



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Regional Development

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into the Coleraine to Londonderry
Rail Track Phase 2 Project:
Stakeholder Event (Table 1)

27 January 2015

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Regional Development

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr John Dallat
Mr Cathal Ó hÓisín

Witnesses:

Mr Scott Kennerley	Consumer Council
Ms Mary Casey	Into the West
Mr Eamonn McCann	Into the West
Mr Denis Bradley	Public
Ms Jean Dunlop	Public

Mr Cathal Ó hÓisín: You are very welcome. Thank you very much for coming along. This is all part of the inquiry that we called before Christmas. My name is Cathal Ó hÓisín, and I am one of the MLAs for East Derry. East Derry is quite well-represented today, by me and John Dallat. You have a third of the MLAs from that constituency — which is, maybe, the most relevant constituency in that it is the one that the biggest end of the railway runs through.

This is an evidence-taking session, and, as the Clerk said earlier, try to keep things fairly concise, as we do not have long: we have about 10 minutes. We have divided this up into a number of subject matters. Mine is the first: the role of the Derry-Coleraine railway service in connecting people to employment, education and essential services. It is really the crux of what the railway should be and is about.

Mr Eamonn McCann (Into the West): I think the reference to education is particularly apt here. Coincidentally, our railway line goes from Derry to Coleraine through Jordanstown to Belfast. Those are the four campuses of Ulster University, although soon there will only be three. That provides, or ought to provide, a real marketing opportunity, which I do not think has been taken up. We do not see that being hammered home around the university. There is also the fact that you can work on a train: you can use WI-FI and so forth, which you cannot do on any other means of internal transport. I will leave it at that, as I know I have to speak very briefly. That is one point about our railway that I would like to see taken up in the future.

Mr Ó hÓisín: Eamonn, I agree absolutely. I drive to Belfast four days a week, and in real time that is four hours of dead time because you cannot do anything in a car. You might get away with something on a bus, but you certainly can work on a train. I agree 100%.

Ms Mary Casey (Into the West): We have lecturers in the university system — I am talking about the University of Ulster — who lecture on different campuses, and therefore they have to get to different

campuses. A new vice chancellor is coming in, Paddy Nixon, and he will start soon. The current vice chancellor, Richard Barnett, was committed to Magee, however, the bulk of Ulster University's investment went into the £150 million project at the York Street site in Belfast.

In relation to employment, 40% of the population in the city is under 25; one in five young people are unemployed and suffering from depression; 23% are under 16; and the bulk of investment and jobs, such as the 500 created recently by PwC for accountants and lawyers, are in the Belfast metropolitan area. We need to get our population of over 200,000 from the region to the jobs in Belfast, if that is where they are going to be. We need fast hourly services, taking one hour or one hour and five minutes, which Mal McCreevy stated he could provide, at peak times to get people to and from their work.

In relation to hospital facilities, I had to go to Belfast recently when a member of my family was in the City Hospital, which has its own station. It is where the cancer service is and where most of the large investment is going, and we are promised when we have the radiotherapy clinic etc. So, there are those issues too.

This city has been identified for connections by the North/South Ministerial Council under the north-west gateway initiative. The north-west gateway initiative was discussed at a meeting as recently as 14 December in Armagh. However, it has been deferred and deferred and deferred. The south eastern partnership, the peace and reconciliation body under Pat Colgan, has stated that this north-west gateway initiative is going to happen, yet there is no budget set aside for it. Whilst there has been investment into different areas of the region, this cross-party grouping established by OFMDFM will hopefully harness the north-west gateway initiative hub to a budget, to be targeted and to happen from within this city and for this region. The promised transportation hub for this city will have spokes going out into the north-west cross-border region of Donegal, which has suffered unemployment of 6,000 over a number of years. We have got the statistics under ILEX for the levels of deprivation in this super-council area, which is now linked to Limavady. That must be responded to.

Ms Jean Dunlop (Public): I speak on behalf of the Coleraine end of the line. Not only do we want hourly services, but we want enhanced start and finish times. Do not forget the weekends either. At the moment, the first train from Coleraine will get you into the station here at 8:33 am, which does not give you enough time to get into Magee and then to wherever you need to go in Magee. It is the same at night. The last train home tonight for me is at 9:33 pm, and it is 7:33 pm on Saturday and Sunday. It is totally useless, plus the fact that if the service is only every two hours and you are coming here for a meeting, you have a lot of hanging-around time, which is no good.

Mr Ó hOisín: We took some evidence on the train coming here today, which was quite convincing about that — *[Inaudible.]*

Mr Scott Kennerley (Consumer Council): The question is about employment, education and essential services. Northern Ireland is configured in such a way that there are a lot of essential services, employment and education opportunities centred in and around Belfast. So it is essential that there are good efficient public transport services connecting the two cities and regions.

The Department for Regional Development is on record as stating that the Minister's goal is to have a public transport system that is an accessible, affordable, viable alternative to the private car. In order to deliver that vision, there needs to be an effective rail system linking the three areas of Derry/Londonderry, Coleraine and Belfast. That requires the railway system to be developed to meet the needs of the passengers. If you look at the statistics for passenger numbers, both on the rail line and on the 212 Goldline bus service linking the areas, there is obviously a demand, and, if services are tailored to the needs of passengers and consumers, they will be used.

The Consumer Council's view on all public transport services is that there needs to be a thorough understanding of the who, what, when, where, why and how of people travelling currently. A public transport system then needs to be built to match those needs, rather than what we currently have, which is a public transport system that forces people to change their needs if they want to use it.

Ms Dunlop: I can give you an example of where transport is not meeting needs despite having some of the capacity to do so. It does not just apply to Derry; the same applies everywhere. Round about Christmas, there were three times when three of the six carriages on the train up to Belfast were closed off, because they said staff were sick. Six carriages were going —

Mr Ó hOisín: Why were the three closed off?

Ms Dunlop: That is what I am trying to say. According to the conductor, they did not have enough staff. They needed two conductors to manage the six carriages, and they only had one. One did not turn up at the last minute, so we were all shunted off the back carriages to the front of the train, which was already packed.

Ms Casey: Can I come in here? I want to tell you that, from Central Station to Ballymena, people have to sit on the floor of the train or stand regularly. It is a disgrace from a customer-relationship point of view. As you were saying, Jean, the problem is then, when you put on the two or three carriages to make a six-carriage train, there is no connection between the three and the three and therefore they have to put on two conductors. It is a nonsense.

Mr Ó hOisín: Thank you, everybody. That session on question 1 has ended. Do you have dates for that, Jean? It does not happen on the buses because if the bus is full, they order another bus to go through.

Ms Dunlop: I was at the bus stop in High Street, probably around one year ago. When the bus got to High Street, it filled up with half the people there. The rest of the people were left standing there.

Mr Ó hOisín: Maybe I could talk to you privately afterwards about that, if that is all right.

Mr John Dallat: Our topic is the role of the Derry to Coleraine railway service in the economy of the north-west. Denis, will we fire off with you?

Mr Denis Bradley: I am just an ordinary consumer who would use the train more regularly if it were available at the appropriate times and hours. Quite often, I use the train to go to Belfast and end up coming back on the bus for all kinds of reasons, mainly being that the train is very badly timed and therefore inappropriate.

I find all this a bit surreal. My main contribution to this is that I just find this incredibly surreal that, in this day and age, we should be having an inquiry into whether and what we should do with the train between the two main cities of a particular area. We have either lost the grip of ourselves or we have lost the economic thread of all this.

There will always be tension between a central city, the main capital city, and any other regional place. That happens between Dublin and the rest of the place. It happens in London, Germany and so forth, but nowhere else in the world would I consider that in whatever year we are in, 2015, there would be a discussion about a railway line and a well-programmed railway connection between two cities in a region. It just would not be happening at the moment, yet we are forced into this kind of inquiry.

Now, it is partly because of the neglect, obviously, that has happened for years and years and, secondly, because of the lack of money to actually build a proper second railway line which would go more directly to Belfast. So, we are now left with the situation where we do a tourist trip around Coleraine, through Ballymena and into Belfast, and back the same way. It is very beautiful in its own way and is a wonderful experience. The train always outstrips the bus and the car for 1,000 various reasons. It is a much more civilised way, but when you come down the economics of this situation, any businessman or organisation has to think, "What is the connectivity between two cities?" That is one of the bottom lines that he asks. If you say, "Well, actually, we have a small airport which has a couple of flights into it from a few places and a good bus service between the two main cities, but we have a railway line that can only really go one way at one time", I think that whoever he or she might be would kind of scratch their head and say, "Well, that is a strange phenomenon."

So, you are very welcome, John, and it is very nice to see the Committee here. It is typical of the situation that we end up with two north-west politicians and the central politicians remain at home for a variety of reasons. That actually happens all the time. It is not the same distance from Derry to Belfast as it is from Belfast to Derry because the people from Derry always travel to Belfast and the people from Belfast very occasionally travel to Derry. As I say, that happens in Dublin, London and so forth, but if you are actually doing an inquiry, it would appear to me to be important that the politicians

who will actually make some suggestions to the Minister on this situation actually get out, be present and get some kind of acquaintance with the situation.

When it comes to the economy, there is also a big issue. I am going on far too long. I do not have that much to say, but I just want to finish off by saying this: Derry and this region is always accused of whingeing and so forth. How can you be accused of whingeing if you are at the top of every unwanted economic statistical analysis? Top when it comes to lack of employment, lack of health facilities, lack of this, lack of that. That is not good for the economy of any particular place, no matter where it may be, if it all concentrates in one particular area. What is beginning to show itself now is that Belfast is becoming much too crowded in too many fashions. Therefore, it needs to become distributed in the rest of the place.

We will always be the second city. That will always be the reality. That is OK. You have to live with that and I am glad and welcome it, but that does not mean that in 2015, you do not have a proper rail service between the two places.

Mr Dallat: I think that your point is well made, Denis. Of course, you know that 15 years ago, they were closing it.

Mr Denis Bradley: Absolutely.

Mr E McCann: Following on from what Denis said, it is true that, in any situation, the second city in any area can still feel, and usually with good reason, that it has not been treated fairly when compared to the capital. That is true between Birmingham and London, for example, or Manchester and London. More aptly, we hear all the time about Cork and Dublin. It seems to me that, just because that is the case, it does not mean that we cannot address it specifically in relation to this part of the world.

Part of the uniqueness or distinctiveness of this situation is that there is a perception, which is largely well founded although sometimes taken much too far, that Derry has been neglected, whether deliberately or not, down through the years. The fact is that there is a natural pull and a magnetic attraction from the big metropolitan city for resources, industry, facilities of an artistic, cultural and sporting nature and all the rest of it. It is left to its own devices, as it were, for the free flow of resources according to supply and demand. You will find, if you stand back from it, that the smaller second city will lose out as resources flow to the larger one. In that situation, and particularly given the history of the Derry/Belfast relationship, it requires not just goodwill or fair treatment towards Derry, but a conscious intervention by government to say that there is a problem and that it is not a level playing field for whatever reason. I am fed up with people — I do it myself — getting into the historical dimensions of it, but, for whatever reason, there is not a level playing field. There is an imbalance.

Mr Dallat: So, Eamonn, you are saying that there is a deficit.

Mr E McCann: There is a deficit that has to be specifically addressed when we are talking about transport infrastructure, patterns of inward investment, location of educational facilities and such things. It does not just require fair play or us to say, "Let's stand back and not give anybody an advantage". The advantage is inbuilt for Belfast and, therefore, it needs a conscious intervention. The Government are the only people who can do that.

Ms Jean Dunlop: In all these discussion, I always focus on Coleraine because it is in danger of getting left out completely in all these things. A better connection between the two cities, Derry and Belfast, can only benefit Coleraine, even from the point of view that there is very little work left in Coleraine. If you were to stand a chance of getting a job somewhere else along the line, you would need better rail services. As I said during the last submission, services are not too bad to Belfast now but are still atrocious to Derry. Earlier starting times and later finishing times are very important to enable people in Coleraine to get to Derry for work and to get to the airports for travel etc.

Mr Dallat: Did you say that you are from Coleraine?

Ms Dunlop: Yes, I am.

Mr Dallat: I am sure that somebody will make the point — maybe they are not here — that the railway is also critical to Coleraine, Ballymoney, Ballymena, Limavady; everybody is on a winner.

Ms Casey: The Into the West railway lobby group was established in 2001. With the threat of the line being closed at Coleraine, a group came together and set up that voluntary campaign. We have met various government officials and elected representatives, and we have petitioned on the trains and marched the streets of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry to gain support. We are now at the stage where, 15 years later, we are still asking the same questions as to why we have, as Denis said, this inquiry in the first place.

Eamonn mentioned the need for intervention. The need for intervention was identified way back in the 1980s and the early 1990s when the University of Ulster was being established at Magee, when it took a Westminster parliamentary select Committee to turn around a decision by the Northern Ireland Department of Education not to invest in Magee and to invest in Jordanstown.

Mr Dallat: Mary, we only have a few minutes.

Ms Casey: We will have the main centre for higher education based in Belfast. We need to get our young people to that centre. We have the highest unemployment black spot in the north-west, and the new Derry and Strabane council will be the highest in the United Kingdom at 8.2%. We have 40% of our population that is under 25. If I had been out to the States and was campaigning to — *[Inaudible.]* — into this city and they say to me, "How do we get there, Mary?"

Mr Kennerley: Specifically in relation to the economy, as you have said, if you are a businessman looking to invest, you look at where the skills are, whether there is a skill base to actually do the work that you want to be done and what the connections are like. In terms of transport infrastructure, the policy of the Northern Ireland Government —

Mr Denis Bradley: There is one thing on that, just to follow that through. It is actually more appropriate here because Invest Northern Ireland does not actually tell businesspeople where to go to and there is no thingummy. That means that infrastructure is much more important. Some countries do not do that in their investment policy; they say that a certain percentage will be taken to certain parts of the region. That does not happen here, which means that the infrastructure is more important.

Mr Kennerley: The point that I was going to make —

Mr Denis Bradley: Sorry for cutting across.

Mr Kennerley: — is that government policy is already in place. The policy fit for transport is good. The regional development strategy, for example, highlights the importance of Derry as the gateway to the north-west and the economic driver, and it recognises that the principal driver for the economy in Northern Ireland is going to be Belfast. There needs to be a link between the two. The policy is there, so the idea is there. What needs to come with it is the investment.

Ms Ursula McCanny (Northern Ireland Assembly): I am the Assembly's community outreach coordinator. I will be facilitating discussion on life in the north-west without a fit-for-purpose rail service. I know that you might have covered some of these issues, but if you can think about what you might be missing out on in the north-west without that rail service.

Ms Casey: In 2000, it was planned that the railway line would close down at Coleraine, and then it was planned that it would close at Ballymena in order that it would not look as if it was just closing at Coleraine. So, here we are in the situation where we have 40% of our population under 25. We have a supply of labour needing jobs. We have 8.2% unemployment. How do they get to the jobs centre, which is Belfast?

The problem at the moment is that we have something like six to eight services of Translink buses before 8.00 am heading to Belfast and they have to stop at Hillhead at Toome because of the traffic jam there where it is a single two-way carriageway before it goes onto the motorway. Coming back in the evening, it backs up as far as Randalstown, nearly to the turn-off for Antrim. It backs up to there with the clog. If you are going out of Belfast in the evening by road and you go up the M2, you will see a massive amount of lights coming your way and a massive amount of traffic going in the direction that you are going in. We now have a high level of accident rates. The accidents and the insurance and

the budgets all need to come together so that we can see exactly what is happening here. It is about getting people to work. It is about movement; getting people moving.

We have had Americans coming here who take military tours all over the world, and this city in the Second World War was the base for the North Atlantic Fleet. It was the US hub for investment. We had the intelligence centre here for the American fleet during the Second World War. This was the hub for the States in the 1940s. We can be the hub for the States again. There is an American military tourism organisation that takes something like 50,000 tours a year to military sites around the world.

We had one day of snow in this city, and the whole city came to a standstill. The whole integrated transport strategy for this city has not been worked up. I was on the transport and infrastructure strategic working group for ILEX from 2008 to 2010. A whole range of investments need to be made. The north-west region must be the transportation hub.

Ms McCanny: I really want to focus on the topic that we are discussing, which is life in the north-west without a fit-for-purpose rail service.

Mr E McCann: I will make a very broad and simple point to do with quality of life. This might seem like a very sentimental point to make, but they do not mind. There is room for sentiment in these things too.

Mr Denis Bradley: I do not believe it, Eamonn. *[Laughter.]*

Mr E McCann: Kids who grow up without ever being on a railway miss out on something. I say that on the basis of my own experience. Railways are romantic, and there is nothing wrong with that. We all need a bit of romance in our lives, particularly in the harsh times that are in it in a place like this.

I am partly influenced by my own childhood. We did a lot of travelling from Belfast to Derry because almost all of my people come from the New Lodge in Belfast. Nothing could replace that. Travelling up and down to Belfast on buses or in cars does not come close to what it is like on the railways.

There is an economic dimension to it — we will get onto tourism — but the comfort and spiritual well-being and the relaxing nature of travelling by train seems to me to be a very important aspect of it. If we had a better rail service, there would be more of that in local people's lives. We need that very badly.

Ms Casey: We have over 1·2 million passengers on this line, which is an increase of 239%. There are 865,000 on the Belfast to Dublin line, yet it is core and we are ancillary, second-rate and non-core.

Mr Kennerley: Having grown up in Wales, I disagree with you on your point that the journey up by road is not the same. I think that it is spectacular. Driving through the Glenshane Pass and that wee town is just beautiful, but the rail line between Derry and Coleraine and Coleraine down to Belfast makes for a beautiful journey as well. So, I do not really disagree with you. It is just that I think that the journey by road is spectacular as well.

On life in the north-west without a fit-for-purpose rail service, if there was no rail service, that would not stop people going to Belfast for jobs and education or to access essential services. However, it would have such an impact on the other targets that the Assembly has in relation to sustainable development, emissions and, as is already set out in policy, a public transport system that aims to be an accessible, affordable, viable alternative to the private car. If you do not have a fit-for-purpose rail service linking the two major cities in the region, that policy cannot be achieved.

Ms Casey: That is right. We have a target of a 35% reduction in carbon emissions by 2025 and so far Northern Ireland is the least of all the regions of the United Kingdom in achieving those targets: 17%.

Ms Dunlop: As someone coming into the north-west to attend things and so on, if the rail service is taken away, all the extra, non-essential things will die a death because a lot of people will not come to them. It is hard enough to get to things at the minute via rail.

Mr Kennerley: There is another point that I would make in relation to the demographics of Northern Ireland. We are increasingly becoming an older population. Access to vehicles will become a

problem as we become an older society with increased mobility issues. The private car will not necessarily be as accessible to us as a population, and we will need our public transport links.

Ms Dunlop: We also now have a society in which so many young people do not have work, do not have money, and could never afford to buy a car or pay the insurance on it. An occasional journey on a train might be their only option.

Mr Denis Bradley: I better address the Assembly's community outreach. There is a growing cynicism in the north-west about politics in general.

Ms Casey: That is not just in the north-west.

Mr Denis Bradley: No, it is an international phenomenon at the moment. If you are in this city long enough and get to know it, you will find a deep, fundamental depression around politics. That has many manifestations. I suppose that one of those is —

Ms McCanny: Is this to do with the rail service?

Mr Denis Bradley: It is totally to do with the rail service.

Ms McCanny: OK, that is fine.

Mr Denis Bradley: Nobody would ever ask why you need a railway in Belfast. That question would never ever be asked. You would not be sitting at a table anywhere in Belfast asking that question. A cynicism leading to depression and a negative view of things is growing in this city. It is dangerous for this city, with its history, to be growing negativity. It has a dangerous, dangerous history. The Assembly has been negligent in not assessing, understanding, coming to terms with, and doing something about that. I do not think that there is any great danger of the world exploding around Derry tomorrow, but I do think that, every time that you create an opportunity like that, it is bad for politics. The railway is linked to that to some small degree.

Mr Kennerley: I said that, as we become an older generation, access to services and public transport is increasingly important. The point about younger people was then made as well. Interestingly, in 2011, the Consumer Council conducted research with young people on their attitudes to public transport services. Those young people basically said, "As soon as I pass my test and have my car, that is it: you will never see me on public transport again." We then conducted research again with very small samples of young people specifically in relation to a project in Dungannon. The young people there basically said, "It will be public transport for me for the foreseeable future, because I cannot afford driving lessons let alone insure and run a car." So, there is definitely an economic factor in the importance of being able to access public transport services.

The Assistant Committee Clerk: I am Gavin from the Committee. I am covering discussion point number 4, which is the future of rail services in the north-west. We are talking about the best case. I heard someone mention 'Field of Dreams' earlier.

Mr E McCann: I think that the advertising tag line for that movie was, "If you build it, they will come." If you build a proper rail service and have a fast, hourly timetabled rail service, people will indeed come. All the indications, from not just here but across Europe, are that, where there is a decent reliable, comfortable rail service, the people flock to it. It is also cheaper.

The best case is a broad topic. The environmental argument is part of the best case that I would make. We have an Executive who, like Governments everywhere, came into office claiming that they were going to be very green and benchmark everything according to the likely effects on the environment. The fact is that that is not happening. If you look at the balance between spending on public transport — rail in particular on the one hand and roads on the other — you will find that Northern Ireland has a much smaller percentage, about one third, of its transport budget spent on rail than Scotland, for example, which is roughly comparable. That should change. The shifting of a relatively small amount from the roads budget — we are talking about 10%, or even 8% or 9% — to rail would transform the financial position of our rail network. We believe that that should be done.

We keep talking about environmental impact assessments and, indeed, one of those was done for the A5, but when we talk about environmental impact assessments, we should also talk about the environment in general, and we should talk about the level of emissions from particular forms of transport. If that were factored into the argument about the development of transport infrastructure generally, rail would come out on top, and that should inform the discussions and the debates of the Committee.

Mr Denis Bradley: The Liam Donaldson report, which looked at the governance of our health system in Northern Ireland, is out today. It is interesting in that he quotes from somebody who comes from this part of the world — he does not name them — who said:

"I wish you would stop building hospitals and start building roads."

The point of that statement is the fact that we are not going to have the 10 hospitals in the future. In fact, one of his recommendations is that we reduce to four hospitals.

It is quite interesting, and this is what is scary about us at this moment in time; one of his recommendations is that we bring in a team of international experts who have got the guarantee, before they come, that their recommendations will be accepted, which is actually saying that our Assembly and our Executive are not capable of taking those decisions. That is what that is the code for. He is saying that if you want to come down to four hospitals, which would cover this whole place, you really need better infrastructure to get people. We are going to have more specialisation in the hospital needs coming forth, we have to reduce from 10 hospitals, and we have to get people to those hospitals more quickly and make people feel safe getting there more quickly.

Now, that does mean better roads. However, it will also mean a lot of people travelling back and forth to the main centres of health. Derry might have some facilities, but it is not going to have all those facilities. If it has cancer facilities, it will not have stroke facilities; if it has some stroke facilities, it will not have renal facilities or whatever. Now, there are ways of transporting people in emergencies, but there are also ways of transporting people in comfort, and rail happens to be one of the comfortable ways: people can go out and take it quietly for a day and not be upset by being squashed on a bus, and they can walk about on a train. I only discovered about five years ago that there are no toilets on our buses, and that had the biggest impact on me and made me realise that I was old. We expect people to travel from Derry to Belfast, which takes the best part of two hours, without a toilet stop. At least a train provides a bloody toilet. I just cannot get over that fact. I would not have noticed that when I was 50. However, I have suddenly noticed that two hours on a bus without a toilet is not good.

Ms Dunlop: I have two points. First, we should not to go down the privatisation route, because we would end up spending more money, as they do in England, where they give more subsidies to the private routes than the one public route that is left, and I do not know how much longer that will last. That would tie in with them bringing in outside people to try to look at our services for health etc. I read that the OECD is being brought in, and part of its agenda includes privatising everything. That would be a very bad move for Translink.

The second point is that, a few months back, I read something from Into the West rail lobby, which I thought was very good. Someone said that we should develop the Enterprise service that goes from Dublin to Belfast right through to Derry. I think that person made a point about miles. There is something like a 12-mile difference between going straight to Derry by bus or whatever and going by train. So, with the right service and the right speed, it is certainly very doable and would open up the whole area.

Mr Kennerley: The best-case scenario for rail services in the north-west has to be based on a thorough understanding of what passengers need. You have to understand that, survey that and ask about that. There has to be a thorough understanding of who, what, when, where, why and how people are currently travelling, an understanding of what those travel needs are, what journeys are being made and why they are being made, and a holistic approach to public transport services, bus and rail, which are then designed to meet those needs based on the policy objectives that are already there. The blueprint is there. If you want to build it and they will come then find out what is needed and then build it, not the other way around.

Mr Denis Bradley: Do you think there is a possibility that those statistics are already in existence?

Ms Casey: Yes, they are. All of the statistics are there. The policy frameworks are there. It is coming down under the transportation studies that have been done. It is coming down under the public consultations that were done last year by the Department for Regional Development on future investment for railways within Northern Ireland.

The best-case scenario would be that, if I get on a bus from Foyle Street to go the station, I am not packed like a sardine in a can in unsafe conditions the whole way across. When they know that there is a full bus, put on a double-decker. When they do not have a double-decker, put on two buses, instead of cramming everyone into a single bus to get off at the railway station, where there is no pedestrian crossing to get across the street, with taxis coming through here, there and everywhere.

Then you go into the station and you have to stand outside in the rain to get up the steps. Somebody has to hold the door open for you because it is not an automatic door. You cannot buy your ticket because there is such a queue from outside into the station. It is an upturned egg box. It is cramped. You then have a poor member of staff who has to stand at the door to give change and give you a ticket out of his pouch, while the office is closed. The office closes at 2.00 pm on weekdays and it is not open at weekends, so we do not have an office in the railway station. Then you get out onto the platform and you stand at a bollard. You are not allowed to get on to the platform because the people coming off the train are shuffled off and down a — *[Inaudible.]* — to go across the same road, and guess what? There are 60 or 70 people getting off the train and getting onto a single-deck bus.

The Committee Clerk: Ladies and gentlemen, I will draw the session on this issue to a close.

Mr Desmond McKibbin (NIA Research Office): We move now to the last issue, which is about the impact of the railway on tourism in the north-west.

Mr E McCann: When you talk about tourism, trains come into their own. Trains are a tourist attraction in themselves. Look at the tourism programmes that you see on television. They are very popular. Take Michael Palin. When you try to make a programme about roads you end up with 'Top Gear'; when you make a programme about trains, you end up with Michael Palin's 'Great Railway Journeys', of which one was from Coleraine to Derry.

Mr Denis Bradley: You end up with Michael Portillo. I am shocked at you.

Mr E McCann: And Michael Portillo. You get that everywhere. Do you ever see a postcard of a car going along a motorway with someone saying, "Look at this beautiful scene"? If you stand outside Derry Guildhall and look across the river, for example, and look at the train — it has six carriages; it does not have the romance of steam — pulling out along the river with that great bank of primitive forest behind it, it is a most charming sight. That is the only word I can think of; it is just lovely.

What is more, when you look at this area specifically, from here and up past Coleraine, you are going from Derry up past the Giant's Causeway. The Giant's Causeway attracts 750,000 visitors a year, so Tourism Northern Ireland, as I think it is now called, tells us. I cannot imagine that anybody wants to spend more than an hour at the Giant's Causeway. I do not mean to denigrate the place, but there is not much to see there, apart from the disappointing size of the basalt columns.

Mr Denis Bradley: It is good for an hour.

Mr E McCann: It is good for an hour. Look at what we have got in Derry. Is there not a natural tourism product, as we have to call it these days, involving the Giant's Causeway and the walled city of Derry? Here we have one the most unique sites in the whole of Europe; there are only two walled cities extant with the walls intact. The walls of Derry are of European importance. Although the future of Europe did not turn on the siege of Derry, it certainly turned on the outcome of the Williamite wars. Aughrim, I suppose, was the more significant battle, but, nevertheless, the siege of Derry has a European appeal, and we take it for granted here because we see it as we walk past it and so forth.

It seems to me that, given the sheer beauty of that train journey, as Palin, Portillo and others have mentioned, which would link those two places — this goes back to the economic aspect that we talked about — any investment that is accompanied by proper, adequate and appropriate advertising of that line and its linking of the two places would repay itself in economic terms and certainly in terms of the

visitor experience. That is a horrible phrase, I know, but it certainly would be tremendous for that. I am sorry for going on for so long.

Ms Dunlop: I want to build on what he has just said. Going back to the City of Culture 2013 —

Mr Denis Bradley: The figures are good.

Ms Dunlop: — there were people coming to Derry and people trying to get out of Derry, and Derry and the whole of Northern Ireland lost out so much. People could not get to Derry for the events because some of them were outside the train timetable. That also affected people who could not get accommodation in Derry and were also unable to travel by train or bus to accommodation nearby in Coleraine or Limavady or wherever else outside the city. The bus or train connections did not exist and no special effort was made, even though we knew about the City of Culture a year before. Nothing was done; not even an extra bus was available.

Mr McKibbin: That is something that has come up tonight. It seems an awful shame, really. It is incredible.

Ms Dunlop: Yes. There were so many events. There is a wonderful jazz festival that runs for three or four days every year and there are late-night services in the city but none outside it. How do the rest of us get to the event?

Mr Denis Bradley: When it comes to the tourism issue I suppose it is a matter of back from the past and into the future. I grew up 14 miles from here in Buncrana, and my first memory is the train coming into Buncrana. It is, literally, one of my first and earliest memories. At that stage, I am told, five trains came into and went out of the city. Some went north to Inishowen and others to the south of Inishowen. One went to Portadown, one went to Derry and others went all over the place. The whole of this area was a tourist area.

A boat came directly from Glasgow that was called the Scotch boat. My father drove a bus; he was away every morning at 4.00 am to pick up people from the boat. This was a Mecca of tourism. The thing that killed that, as it killed Portrush — it was not just Derry it killed — was the cheap flights. Now, that is OK; we have been through that period, and those cheap flights will continue, but there is a growing desire, I would have thought, for what we have to offer.

What we have to offer has to improve. Eamonn has mentioned some of it. Some people do not want to just lie in the sun any more; they want different and richer experiences and so forth. All of that remains true. If you are talking about tourism, you have to do the railway.

By the way, I used to work a little bit around television. I did an interview with Michael Palin an hour before he went on the train journey from here to Coleraine. He described it as one of the nicest train journeys ever. I filmed it in the old Foyle Valley railway over there, which was a train that went from this side of the river right down into Strabane, Lifford and so forth. What am I saying in that? I am saying that we have had the closure of the railways. It is time, economically and tourist-wise, to re-look at all of that and open it up again. We are not going to do it with five railways any more, but there is no doubt that we need at least one that is suitable for purpose.

Ms Dunlop: It goes back to what you were saying about connecting to the Giant's Causeway. Surely that should be very feasible if you had a train coming from Derry into Portrush and then a bus connection out to the causeway.

Ms Casey: All of that and the integrated transport strategy for the city and region were discussed during the transport and infrastructure strategic working group meetings as part of the Ilex regeneration plan from 2008 to 2010. All of that is readily available in Ilex. The statistics are there in relation to people movement, what is required and everything else. The tourism studies have been done. They have been done by the city council, Declan McGonagle and various people. All those studies are to hand.

We are bereft of any person or group taking the initiative. When Pat Colgan was tackled about that last May at a Peace and INTERREG conference in the City Hotel, his answer to my question was that it was being looked at as part of a north-west economic gateway initiative. That encompasses community planning. It is all about all these issues; it is about tourism, employment and education.

That is what community planning is about. It is coming in now. We do not need the OECD in here to tell us what we need; we know what we need. We have the details.

It is about local people doing things for themselves through the Ilex regeneration plan. All we need is a budget to be set for the city and the north-west region that works out the proportion that will make a difference to the 60% of neighbourhoods experiencing child poverty, the 8.2% unemployed and the 44% of lone parents not in economic employment. Those things can come out of a tourism-driven strategy and the high-end employment opportunities that have been identified in strategic documents, such as life sciences etc. It is about building the skills base in children and young people and making sure that no child leaves school without a qualification.

Those are all things that need to be coupled together in one budget that makes sense. It is not an INTERREG budget with a small amount of money that was previously for cross-border work in Derry and Donegal; it will now bring in Belfast. It is a sizeable intervention budget that is a legacy of the Troubles, Bloody Sunday and the City of Culture —

Ms Christine Dodson (Committee for Regional Development): Sorry, Mary, I am going to allow Scott —

Ms Casey: It must be placed in this city under a strategy board that understands what is required.

Ms Dodson: Can we just let Scott in before we finish?

Mr Kennerley: In relation to tourism, the Programme for Government's primary objective is the economy. One of the drivers for the economy is to significantly increase the contribution of tourism to the economy. That is part of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's working programme. It is one of its core objectives.

What we see now is a concerted effort to increase aviation links with key European hubs and further afield to the likes of Canada etc. There is a great desire to get a direct flight to Germany. With the best will in the world, that is never going to happen at the City of Derry Airport; it is going to be in one of the Belfast airports. That is where the link is most likely to go in. That creates the opportunity to have a tourism link with tourists who are traditionally seen as not beach tourists but outdoor sightseeing tourists. The whole north-west — Coleraine, Benone, city of Derry — is made for that. It is absolutely stunning. As a tourist to the area myself, from the part of Northern Ireland where I live, it is spectacular. It is ready-made; it does not necessarily need a lot done to it. It just needs to be marketed well and the infrastructure links, such as the railway, to get the people. People are not going to fly in from Germany with their car; they are going to fly in, and they will need to get out.

Mr McCann: Do I have time for a very quick point? We were talking about tourism and heritage and all the rest of it. One of the glories of Derry's built heritage is the Waterside station, which should be brought back into use when we develop the line. It was designed by John Lanyon. He is the son of another Lanyon who was the British Army's architect for the whole of Ireland. He designed it in 1873, and it opened in 1875. It has survived all this time. It survived the Beeching/Benson cuts in the 1950s; it survived two bombings by the Provisional IRA. There it is as a symbol of the sturdiness and resilience of Derry. It is also an absolutely — *[Inaudible.]* — sandstone to complement the walled city across the river. It is an absolutely classical railway station of the Victorian era.

Ms Casey: To add to that, 64% of the population wanted investment in Lanyon-designed Victorian railway station as a part of the DRD consultation.

The Committee Clerk: Thank you, ladies and gents. That draws to a close the round-table sessions. Maybe our two members might want to have a quick word about their experiences this evening going round the various tables. In advance of that, I thank the members, the Deputy Mayor, councillors, ladies and gentlemen. This has been a fantastic turnout. We certainly did not expect this. I also formally thank my colleagues from Assembly Connect and from clerking and reporting.