

My apologies for being unable to attend the meeting held in Londonderry to examine the rail link between Belfast and Derry. Thank you for making contact.

I work for the Loughs Agency and our remit includes the development of marine tourism. The rail link is a significant product within the marine tourism portfolio being an attraction in its own right as well as a conveyance for tourists wishing to visit Derry and the northwest.

The rail line is a marine tourism line. After Coleraine, the line follows the coast, bursting through the tunnel at Downhill to run behind Benone beach, offering glimpses of this long, long sandy beach running out to Magilligan Point, the Atlantic Ocean beyond. Dipping inland, the railway comes back seawards to bound Lough Foyle, the famed hills of Donegal rising from the far shore. The line follows the lough, alternating between running tight to salt marsh and striding across flat polder lands claimed from the sea in centuries past to provide some of the country's most fertile land.

The final stretch to the (current) end of the line slips alongside the River Foyle, offering fantastic views up the river to the spires of Londonderry on the banks of the Foyle. As the train pulls into the station, passengers can look across the river to their ancient city destination and the modern link provided by the Peace Bridge.

The rail line in question is, of course, one of the Great Railway Journeys and featured as such on national television. This kudos prompts many people to travel the line as tourists.

Clearly, the rail link with the causeway coast (via Coleraine and Portrush) and with Belfast (and thence with the Republic of Ireland's still relatively extensive rail network) offers an attractive and convenient travel option for the many tourists staying in those areas but wishing to visit Ireland's best preserved walled city with its museums, riverside walks, aquarium, visitor centres and flourishing cultural scene.

Andy

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