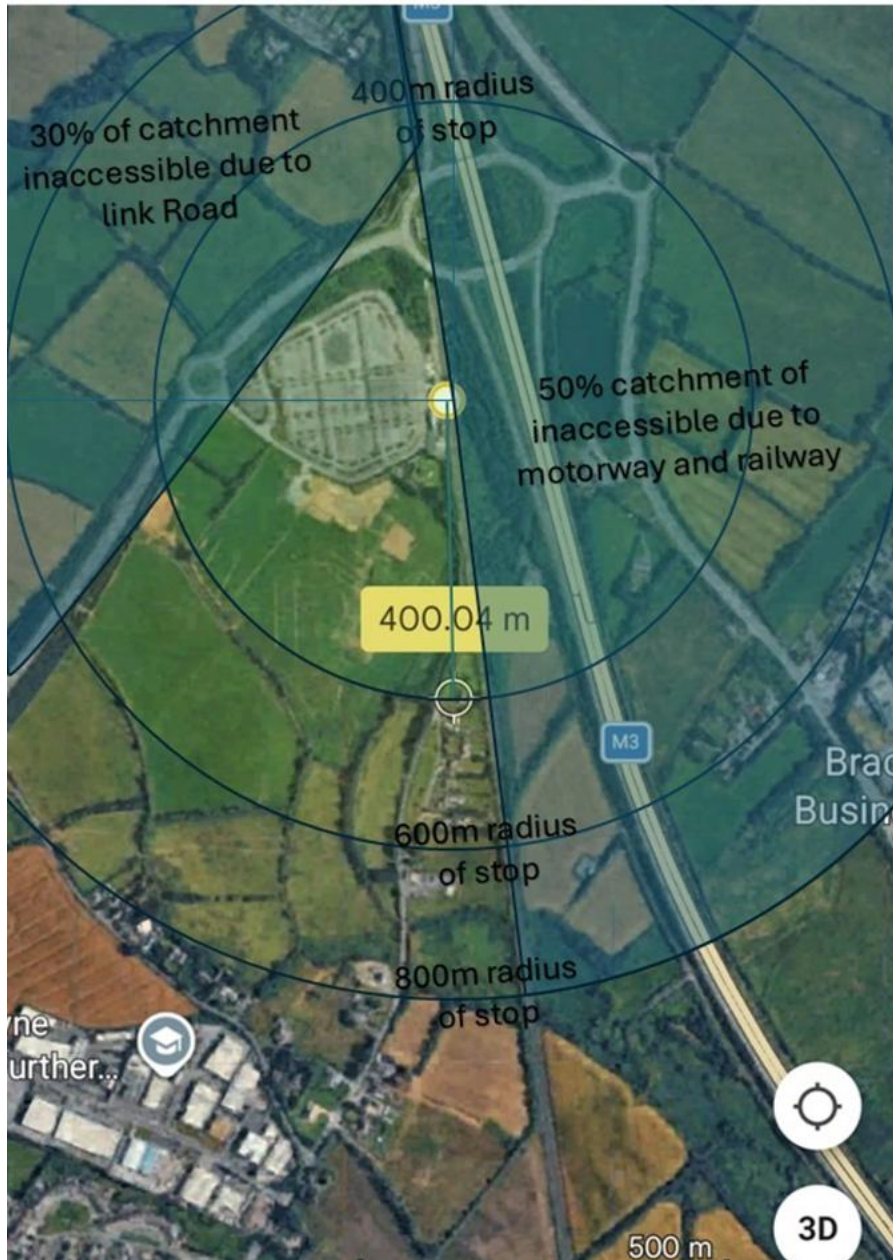


Figure 1: M3 Parkway station / Dunboyne as illustration of how the catchment area of a station can be dramatically reduced by poor choice of its location

In general, anything that blocks direct pedestrian access, or any low intensity uses such as parking, distributor roads, warehousing distribution etc. should be avoided within 800m of a station (i.e. the typical walking catchment). However, we acknowledge that there are some low intensity uses such as depots, sidings, and Park + Ride which must be located adjacent to

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the tracks and in close proximity to the stations. In order to minimise the impact on future high-density transit-oriented development care should be taken when planning the track alignment and station layout to ensure that these can be facilitated without blocking all access to the station and minimizing the amount of land-take for such uses in close vicinity to the stations.

In an idealized situation of unimpeded pedestrian routes radiating out from a “Green Field” station, with very high-density transit-oriented development at 0-200m walking distance from the station, high-density transit-oriented development at 200-400m, medium high density at 400-600m, and medium density at 600-800m from the station, up 80,000 residents can be housed with 15 minutes’ walk of each station. While theoretically optimised maximums are never achieved in practice, a population 20,000 around each stop is achievable

This can be achieved by for example

- Locating stations at least 500-600m meters from distributor roads, or other features which restrict pedestrian permeability.
- Situating sidings, depots, and maintenance infrastructure equidistant between train stops as far from both as possible.
- Sidings, depots, and maintenance infrastructure as well as park and ride are all on the same quadrant of the stop’s vicinity.

Ensuring road access to sidings, depots, and maintenance infrastructure as well as park and ride is oriented away from the train station.

We are aware that in real-life a multitude of other constraints (topography, land-use and ownership etc.) need to be considered and compromises be made.

2.2.3 Strategic importance of certain stations

The location of Monard station is almost the only location on the CACR line where these criteria can be achieved. Most if not all other areas along the CACR line have significant space constraints, primarily because of the close proximity of the rail alignment (from Mallow to Kent to Midelton) to major roads (N20, N8, and N25), and the proximity of the sea along the Cobh line. It is for this reason that that Monard was selected as the site of a strategic transit-oriented development and that unimpeded pedestrian access must be prioritised over parking and road access within 400-800m of this station.

As the South side of the tracks at Monard station has more constraints with slopes, the majority of, but not all, development is envisaged to be to the North. Hence, the station should primarily address the northern entrance with bike parking, a future bus interchange

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etc. here. (Though co-locating bus infrastructure with car parking until the first phase of development is complete makes more sense), while plant, equipment, maintenance, etc., as well as parking and motor vehicle access, should be confined to the South.

This would apply similarly to Blarney / Stoneview station. While here the focus south of the track is the provision of a Park + Ride and transport hub (see 2.2.1 above), to the north of the tracks there is substantial opportunity for the development of high-density transit-oriented development. This should proceed similarly to what is proposed at Monard. As such access to the north of the station should not compromise or complicate any future plans for a pedestrianized area to the north of the station or development of high-density urban character in the vicinity of the station. Access to the north should be primarily by active travel and does not need to include provision for private motor vehicle access or a large turning circle."

2.2.4 Station access in general:

In relation to our thoughts above, we welcome elements in the PO plans like for example

- At Carrigtwohill West station the improved pathway access to the south-east
- At Blarney station the prepared future station entrance to the north
- At Water Rock station the prepared future entrance from the south

While station access for active travel, and in most cases, public transport by bus, is necessary on both sides of a station, access by private motor vehicles is not required on both sides of any station. And in the case of new Greenfield stations, with their surroundings to be developed as high-density transit-oriented communities, station layout and design should not compromise or complicate such developments, giving future planners the option of pedestrianising the area around the station entrance on one or both sides of a station.

Station lay-outs should also reflect local topography and in case take advantage of same. A recent unfortunate example here is Little Island station, where a recently refurbished pedestrian bridge ends 10m short of the ramped pedestrian access path at the same height level, but still forces passengers accessing the station to go down the entire ramped path to the station entrance, just to then return on the platform and climb up the stairs to the bridge again. Adjustment of the standard lay-out here to local conditions would have created a far more convenient access to the eastbound platform coming from the road bridge across the N25.

We trust that such scenarios be avoided in future.,

2.3 Integration with Bus and Bicycle

Integration of the Commuter Rail with other transport modes is of high importance. Apart from car travel via P+R, convenient access by bus and bicycle are equally important to harvest the full potential of an extended catchment and create a fully integrated sustainable transport system.

2.3.1 Bus access

Following the objective to create a fully integrated public transport system, interlinking the train stations with bus routes either en route or as local feeder services (also as demand responsive services with flexible routing) is important. Access for buses to the stations' entrances must be provided.

Room for bus stops and the option to have bus services terminating there (vehicle turns, lay-by bays) must be included in the stations' forecourts. Where bus services are not imminently planned, spaces should be earmarked to serve these purposes at a later stage.

Where high (bulked) volumes of cars leaving the P+R sites are expected (e.g. Blarney, Dunkettle), separate bus lanes or exits to the road network should be considered.

Examples in the PO plans are:

At Ballynoe station, due to very difficult terrain (e.g. steep slope) access to the residential areas to the east would call for a local feeder bus. At the station, however, the lay-out does not show any provisions for a bus to stop or turn.

Tivoli

2.3.2 Combination with Cycle traffic

The combination with cycling can be twofold: Accessing the station by bike and park (Bike + Ride) or carrying the bicycle on the train for the later onward journey. Both options should be catered for.

Bike+Ride

As cycling (esp with e-bikes) will substantially expand the catchment of the train stations by active travel, safe and secure bicycle parking at the stations is essential. Commuters will typically leave their bikes there for a full working day, 5 days a week. Especially with e-bikes becoming more and more popular, weather and theft protected parking is essential. Bicycle parking would hence need to be provided to a high degree in access-controlled compounds, bike bunkers or lockers. Where station entrances exist to either side of the tracks, both sides should have Bike + Ride facilities.

Special attention should also be given to stations with potential bike travel at the end of the train commute (LAST mile), where bicycles are likely to be regularly parked overnight. Secure bike parking

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is particularly important here. Stations in question would likely be Dunkettle, Little Island or Carrigtwohill West.

Taking the bike on the train

Taking a bike on the train is popular in many countries across Europe, as it offers full flexibility on both end of the train journey. Apart from dedicated room on the trains, access to the platforms must be adequately provided. This applies in particular for lifts to reach the pedestrian bridges. These should be large enough to take bicycles, e-bikes and also shorter Cargo-Bikes (e.g. increasingly popular 'long-tails' with 2 child seats in the back). As a matter of inclusion, cyclists of all age should be able to access the bridges to the platform with their bicycle, and the likelihood of carrying an e-bike up and down stairs is very limited.

The option of combined bike and train travel should be provided in the station design.

2.4 Other topics

Location of main depot and diversion of Greenway

The proposed diversion of the Carrigtwohill to Midleton Greenway to accommodate the construction of the maintenance depot west of Water Rock station does not in itself add significant or excessive to travel distance along the Greenway. However, when taken in combination with other existing constraints on the Greenway route in that area and the number of crossings and conflicts with roads / motor traffic in this part of the greenway, the overall result is a greenway which is significantly less direct, continuous, and attractive than would be ideal. We also note that this results in the Greenway not serving Water Rock station.

We feel given these existing constraints and the desirability of the Greenway serving Water Rock station that the Greenway should cross over the railway alignment west of the proposed maintenance depot and proceed on the south side in close proximity to the railway line until Water Rock station at which stage it could cross back to the north side of the tracks. This would have two advantages: It creates a more direct, uninterrupted route, and a quieter and more attractive environment for the Greenway. While also serving Water Rock station and the area of undeveloped land between the rail alignment and the N25, it also gives planners the option of a future high-density transit-oriented development in this area served by both a railway station on the Greenway link.

Transport Analysis

Regarding Train Service Specifications (Project Report, chapter 5), TSS Options 1, 2, & 2a are all well thought out and highly desirable options. The choice of which option to go with should be informed by how this will impact on Intercity, services & possible future direct services to Limerick & Galway. It should also be a priority to ensure nothing is done which would compromise or complicate a future extension of local rail services to Buttevant and Charleville.

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Trees and Green surfaces

We commend generous layout of car parks with numerous patches of green surfaces, e.g. at Blarney/Stoneview station. This contributes to natural attenuation of storm water as well as to an attractive landscaping. Trees should be included in the forecourts' landscaping wherever possible (these are not shown in the PO plans) to improve local microclimate, promote biodiversity, provide carbon sinking capacities and contribute to the stations' quality as a 'place'.

Parking stands should be finished with semi permeable surfacing to also allow for natural storm water attenuation.

3 Conclusion

We strongly support the proposed CACR Phase 2 project as a whole 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 stations act as focus points for communities around which the activities which generate the highest number of trips are clustered. The Commuter Rail stations becoming a focus of the community will ensure 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. High quality integration with other modes (car, bus, bicycle, pedestrians) and seamless interchange 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 project and other 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

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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/>