

FRIENDS *of the* earth

Northern Ireland

NEWSLETTER

Issue 2 Spring 2001



Friends of the Earth inspires solutions to environmental problems which make life better for people

M1/Westlink: public inquiry or kangaroo court?

Why did Friends of the Earth dub the M1/Westlink public inquiry a 'kangaroo court'? Why does the Department of Regional Development stand accused of flagrantly breaching the Human Rights Act? And why did the Department press ahead with the Inquiry even as the High Court was hearing evidence on a number of similar alleged breaches?

The public inquiry into plans to expand the M1/Westlink by building new slip roads, extra lanes and flyovers at a cost of £46m, is theoretically intended to consider environmental impacts and public concerns in detail. Crucially, the Human Rights Act requires that citizens

are entitled to 'a fair and public hearing...by an independent and impartial tribunal'. Friends of the Earth contends that the M1/Westlink inquiry has fallen far short of that requirement.

The inspector is not *independent*. He is directly appointed by the Department of Regional Development which is the body whose plans for the M1/Westlink are the subject of the Inquiry. In other words, those who are on trial have appointed their own judge.

The ultimate decision lies in the hands of the Minister for Regional Development. He is currently free to accept or ignore the findings of the Inquiry.

Ultimately the Minister is his own judge. He is not *independent* or *impartial*.

The Department of Regional Development is represented at the Inquiry by a QC. The Port of Belfast is represented by a QC. Both these bodies are in favour of the expansion of the M1/Westlink and both are using public money to argue their case. Members of the public and public interest groups do not have access to public funds to pay for legal representation. This is not a *fair hearing*.

Meanwhile the Department has ignored warnings that it is breaching human rights law, safe in the knowledge that none



Campaigners outside the M1/Westlink public inquiry which they believe breached the Human Rights Act.

of the objectors have access to the kind of funds needed to mount a legal challenge.

Assembly, Stormont, Belfast BT4 3XX and ask his Committee to investigate the behaviour of the Department.

Take Action: Please write to Alban Maginness MLA, Chair, Regional Development Committee, Northern Ireland

For further information go to www.foe.co.uk/ni/

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A sane alternative



Mock road signs point the way to the controversial Roads Service scheme and Friends of the Earth's alternative.

A 'Park & Rail' site at Dunmurry and a rail service to the centre of Belfast with a ten minute frequency is the centrepiece of a report on alternatives to government plans for the M1/Westlink. The research was commissioned by the West Belfast Partnership Board and Friends of the Earth, and was carried out by Professor Austin Smyth of Napier University. It identifies a number of alternative ways of managing congestion on the Westlink without relying on huge expenditure on flyovers and new road capacity which will merely

fill up with 'induced traffic' within a few years. The report suggests measures which could be implemented now to improve the situation, rather than have us wait until at least 2007 for the Department to complete its own fundamentally flawed scheme.

Roads Service have been asked to carry out a full appraisal of the options identified in Professor Smyth's report.

Further information: the M1/Westlink report is available by going to www.foe.co.uk/ni/



PROFILE

Volunteers

Every week four committed individuals make a generous gift to Friends of the Earth, not by getting out their cheque books or credit cards but by freely giving their time to support FOE's work in Northern Ireland.

Volunteer Co-ordinator Chris McCartney talked to Declan Allison, Sean Hayes, Emily Jolliffe and Carol Lindsay to find out what motivated them to work without pay...

Sean Hayes wanted to use the extra time he had after retiring - after many years as a Friends of the Earth supporter, it made sense. Carol Lindsay had studied environmental issues with the Open University and wanted to do something 'more active'. Declan Allison was drawn by Friends of the Earth's ideology:

'We campaign for justice - social and environmental justice - so politically I feel at home here'.

The volunteers undertake various tasks. Emily Jolliffe is Friends of the Earth's Librarian and said 'I've learnt how to catalogue the books and reports we have in the office.' Among his achievements as Assistant Campaigner, Declan has campaigned for funding for Northern Ireland's threatened railways. 'It depends on the campaign but I can end up doing anything from talking to MLAs, carrying out research or making props for a media stunt.' Like Declan, Carol is an Assistant Campaigner, tackling pollution caused by factories and landfill sites. Sean clips the newspapers for relevant press articles each week. 'It's my perfect job because I'm interested in current affairs.'

Carol, Declan, Emily and Sean make an important contribution to Friends of the Earth's work, as Lisa Fagan, Campaigns Co-ordinator agreed. 'We would be greatly limited without our volunteers and we're very grateful for all they do. On top of that, each of them brings their own personality and humour to the job, making Friends of the Earth a more exciting place to work.'

It's not just about making a contribution according to Emily. 'I've got a lot back from working here and I really enjoy it too. I would advise anyone who's interested to just give it a go.' Declan seemed to agree: 'I've gained more confidence and my understanding of environmental issues has increased.'



Take Action: Contact Chris McCartney on 028 9066 4311 for a Volunteer Information Pack.



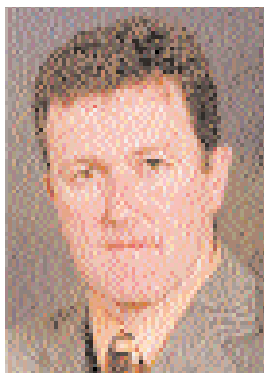
Working for free but not for nothing - from left to right, Emily Jolliffe, Declan Allison, Carol Lindsay and Sean Hayes.

What Assembly members think



Patricia Lewsley MLA
SDLP

'The Department of Regional Development would need to make a substantial investment in public transport to encourage drivers to leave their cars at home.'
Response to Friends of the Earth



Connor Murphy MLA
Sinn Féin

'The current traffic congestion and the anticipated traffic nightmare over the coming years dictates that a grooming of the public transport system must take place as a matter of urgency.'
Hansard 27 June 2000



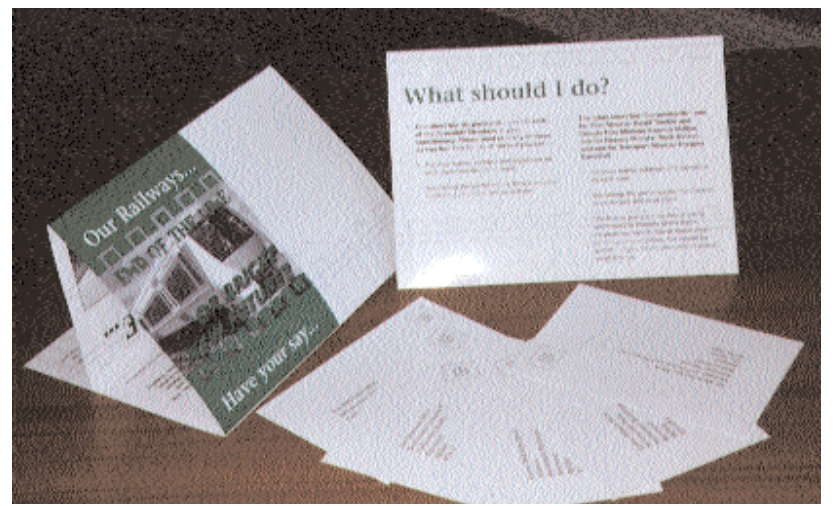
Michael McGimpsey MLA
Ulster Unionist Party

'The road lobby has been pursuing its case without regard for the viability of its schemes or for the detrimental effects of its proposals on the environment and local communities.'
Letter to constituent.



Jim Wells MLA
Democratic Unionist Party

'At last the tide has turned in favour of railway transport in Northern Ireland. Although this is a small step I am determined to do everything in my power to ensure that this is the start of a major investment programme for Northern Ireland's railways.'
Response to Friends of the Earth



Campaign packs like this one enabled people to show their support for investment in railways.

Railways: citizens call for cash

Citizen action has played a pivotal role in the campaign to save Northern Ireland's railways. Railway unions and transport campaigners came together to mastermind a campaign pack which gave members of the public the opportunity to express their views. The opportunity was seized with considerable enthusiasm and resulted in some thousands of postcards landing on the desks of Ministers and Assembly Members.

Decades of under-investment by successive Westminster administrations had culminated in Government appointing a task force to look at all the options for the future of the railways, including closure. A series of public meetings left the Railways Task Force in no doubt of the strength of public feeling - there is enormous support for rejuvenating our ailing railway system. Then came the deluge of postcards which let our politicians know in clear terms that money would have to be made available to rescue the railways. Meanwhile the Belfast Telegraph kept the issue in the news by conducting a dogged campaign, and a huge range of organisations made submissions to the Railways Task Force.

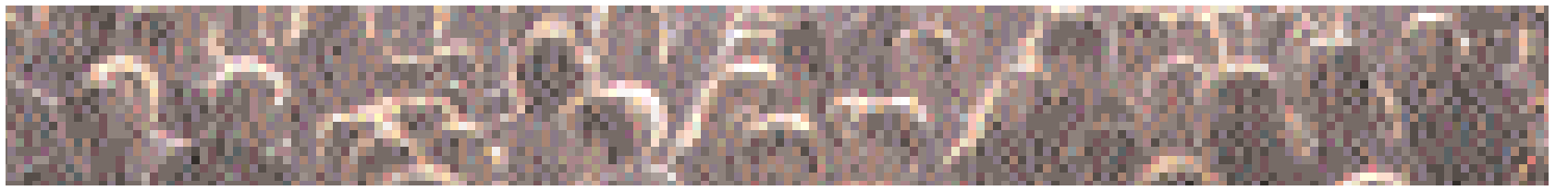
Some visionary but hard headed research commissioned by Friends of the Earth, Transport 2000 and the TSSA underpinned much of the campaign. The central message of the report is that railways are the essential core of any public transport system and Northern Ireland is no exception. It describes how railways are critical to our economic, social and environmental well-being.

The result of all this activity is that the budget and Programme for Government have ear-marked enough money to replace most of our ancient rolling stock and to do some essential maintenance, so our railways will at least survive to fight another day.

And the fight goes on - it will take considerable effort over the coming months and years to persuade Government that the only sustainable strategy is to cut its over-ambitious programme of road building and invest in a first class public transport system. Central to all this will be the role of citizens in making their views known. Friends of the Earth aims to ensure that those voices are heard.

Further Information: *Out of the Shadows: the future of Northern Ireland's railways* and a briefing paper *Railways: ruin or revival?* are available by going to www.foe.co.uk/ni/

Take action: To register your name on Friends of the Earth's railways campaign database, please call 028 9066 4311.



The climate summit in the Hague where environmental activists built this dyke as a powerful reminder of the need to cut greenhouse gases.

COMMENT

Climate justice



How should Northern Ireland respond to climate change? The Department of the Environment has commissioned work on developing a 'strategy on adapting to the potential impacts of climate change in Northern Ireland'. So now it's official - there will be impacts and we will have to adapt, but is that an adequate response?

It's lucky for us that we live in a country which has the wealth to enable us to adapt. (Although if recent predictions of a six degree centigrade rise in average global temperatures during the next hundred years prove to be correct, the concept of adapting to change is likely to be a purely

academic one.) Others are less fortunate and they include the victims of the string of weather-related disasters throughout the world in recent years. Christian Aid report that of the thirteen most recent emergencies they have responded to, eleven were severe weather events. Venezuela, Mozambique, Bangladesh and Hurricane Mitch spring to mind.

In Northern Ireland we are known as particularly generous givers to organisations such as Concern and Oxfam who are helping the victims of climate change to cope with the consequences. But what we give with one hand, we take away

with the other as we continue to pollute the planet with our wasteful use of precious resources and visit the consequences on poorer countries who are least equipped to adapt. Surely the correct response, both moral and practical, is to slash our own emissions now.

John Woods
Head of Campaigns & Development

Our changing climate

The floods and storms of last winter brought it home to the people of these islands that our climate is changing and that the consequences will be felt at home, not just in countries like Bangladesh, Mozambique and Nicaragua. The new weather patterns are consistent with the predictions made by climate scientists for warmer, wetter winters and more frequent storms.

Ironically, at a time when much of Britain and Ireland lay under water, the other big news story was of the fuel protests sweeping Europe. Although Friends of the Earth was pleased that, for the most part, Gordon Brown resisted the demands of the protestors to reduce fuel taxes, the organisation was dismayed

that New Labour did not have the courage to explain that high fuel taxation was essential to tackle climate change, instead pretending the revenue was needed to fund healthcare and education. Sales of fuel efficient cars have increased as a result of high fuel prices.

Tragically the devastating impacts of climate change being felt around the globe did not provoke governments meeting at the climate summit in the Hague to reach agreement on cutting greenhouse gas emissions. While the media concentrated on the war of words between John Prescott and the French Environment Minister, Friends of the Earth was insisting that the blame for failure lay with the world's largest climate villain,

the United States which had refused to make the necessary cuts in its greenhouse gas emissions.

Friends of the Earth has calculated that the UK's carbon dioxide (CO²) emissions must be reduced by 80% over the next fifty years if we are to allow for predicted population growth, enable poor countries to develop their economies and still stay within environmental limits.

But CO² cuts of 80% don't mean a return to pre-industrial living standards. We can meet people's need for energy by moving away from fossil fuels and instead developing a renewable energy economy. This 'environmental modernisation' of the economy would create jobs as well as averting the misery of climate change. For example Harland and Wolff, so often in the news because of job losses, is superbly well placed to build off-shore wind farms, creating hundreds of jobs in the process.



Take action: Switch to green electricity. You can choose electricity that has been generated from wind by joining NIE's Eco Energy scheme. Telephone NIE on 0345 455455 for further information.



A man in Lucan, Co. Dublin ponders the relationship between gas guzzling vehicles and climate change?



Greening the economy: the construction of off-shore wind turbines could bring hundreds of jobs to the troubled shipyard.

Courtesy of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board

© Alan Betson/Irish Times



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Walking bus

Turn up at any primary school at around 8.45 on a weekday morning and you're likely to be confronted by a chaotic scene as parents and children make the daily dash to school. In those 15 minutes at the start and end of the school day, the school vicinity becomes jammed with cars vying for parking space. Cars will be parked on kerbs and at junctions, blocking driveways and bus stops.

Today nearly twice as many children arrive at school by car than ten years ago. The incidence of asthma and wheezing has almost doubled in the same period with one child in seven now suffering the condition.


Everyone with a child of school age will know that safety is the number one consideration when it comes to finding a way for them to get to school and back each day. Increasingly busy roads

make crossing them much more difficult, and cycling on them potentially fatal. As it is, one child in fifteen is injured in a road accident before their sixteenth birthday. Little wonder then that parents choose to take their children to school by car. Yet it's all part of the same problem.

The great news is that there is an excellent way for children to get to school safely without parents escorting them and without using the car. It improves children's health, saves their parents time and reduces traffic congestion and pollution around the school gates. It's the walking bus.

Put simply, the walking bus is a line of children, walking in pairs to school along a set route with an adult 'driver' at the front and 'conductor' at the back. Like a

bus, there are scheduled bus stops where children are picked up at specific times so, like a bus, you can miss it. But the similarities end there - unlike a bus it is free, healthy and non-polluting. Everybody gains with a walking bus.

 Take action: Call Friends of the Earth on 020 7490 1555 to buy a copy of the Walking Bus Guide, priced at £3.50.



Courtesy of Tim O'Leary/Friends of the Earth

Local Groups

If you would like to campaign for a better environment, you are welcome to join your nearest Friends of the Earth Local Group. Further information is available by contacting the group co-ordinator using the details below.

Ards Friends of the Earth
Karen and Denis Reid
'Still Waters'
30 Cook's Cove
Kircubbin, Newtownards
Co. Down BT22 2ST
Tel 028 4273 8707

Armagh City Friends of the Earth
Contact Lisa Fagan on
028 9066 4344

Bannside Friends of the Earth
(meets in Coleraine)
Susanne Guthrie
4 Castle Walk
Castlerock, Co. Derry BT51 4TP
Tel 028 7084 8817

Belfast Friends of the Earth
Declan Allison
40 Wellington Park
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Craigavon Friends of the Earth
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122 Westacres
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E-mail: caroll1@breathemail.net

Downpatrick Friends of the Earth
Keith Bradford
The Walled Garden
Finnebrogue, Downpatrick
Co. Down BT30 9AA
Tel 028 4461 2260

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Jacqueline Ingram
Kilgarrow, Newtownbutler
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Omagh
Co. Tyrone BT78 5AF
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E-mail cmc94@hotmail.com

Growing a local food economy

Agriculture Minister Brid Rodgers joined shoppers at Belfast Farmers' Market recently to show her support for locally produced food, and to urge farmers here to convert to organic production in order to exploit the growing demand for organic food. Organic sales are growing at a rate of 40% a year, however more than 70% of organic food bought in the UK is imported, leading the Minister to encourage farmers to grasp the market opportunity.

Locally grown food, some of it organically produced, is sold at the Belfast Farmers' Market held at St. George's on the first and third Saturday of each month. Farmers' markets and other farm retailing initiatives such as box delivery schemes and farm shops can contribute to the growth of local food economies, helping to release farmers from the tyranny of the supermarkets. Also, local food has fewer 'food miles' associated with it than food which has been transported thousands of miles to reach our plates, contributing to climate change in the process.

Friends of the Earth is about to commission some research on

barriers to the growth of a local food economy, meanwhile the Department of Agriculture has recently begun a study into how it should stimulate and support growth of the organic sector.

There was good news too on the GM front, with the collapse in London of the Seed List hearing for a genetically modified variety of fodder maize called Chardon LL. No seed can be grown commercially in the UK until it has been added to the

UK's National Seed List but the hearing into the proposed addition of Chardon LL to the Seed List had to be suspended when it emerged that trials which ought to have lasted for two years had in fact only lasted for one.

This defeat is another nail in the coffin of the biotech industry and many GM companies are now dropping their life sciences divisions and returning to pharmaceuticals.



Agriculture Minister Brid Rodgers with celebrity chef Paul Rankin sampling some locally produced organic food at the Belfast Farmers' Market.

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Editor: Lisa Fagan

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