

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

the future of Northern Ireland's railways

a report by the Transport Research and Information Network for
Friends of the Earth (Northern Ireland)
Transport 2000
Transport Salaried Staffs Association
being their submission to the Railways Task Force

June 2000



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Introduction

The future of railways in Northern Ireland is currently in the melting pot. They are the subject of a review by the Railways Task Force, set up by former Minister for Regional Development Adam Ingram MP, following publication of the Strategic Safety Review by consultants A D Little Ltd. In addition to taking into account the findings of the Little Report (see below) the Task Force also considers ‘the range of projections of possible need and demand for rail services within the wider strategic context of the future development of transportation in the region, and the Government’s transportation policies’. (Railways Task force Terms of Reference) It is also expected to:

- Quantify the costs and benefits (monetary and non-monetary) of the range of options, taking into account considerations of value for money and affordability within the context of the Government’s public expenditure plans and priorities and
- The scope for securing additional sources of funding to augment public expenditure for the railways, including public-private partnerships and asset leasing; and
- An agreed framework for evaluation which reflects current best practice

The above sounds perfectly reasonable. Statements from the Minister, however, have suggested that closure of a sizeable part of the network, possibly as much as all the routes apart from Belfast to Dublin, is an option which is being seriously considered. Friends of the Earth, Transport 2000 and Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) totally reject the view that any line closures in Northern Ireland are justified and this paper sets out a vision for how railways in Northern Ireland could develop over the next twenty years.

This report has been prepared by Paul Salveson (Transport Research and Information Network) on behalf of Friends of the Earth (Northern Ireland); Transport 2000 and Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) and forms their submission to the Railways Task Force. It is also intended to stimulate debate about the future of sustainable transport in Northern Ireland, in the light of the evolution of wider policies on regional development, social inclusion and sustainability.

Executive Summary

Northern Ireland risks being left out in the remarkable renaissance in rail travel which is sweeping across Europe. Cities of a comparable size to Belfast are benefiting from major investment in commuter rail networks and in new light rail schemes, which are leading to a major shift from car to public transport. We need to get away from the fatalism which has afflicted transport policy in Northern Ireland for decades, which sees the car as remaining the mainstay of the transport network. With relatively modest levels of investment, Northern Ireland can begin to develop a high quality integrated transport network which makes the best of rail, coach and bus, and offers opportunities for motorists, cyclists and walkers to access good quality public transport.

The current review of railways in the region has united every section of opinion in Northern Ireland. The almost universal message is that people want to keep their railway services and see them developed. It would be an insensitive Government which did not listen to this message.

This report sets out a vision for the future of railways in Northern Ireland which goes beyond the recommendations of the Little Report and tries to meet the popular aspiration for an expanding rail service. We believe that the core network should be safeguarded by the immediate implementation of the Little Report, but we must go beyond that. Key recommendations are:

The Framework

- Create a Public Transport Unit within Department for Regional Development
- Create a Strategic Transport Authority, modelled on the British Strategic Rail Authority, but covering all public transport
- Create a Greater Belfast Passenger Transport Authority, including DRD and district councils, plus external bodies
- Develop strategic plan for sustainable transport, with substantially increased funding for rail and bus based on a growing network (see below)
- Ensure Northern Ireland gets its fair share of UK government and European funds for public transport investment

Translink

- Give Translink greater commercial freedom, coupled with demanding targets to grow the passenger business and improve service quality to passengers
- Give Translink immediate freedom to lease desperately-needed new rolling stock
- Overcome the perception that Translink is 'a bus company running trains'

Services

- A BART for Belfast: create a frequent, high quality cross-city suburban network with Larne and Bangor to the north and east, and Aldergrove and Portadown to the west and south: Belfast Area Rapid Transit.
- Re-open line from Portadown to Armagh to link into proposed BART network
- Provide high quality 'North Atlantic Express' service from Derry/Londonderry to Belfast (in 1h 30 min) and Dublin (total journey time 3h 30min)

Stations

- Improve station quality, with more bus-rail interchange, park and ride and safe cycle storage
- Provide park and ride stations at Ballyhenry (between Antrim and Belfast) and Spurucefield (between Portadown and Belfast)
- Improve rail-air interchange at Belfast City Airport

Light Rail

- Re-examine the case for light rail on the Belfast – Comber route, and routes to the west and south of the city

Partnership

- Develop a Community-Rail Partnership for Belfast to Derry/Londonderry route, identifying and exploiting opportunities along the rail corridor for economic development, tourism

Future development

- Examine feasibility of re-opening Portadown to Derry/Londonderry via Omagh
- Evaluate potential of more freight on rail

1. The current situation: what NIR Offers

1.1 The Rail Network

Northern Ireland's rail network now forms a small part of what was once an extensive system covering all parts of the region. The main arteries of the network today are:

- Belfast to Dublin
- Belfast to Portadown (suburban services)
- Belfast to Larne
- Belfast to Bangor
- Belfast to Derry/Londonderry and Portrush

Belfast Central is the hub of the system, although the recently re-opened Great Victoria Street station, offering better access to the city centre and good connections with local and long-distance bus services, has proved popular.

The opening of Belfast Central, followed by the cross-harbour link and the subsequent re-opening of Great Victoria Street laid the base for a major improvement in train services. The historic separation of services to the south, operated by the Great Northern (Ireland) Railway, and those to the north operated by the LMS' Northern Counties Committee (NCC) have stymied the growth of the region's rail network. The additional segregation of Bangor trains, using the former Queen's Quay terminus, was a further constraint. Today, the three networks are linked, with Belfast Central forming the hub of the network. The train service pattern provides the opportunity of through journeys for example, from Bangor to Derry/Londonderry via Lisburn, or from Larne to Portadown. Good interchange facilities at Belfast Central for other routes, and at Great Victoria Street for bus and coach services, offer the basis of a good quality, integrated transport network in Northern Ireland. Sadly, that potential, as we will outline, is not being realised.

Taking each route in turn, the network represents a mixture of positive and negative features.

1.1.1 Belfast to Dublin

This route has benefited from extensive modernisation in recent years, on both sides of the border. New rolling stock has been introduced and the line has been upgraded for speeds of up to 90 mph. Traffic is growing substantially. Passenger numbers in 1997/8 were 829,740 whilst last year (1999/2000) they reached 927,484. This growth shows that investment leads to a better quality product which attracts more passengers, many of whom previously may have chosen to drive between the two capitals. Between 1992 and last year passengers using cross-border services have almost doubled. (Figures courtesy of Translink; see Table 1 for full details).

1.1.2 Belfast to Larne

This route, part of the Trans-European Network from Cork, serves the commuter towns of Whiteabbey and Jordanstown (main campus for the University of Ulster), Carrickfergus, the popular small resort of Whitehead, and Larne itself. The line has suffered from under-investment and on-going problems with sea defences in the Whitehead area. The line is now single track beyond Downshire, owing to lack of funds to maintain the 'up' seaward side line between Downshire and Whitehead. Whitehead is also the base of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland, which is becoming an important tourist attraction. Larne is a major port, and from September will see the return of Stena Line ferry services to Stranraer. The Larne line's patronage has remained fairly static, with 1,535,449 passengers carried in 1997/8 and a slight drop to 1,496,808 last year.

1.1.3 Belfast to Bangor

The route takes the southern shore of Belfast Lough, serving prosperous commuter suburbs before terminating at Bangor, where a new bus-rail interchange is under construction. It offers a potentially good link to Belfast City Airport, at Sydenham, as well as an alternative to the busy road into central

Belfast. Parts of the infrastructure are in poor condition, notably the track at Craigavad and a bridge at Connswater. There has been a more noticeable slight loss of passengers on the route, compared with the Larne line, since 1997/8 when 1,583,772 passengers were carried, compared with 1,300,387 last year.

1.1.4 Belfast to Derry/Londonderry and Portrush

This once formed the main 'domestic' line within Northern Ireland, with good quality trains, carrying full dining facilities, making the journey from Belfast to Northern Ireland's second city in 2 hrs 15minutes. This was in 1959! In the early 1960s non-stop excursion trains often completed the journey from York Road to Derry/Londonderry in 90 minutes. Today's service takes 2 hrs 30mins, using the more circuitous route via Lisburn and Crumlin. The re-opening of the direct route from Bleach Green to Antrim later this year will cut some 25 minutes off the timetable and provide a much-improved service to the towns of Antrim, Ballymena, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Portrush, and Derry/Londonderry itself. Ridership since 1997/8 on both Portrush and Derry/Londonderry routes has declined. In 1997/8 612,280 passengers travelled to or from Derry/Londonderry by train, and 280,326 to or from Portrush. Last year's figures show 572,775 on the Derry/Londonderry route and 213,427 on the Portrush line. The Portrush branch is being re-laid this summer to allow higher line speeds.

1.1.5 Portadown Local Services

The Belfast – Lurgan – Portadown corridor is served by local services, some of which originate in Bangor or occasionally Larne. The line serves substantial population centres including Lisburn, Lurgan and parts of the new town of Craigavon, as well as Portadown itself. Usage has again declined, from 1,511,722 in 1997/8 to 1,397,424 last year.

1.2 Why the decline?

The drop in passenger numbers on all services, with the startling exception of the Belfast to Dublin route, should raise some serious questions. Research carried out by PriceWaterhouseCoopers and the General Consumers' Council (GCC) shows declining levels of satisfaction by users of Northern Ireland's railways (see *GCC Submission to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee*, April 2000). Surveys are carried out on a twice-yearly basis as part of monitoring procedures for Translink's Passengers Charter. The results of the last survey, in Autumn 1999, showed the lowest rating ever scored by the railways, of 63 (out of 100), compared with a highest score of 74 in 1994. Even more striking is the contrast between passenger ratings of the *Enterprise* service, with other NIR services (GCC, 2000). In every category the *Enterprise* service outperforms other NIR services by a margin of between 12% and 32%. The most marked differences were perceptions of cleanliness and punctuality. The decline in passenger confidence in Northern Ireland Railways has been much more precipitous than passenger perceptions of Citybus and Ulsterbus, where overall performance ratings have dropped, but not as greatly as the railways.

The decline in patronage of Northern Ireland's railways is taking place at a time of major growth in rail travel in most European countries. Rail use in Britain is growing at a rate of some 6% each year (see *RAIL*, June 14 2000), and in the last year more people used rail than in any year since 1946. On some routes, particularly the main commuter arteries into the larger cities, the growth is much higher. Next year is likely to see more people travelling by train than at any period this century. Given the substantially smaller rail network following the cuts of the 1960s and 1970s, this is a remarkable achievement.

So why is this picture not being replicated in Northern Ireland? Clearly there are external factors, relating to the political situation, which has depressed economic activity. It should be noted that ridership on NIR's domestic services showed a modest increase overall compared with 1998/9. However, the dramatic increase in patronage on *The Enterprise*, almost year on year, suggests that external factors are not the major determinant of the decline in rail use. The lack of investment in the network must clearly be the main factor, with increasingly unreliable rolling stock operating on lines

which require investment to offer greater speed. It is our belief that the rolling stock is the central problem. Despite the enormous improvements represented by the cross-city link and the re-opening of Great Victoria Street, the trains being used on domestic services are woefully inadequate. In contrast, *The Enterprise* offers modern, clean, air-conditioned trains with good end to end timings and high levels of reliability. Unless a decision is made very soon to invest in new trains, the decline in rail patronage will continue.

1.3 Facilities

The facilities offered by Northern Ireland Railways can be broken down into five categories:

- Station Facilities
- On-Train Facilities
- Information Services
- Ticketing
- LinkLine services

1.3.1 Stations

In common with most other European railways, NIR pursued a policy of de-staffing the more lightly-used stations, during the 1970s. However, a relatively high proportion of Translink's stations remain staffed, including Belfast Central, Great Victoria Street, Lisburn, Lurgan, Portadown, Antrim, Ballymena, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Derry/Londonderry, Portrush, Larne, Bangor and Whitehead. The appearance of many of these stations are a great credit to their staff, with Portadown and Lisburn in particular rivalling each other for the most attractive garden displays! These are important features which make rail a quality form of transport; equally if not more important are good quality catering facilities, which are less widespread. Only Great Victoria Street and Central have buffet facilities, as far as we are aware. Disabled access is regarded as an important issue for Translink staff, and whilst many stations offer easy access, others provide staff assistance for passengers with special needs.

Unstaffed stations are in perhaps surprisingly good condition, with relatively little vandalism compared with many UK stations, and high levels of cleanliness and up to date information.

Translink is investing in new integrated bus and rail facilities at several key locations, including Bangor, Coleraine and Carrickfergus.

1.3.2 Rolling Stock

Facilities on the trains themselves are, with the notable exception of the Belfast – Dublin Enterprise, are limited. There are no catering facilities on domestic services, and the rolling stock is elderly. Passenger perception is of 'old, dirty trains' (see *GCC Submission to Northern Ireland Affairs Committee*, April 2000): whilst they certainly are old, and increasingly unreliable, the standard of cleanliness on the trains is actually quite good. However, the overall appearance presented to passengers is that of old, decaying trains. They bear poor comparison with the rolling stock used on *The Enterprise*, and no doubt passengers with long memories will recall the days of top quality dining car services on Belfast to Derry/Londonderry trains. Modern facilities such as public address, facilities for disabled passengers, and visual information displays are absent from the domestic train fleet. Replacement of the rolling stock is the most urgent priority facing Translink (see Tables 2 and 3).

Unless steps are taken very quickly, the existing fleet will become more and more difficult to maintain. Translink's own figures, supplied to PriceWaterhouseCoopers, suggest that by 2005/6 out of an actual requirement of 29 trainsets to maintain existing service levels, only 16 sets will actually be available. The PriceWaterhouseCoopers report spells it out in language which is perhaps unusual for consultants:

*In the absence of **urgent** investment in rolling stock, it is currently expected that the size of the available rolling stock will reduce from its present level of 29 trainsets to 27 sets in 2000/1, to*

16 train sets by 2005/6. This will have an increasingly devastating effect on the level of service that can be provided by Northern Ireland Railways in every year from 2000/1.
(PriceWaterhouseCoopers, *Interim Train Replacement, Final Report* January 2000).

In other words, the crisis is not going to suddenly hit in a few years. It is here already, and will become progressively worse with more and more trains being cancelled, loss of passenger confidence, and a downward spiral of ridership.

1.3.3 Information Facilities

Translink offers a reasonable quality information service, for both bus and train services, at its staffed stations and also from its telephone enquiry line. It also offers information via the Internet on timetables and special offers.

1.3.4 Ticketing

Northern Ireland Railways offers a range of tickets based on day returns, singles and monthly returns. There are reduced fares for young people under 16, elderly and disabled persons and war veterans. Students over 16 can purchase a railcard which gives 33% discount on fares. The one-day combined bus and rail rover ticket offers extremely good value for travel across the region.

There is, surprisingly, little through ticketing as yet, though Bangor is being developed as a pilot scheme for integrated ticketing. Passenger buying rail ticket in central Belfast can request a 'bus add-on' ticket for Bangor which allows use of bus services in the Bangor area.

1.3.5 Integrated Transport: LinkLine services

There are several 'dedicated' rail link bus services, including the free CentreLink in Belfast and the LinkLine from Waterside rail station to the main bus station in Derry/Londonderry. In addition, there are other LinkLine services to, for example, Ballycastle from Ballymoney railway station. Portadown has a network of LinkLine services radiating from the railway station.

1.4 Marketing and Promotion

Northern Ireland Railways, as part of Translink, is promoted as part of a wider public transport network. This has advantages and disadvantages. Rail can potentially lose its focus as a specific form of public transport, and be submerged within the wider spread of bus and coach services operated by Translink. Whilst there is good publicity about *The Enterprise* service, there is nothing available promoting use of the domestic lines as such, despite the access they provide to some of Northern Ireland's finest scenery and most popular seaside resorts (e.g. the coastal stretch between Castlerock and Derry/Londonderry, the resorts of Whitehead, and Bangor).

The quality of Translink's publications is high, and in many cases an improvement on that offered by the privatised train companies in Britain. Its recently published access guides to rail and bus stations is an example which could be usefully copied by other train operators.

1.5 Value for money?

The relatively low call on the public purse by Translink's rail operations has been well documented recently. The six million passenger journeys each year were supported by a subsidy of around £9 million per annum, or £1.50 for each journey. Expressed in subsidy per passenger mile, Translink gets 5.28p. This compares with 22.1p per passenger mile for ScotRail, 41.5p for the Merseyrail network and 35.8p for the Cardiff Valleys network (Austin Smyth, article in *Belfast Telegraph*, March 31 2000). It should be noted that Translink, unlike the British train operators, does not lease its rolling stock, and this is reflected in the low figure for NIR. This is still exceptionally low for a European railway.

It should also be pointed out that, in transport as in anything else, you generally get what you pay for. The low level of subsidy has resulted in life-expired rolling stock and, on some routes, infrastructure which requires major upgrading.

2. The wider agenda:

2.1 Regional Development, Tourism and Social Inclusion

A long-term development strategy for Northern Ireland – *Shaping Our Future* – was published in 1998. Broadly, it took a positive approach to developing the rail network. Most importantly, the location of major housing development was often located in towns which were rail-served, and the importance of good rail links was acknowledged in the ‘daughter document’, the *Family of Settlements* report. We comment extensively on the proposed targets for new housing later in this report, noting the high number of units proposed for the threatened rail corridor between Belfast, Coleraine and Derry/Londonderry. What should be stressed here is that Belfast’s population has declined, with people moving out to the more peripheral towns and villages. However, its importance as a business and employment centre is growing, and the level of commuting into the city is growing with it. Unless there is a good quality rail network the roads will become more and more congested, risking the stunting of the city’s growth.

It is widely expected that tourism will take off as political stability comes to Northern Ireland. *Shaping Our Future*’s policy SPG 21 aims to ‘establish a world-wide image for Northern Ireland, based on positive images of progress’. Policy SPG 22 aims to ‘protect and enhance opportunities to capitalise on the Region’s tourism magnets and niche market potential, in order to strengthen the regional ‘pull’ and spread benefits throughout Northern Ireland’. Interestingly, it suggests investigating the potential of re-opening disused canals, but does not make any similar mention of re-opening disused railways for tourist use, nor indeed has it much to say on using rail and bus to access tourist attractions. Tourist railways in Britain are significant motors of economic regeneration, and many are exploring a new role as providers of local transport services. It could be that re-opening parts of the Portadown to Derry/Londonderry route as a tourist attraction, linking with the Foyle Valley Railway’s plans to re-open from Derry/Londonderry to Strabane and Donegal, could create both a tourist attraction and a new transport facility.

Northern Ireland still has a sizeable minority of households which do not have access to a car. Whilst car ownership is increasing, the number of households without a car still lags behind Great Britain. Northern Ireland has 307 cars per 1000 of population compared with 368 per 1000 in Great Britain. Further, the rate of road accidents is higher in Northern Ireland, with 8.6 deaths (in 1997) per 100,000 population, as against 6.3 in Great Britain (*Transport Statistics 1999*, DETR). Improving public transport would benefit a wide cross-section of Northern Ireland’s communities and help to reduce its high road accident figures.

2.2 Cross-Border Issues

Shaping Our Future stresses the importance of improved cross-border links, both between Belfast to Dublin, but also in the west and north-west. A good rail link to Derry/Londonderry, with connecting bus services into Donegal, would offer a much-improved cross-border service. Future re-opening of the Portadown to Derry/Londonderry line would help to re-establish strong economic links between Northern Ireland and the Republic in areas which have been economically marginalised.

3. Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats

3.1 Strengths

Northern Ireland Railways does have some advantages over other small railway companies across Europe. It is fully integrated, benefiting from the major capital schemes which united the previously divided railway network. It is also vertically integrated, with responsibility for both train operations and infrastructure falling within the one company. This, especially for a small railway with only one operator, ensures – in theory - a close match between the needs of providing services to meet public demand, and having an infrastructure which can handle the demand.

A further strength – with qualifications – is the integration of bus and rail services under one management. This should lead to getting the best from both modes, rather than having the two in pointless competition. This is being reflected in new bus-rail interchanges, and in pilot schemes for through ticketing between bus and rail.

A real strength of NIR is its staff, who are enthusiastic and dedicated. The overall level of friendliness and courtesy seems, to an outside observer, to be far better than that found on most of Europe's railways. The current uncertainty over the future of the rail network could potentially undermine this commitment.

The overall policy framework, in documents such as *Shaping Our Future* is favourable to rail. Northern Ireland's equivalent of the Integrated Transport White Paper – *Moving Forward* - proposed 'the development of a fast, efficient and accessible public transport network'.

3.2 Weaknesses

It is widely recognised that the rail network is suffering from serious under-investment, in infrastructure and rolling stock. The potential opened up by construction of the Dargan Bridge and re-opening of Great Victoria Street is not being met because the trains are old and unreliable, and line speeds are slow due to the condition of track.

As a public sector company, Translink is not able to borrow freely like any commercial company is able, and is constrained by successive Governments' neglect of the rail network.

3.3 Opportunities

The current review by the Railways Task Force represents an opportunity to make some serious commitments to the development of the rail network in Northern Ireland. For the first time in many years, the Government is undertaking a thorough review of the railways. This presents an opportunity to put right the mistaken decisions which led to line closures and the decline of the region's rural economy in the 1960s, and the continuing lack of investment in an important public asset.

Congestion is a factor driving the growth of rail patronage in many major cities across the UK. It is a factor in Belfast, with corridors from Larne and Carrickfergus, Bangor, and Lisburn suffering congestion at peak times. Rail can offer a quality alternative, instead of spending millions on new roads, if a small proportion of that amount was directed into the railways.

Railways across Europe are enjoying a remarkable renaissance. This is no longer confined to high-speed InterCity routes. In Germany, Sweden, Denmark, France and Switzerland major investment is going into regional routes, with dramatic increases in passengers (see below). There is an opportunity for rail to provide a quality, safe and sustainable means of transport which will provide not only good Cross-Border links, but also offer an alternative to the car for commuting journeys, and a good means of accessing the north and north-west of the region.

3.4 Threats

The current review has been perceived as a threat by many observers. There is no doubt that any root-and-branch review of a service should include the option of withdrawal, so clearly a threat exists. We hope that this submission will form part of a tidal wave of opinion which will help to create a positive policy environment for rail in Northern Ireland, with high levels of investment which form part of a long-term strategy for rail and regional development.

There is a very real threat in the form of run-down rolling stock and decaying infrastructure. Unless investment is made soon, it will become increasingly difficult to maintain the existing, inadequate, fleet of trains. This will lead to more frequent breakdowns and consequent unreliability, and fewer passengers using the trains. This is already happening, and will only get worse. Staff morale will also suffer; already, passenger perceptions of customer care are showing a decline in the level of staff helpfulness and general attitude. (GCC, 2000).

4. Europe's Railway Renaissance: will it reach Northern Ireland?

Regionalisation of local and regional rail services is sweeping Europe. Local and regional services are being upgraded and developed in both urban and rural areas. In many cities roughly the size of Belfast there are high quality, frequent commuter services along main corridors – in Germany, termed 'S-Bahn', or suburban railway. These services form the spine of urban transport networks, usually converging on main city centre stations and fanning out to densely populated districts. Suburban stations act as hubs for local transport connections, using bus and in many cases light rail. Integrated ticketing means that the passenger can travel on all modes with a weekly or monthly travel card, or buy a through ticket valid on bus, train and tram.

4.1 City transport: comparisons with Belfast

European cities with good quality transport systems, of a comparable size to Belfast (based on a 1996 population of 297,000 for the city itself), include:

Mannheim, Germany (pop. 320,000)

Mannheim has an extensive tram network totalling 58km based on eight routes, operated by municipally-owned transport company MVG. New routes are being added to the network; the last opened in 1997. Three more are planned to open by 2010. There are several other transport companies in the area, including OEG which runs light rail services from Mannheim to Heidelberg and other towns. German Rail (DB) operates local rail services in the area.

Karlsruhe, Germany (pop. 233,000)

Karlsruhe has an extensive light rail network which was, until recently, unique in sharing some of its infrastructure with the heavy rail operator, DB (German Rail). The city transport operator, AVG, is owned by the municipalities and operates an extensive system which goes out to rural settlements around the conurbation. In 1995 it carried a total of 31.2 million passengers. Passenger numbers have more than doubled over the last ten years. On some routes, modal shift from car to public transport has been as high as 40%.

Strasbourg, France (pop. 252,000)

The city's light rail system is quite new, having been opened in 1995. It has proved highly successful and new extensions are being added to the system. The regional government of Alsace has financed new regional services which run at speeds of up to 20km/h on the Strasbourg to Mulhouse route.

Nantes, France (pop. 244,000)

Nantes opened a new tram route 1985, linking north east and south west parts of the city. It was a great success and a new Line 2 opened a few years later, linking north-west with south-east parts of the conurbation, with the two routes crossing in the city centre. The bus network has been restructured to act as a feeder to the tram network. Passenger journeys on the light rail network in 1992 were 16.6 million; this rose to 35 million in 1995. SNCF operates four routes into the city, which are funded by the regional government, using refurbished diesel railcars. A new route, currently freight only, is to be opened with seven new stations on a 20km route from north to south of the city.

Utrecht, Netherlands (pop. 233,000)

The Utrecht 'Sneltram' (Fast Tram) opened its first route in 1991. It helped open up new development to the south of the city, where large-scale housing development has taken place after installation of the tram route. The service is privately operated on a franchise to the city council. New routes are being planned, and the Sneltram is being considered for inclusion as part of the evolving S-Bahn project for the Randstad area.

Rennes, France (pop. 205,000)

Rennes opened a new metro system in 1997, using the driverless VAL system on an 8.1km route. It is promoted by Semtcar, a public-private company which franchises operations to a local operator, STUR. Semtcar has representatives of all the 33 district councils in the Rennes area, as well as private shareholders. Two more lines are planned; Line 2 is due to open in 2001 and Line 3 at a later date. The state railway, SNCF, operates suburban services on five routes. There are plans to open several new interchange stations with the metro and bus systems.

Gent, Belgium (pop. 260,000)

Gent's tram system extends some 30km over three routes and is operated by bus/tram company De Lijn. It integrates with state rail operator SNCB's services at Gent main line station, St Pieters, and with local bus services. There is also an 8.3km trolleybus network.

4.2 The Regional networks

There is strong local authority involvement in the ownership of many of the regional railway companies, who often run both bus and train services as an integrated whole. There are some comparisons which can be applied in a Northern Ireland context. Firstly, creation of the Assembly means that there will be a degree of regional accountability, and a regional focus which has been absent until now. Northern Ireland Railways, like most of Europe's railways, remains publicly-owned though there are a growing number of examples of private sector involvement in rail. In many cases both rail and bus services are provided by one operator, such as the Duren County Railway in Germany, illustrated below. In virtually every case there is strong political leadership, at a strategic level, which can respond to growing pressure from the electorate for improved public transport.

Each situation is obviously different, but there are many useful lessons to be learnt and applied in a Northern Irish context.

4.2.1 Germany

Following re-unification, the German federal government passed laws to 'regionalise' local rail services. The regional governments, or *lander*, were given powers to franchise local passenger services. The way this has been done varies around the country, with some *lander* retaining direct responsibility, and others devolving powers to a more local level. German Rail has won several contracts, and established a special business unit to respond to the challenge of regionalisation. In several cases independent companies have won franchises. The size of the regional governments varies, but in terms of land mass Northern Ireland forms a size which bears comparison with some of the German *lander*.

Its RegioExpress services operate on routes not dissimilar to Belfast –Derry/Londonderry, using new tilting diesel units capable of speeds of up to 160km/h. The tilting facility allows them to negotiate curves at higher speed than conventional trains. The RegioExpress services have on-train catering and are fully air-conditioned.

Local case study: The Duren County Railway (DKB)

The DKB's involvement in local rail services was a pilot scheme for regionalisation, and the results have satisfied everyone. Two branch lines from the industrial town of Duren, to Julich and Heimbach, were handed over to the Duren County Council in 1994. The council already had its own local bus company, the DKB, which started life in the nineteenth century as a tram operator. The company invested heavily in the run-down branch lines, improving track, re-building stations and integrating rail services with its bus network. New 'Regiosprinter' trains were ordered from Siemens which were delivered in 1996. The trains represented a dramatic improvement in quality, with on-train information systems, ticket facilities, and plenty of room for bikes and luggage. Passenger numbers on the lines continues to increase, and half-hourly frequencies were recently introduced.

The line has an active user group which works closely with DKB. The group is lobbying politicians to re-open a number of lines in the area to extend DKB's network. As well as its core passenger service, DKB acts as track authority for DB Cargo which operates some freight traffic along parts of the lines. There are also summer steam-hauled trains along the two lines, using a privately-owned steam locomotive which DKB occasionally borrows for engineer's trains!

The Schönbuchbahn

This line runs from Boblingen to Dettenhausen in Baden-Württemberg. It closed to passengers in the 1980s and re-opened in 1998 as a result of the regional government and local authorities developing a package which included complete track re-laying, new stations and new Adtranz Regioshuttle trains. The service links several rural communities into the growing town of Boblingen, connecting with fast commuter services to Stuttgart.

4.2.2 The Netherlands

The Netherlands Government recently decided to split several of the most peripheral rural lines from the main Dutch Railways (NS) network. It has specified a rolling programme of franchising of local lines which is taking place now, and should be complete by 2004.

Local case study: Syntus

One of the first lines to be separated from NS ownership was the rural network based on Doetinchem, near Arnhem, extending east to Winterswijk and then north-west to Zutphen. A new company was created as a result of two friends getting together: the local NS manager at Doetinchem and his counterpart in the local bus company. They developed their vision for one transport operator providing bus and rail services in the region, and persuaded the Dutch Government to back them. Syntus was the result: a company owned partly by NS and partly by local bus interests, with the backing of a major French company.

The new service started in May 1999, and is a fully-integrated rail and bus operation, with drivers trained to operate both buses and trains. Frequencies have been improved and there are plans for new interchanges at several stations along the route.

4.2.3 Sweden

Sweden has perhaps gone furthest in decentralising railway operations. The Government legislated for a separate infrastructure body, Banverket, in the early 1990s. They also allowed democratically-elected county transport authorities to tender local rail services, to get better value for money and improved integration with bus services. Up to the 1990s there was just one train operator, Swedish State Railways (SJ) which expected to win all the county contracts. However, a small local bus company, BK, surprised everyone by winning contracts in the south of the country. Today, several more operators are on the scene including BSM, The Train Company, and BK itself, trading as BK Train.

Local case study: The Jönköping County Network

Jonkoping county, centred on the town of that name, covers a large part of southern Sweden. It was the first county transport authority to put local rail services out to tender and awarded contracts to BK Train, which was able to offer lower prices and better value for money than SJ. The authority, which is half-owned by the county council and half by the district councils in the area, owns a fleet of trains which are currently Fiat railcars. All the operator does is run the trains, and maintain the units at its workshops in Vetlanda. Savings on contract prices have led to introduction of new services. The transport authority has introduced smart-card ticketing on trains and buses and has made an order for a fleet of new trains, to be delivered next year.

Local case study: The Inland Railway

The Inland Railway extends some 1076 km from Ostersund to Gällivare in the north of the country. The highly scenic route has teetered on the brink of closure several times but its future is now assured. The infrastructure belongs to the Inland Railway AB; unlike most other Swedish operators, it is a vertically-integrated company, with a subsidiary which operates a limited number of passenger trains over parts of the line. It acts as track authority for other operators, including freight companies which move timber and other goods from depots along the route to other parts of Sweden. There are popular tourist services in the summer months, some using steam. Trains stop at several stations along the line which are now owned by local businesspeople, offer a range of local cuisine and crafts.

4.2.4 The Republic of Ireland

The Republic of Ireland does not have a strong tier of regional government, yet it is of obvious relevance as Northern Ireland's neighbour, its railway company Iarnród Éireann sharing operation of the Belfast- Dublin *Enterprise* service with Translink. The structure of Iarnród Éireann is not dissimilar to NIR. It is publicly owned, with no separation of infrastructure from operations. Dublin, a much larger city than Belfast with over a million inhabitants, has the highly successful electrified DART system, running on a north-south route across the city, and currently being extended. Business on Iarnród Éireann is increasing rapidly, reflecting the dynamic economy. Passenger growth is averaging about 10% each year.

The National Development Plan for transport was published last year. It allocates some £2.837 bn for public transport over the period 2000-2006. For main line railways (excluding DART and suburban) it proposes £350 for completion of the railway safety programme, which is roughly equivalent to the recommendations of the Little Report for NIR. It adds a further £150m for a renewal and upgrading programme. The plan caters for annual passenger growth of between 5-10% and will allow renewal of 311 miles of track, purchase of 20 new coaches, and safety improvements at level crossings and bridges.

The proposals for regional and suburban railways include a new rail link through Dublin city centre; rail link to Dublin Airport; improved signalling; possible rail link to Navan, and a range of other improvements. There will be enhanced service on the Cork – Cobh route, and improvements to suburban services into Galway and Limerick. The Dublin light rail scheme (LUAS) is under construction and several enhancements are being planned or evaluated.

4.3 Lessons for Northern Ireland?

These examples show that with focussed management, a close relationship with local and regional government, and investment, regional railways can be transformed into prospering, modern forms of transport. The evidence is clear that strong regional government can be the catalyst in developing local and regional railways. The Department for Regional Development should seize the opportunity to learn from these examples of good practice and distance itself from the pro-roads policy of the past. A study visit, involving both civil servants and politicians to some of the most innovative regions involved in transport around Europe would be a worthwhile initiative.

One factor which most regions have in common is a clear separation between the strategic body – usually part of the regional government structure – and the actual service provision. This creates transparency between the buyer of services – effectively the community – and the actual provider, be it a public or private operator.

5. A new approach to regional railways: partnerships and re-openings

There are many examples of what could be done, in Britain and in other parts of Europe. Solutions will vary according to local circumstances, but there are several common threads. These are:

- **Focussed management:** if a regional railway doesn't have someone clearly in charge and locally-based, don't expect it to achieve much
- **Dedicated staff and rolling stock:** staff who are regular to a line get to know the passengers and develop a sense of pride in the line; dedicated rolling stock can be specially branded to reflect a local identity
- **Partnership:** the railway company, on its own, will not be able to turn round the fortunes of a regional railway. They need to work with local authorities and the wider community, ideally through partnership structures. Local people must be involved.
- **Investment:** no amount of marketing will cover up the cracks caused by historic under-investment in trains, stations and infrastructure
- **Network effects:** regional railways are part of a national, and international rail network. They need to connect easily into InterCity and other longer-distance services
- **Quality:** rural train services must offer a reasonable level of frequency with good quality trains and safe, attractive stations. The aim should be for a minimum standard of one train per hour, with only a few exceptions where very low population levels (e.g. North of Scotland) cannot justify this. The Passenger Service Requirement, specified by the Strategic Rail Authority, should specify improved frequencies.
- **Integration:** it isn't just railways: they have got to link up with other forms of transport, be it park and ride, cycling and walking, feeder buses, or demand-responsive community transport services
- **It isn't just transport:** rail should form a corridor for sustainable development, with housing, business activities and community facilities located at or near stations. Land-use planning has got to connect with transport policy to ensure development really is sustainable.

5.1 Partnership: how rail can rediscover its links with local communities

The last few years have seen an exciting growth of community-rail partnerships in the UK, and were recently praised by the chairman of the Shadow Strategic Rail Authority, Sir Alistair Morton. They are usually informal structures which bring together train operators, Railtrack, local authorities and the wider community in the promotion and development of a line or group of lines. Rail partnerships are ways of bringing the railway and the community closer together, acting as linear development agencies along a rail corridor. Rail partnerships encourage their members to see rail not just as an isolated form of transport, but as a key part in a much broader canvas including integrated transport, land-use, economic development and tourism, and other areas of social policy.

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships now has over twenty member organisations, covering lines from as far north as Thurso and Wick, down to Penzance and Swanage. The association provides a means for partnerships to share ideas and experience and promote the importance of rural railways amongst national decision-makers.

The Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership

First established in 1992, the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership has brought together a wide range of partners including Wales and West (the train operators), Railtrack, local authorities and national parks. It promotes the network of branch lines in Devon and Cornwall for both visitors and local people. Activities include:

- *Promotional literature:* last year it published 200,000 copies of 'Great Scenic Railways of Devon and Cornwall' and a range of individual Line Guides for the Tarka, Tamar

Valley, Looe Valley and Falmouth branch lines. Leaflet racks are supplied to major tourist attractions and hotels.

- *Events:* The Partnership has organised special events on trains, such as a Jazz Night, a Carols Train, local exhibitions on the history of the railways, and other media events
- *Station Improvements:* Most local stations now have tailor-made 'welcome' posters at their exit points. Local artists were used to research and design each poster. Other small-scale improvements have included new seating and station refurbishment
- *Information:* posters have been provided at several stations with connecting bus services; rail information posters have been erected in town and village centres.

All of the Devon and Cornwall branches are experiencing growth, with the Looe and Falmouth branches experiencing the biggest increases.

The Penistone Line Partnership

The Penistone Line runs from Huddersfield to Penistone, Barnsley and Sheffield, serving a mixture of urban and rural communities. National Lottery Charities Board funds a development worker for the Partnership, which was established in 1994 with a volunteer-run structure. It originated the idea of live music on scheduled trains, and still runs monthly Jazz Trains and other special events at Christmas and on other occasions.

The Partnership is at the forefront of community development initiatives on railways. It works with local schools on educational projects, and local community groups, such as Womens' Institutes, on station garden projects. Its *Tracking Lives* project involves local people building up an archive of material to create a community history of the line and the towns and villages it serves.

The Partnership has worked with Passenger Transport Executives to identify scope for new bus links, and initiated a project at Denby Dale which led to the award of Rural Bus Challenge funding for a bus-rail interchange and new bus services linking the rail service with outlying villages.

It also organises:

- Monthly guided walks from stations along the line
- Days out for members and friends
- A quarterly community newsletter

The service on the line is the best it has ever had, with additional evening and Sunday services introduced over the last three years. Passenger numbers continue to rise.

The Essex Community-Rail Partnership

The Partnership is based in a refurbished station building at Mistley, on the Manningtree to Harwich branch. As well as supporting the Harwich branch it also covers the Southminster and Walton-on-Naze lines in the south of the county. Its activities include:

- developing 'community adoption' schemes for stations
- preparing funding packages for station renovation
- developing 'Lineside Action Groups' for the three lines
- producing leaflets promoting rail travel and bus links on the three lines
- promoting local attractions which can be reached by rail
- organising special 'on train' events e.g. Santa Train

Settle-Carlisle Business Liaison Group/Development Company

This is a unique partnership, bringing together local businesses along the Settle-Carlisle railway corridor which have a commercial interest in the railway's survival. It's living proof that rural railways and small businesses have intertwined interests, and has a membership of over 50 companies. They include shopkeepers, hoteliers, and firms involved in e-commerce. The businesses involved, and groups including Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line and the Settle-Carlisle Railway

Development Company, have made an enormous difference to the line, with stations which are warm and welcoming, and key parts of village communities. The group publishes a quarterly newsletter *Business Line*.

5.2 Re-openings

It isn't just urban areas that are getting new railways and re-opened stations. There are a number of successful examples of line re-openings in more rural areas, not dissimilar to some parts of Northern Ireland.

Robin Hood: Nottingham to Worksop

The re-opening of this line opened up new opportunities for people in the former coalfield areas of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. The project involved major infrastructure work, including digging-out a tunnel and constructing a short section of entirely new railway. The scheme was financed by the EC, central Government and the two county councils. Passenger numbers have surprised many observers, with trains being frequently overcrowded.

Ribble Valley

The Blackburn to Clitheroe and Hellified line lost its passenger service in the 1960s, but survived as an important freight corridor into the 1980s. Ribble Valley Rail was formed in 1991 to campaign for a regular passenger service over the line, and developed a highly effective relationship with Lancashire County Council and Ribble Valley District Council. Their efforts were crowned with success in 1996, when an hourly passenger service was introduced, extending the Manchester to Blackburn service with new stations at Ramsgreave and Wilpshire, Langho, Whalley and Clitheroe. Use of the new service exceeded all forecasts and trains, like the Robin Hood service, are often crowded. The group has continued to promote the service, and work closely with First North Western and Lancashire County Council on service quality issues. The county council has invested over £350,000 on a bus-rail interchange at Clitheroe station.

Okehampton: The Dartmoor Railway

On the initiative of Devon County Council, passenger services returned to Okehampton in summer 1998, with Sundays-only shuttles linking into a network of bus services at Okehampton which take visitors out to Dartmoor. Okehampton station has been restored to its Southern Railway glory and has a buffet, craft and model railway shop. Funding has come from Devon County Council and a range of other sources. The track maintenance contract was won by Yorkshire-based RMS Locotec, who recently took over the lease to operate the railway itself as far as connection with Railtrack at Crediton. The company operates the railway as 'The Dartmoor Railway' and in the summer of 2000 will be operating the 'Dartmoor Pony' shuttle from Okehampton station to Meldon Quarry.

Dartmoor Railway Ltd promotes the seasonal passenger service from Exeter, contracting with Wales and West Railway to provide a diesel multiple unit and train crew. Fares are collected by Dartmoor Railway staff. The next stage could be for Dartmoor Railway to charter its own rolling stock using more tourist-friendly trains.

Settle-Carlisle Line

The line survived a concerted attempt at closure in the late 1980s, but several of the local stations had already been closed down by BR in the 1970s. These included Horton-in-Ribblesdale, Ribbleshead, Garsdale, Lazonby, Langwathby and Armathwaite. These stations were re-opened, to the delight of local people and the thousands of visitors who come to the Yorkshire Dales each year, in 1986. Fortunately, the station buildings had survived and many have been transformed into attractive accommodation for business activities. Langwathby station has an excellent restaurant and mini-museum. Horton-in-Ribblesdale recently won the 'national community spirit' prize for its spotless waiting rooms and outstanding appearance. Ribbleshead station is being transformed into an

Interpretation Centre, complete with a caretaker's flat on the premises. All the stations are well cared-for by the local community, through the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line. The Settle-Carlisle Railway Development Company has brought a strategic focus to the development of the line, pulling in funding for station enhancements such as period-style lighting and seating, and improved passenger facilities.

5.3 Can lessons be learnt?

Many lines in Britain which have similar characteristics to some disused routes in Northern Ireland have re-opened as a result of a partnership approach, initially involving local authorities and voluntary campaigning groups. Translink has an opportunity to work with such groups in Northern Ireland to identify potential re-openings and do some initial feasibility work to see whether further research would be fruitful. Some lines which may not be viable for re-opening now, could become so in ten or twenty years. Development should not be allowed on trackbeds which would prevent future re-opening.

Later in this report we suggest how a pilot scheme for a community-rail partnership for the Belfast to Derry/Londonderry route could be developed. The examples of lines like Settle-Carlisle suggest that regional railways can become a real pleasure to use, with attractive stations and good quality trains. The railway becomes like a necklace – with each station a pearl, and the railway the thread that binds them, and their communities, together.

6. Why Northern Ireland Needs Its Railways

It would be foolhardy to close down any of Northern Ireland's Railways at a time when they could, given sufficient investment, offer a sustainable alternative to the car and act as a tool of regional development. This is already happening in Britain, and in the Republic of Ireland. The argument for development is three-fold:

- **Social:** ensuring that railways meet the needs of all sections of the community, helping overcome social exclusion and offering a quality, accessible form of transport which is affordable and safe. This is stressed in *Shaping Our Future*, policy SPG 3.2 which says 'improve and develop public transport to assist in providing safe and equitable access to services, facilities and employment opportunities essential to the vitality of local communities'. Rail is *not* just a form of transport for the better-off. It can provide opportunities for access to employment and training, particularly from more remote parts of the region. It forms the core of an integrated transport system which is affordable and accessible for all.
- **Economic:** acting as a tool of sustainable regional development, opening up areas which have suffered over the last thirty years and more, providing a quality means of transport for business purposes. A town off the rail map suffers from perceptions of peripherality. If a town is rail-linked it is part of a clear, international transport network. This is crucial to Northern Ireland's developing tourism economy. Railways can form a corridor for sustainable development, with stations acting as hubs for social and business activity. Development needs to be located, as far as possible, at locations which are rail served, or could become so. Loss of a sizeable part of the NIR network would make the Translink engineering workshops at Belfast unviable, with the loss of up to 200 skilled jobs in an area of high unemployment, in addition to the redundancies of operational staff. The economic benefits of public transport investment are often ignored. For example, evidence from Los Angeles has shown that 85 cents of every dollar spent on petrol leaves the regional economy. In contrast, out of every dollar that buys a fare in public transport, 80 cents goes in transport workers' wages which go on to generate \$3.80 of goods and services in the region (Friends of the Earth, 1995. *Working Future? - Jobs and the Environment.*)
- **Environmental:** railways are safe, low-polluting forms of transport. They can offer an alternative to the car for commuting, leisure and long distance business travel. It is much more difficult to persuade motorists to use a bus than a train. Rail is perceived as a quality form of transport, typified by *The Enterprise*. Coach services, even of the high-quality Goldrider fleet, are still seen as a form of transport for the non-car owner.

Despite many towns losing their rail service as long ago as the mid-1960s, the loss still rankles. Large towns such as Enniskillen, Armagh, Omagh, Strabane and Dungannon have become more peripheral as a result of the loss of their train service. There is an awareness in many towns still served by rail that they would be vulnerable to any loss of service.

Many respondents to the consultation document *Shaping Our Future* commented on the document's inadequate regard for rail as a key element in regional development. For example, the Derry/Londonderry Chamber of Commerce commented that 'the rail link is neglected. Perhaps the one single development which would contribute significantly to road traffic relief would be the provision of a fast, efficient and modern InterCity rail link with Belfast. This obvious need has existed for years and is now an urgent priority.'

Derry City Council is part of a consortium of seven district councils lobbying for better rail services to the north-west. The City Partnership Board is also pressing for better rail services.

Larne District Council said that 'poor infrastructure has actually stifled the town's growth' and that there was a need to improve the railway infrastructure. Ballymena District Council commented on the

need for better rail services and improved park and ride facilities at the station. Derry City Council noted that the ‘bus and rail networks need considerable investment’.

The proposals contained in *Shaping Our Future* subsidiary document, *Family of Settlements Report*, makes telling reading. Many towns which are targeted for major growth in housing, with good rail links often cited as a strength, are on routes which may face closure. These include:

- Antrim – 3600 new units
- Ballymena – 4050 new units
- Ballymoney – 1,650 new units
- Coleraine – 3,950 new units
- Derry/Londonderry – 9000 new units

Any suggestion that rail links would be lost make a mockery of everything *Shaping Our Future* says about sustainable development. Closure of the railways will mean that the vast majority of the new residents in the areas targeted for growth will use their cars, with a minority reliant on bus services.

7. The Vision

7.1 Rail - core of an integrated network

Railways in Northern Ireland have the potential to meet a much greater proportion of the region's transport needs than they do at present, and to offer improved opportunities for cross-border travel. The basic structure of an integrated transport system, through a publicly-owned and accountable company, Translink, is already there. The desperate need, here and now, is for investment linked into a long-term integrated transport strategy which makes the best of rail and bus, and which aims to minimise use of the car wherever possible.

Rail can, despite the cutbacks of the 1960s, still offer a good spread of service across Northern Ireland, with the exception of the west. Rail should be the core of an integrated transport network on the following corridors:

- Belfast – Lisburn – Portadown – Newry
- Belfast – Bangor
- Belfast – Carrickfergus – Whitehead – Larne
- Belfast – Antrim – Ballymena – Coleraine – Portrush – Derry/Londonderry

Translink has already provided feeder bus services from rail hubs, e.g. Portadown, Coleraine and Bangor. There is scope for more dedicated LinkLine services from rail hubs, which we identify below on a route-by-route basis.

7.2 Little or Nothing?

The Little Report, and the report of PriceWaterhouseCoopers on rolling stock, make a good case for investment to bring the railways of Northern Ireland up to a reasonable standard, allowing the current level of services to be operated with maximum safety and reliability. We have no quarrel with any of the findings, and our only comment would be that their relatively modest investment proposals should be implemented quickly and without any more of the deeply damaging vacillation which has characterised investment decisions in Northern Ireland's railways over the last ten years.

There is a need, and a clear demand from all sections of the Northern Ireland community, for more investment in the rail network to enable it to perform a much bigger role than that which it does today. If the current review of rail services has achieved anything, it is the uniting of every section of mainstream opinion within Northern Ireland, straddling all communities and their political parties, as well as the business community and the voluntary sector.

7.3 Getting investment into the railways

Friends of the Earth, Transport 2000 and TSSA believe that a major twenty-year investment programme is required to create a dynamic, sustainable rail network which will equal if not better the standard of rail provision in the Republic.

The most pressing need is for new rolling stock. All the existing fleet needs replacing, some of it as a matter of urgency. Several good quality, off-the-shelf designs are available within the UK and from other manufacturers around the world. The Adtranz 'Turbostar' or the Alstom 'Coradia' would go a long way to meeting the needs of a quality replacement train for Northern Ireland's services, with appropriate re-gauging. The main criteria should be for a three-car diesel multiple unit with:

- High standards of comfort, with air-conditioning
- On-train visual and aural information facilities
- High standards of disabled access
- 100 mph capability
- Adequate space for bikes and heavy luggage
- Ability to run in multiple, of up to three sets

We suggest below a strongly-branded 'Belfast S-Bahn' or BART, using good quality vehicles. The needs of the Derry/Londonderry Route are different but can be accommodated using the same basic train, with different internal layout and possibly modifications to permit higher maximum speeds. The commuter stock should aim to provide relatively dense seating, without catering facilities, and would not normally run at speeds of more than 80mph. The Derry/Londonderry stock should have a more 'InterCity' feel, with tables, and catering facilities and a 90 mph capability (and 100mph on Belfast to Dublin) There should be more space for bikes, heavy luggage and prams.

7.4 The routes:

7.4.1 A BART for Belfast?

The existing rail network has enormous potential, following the connection of the three historically-divided routes (NCC, GNR and B&CDR lines). Belfast and its surrounding towns should get the equivalent of a modern, German-style 'S-Bahn' – or the Belfast equivalent (BART) of Dublin's Area Rapid Transit (DART) with good quality, frequent commuter services along main corridors. The basic pattern should be that of a stopping and semi-fast service, using stations which are staffed, well-designed and attractive.

The main 'legs' of such a network now are Bangor and Larne to Belfast, then the core route to Lisburn and Portadown. This has immediate potential for growth, providing the right quality and amount of rolling stock was available to offer high frequencies (every 10 min along the core route south of Belfast). However, there are two destinations not currently rail-served which could form part of the BART network: Aldergrove Airport and Armagh City.

Aldergrove Airport currently has 3 million passengers a year, and it is growing. The Lisburn to Antrim railway passes the airport perimeter and could, relatively easily, be diverted to serve the airport. Alternatively, a 'people mover' type service could link the main passenger terminal with a station on the existing line. This would offer a high quality link from the city to Northern Ireland's main international airport which is not currently offered by the half-hourly bus service. All the evidence suggests that rail links to airports massively out-perform bus links once the rail service is introduced. Examples include Manchester, Gardermoen (Norway), and Arlanda (Sweden). An Aldergrove to Belfast and Bangor service would provide links to the south at Lisburn and a connection to Belfast City Airport at Sydenham when either airport was closed for whatever reason. The service pattern could be Antrim – Aldergrove- Belfast - Bangor, with trains connecting at Antrim for Derry/Londonderry services.

Interchange facilities from rail to air at Belfast City Airport should be improved. The building of a new terminal offers the opportunity to do this, removing the present inadequate arrangements at Sydenham and providing a new dedicated station for the Airport which is of a high standard.

Armagh is Northern Ireland's third city with a population of some 14,750 residents in the city itself. The housing projections for the district provide for 2,000 new units in the urban area, and 1,600 in the rural part of the district. The former railway between Armagh and Portadown is largely intact, though lifted. Re-instating the rail link would create an obvious southern end of a cross-Belfast commuter service and open up opportunities for developing tourism in the historic city.

Several other towns currently served by the Belfast to Portadown railway are likely to grow substantially in the next few years. Craigavon has a target of nearly 5,000 new units, of which 3,500 will be in the urban area, close to the railway. Banbridge, within easy driving distance of the railway, is set to grow by 2,400 units. There is serious congestion on the M1 south of Belfast. A new park and ride station at close to Lisburn would offer an attractive alternative for motorists wanting to access Belfast city centre. A similar facility could be provided at Ballyhenry, near Bleach Green, for commuters from the north of the city centre.

7.4.2 The Derry/Londonderry Route

The main line from Belfast to Derry/Londonderry will be re-instated when the section from Bleach Green to Antrim re-opens later this year. This will, at a stroke, take 25 minutes off the journey time between the two cities. However, use of life-expired trains will not capture the great potential that the re-opening offers. There should be a target of a 1hr 30 minute journey time on the fastest trains from Derry/Londonderry to Belfast, based on an express service stopping only at Coleraine, Ballymoney, Ballymena and Antrim, using modern diesel trains, such as the ‘Turbostar’ built by Adtranz or the Coradia supplied by Alstom. There should be buffet car facilities available on the train, capable of serving hot meals. We also suggest this service – *The North Atlantic Express* – should continue, with some trains running through to Dublin. This would fill the current gaps in *The Enterprise* timetable, and give Derry/Londonderry a direct service to Dublin in 3h 30min.

Faster timings would be achieved through upgrading track on certain sections of the route, particularly between Coleraine and Derry/Londonderry. There would be a need for selective re-instatement of passing loops to provide greater capacity on the line.

Several towns along the route are targeted for substantial growth in *Shaping Our Future*. Its *Family of Settlements* report shows a projected additional 4,050 units in the Ballymena district; 1650 in Ballymoney; and nearly 4,000 in Coleraine. It cites the town’s road and rail links giving ‘good accessibility to the region’s major urban areas and gateways’. Derry/Londonderry itself, with a population in the urban area already at 84,200, is targeted for an extra 7,800 units in the urban area alone, with a further 1,200 units in the rural hinterland. The report says ‘Strengthening the city’s strategic transport links, particularly the connections to Belfast and Dublin, will assist in reducing the perception of peripherality’. (p.39).

There may be two-way commuter potential on the Derry/Londonderry corridor, and the possibility of re-opening Limavady Junction as a park and ride station should be investigated.

The Belfast to Derry/Londonderry line is, in a way Northern Ireland’s Settle-Carlisle route. It has had its glory days, and has in recent years declined into becoming a backwater. Yet the potential is enormous. It links Northern Ireland’s two main cities, and serves several major towns which are likely to grow rapidly in the next ten years. It serves some of Northern Ireland’s major tourist areas, and the line itself offers stunning views of the Atlantic and Lough Foyle. It is a gateway to Donegal, and offers a direct link to Portrush and connections for the Giant’s Causeway. Bus links provide easy access to Lough Neagh from Antrim, Ballycastle from Ballymoney, and, potentially the Glens of Antrim from Ballymena. We propose the establishment of a Derry/Londonderry Rail Partnership (see below, Section 7.10) which will capture this enormous potential, and build on the new opportunities to be opened up by the Bleach Green – Antrim re-opening in November.

7.4.3 Cross-Border Services

The proposed through service from Derry/Londonderry to Dublin would fill in the current timetable gaps providing, at certain times of the day, a quality hourly service between Belfast and Dublin. Our suggestion to examine the feasibility of re-opening the Derry/Londonderry to Portadown railway would offer much-improved links to the border areas to the west of Ireland. There should also be better bus connections from Waterside station for direct services to Donegal. Having to change twice (at the rail station and then bus station) is a deterrent to passengers.

7.5 Light rail for Belfast? The case of Comber

There is a debate about the best way to serve the growing population in the Newtownards area. It has grown by over 20% between 1981 and 1996, and *Shaping Our Future* allocates 3,950 new units in the Ards area. The Family of Settlements report notes that ‘growth of Newtownards has increased congestion on the approaches to Belfast. Consideration should therefore be given to ensuring that any new private development is linked to the provision of new public transport, additional infrastructure

and community facilities'. (p.73). The same section of the report notes that 'the possibility of developing a dedicated public transport route along the former Belfast to Comber railway line would improve accessibility and could represent a significant strength and opportunity for the town.'

The issue is: light rail or guided bus? Many cities across Europe, with smaller populations than Belfast, have flourishing light rail networks. Belfast's tram network was dismantled in the 1950s, and whilst today's bus network is comprehensive, using – in most cases – good quality vehicles, there remains a number of problems. Firstly, even with bus lanes, or segregated busways, there is often limited road space to handle buses. A more fundamental problem is that the bus, even with all the benefits of modern air-conditioning and low-floor access, has a major perception problem. It is very difficult indeed to persuade motorists to use a bus. It is much easier to get them onto a train – or a tram. The examples often cited of 'successful' bus ways include those at Essen, Germany, and Adelaide, Australia. However, in neither case has the system been significantly extended and the Essen authorities have instead invested in new light rail services and expanding commuter-rail. A recent report by the respected transport economist Carmen Hass-Klau (*Financial, Operational and Demand Comparison of Light Rail, Guided Buses, Busways and Bus Lanes*, published by ETP, April 2000) concluded that guided bus is not the low-cost alternative to light rail, noting that very often the infrastructure and other capital costs of guided bus (e.g. the vehicles themselves) were not taken fully into account in assessing their viability. She concluded that the high initial cost and relative inflexibility of light rail may in fact work to its advantage:

'In political terms, these attributes give it a high profile as a symbol of commitment in the early stages, and make it a confident, futuristic symbol of the city when it is implemented. Light rail systems have many friends – commercial, civic, political and environmental – and few enemies.' Guided busways are *'useful additions.....but probably limited to a fringe role.'*

We are not convinced that the proposed e-way would offer an attractive alternative to the car. The points made by the Hass-Klau report is that guided busways do not form the basis of a city-wide network, but are peripheral, but sometimes useful, extras. If Belfast wants a city-wide high quality network it should opt for light rail.

It is far easier to get motorists onto a high quality light vehicle than onto a bus. It would make more sense to seriously investigate the option of developing a modern light rail system for Belfast which links in with both existing rail and bus services at key hub locations in the city centre (e.g. Central and Great Victoria Street). Light rail systems work best when they form a network, though the successful Manchester Metrolink began by connecting two life-expired sections of suburban railway. An initial route for Belfast would include the Comber line, serving the city centre and then running to the west or south of the city. Other routes could be added in later stages, as the initial service 'beds down' and teething troubles are overcome. We propose that detailed feasibility is undertaken which makes a serious comparison between light rail and guided bus, based on the modelling of several possible route options across the city.

The political pendulum has changed significantly in recent months, following lukewarm support for light rail in the Government's Integrated Transport White Paper. There is now a much greater interest in light rail, and the early success of Croydon Tramlink will strengthen the case for major investment in light rail, in the Government's 10-year spending plan (see *Transit* journal 'Prescott executes U-turn as light rail becomes the agent of radical change in public transport', April 21 2000). The next scheme to open will be the Nottingham Rapid Transit system, which will be a light rail system. The population of Nottingham is almost the same as Belfast's, at some 260,000 inhabitants. Belfast is of the right size and shape to make for a viable light rail system, and now is the opportunity to push hard for it.

Translink should opt for light rail, but press for the extension of bus lanes on the busier arterial routes into Belfast city centre.

7.6 Tourism

The railways of Northern Ireland have great potential for tourist use, but seem to be seriously underplayed by tourism agencies. The new political situation in the region means that tourism will revive, and many foreign visitors may well be pre-disposed to use rail rather than hire cars if they come from public-transport friendly countries, e.g. Germany, The Netherlands, and Scandinavia.

Rail has much to offer as an experience in itself. The ride between Coleraine and Derry/Londonderry is one of the most scenic in Ireland, and even the short commuter routes to Larne and Bangor offer superb views across Belfast Lough. Rail could offer a good quality way for foreign tourists to discover Northern Ireland, particularly in conjunction with the Ulsterbus network. More collaboration with the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland could result in regular summer steam excursions to Portrush and Derry/Londonderry, aimed at the general family market, rather than railway enthusiasts. The Larne line provides access to the historic town of Carrickfergus and the resort of Whitehead, with its RPSI base. The Bangor line provides a link to the Folk Museum at Cultra, and Bangor itself.

Re-opening railways primarily as tourist attractions can lead to their use as means of transport. The re-opening of the former GN (I) route as the Foyle Valley Railway could bring some transport benefits along the Derry/Londonderry to Strabane corridor.

An important element of a rail-based tourism strategy must be to get tourists onto rail as soon as they get off a plane – a station for Aldergrove Airport must be a major priority, with good quality, multi-lingual publicity available for tourists. Equally, improvements should be made to the interchange facilities at Belfast City Airport. Northern Ireland tourist publicity should stress the availability of rail and coach services. There is scope for developing specialist tourism, for example walking or cycling tourism which makes use of the train for part of the visit.

7.7 The Freight Dimension

Very little freight is carried on Northern Ireland's railways today, though there is potential for much more. Iainród Éireann operates regular services into Belfast's Adelaide Yard, and there is occasional freight traffic to Derry/Londonderry, involving timber and, in the past, fertiliser.

There is freight potential to both Belfast and Larne ports, from within Northern Ireland, and from the Republic. Both have been rail-connected and it would not present major problems to restore links. Larne is part of the European TENS network and offers a short crossing to Stranraer, which is capable of handling rail freight, which could stay on rail through the Channel Tunnel and on to major European destinations. Modern freight operations mean that containers and swap-bodies can be transferred quickly from a rail vehicle onto a ferry and then transferred back on to a rail vehicle at the port. The level of handling facilities required need not be great: a siding with access for road vehicles and space for a mobile crane to transfer containers, swapbodies and other goods would not be difficult to provide. The biggest problem would be in identifying suitable rolling stock. There may be some surplus wagons available from Iainród Éireann, though building new, purpose-built vehicles would be a worthwhile long-term investment.

The existing sporadic timber traffic from Derry/Londonderry could be developed more if there was the right framework to encourage it.

Part of the problem in developing new freight business is that Translink is a passenger transport operator, and there is little freight expertise left within the company. One option could be to allow Iainród Éireann to be more pro-active in winning freight in Northern Ireland, though the difficulty here (apart from politics) is that new freight business is won by good local knowledge and business contacts, and a close relationship with local authorities and development agencies. Translink may be encouraged, if grant aid was available for handling facilities, to develop either its own rail freight subsidiary, or to develop a partnership with English Welsh and Scottish Railways, the main UK rail freight operator.

The Department for Regional Development should commission a detailed study which examines options for developing rail freight within Northern Ireland, considering potential traffic, suitable rail-head facilities including ports and inland locations, and most appropriate structures to develop the business.

7.8 The Long-term:

7.8.1 Portadown to Derry/Londonderry re-opened?

The railway from Portadown to Derry/Londonderry closed completely in 1965, leaving substantial towns such as Omagh, Dungannon and Strabane isolated from the rail network. This isolation has contributed towards the problems of peripherality they have suffered in the last thirty years. It is time to take a serious look at the prospects for re-opening the railway in its entirety, with good quality connecting bus links from the main rail hubs to some of the more remote rural communities in the west. Shaping Our Future's targets for new housing in these areas point to significant growth over the next twenty years, with the following units proposed:

| | |
|-----------|-------|
| Dungannon | 3,100 |
| Omagh | 3,650 |
| Strabane | 2,400 |

The re-opening would be costly, but may well be justified on social and economic grounds. Modern rolling stock which is cheap to operate with low maintenance costs will help bring operating costs down, with a railway providing an invaluable tool for regional development.

7.8.2 Other possible re-openings

There are other lines which closed in the 1960s which could be candidates for re-opening. If the line was re-opened, for light rail, between Belfast and Comber, a future extension to Newcastle should not be ruled out. In many cases, sizeable towns which once had a railway service may be better linked into Northern Ireland's rail network by an extension of Link Line bus services. For example a re-opened branch from Cookstown to the Derry/Londonderry – Portadown line at Dungannon may not be viable, but a good quality bus connection would provide an alternative. Equally, Enniskillen could have a LinkLine service to Omagh.

7.9 Resources: where would the money come from?

It must be recognised that the current financial support given to Translink, for both rail and bus services, represents extremely good value for money compared both with Britain and other parts of Europe. The subsidy of 5.3p per passenger mile compares with companies which have parallels with Translink operations, such as ScotRail, whose subsidy is 21p per passenger mile. The subsidy per head of population is one seventh of the UK average. Translink is not a major burden on the taxpayer. It has managed to achieve a great deal with scant resources.

The immediate issue must be to ensure that Northern Ireland's rail network gets the level of public sector funding which it deserves and is entitled to. This means ensuring that the imminent 10-year spending plan provides sufficient funds to implement the recommendations of the Little Report in its entirety, but also to provide additional funds to improve on the basic network as it stands today. This means a complete renewal of the rolling stock fleet, based on a long-term leasing arrangement with an appropriate supplier.

The £183 million figure quoted to regenerate Northern Ireland's rail network is small. The 'Leeds First' project to improve station capacity and passenger facilities is costing £165 million alone. In terms of transport investment £183 million is a small price to pay for getting a better rail service for an entire region.

Structural Funds

The rail network has already benefited significantly from European Union funds, notably the upgrade of the Belfast – Dublin route, Great Victoria Street station, the Dargan Bridge and Bleach Green to Antrim. The Northern Ireland Structural Funds Plan 2000-2006 states in paragraph 7.31 as an example of projects which might be funded under the Economic Renewal Priority:

“Northern Ireland’s infrastructure will need to be reinforced substantially to realise the opportunities for faster economic growth. Strategic infrastructure projects which might be considered for support under the criteria set out above could include support for appropriate energy projects, development of strategic public transport initiatives (to increase public transport carrying capacity, to reduce congestion and pollution and to improve the functioning of the labour market) and key transport linkages and infrastructure investments required to support identified inward investment projects.”

We understand that the current plans do not include bids for rail public transport infrastructure and it appears likely that the reason for this is the lack of available additional funds. One highly appropriate source, however, would be the monies ear-marked for the M1/Westlink project. If expenditure on the Westlink was reduced from £40m to £10m and £30m invested in rail in the same transport corridor, a further £90m could be levered in EU funding for spending on rail. The Department of Regional Development and the Department of Finance and Personnel should urgently review the former DRD’s Structural Funds plans.

A strong case could be made for EU assistance with other parts of the network on the basis of the beneficial economic, social and environmental impacts of such investment.

Private Finance

There is scope for greater co-operation with the private sector, for example in leasing arrangements for rolling stock, and in exploiting opportunities for rail freight in Northern Ireland. However, there is scant evidence that privatisation on its own reduces costs, as we have seen in the UK. One of the main advantages of privatisation is that it allows for greater commercial freedom, but the same objective can be achieved by giving a public sector company such as Translink greater autonomy.

IDB Support

The Industrial Development Board has a budget of over £150m per annum in order to create jobs in Northern Ireland. The recent Public Accounts Committee report found that ‘Between April 1988 and March 1997, IDB offered some £397 million of public funds, through 102 offers of selective financial assistance, to promote some 15,200 jobs in new inward projects.’ This works out at an average of £26,000 per job. It has often made large grants to keep mobile investment from moving on. 700 long term jobs (NIR’s work force) must surely warrant at least the kind of support given to trans-national companies. A figure of at least £30,000 per job would seem appropriate in this instance making a total of £21m.

Existing Roads Budget

The existing budget for Roads Service includes sums for minor but expensive ‘improvements’ to the roads network throughout Northern Ireland. Many of these have little to do with safety and much to do with increasing traffic speeds. They are justified through cost benefit analysis demonstrating aggregate time-savings to motorists. A review of Roads Service’s spending plans should take place

with a view to transferring spending to the rail infrastructure. This will mean some tough political choices being made.

The evidence of rail investment around the world, and here in Ireland with *The Enterprise* service, is that by creating the basis of a good quality infrastructure, with attractive passenger facilities and fast, frequent trains, passenger numbers rise and revenue goes up accordingly. We should not fool ourselves into thinking that routes such as Belfast to Derry/Londonderry, or the Larne and Bangor lines, will ever be fully commercial, whether under public or private ownership. However, investment will bring running costs down and drive revenue up. The relatively modest financial support given to the railways in Northern Ireland is a very small price to pay for keeping thousands of cars off the road each day, and providing a quality means of transport for those without access to a car.

7.10 Translink: developing a community focus

Translink can pride itself by being a responsible, community-focused business. Its commitment to improving access for people with disabilities; its encouragement of schools involvement in transport; its close liaison with the local authorities all point towards a positive attitude which is not always evident on some of Britain's privatised railways.

However, there are some lessons that can be learnt from UK practice in rail-community relations. The community-rail partnerships which exist on many British regional lines could usefully be applied to a Northern Ireland context. These partnerships work best on a 'line of route' basis, acting as linear regional development agencies. The railway is seen not just as a piece of infrastructure, but a spine along which a range of sustainable economic and social initiatives can happen, which relate to each other in various ways. The role of the station is key to this: a hub not just for transport interchange, but a potential location for shops, offices and other activities which create a cluster of economic activity. To make this concept work, a partnership involving the railway company, local authorities, tourism development agencies, community organisations and local business needs to be established.

The most appropriate route to develop the partnership, initially, may be the Derry/Londonderry Route. Its main aims could be to

- Promote greater use of the railway for passenger and freight movement
- To develop good interchange between the railway and bus, park and ride and cycling
- To improve facilities and services along the railway
- To encourage sustainable development along the rail corridor
- To foster community links to the railway, including schools
- To encourage tourism along the route

The partnership could be established quickly, capitalising on the concerns which have been expressed by local authorities, chambers of commerce and community organisations about the future of the line. For it to work, a rail partnership officer should be appointed, who would be based at a convenient location along the line (e.g. Coleraine).

Northern Ireland is seeing a growing number of community transport schemes, funded by the Rural Transport Fund. Encouragement should be given to voluntary sector community transport operators to link their services with rail and coach operations, offering disabled people, and others without access to transport, a seamless and accessible journey over longer distances.

7.11 Protecting the Passengers' Interest

Translink has its own passenger groups, and the General Consumers' Council has overall consultative role in public transport. However, the level of consumer protection enjoyed by rail users in Northern Ireland is less than their counterparts in Britain. The recently re-structured Rail Passengers' Council is funded through the (Shadow) Strategic Rail Authority, together with a network of regional Rail Passenger Committees. Any significant change to rail services has to be considered by these

committees, which can exert considerable power. The British structure is enshrined in legislation, and the Transport Bill currently going through Parliament will further strengthen the role of the committees.

In Northern Ireland, we would like to see a strengthening of the role of the General Consumers' Council, with the formation of a Transport Users' Council under the aegis of the GCC. This body could be composed of people who represent a diverse range of users, with a cross-community approach. Translink should review its own arrangements for dealing with passenger complaints, adopting the recommendations made by the General Consumers' Council in their submission to the Railways Task Force.

7.12 How should transport be organised in Northern Ireland?

In most European regions there is a much clearer distinction between the actual provision of public transport services and the more overall strategic direction. There is a need to examine options which provide:

- Clear democratic accountability
- Strategic direction
- Clear separation of service provision from strategic policy
- A degree of operational autonomy for the service provider

Translink is playing an important role as a multi-modal transport provider in Northern Ireland. It is publicly-owned, and is now accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly's Department for Regional Development. We do not believe that privatisation as such is the appropriate way forward, though greater commercial freedom for Translink, particularly in terms of borrowing and leasing arrangements, would be very welcome. One possible way of doing this would be to examine the potential of the model provided by the recent change in status of the Post Office. Translink needs, from Government, a long-term investment commitment to meet social, economic and environmental needs.

The current structure of Translink has been criticised by some people for being excessively bus-oriented. This undoubtedly reflects genuine concerns about the lack of investment in rail, which is not the responsibility of Translink's managers. Translink should be aware of concerns amongst its own railway staff and work hard to demonstrate in both policy and practice that it is a genuinely integrated transport operator, determined to maximise the best potential of both bus and rail.

We are very strongly of the view that there should be a new Public Transport Unit within the Department for Regional Development (not within Roads Service), staffed by people who are committed to an expanding, integrated public transport network. This Unit should work closely with other parts of the Department to ensure that land use planning is closely integrated with sustainable transport provision, and also that other areas of policy dovetail with transport. We would stress that policies to overcome social exclusion, and rural peripherality, require good quality, affordable public transport – not new roads.

A Strategic Transport Authority

The British model, where a Strategic Rail Authority has been established by the Government to develop the rail network and generate long-term funding, should be considered in a Northern Ireland context. We propose a **Strategic Transport Authority** which would be a public sector body responsible for procuring transport services across the region, encouraging cross-border links, and ensuring sufficient long-term investment is committed to public transport. The existing NI Transport Holding Company could form the basis of the authority. This would not be a return to the discredited Ulster Transport Authority, which was responsible for the closure of many rail routes across Northern Ireland.

The structure of the STA could be based on that of the British Strategic Rail Authority, with a chair and separate chief executive, and a board representing a broad cross-section of Northern Ireland's public, private and voluntary sectors. Its main purposes should be:

- To promote the use of public transport, rail, light rail and bus
- To secure the development of an integrated public transport network

Based on the provisions of the Transport Bill currently passing through Parliament to establish the Strategic Rail Authority, the Northern Ireland STA should:

- Protect the interests of rail and bus users
- Contribute to their achievement of sustainable development
- Promote efficiency and economy on the part of persons providing public transport services
- Enable persons providing public transport services to plan the future of their businesses with a reasonable degree of assurance

(see *Transport Bill, Clause 182 (2)*).

With this option, the Strategic Transport Authority could develop a 10-year plan for public transport in Northern Ireland, with agreed funding from the DRD. The STA would purchase transport services from providers, which would primarily be Translink.

Greater Belfast

It would be useful to consider ways of bringing stronger focus to the very important commuter networks around Belfast. Larger British conurbations have passenger transport authorities (PTAs), composed of elected politicians, and passenger transport executives whose work is supervised by the PTA. Most European conurbations have something similar, usually involving some degree of political accountability. Their advantage is the bringing of a strong focus on integrated transport backed up by political will to implement schemes which reduce car dependence.

We propose the establishment of a **Greater Belfast Integrated Transport Authority** which would come under the wing of the Department for Regional Development and be resourced by the proposed Public Transport Unit, with a dedicated team of officers. Composition would include Assembly members with representation from district councils in the Greater Belfast area. We would also suggest representation from key agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors with interests in transport.

Its primary role would be to develop a strategic approach to integrated transport in the Greater Belfast area, including both public transport and roads, with an emphasis on achieving the objectives of *Moving Forward* and the Integrated Transport White Paper. It could guide the development of the proposed Regional Transport Plan insofar as it relates to Greater Belfast. In due course it could take on a direct role in procuring local transport services from bus, light rail and heavy rail providers. It would liaise closely the proposed Strategic Transport Authority, with some board members on both bodies.

8 Conclusion

The current review of railways in Northern Ireland offers an opportunity to develop a long-term strategy for a high quality, safe railway which can play a central role within an integrated transport policy for Northern Ireland, as well as providing improved cross-border links. Our main proposals are:

Immediate

- Implement recommendations of Little report, including renewal of rolling stock fleet over a five year-period and infrastructure upgrade
- Conduct an urgent review of DRD's EU structural funds plans with a view to transferring funds allocated to the M1/Westlink for rail improvements with 75% EU support.
- Develop a long-term strategy for rail's development in Northern Ireland, linked with wider regional development strategies and high levels of rail-bus integration.
- Further development of LinkLine bus services from railheads, and park and ride
- Create Derry/Londonderry Line Partnership, bringing together Translink, local authorities, businesses and community groups
- Feasibility study into rail freight potential in Northern Ireland
- Create new 'Public Transport Unit' in DRD
- Set challenging but realisable targets for passenger growth on NIR, based on a long-term investment strategy.

Short-term (2001-2006)

- Provide additional rolling stock to meet future demands: Turbostar-type vehicles, adapted for commuter and longer distance services (e.g. Derry/Londonderry)
- Track improvements on Derry/Londonderry, Bangor and Larne routes
- First phase of Belfast Supertram: Comber to Belfast City Hall
- New station at Aldergrove Airport, with people mover connection to passenger terminal
- Park and ride stations at Ballyhenry and in the Lisburn Area
- Feasibility study on re-opening of Portadown to Derry/Londonderry railway
- Create Strategic Transport Authority
- Create Greater Belfast Integrated Transport Authority
- Link innovative community transport services in rural areas with railheads

Medium-term (2007-2015)

- Re-open Portadown to Armagh railway
- Direct rail link into Aldergrove Airport
- Create additional capacity on Belfast – Portadown corridor by providing extra tracks
- Upgrade Derry/Londonderry Route for 90 mph operation; improve line capacity
- Through service from Derry/Londonderry to Dublin via Belfast
- Second phase of Belfast Supertram, to West Belfast
- Rail links into Larne and Belfast ports

Long-term (2016-2030)

- New railway serving west of the Bann, Portadown - Derry/Londonderry
- Electrification of Belfast suburban network
- Further Supertram extensions

Table 1

N I Railways: Passenger Journeys

| | 1992/93 | 1993/94 | 1994/95 | 1995/96 | 1996/97 | 1997/98 | 1998/99 | 1999/2000 |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| BANGOR | 1406,000 | 1489,000 | 1593,000 | 1290,400 | 1285,600 | 1583,772 | 1454,722 | 1399,387 |
| PORTADOWN | 1414,000 | 1517,000 | 1602,800 | 1912,700 | 1856,500 | 1511,722 | 1258,926 | 1397,424 |
| LARNE | 1340,000 | 1446,000 | 1465,300 | 1454,700 | 1405,800 | 1535,449 | 1467,440 | 1496,808 |
| LONDONDERRY | 457,000 | 536,000 | 613,300 | 768,600 | 697,000 | 612,280 | 560,372 | 572,775 |
| PORTRUSH | 141,000 | 155,000 | 169,000 | 240,800 | 257,300 | 280,326 | 223,250 | 213,427 |
| Suburban Total | 4758,000 | 5143,000 | 5443,400 | 5667,200 | 5502,200 | 5523,549 | 4964,710 | 5079,821 |
| CROSS BORDER | 487,000 | 588,000 | 700,100 | 810,600 | 685,700 | 829,740 | 846,997 | 927,484 |
| TOTAL | 5245,000 | 5731,000 | 6143,500 | 6477,800 | 6187,900 | 6353,289 | 5811,707 | 6007,305 |

Table 2

Life Expiry Schedules – Class 80 Rolling Stock

| Year | Power Cars | Driving Trailers | Intermediate Trailers |
|--------------|------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| 2000 | - | 3 | 4 |
| 2001 | - | - | - |
| 2002 | - | - | - |
| 2003 | - | - | - |
| 2004 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| 2005 | 5 | 7 | 3 |
| 2006 | - | - | - |
| 2007 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| 2008 | 12 | 6 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 21 | 19 | 17 |

With provision of low-cost life extension work within NIR workshops, most vehicles reaching life expiry before 2005 could be life extended by 1-2 years (some vehicles may be unsuitable for low-cost life extension). For example 2000 life expiry could be deferred to 2001.

Life Expiry schedules: ex-Cross Border Mk II coaches

The majority of Mk II coaches are already life-expired and have been withdrawn from service. Those better coaches remaining in service will not be capable of operating beyond end of 2001 without heavy refurbishment.

Table 3

Rolling Stock Availability

| Year | 1999/2000 | 2000/01 | 2001/02 | 2002/03 | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Existing Sets fit for service | 29 | 27 | 25 | 25 | 25 | 23 | 16 | 14 | 13 | 7 |
| Available Set Requirement | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 |
| Shortfall | 0 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 13 | 15 | 16 | 22 |

| Year | 1999/2000 | 2000/01 | 2001/02 | 2002/03 | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Existing Sets fit for service | 29 | 27 | 25 | 25 | 25 | 23 | 16 | 14 | 13 | 7 |
| Shortfall | 0 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 13 | 15 | 16 | 22 |

| Year | 1999/2000 | 2000/01 | 2001/02 | 2002/03 | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Existing Sets fit for service | 29 | 27 | 25 | 25 | 25 | 23 | 16 | 14 | 13 | 7 |
| Available Set Requirement | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 |
| Shortfall | 0 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 13 | 15 | 16 | 22 |

| Year | 1999/2000 | 2000/01 | 2001/02 | 2002/03 | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Existing Sets fit for service | 29 | 27 | 25 | 25 | 25 | 23 | 16 | 14 | 13 | 7 |
| Shortfall | 0 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 13 | 15 | 16 | 22 |

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