

A Position Report on the Future Investment Needs of the Northern Ireland Railway Network

Response by Friends of the Earth

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Executive Summary

In Great Britain and in the Republic of Ireland, the respective governments are investing in rail. In Great Britain last year, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) announced a 10-year £67.5 billion package of investment. In Ireland, the Irish rail operator, Iarnród Éireann, is investing EUR1.3 billion in improvements to the rail network in the Republic over the next six to ten years.

Rail is recognised as making a major contribution to economic competitiveness and to the quality of the environment. In Great Britain, rail passenger journeys have risen by 33% since 1995. A major factor in this growth has been an increase in traffic congestion which is driving people to seek a more reliable and comfortable means of making their journeys.

Traffic congestion is becoming an increasing problem in Northern Ireland. One prediction, based on official statistics, forecast that traffic volumes in Northern Ireland could rise by as much as 63% over the 10 years to 2012, and that the rate of growth was unlikely to be less than 34%. The traditional response has been to build more roads. But rail provides a much more cost-effective and sustainable means of helping to address the problem.

For many years, Northern Ireland's rail network has suffered from chronic under-funding and under-investment. Capital investment in the railways during much of the 1990s was a fraction of that which took place in Great Britain during the same period. Yet, despite this, there has been a remarkable growth in passenger numbers over the past four years.

The network's considerable potential for further growth is demonstrated by an independent analysis commissioned by Translink. This concludes that, with a prudent level of investment in rail and a strategic approach to the use of that funding, passenger numbers could double by 2028/29. With this level of investment, it forecasts that the 60% passenger growth target for local rail, set in the DRD's Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS), will be achieved by 2012.

However, the Railways Review Group has failed to integrate the findings of this independent analysis into its own *Position Report*. The document has many other weaknesses in the quality of its analysis, and in the quality of the information it provides and the way it is presented.

Friends of the Earth is dismayed at the fact that crucial decisions about the future of Northern Ireland's rail network are to be taken on the basis of a report which contains so many flaws. Moreover, it is gravely concerned that the government no longer appears to be committed to delivering the vision for public transport set out in its own RTS.

Friends of the Earth calls on Government to accept that the *Position Report* does not form a proper basis on which sensible decisions can be made about the future of the network and, instead, to take the following steps:

- Commit sufficient funds from the Northern Ireland block grant for the next three years to enable Translink to begin implementing the improvements to the network which are required to meet the 60% RTS passenger growth target by 2012
- Require Translink to carry out market research among rail-users and non-users to establish the main reasons for non-use to inform future investment

- Carry out a detailed options analysis in line with the SRA's appraisal criteria designed to ensure that the 60% passenger growth target set in the RTS is met by 2012
- Ensure the analysis incorporates options which include significant enhancements
- Investigate the possibility of the formation of a partnership between Translink and local councils which could take joint responsibility for managing the Belfast-Londonderry line

Introduction

Friends of the Earth welcomes the opportunity provided by Government to comment on the *Position Report* recently produced by the Railways Review Group, and to contribute more broadly to the debate on the future of the railway network in Northern Ireland.

Friends of the Earth believes Government must commit to the highest possible level of investment in the rail network. We would urge Government to ensure that, at a minimum, it provides sufficient investment to meet the target for rail passenger growth set out in its own Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS), published just two years ago.

We are dismayed that Government is now seriously contemplating a failure to invest in key sections of the network which will almost inevitably lead to their closure within the next decade. We have grave concerns about the rationale for taking this step, as set out in the Review Group's *Position Report*.

In this submission, we set out the compelling economic and environmental arguments for investing in Northern Ireland's rail network. We examine the persuasive evidence that there exists considerable untapped potential for the network to contribute to the region's economic growth and to address the growing problem of traffic congestion. We provide an analysis of the *Position Report*, highlighting serious weaknesses in the document. Finally, we urge Government to adopt a more visionary approach to the delivery of rail services.

Why invest in rail?

Rising traffic congestion

In Great Britain and in the Republic of Ireland, the respective governments are investing in rail. In Great Britain last year, the Strategic Rail Authority announced a 10-year £67.5 billion package of investment.¹ In Ireland, the Irish rail operator, Iarnród Éireann, is investing EUR1.3 billion in improvements to the rail network in the Republic over the next six to ten years.²

Rail is recognised as making a major contribution to economic competitiveness and to the quality of the environment. In Britain, rail passenger journeys have risen by

¹ Source: BBC News Online: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/1758882.stm

² Source: Iarnród Éireann website: <http://www.irishrail.ie/projects/onTrack.asp>

33% since 1995.³ A major factor in this growth has been an increase in traffic congestion. Frustrating traffic jams and unpredictable travel times are driving people to seek a more reliable and comfortable means of making their journeys.

While Government makes regular predictions on traffic growth and congestion levels in Great Britain, it does not routinely provide this information for Northern Ireland. Yet the evidence suggests that traffic volumes in Northern Ireland are rising at a much faster rate than in Great Britain. One recent prediction, based on official statistics, forecast that traffic volumes in Northern Ireland could rise by as much as 63% over the 10 years to 2012, and that the rate of growth was unlikely to be less than 34%.⁴

In Northern Ireland, Government's response to rising congestion levels has been to build new roads and widen existing ones. But road-building provides no more than a temporary solution to the problem, because new roads, and new lanes on existing roads, quickly fill up with more traffic.

Rail provides a much more cost-effective and sustainable means of helping to address the problem. When properly delivered, rail also offers a safer and more reliable means of travel than the car. The evidence shows that dependability of travel time is vital to the business sector.⁵

Boosting economic competitiveness

Rail has unique benefits for the development of city and town centres. It increases the potential supply of skilled labour by expanding the number of people who can commute to urban centres. This has knock-on benefits for businesses within the expanded labour catchment area which benefit from increased spending by those now in work or in better-paid jobs. Crucially, rail can provide access to jobs from areas with high levels of unemployment.⁶

One example is the reopened Robin Hood Line in Nottinghamshire. This runs from Nottingham to Worksop via Mansfield. The line has been of particular benefit to communities along the route which have suffered from the decline in local manufacturing and mining industries in the 1980s. Passenger numbers have been growing at the rate of 15% per annum. There is strong evidence that the line has played a significant part in opening up job opportunities to those who live in former mining communities.⁷

In Scotland, the Scottish Executive has invested £2m in preliminary work connected with a plan to re-open the railway link between Edinburgh and the Scottish Borders. Research commissioned by the local councils involved in the scheme predicts 900 new jobs will be created in the Borders over a ten year period as a result of the new railway. The Executive is likely to announce within the next few months whether or

³ Strategic Rail Authority *Everyone's Rail: the wider case for rail* Sept. 2003, p.2.

⁴ Transport 2000 *Proposed Regional Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland: A Consultation Paper – Response from Transport 2000* April 2002

⁵ The CBI has previously estimated the annual cost of road congestion to the British economy as ranging from £15 billion to £22 billion. Figures cited in Strategic Rail Authority, *op. cit.*, p.16.

⁶ These arguments are adapted from those presented in *ibid.*, p. 17 and p29.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31. The Strategic Rail Authority cites the fact that 40% of all work-related journeys from 'coalfield' stations were not made at all prior to the re-opening of the railway. Source: Transport 2000 Trust *At the Leading Edge: a public transport good practice guide*, 2003.

not it will provide most of the £130m funding required for the scheme.⁸ Campaigners are confident the Executive will back the rail link.

Government sees the development of underused or brownfield sites as a central means of addressing the problem of urban sprawl and of regenerating urban centres. Railway stations can play a vital part in this urban renaissance by offering easy access to good transport connections, thus helping to ensure the commercial viability of major development schemes. One example is the Temple Quarter development in Bristol. This is being built on a 46-hectare former brownfield site which incorporates Bristol Temple Meads railway station. Rail access is a major selling point of the development which will result in 150,000 square metres of workspace, some 700 new homes and numerous tourist and leisure facilities.⁹

Such initiatives also help ensure that future commercial and residential development is sustainable and socially inclusive. Developments with poor access to the public transport network encourage reliance on the private car and discriminate against the large proportion of people without regular access to a car, many of whom are on low incomes or are socially disadvantaged in other ways.

Rail can also provide a big boost for tourism. In Britain, rail is used by 27% of overseas tourists visiting the UK.¹⁰ Those travelling by rail also tend to be in high-spending visitor groups.¹¹

In rural areas, railways can help boost local economies, and prevent local towns and villages from becoming isolated and marginalised. Good rail links can enhance access to jobs and services for rural communities, and can boost local tourism. One example of 'rural railway renaissance' is the Bittern Line between Norwich and Sheringham on the north Norfolk coast. The number of passengers on the line is rising at a rate of over 18% a year, following the creation of the Bittern Line Community Rail Partnership involving the train operator, Anglia, and various local bodies, and the introduction of a number of enhancements to the route.¹² The Strategic Rail Authority believes that the community rail partnership model is one which can work well on rural lines.¹³

Better for the environment

We are increasingly aware of the threat of global warming. A major factor is the increase in emissions of carbon dioxide. The UK Government is committed to a 20% reduction in CO₂ omissions from 1990 levels by 2010. In 2000, the transport sector was responsible for 25% of all UK CO₂ omissions.¹⁴ Much of this environmental damage is attributable to cars, lorries and aeroplanes. Rail is far less environmentally

⁸ Information from staff at the Waverley Railway Project and from its website:

www.waverleyrailwayproject.co.uk It is expected that the remainder of the funding will come from the local councils supporting the scheme.

⁹ Strategic Rail Authority, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹⁰ International Passenger Survey 2000, cited in www.tourismtrade.org.uk and in Strategic Rail Authority *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹¹ Halcrow Group Ltd for Yorkshire Forward *Economic Value of the ECML to Yorkshire and Humber*, 2002, cited in Strategic Rail Authority, *op. cit.*, p.22.

¹² Information from Bittern Line website: www.bitternline.com/partnership.htm

¹³ Strategic Rail Authority, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

damaging than these other modes of transport; CO₂ omissions are proportionately much lower for rail journeys than for journeys made by road or short-haul air travel.¹⁵

Railways generally have a much less harmful impact on the landscape than roads; it is estimated that a new three-lane motorway uses double the land required for a new four-track railway.¹⁶ As noted above, railways also support a much more sustainable pattern of development.

Rail's potential in Northern Ireland

For many years, Northern Ireland's rail network has suffered from chronic under-funding and under-investment. During much of the 1990s, the government revenue subsidy for rail per passenger mile was approximately two-thirds of the subsidy in Great Britain, despite the fact that the railways in Great Britain were privatised in the mid-1990s.¹⁷ Capital investment in the railways during much of the 1990s was a fraction of that which took place in Great Britain during the same period.¹⁸

An independent review, recently commissioned by Translink and carried out by Booz Allen Hamilton (BAH), found that 'Because of the history of under investment key infrastructure assets are in a poor condition...'.¹⁹ It is clear that the rail network in Northern Ireland has not been permitted to demonstrate its potential as a safe, fast and reliable form of transport which can make a real difference in helping to address the growing problem of traffic congestion.

Yet, despite the handicap of serious under-investment, passenger numbers on the network have risen quite remarkably over the past four years; the network now has 6.5m passengers annually, an increase of almost 12% on the figure for 1998/99.²⁰ A major factor in this increase has undoubtedly been the very popular Belfast to Dublin *Enterprise* service, inaugurated after the line was upgraded during the 1990s at a cost of £108m.²¹ There has been a 68.8% increase in passengers on this line since the *Enterprise* service was introduced.²² The success of this line demonstrates the potential of the rail network to attract more passengers when Government invests in upgrading the infrastructure. However, local rail journeys (excluding the *Enterprise*) have increased by 7.7% in the three years to 2002/3.²³ This growth has been achieved despite the negative impact of a derailment at Downhill in June 2002 (see p. 10), and an increasing number of rolling stock failures.

¹⁵ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.42.

¹⁷ Railways Task Force *Interim Report on the Future of the Rail Network in Northern Ireland*, September 2000, DRD and NITHC, p. 42.

¹⁸ *Loc. cit.*, precise percentages are not provided but, between 1989/1990 and 1995/6, the per capita level of investment was never more than two-thirds of that in Great Britain, and generally much lower.

¹⁹ Booz Allen Hamilton *Northern Ireland Railways Strategic Review: Final Report – Main Report* May 2004, p.39.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.8.

²¹ Investment figure quoted in *ibid.*, p.40.

²² Figure from Translink and refers to period from September 1997, when the *Enterprise* service was introduced until the end of the financial year 2002/3.

²³ Figure from Translink.

One of the great strengths of the Northern Ireland rail network is that its catchment area includes no less than 75% of the region's population. Most of Northern Ireland's major urban centres – 14 out of 17 – lie along the route of the network. Together, they account for 42% of the population.²⁴ Three growing centres of population lie along one of the key sections of the network which the Department for Regional Development (DRD) is now considering closing. The largest of these is Londonderry, Northern Ireland's second-largest city and the fourth largest on the island of Ireland, with a population of 107,000.²⁵ Official estimates predict its population will rise by 11% by 2015 and by 7% by 2009, the last year of the timeframe used by the Railways Review Group in its consultation document.²⁶

The second largest is Coleraine which currently has a population of 56,000, predicted to rise by 5% by 2015 and 4% by 2009. The third urban centre is Ballymoney. The Ballymoney area has a population of 26,000 which is expected to increase by 9% by 2015 and 6% by 2009.²⁷

The BAH analysis concludes that, with a prudent level of investment in rail and a strategic approach to the use of that funding, passenger numbers could double by 2028/29. With this level of investment, it forecasts that the 60% passenger growth target for local rail, set in the DRD's *Regional Transportation Strategy*, will be achieved by 2010/11, slightly earlier than envisaged in that document.²⁸

It must also be borne in mind that the rail network has great potential to support any future growth in Northern Ireland's tourist industry. Demand for tourism in Northern Ireland is inevitably reduced while sectarian tensions continue. However, these have diminished over the past couple of years and are likely to reduce further if, as seems likely, a lasting political settlement for Northern Ireland is found within the next couple of years.

Given the major part that rail can play as a mode of transport for tourists, the Northern Ireland rail network could perform a vital role in the likely future growth of tourism. In particular, the Coleraine to Derry line is generally acknowledged as one of the most scenic in Ireland. Moreover, Derry is a beautiful and historic city in its own right. It also provides a 'gateway' to Donegal, a popular destination for tourists from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and from overseas. One of most popular tourist attractions on the island of Ireland, the Giants Causeway, is just 10 miles from the railway station at Coleraine and eight miles from the station at Portrush.²⁹ The north Antrim coastline has many other tourist attractions, including some spectacular beaches.

Both the Coleraine to Derry line, and the connecting line from Coleraine to Portrush, have the potential to attract significant numbers of tourists, business and leisure visitors, and day-trippers. For this to happen, however, the Coleraine to Derry line and the Derry station need to be upgraded, and good connecting bus services need

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.16-17 and p.156.

²⁵ Figure for 2000 and relates to population of relevant local government district. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, *Sub-Northern Ireland Population Projections (2000 based)*.

²⁶ *Loc. cit.*

²⁷ *Loc. cit.* Current population figures are for 2000 and relate to population in relevant local government districts.

²⁸ Booz Allen Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p.80. The RTS passenger growth target relates to entire network with the exception of the Belfast-Dublin *Enterprise* service.

²⁹ Information from National Trust website: www.nationaltrust.org.uk

to be available to take rail passengers onward to Donegal and to major tourist attractions in the north west.

In summary, it is clear that the potential of Northern Ireland's rail network has not been properly exploited, due to insufficient investment in infrastructure over a number of years. If a prudent and not excessive level of investment was made in the network and utilised intelligently, passenger numbers could far exceed their current level.

The Railways Review Group *Position Report*

Two years ago, the Northern Ireland Executive launched a ten-year *Regional Transportation Strategy* (RTS) after much public debate and consultation. The strategy declares that its primary vision was:

to have a modern, sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society, the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone's quality of life.³⁰

Moreover, the Strategy also set a target of a 60% increase in rail passengers on the local rail network by 2012. Yet, far from setting out to establish how both the vision and target might be achieved, the government and the Railways Review Group are now seriously considering options which would ensure that the RTS vision does not materialise in the north west, and which would make it much more difficult for Translink to meet the passenger growth target.

In Great Britain, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) places great emphasis on making objective-led – in other words, truly strategic – investment decisions. As it asserts in its *Appraisal Criteria* for rail investment:

The objectives of any proposal must be explicit.....

It is important to define objectives without making any assumptions about the best way of achieving them....³¹

A thorough appraisal of all relevant options is key to finding an optimum value for money solution.³²

The SRA also believes that it is important to assess the costs and benefits of major infrastructure projects over the long-term life of the infrastructure assets involved, where those assets have no alternative use or are location-specific.³³ In the examples given in its appraisal guidance, an asset life of 30 years is assumed. This appears to be a fairly standard assumption within the rail industry. However, the SRA also states that the appraisal period should be extended to allow for the time taken to

³⁰ Department for Regional Development *Regional Transportation Strategy*, 2002., 'Vision and Objectives'. www.drdni.gov.uk/rts/

³¹ Strategic Rail Authority *Appraisal Criteria: A guide to the appraisal of support for passenger and freight rail services*, April 2003, p.10.

³² Strategic Rail Authority, *Appraisal Criteria*, p.11.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.20.

carry out construction work, and that account should also be taken of any benefits delivered by the new or upgraded assets beyond the appraisal period.³⁴

By contrast, the Railways Review Group's *Position Report* merely sets out the projected costs for a number of options over a five-year period. No attempt is made to establish any objectives which any of these options are designed to meet. While the report refers to the DRD's RTS document, it is not placed within the context of that document, and does not even consider how the RTS objective of a 60% increase in local rail passengers by 2012 can be met. None of the options in the *Position Report* are subjected to a proper analysis of both costs and benefits, in line with the SRA's own guidance and the requirements of the Treasury.

A much more realistic, comprehensive and robust analysis is provided by BAH. Its options appraisal takes into account the passenger growth target set by the RTS. The appraisal of costs and benefits relates to a 25-year period. This period would still appear to be shorter than that required under the SRA's guidelines and thus may not reflect fully the long-term benefits of the investment proposed by BAH. The BAH report finds that prudent investment in infrastructure and new rolling stock aimed at increasing passenger numbers delivers a substantial net benefit, while merely investing at a 'do minimum' level would incur a considerable net cost over the long term. The additional capital investment required under the report's 'Expanded Offering' option is a relatively modest £52m over that required under the 'do minimum' option.³⁵ This investment would be incurred mostly over a ten-year period, representing additional expenditure of approximately £5m a year during that period.

While reference is made to the BAH report in the Railway Review Group's *Position Report*, no attempt has been made to integrate the findings of the former document into the latter. Given the considerable work involved in the production of the BAH report and the much higher level of analysis in this document, it seems very curious that the *Position Report* has taken no real account of its findings.

We also have concerns about the quality of and presentation of much of the information in the *Position Report*. A key concern is the use of the term 'Lesser Used Lines' to refer to those sections of line which Government is now considering closing. Figures in the *Position Report* clearly show that, in the three years to 2002/03, both the 'lesser used' Ballymena-Derry and Coleraine-Portrush lines had more passengers than the so-called 'core' Belfast-Ballymena line.³⁶ Indeed, the Ballymena to Derry line carried three times as many passengers as the Belfast-Ballymena line during that period.

The report focuses on the comparative performance of the 'Lesser Used' lines during 2002/3. However, passenger figures on both the Ballymena-Derry and Coleraine-Portrush lines were adversely affected by the Downhill derailment in June 2002. This is merely mentioned in a footnote in the report, yet the report takes no account of the impact of this accident.³⁷

Moreover, the report also mentions in a footnote that passenger figures on the Ballymena to Derry line were more than double their current level in the mid-1990s.³⁸

³⁴ *Loc. cit.*

³⁵ Booz Allen Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p.101.

³⁶ Railways Review Group, *A Position Report on the Future Investment Needs of the Northern Ireland Railway Network*, May 2004, p. 13 and 16.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.13.

³⁸ *Loc. cit.*

Translink officials have told us privately that they believe the deteriorating level of service, due to the failure to invest in this line, is the reason for this sharp drop. It is evident that the Ballymena to Derry line has considerable potential for a significant growth in passenger numbers, and yet no account of this important fact is taken in the report.

A number of cost-effective, sensible ideas for rail investment are contained within another key government document, the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan. While the *Position Report* mentions these, it fails to incorporate the proposals into any of the funding options it presents. These include the provision of three new or re-located stations in the greater Belfast area, including a new station at Belfast City Airport. The estimated cost of these stations is a relatively modest £13m, suggesting they deserve serious consideration.³⁹

There are a number of further problems in the presentation of information. For example, in a table which aims to compare travel times by different modes, off-peak car times are used and it is not clear whether the times relate to travel times to the outer boundary or centre of the relevant destination. It is unclear, therefore, whether the table represents a true comparison between bus, train and car.⁴⁰ Moreover, the table is of limited use for planning and analysis purposes, as no estimate is included of future car journey travel times. These are likely to rise, given the current rate of growth in traffic volumes.

In the case of other tables showing information on rail passenger numbers, the report does not make clear whether the figures relate to journeys which are all one-way or journeys in both directions, and whether the data includes intermediate stops.⁴¹

In short, Friends of the Earth is gravely concerned that vital decisions relating to the future of the rail network, and which could result in the closure of part of that network, are to be taken on the basis of a report which contains so many serious flaws in its analysis, and in the quality of and presentation of its information. We would urge Government to conduct a proper analysis of all options in line with its own Regional Transportation Strategy before making any decisions.

The need for greater vision

One of the major problems with the current debate on rail is that it is being conducted without the benefit of any real vision on the part of policymakers. The approach taken is one of small, incremental changes, rather than an examination of the potential benefits of cost-effective enhancements which could bring large numbers of new passengers onto the Northern Ireland rail network.

One of the most obvious drawbacks of the current railway line to Derry is the fact that it terminates on the city's Waterside, necessitating a bus journey or lengthy walk to or from the city centre. Transport 2000 has previously proposed the construction of a £20m rail bridge across the River Foyle, and a new £15m bus/rail interchange on the city side. Moreover, it has identified a potential site for the interchange, and has pointed out that the bus/rail station might well attract investment from private developers, if combined with a commercial development, such as a shopping

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.8-9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.12.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.13 and p.16.

centre.⁴² The Irish government might also be willing to invest funding in a development which would improve transport links to Donegal, and cross-border links between Derry and Dublin. Like the Temple Quarter development in Bristol, referred to earlier, such an initiative could have considerable economic benefits for Derry, including the creation of jobs in an area of relatively high unemployment.

This proposed development would cut the overall journey time for rail travellers to and from Derry city centre, making the line more attractive to regular travellers, tourists, business visitors and day-trippers. It would also encourage more residents of Derry to use the railway line, thus enhancing mobility in a city where 32.5% of households are without a car.⁴³ It is surprising that no market research has been conducted to ascertain to what extent the current location of the station in Derry deters potential users of the line. We would urge Government to give this proposal serious consideration, and to provide the funds to upgrade the existing Waterside station.

We also believe there is a clear case for extending the rail network to link up with both Belfast City and Belfast International Airports, both of which are very close to railway lines. Such an initiative could bring many more passengers onto the rail network, as well as helping to reduce congestion on the roads which serve each of these airports. For example, 30% of the passengers using Prestwick International Airport in Scotland travel by rail to get to and from the airport. The Scottish Executive is now planning to connect both Glasgow and Edinburgh Airports to the rail network.⁴⁴

Friends of the Earth's message to Government

In the light of the evidence and comments presented above, we would urge Government to take the following steps:

- Ensure that sufficient funds are committed from the Northern Ireland block grant for the next three years to enable the first three years of funding for the 'Expanded Offering' option, presented in the BAH report, to be delivered
- Require Translink to carry out market research among rail-users and non-users to establish the main reasons for non-use and, in particular, to assess the potential for passenger growth that might be afforded by rail links to both Belfast airports, and by the installation of a rail bridge and city centre rail/bus interchange in Derry
- In order to inform longer-term investment decisions, carry out a detailed options analysis in line with the SRA's appraisal criteria designed to ensure that the 60% passenger growth target set in the RTS is met by 2012

⁴² The site identified by Transport 2000 is the site of the current bus station and adjoining land in Foyle Street. This site appeared to be feasible when Transport 2000 drew up its plans in 2002. It was also advised by sources in Translink that its suggested low-level rail bridge was technically feasible.

⁴³ Percentage calculated on the basis of figures from the Northern Ireland Census 2001 available at www.nicensus2001.gov.uk

⁴⁴ Cited in Strategic Rail Authority, *Everyone's Rail*, p.21. Source: Scottish Executive. Figure quoted is for 2002.

- Ensure that the analysis incorporates options which include significant enhancements, such as airport rail links and improved access to the railway in Derry
- Investigate the possibility of the formation of a partnership between Translink and local councils which could take joint responsibility for managing the Belfast-Londonderry line

Summary

The governments in both Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland are investing significant sums of money in rail. They see the considerable economic and environmental benefits which rail can deliver. Rail can help address the growing problem of traffic congestion, it can assist in the regeneration and economic strengthening of towns, cities and rural areas, and it helps reduce harmful emissions of carbon dioxide which are contributing to global warming.

The rail network in Northern Ireland has suffered from chronic under-investment over many years. This has meant it has not been given the opportunity to demonstrate its potential as a safe, reliable and sustainable form of transport. Yet, despite all the current handicaps, passenger numbers have risen over the past four years. One of the major factors has been the introduction of the *Enterprise* service between Belfast and Dublin. The success of this service illustrates the benefits which can be gained when Government does invest in rail.

The analysis carried out by BAH clearly shows the potential for passenger growth in the rail network, if there is a prudent level of investment and if that funding is used in an effective, strategic way. It is a source of great concern that, by contrast, the *Position Report* produced by the Railways Review Group fails to examine the potential of rail and, instead, takes a short-term, narrow approach to the issue of investment. The *Position Report* takes no real account of the RTS and does not establish any objectives as a basis for taking decisions on investment. There are serious weaknesses in the provision and presentation of information, and of analysis, in the report. Moreover, it fails to integrate the findings from the BAH report.

Friends of the Earth does not believe that the *Position Report* forms a proper basis for making crucial decisions on the future of the rail network in Northern Ireland. We call on Government to ensure that sufficient funding is included within the Northern Ireland block grant to enable the 'Expanded Offering' option in the BAH report to be implemented. We further urge Government to conduct a proper, detailed analysis aimed at ensuring that the 60% rail passenger growth target set in its own RTS is met within the ten-year timeframe of that document.