



SOUTH BELFAST PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Alan Heron
Department for Regional Development
Regional Planning and Transportation Division
Sustainable Transport Branch
3rd Floor
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8GB

12 April 2013

Dear Alan

Re: Future Railway Investment: A Consultation Paper

I write to you in response to the Future Railway Investment consultation. This response has been prepared by the South Belfast Partnership Board in consultation with a number of local community groups in South Belfast. In particular, views have been captured and input into the response from a number of local community structures, including:

- **South Belfast Partnership Board** – A Board which brings together all sectors – community, statutory, political and private – to strengthen and better target the efforts being made by the community, the private sector and the Government to tackle in partnership the economic, social and environmental problems which affect people in the most disadvantaged areas of South Belfast;
- **South Belfast Community Support Group** – A group consisting of a number of representatives from community and voluntary groups that operate in South Belfast which seeks to represent the collective views of the communities they represent;
- **Inner South Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership** – A Partnership that brings together all sectors to oversee the implementation of the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Programme in the three inner city communities of Donegall Pass, Lower Ormeau and the Markets; and
- **South West Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership** – A Partnership that brings together all sectors to facilitate the implementation of the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Programme in the South West Belfast area, which covers Sandy Row, the Village, the mid-Donagall Road and Roden Street.

Collectively we recognise that the Railway is a major asset to South Belfast, but that it is at times often under-utilised and has potential to be further exploited for the benefit of all who live, work or visit the south of the City. We welcome the opportunity to provide comments in relation to future investment in our railways, as we believe it is vital for the future of Northern Ireland that our region continues to develop and deliver high quality public

South Belfast Partnership

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transport services. We note that the community and voluntary sector is poorly represented within the list of specific consultees contained at Appendix 4 of the consultation document and would ask that the Department are sure to gather input from those who live and work in the areas impacted by the railways, particularly as more specific proposals are developed in the future.

Within this context, we have a number of specific comments as follows:

- **Station extensions:** On a point of clarity, the consultation document states that some 21 stations on the network are already due to be extended as part of the investment up to 2015. We would be grateful for clarity as to which stations this refers to as there are a number of stations within South Belfast that could benefit from investment, both in terms of the platforms being extended and in terms of the appearance of existing stations at ground level.
- **Sustainability:** We welcome the recognition on p20 that the “in the longer term if more people are to be encouraged to opt for rail travel on the Belfast – Dublin service, it will require continued improvement in rail services and journey time, particularly relative to travel by car.” Despite the current economic conditions and reducing statutory sector funding, we would argue that it is prudent to invest now in the very best rail infrastructure generally, as well as improving reliability and the passenger experience, to help address the pending problems of traffic congestion on our roads as part of the sustainable development agenda.

For example, we believe there is significant potential in park and ride for commuting via rail both into South Belfast and into the City Centre. The location of the rail line and Adelaide station in close proximity to the IFA’s national stadium also offers great potential to improve access to the Windsor Park via rail, which could help to address and reduce many of the local pressures caused by traffic congestion and parking, improving the sustainability of the stadium and reducing the negative impacts on local residents on match days. To maximise benefits such as this, we have to invest in our rail infrastructure now.

- **Proposed Packages:** Whilst we understand the pressures on public funding a shortage of funding generally to be able to achieve the maximum potential of the rail network, there are a number of elements within the proposed option packages that we feel should be seen as priorities. These include:
 - **Package 1:** Clearly there is an overwhelming need to ensure that the existing network is maintained to a high standard and we fully support the proposals set out as part of this package.
 - **Package 2:** In the light of the comments above regarding the longer-term sustainability agenda, we would recommend that the provision of new halts linked to Park and Ride potential should be a priority for investment as should the proposal to increase park and ride capacity at existing stations. In relation to existing stations, we also feel “improving the quality and attractiveness of facilities is important. As part of this, signage to existing stations could be greatly improved. For example, we understand from the Lisburn Road Business Association – who represents the traders and businesses on the Lisburn Road – that the name ‘Adelaide’ does not carry with it a recognisable location. They would suggest that re-naming the

station to Lisburn Road could greatly enhance the use of trains to access the area, providing users with a better sense of arrival at the Lisburn Road. Similarly, improved signage from the Lisburn Road to the station, as well as from Windsor Park, would also help to improve rail use. This, they believe, would bring significant economic benefits to the area.

- **Package 3:** We fully endorse the proposal for the construction of a new Integrated Transport Hub at Great Victoria Street. Whilst we recognise that this is likely to be one of the most expensive proposals to deliver, we feel that the project could bring much wider regeneration impacts for the surrounding areas, as well as improved image and accessibility of Belfast as a whole. It should therefore be viewed not only as a railway investment project, but as a broader, regionally significant flagship regeneration scheme that would deliver physical, economic and social benefits to one of the most deprived communities within Northern Ireland.

As such, Sandy Row Community Forum have asked us to emphasise the importance of this scheme for their area and would be keen to maximise any input into consultation around the Great Victoria Street development. I have also enclosed a copy of the proposals South Belfast Partnership Board developed in collaboration with the Forum for Alternative Belfast and local community representatives during a planning summer school in August 2011, which shows how the new transport hub could fit in as part of a wider regeneration scheme.

We also note that this package makes reference to the addition of a third line and associated platforms serving Great Victoria Street and Central Station. Whilst we recognise that this may be necessary to remove future passenger capacity constraints, we would highlight the need to ensure that these proposals do not bring any negative impacts for residents who live in close proximity to existing lines. For example, the Markets community is already severed from the River Lagan and surrounding areas by the existing rail lines serving Central Station and we would anticipate that a third line would only impound this sense of isolation. The Markets Development Association (MDA) have included within their longer-term regeneration plans proposals to open up access routes in the Lanyon Tunnels adjacent to Central Station and for a pedestrian footbridge over railway to the Lagan. We would urge the Department to ensure that any future railway investment also serves to improve accessibility and connectivity for neighbouring communities.

- **Package 4:** Again, whilst recognising the potential economic benefits for Northern Ireland in delivering enhanced linkages between Belfast and Dublin, we would again highlight the need to ensure that any negative impacts of this work would be minimised for local communities. That said, we also recognise that electrification on this route, and other routes in the future, are likely to improve the environmental impact of rail travel, contributing to the longer-term sustainability agenda.

We trust that you find these comments useful and look forward to seeing how they help shape the final decisions with regards to investment in our railways in due course. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the matters raised within this response with the

Department, so please don't hesitate to contact my colleague Martyn Smithson on 02890 244 070 or martyn.smithson@southbelfast.org if you would like any further information or clarity in relation to any of our comments.

Yours sincerely

Briege Arthurs
Chief Executive
South Belfast Partnership Board