

Cork Commuter Coalition - Cork City Development Plan Submission

The Cork Commuter Coalition is a group advocating for improved public transport infrastructure and services in the Cork Metropolitan Area. Below is our submission to the Cork City Development Plan 2022-28. Our submission encompasses five different areas (bus, Luas, rail, other transport, and other), and provides input on what we believe would make Cork City a better place to live, work, do business, learn, and enjoy oneself. By no means an exhaustive list, it outlines what we believe the City Council can do to improve transport from 2022-28 and beyond, including working with various groups to achieve vital improvements for the people of Cork.

Bus

BusConnects

Cork's major bus network redesign project, BusConnects, is due for completion within the timeline of the City Development Plan, with the first publication of the expected routes coming in the next few weeks. This is an incredibly important aspect of Cork's public transport strategy, as it provides the largest medium-term benefit to transport in the city. An improved bus service will make using and relying on public transport a lot more feasible for many Corkonians. As such, there are a number of key points which it is important for Cork City Council to support within the City Development Plan.

Infrastructure and Routes

- BusConnects must aim to be at the maximum possible scope in terms of delivery of separated lane infrastructure. One of the key obstacles to reliability at current is buses that get stuck in traffic, causing delays and frustration amongst commuters - making public transport reliable is key to creating a strong public transport system, and will increase its usage as a whole.
- The delivery of such infrastructure should include, insofar as possible, removal of two-way traffic on streets if it impacts the ability to deliver continuous, connected bus lanes throughout the entire network.
- BusConnects also needs to see increased usage of different forms of priority measures to ensure bus lanes remain free of cars, including significantly increased usage of bus gates (including on Patrick's Street), and the usage of bus priority signalling.
- Taxis should no longer be permitted to use bus lanes, and Cork City Council should lobby the NTA to end the decades-long 'trial' of private taxis using bus lanes.
- The strategy should also support the usage of center running platforms wherever possible, which ensure that buses are not delayed by cars at turning points and intersections.
- The strategy would also benefit from the fast tracking of Park and Ride services at key sites outlined in CMATS, which would replicate the successes of the Black Ash Park and Ride at drawing cars away from the city center.

Unified Delivery

- BusConnects should aim for a unified delivery of the updated network - namely that all redesigned routes should go into effect on a single date. The process should not be a

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piecemeal implementation, with different routes becoming active from different dates. This gradual implementation has seen difficulties in Dublin, creating avoidable confusion among city residents.

Map Redesign and Branding

- Maps should possess a greater relevance in the wayfinding of the network, especially as the network aims for greater use of transfers between bus routes. As well as the need for creating familiarity among Corkonians with the new network, it is also the fact that the current map is significantly underused, not appearing on bus stops or other public information spaces. A new map should be sought from among Cork's many skilled graphic designers, potentially in a public competition of some sort.
- Useful for those who may not be as well-versed in using the network, as well as other groups such as tourists, students, and the elderly.

Luas

In light of the delay of Metrolink, the Cork City Development plan has to strongly reaffirm its commitment not just to the delivery of the Cork light rail corridor, but also to its delivery ahead of the initial timeframe.

Cork has the opportunity to be a national leader in the delivery of rapid transit, and the speeding up of the Cork Luas timeframe would be a massive vote of confidence in public transport in Cork. We would like to see that the Luas is in a position for delivery by the early 2030s, which provides a massively improved rapid transit system for public use, while also enabling growth and the delivery of housing to occur in and around rapid transit stations.

Naturally, in line with this advanced timeline, construction would have to begin around the middle of this decade, or about 2025. While this is a significantly sped up affair, we believe that, taking into account existing engineering and planning works on the emerging preferred route, with political will, that initial construction would be ready to begin by 2025.

We would also like to see more information published in the meantime - information publicly available has been incredibly sparse - even the names of stops or details of vehicles have not been made available.

With the intent that Cork is a metropolitan area of 500,000 people by 2040, it is critical that this vital piece of transportation infrastructure is delivered so that major population centers can grow and develop around the corridor.

Rail

As per the recent National Recovery and Resilience Plan, electrification of the Cork suburban rail is one of major projects set for delivery within the timeframe of this Development Plan. Naturally, we are in support of such developments, and are looking forward to their delivery. Nonetheless, there are a number of other suggestions which can be used to improve both the service quality and the quality of usage overall.

- There is currently no information available on the expected service pattern for the electrified service. It is expected to have a 10-minute frequency to all points of the system. The through-running at Kent Station will enable these trains to travel directly

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from one end to the other. As such, we believe that immediate publication of the service pattern will help inform greater public understanding of the project as a whole.

- The Cork suburban rail currently lacks any major commitment to improved branding, such as DART-style branding. The 'Cork suburban rail' identifier is not sufficient in creating an identity for the service, and does not successfully draw together the services offered as part of the Cork suburban rail system. Creation of a single service type would improve wayfinding and establish the services as distinct from other trains. One suggestion would be the use of COMET - Cork METropolitan Rail - though an equally satisfactory name would be sought through public consultation; as long as it is more modern sounding than 'the CART'.
- The City Development Plan should also strongly enunciate its support for both a West Cork and an East Cork Rail Feasibility Study. It is the simple fact that Cork City is highly reliant on a strong Cork County to support its own growth, and some systems are or have the potential to be intrinsically linked, such as farming and secondary industry in West Cork, major county towns, city suburbs, and the city itself.
- This also would provide major connectivity benefits for western suburbs and city area itself - extension of the eastern commuter line to Youghal and Waterford would create greater links within Munster and southeastern Ireland as a whole, moving away from a network that is entirely Dublin centric.
- While, naturally, it is highly unlikely that such projects could see delivery within the time of the Cork City Development Plan, we instead urge the city council to pursue feasibility studies as part of the All-Island Rail Review. There are many different forms, positives, cautions, and impacts which the return of rail would bring, and an investigation into doing so would be incredibly beneficial to resident populations, and to our understanding of the expansion of rail in Ireland as a whole.

Other Transport

While reimagining what Cork can truly be, we also see the opportunity to reimagine what types of transport that we could see in Cork. This is an opportunity to investigate new modes of transportation that help bring transport access to new people, and create a more integrated and expansive transportation network.

A water taxi or ferry service would be a boon to a city which is as much defined by the sea as it is the land. Many of Cork's major population centers are located in proximity to waterways or Cork Harbour, so a form of transportation linking water-based communities would nicely compliment road and rail based public transport, especially in linking communities separated by the Cork Harbour, such as Cobh, Ringaskiddy, Crosshaven, and Passage West. Many other European and American cities operate water transport as part of their regular transport network, which provides a useful template in trialling such a service.

Public transport usage is, at times, difficult to use for those with significant mobility difficulties. While work has been made at improving access at stations and on buses for those who need mobility aids, this may not be sufficient for all who rely on public transport. We would support the introduction of a paratransit system, which provides public transport usage to those with disabilities who are unable to rely on the mainline bus or train network. This is

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roughly comparable to an on-demand Locallink service, which provides direct services for those with such disabilities. A trial of this service would be easily accomplishable, and would help make Cork a city that truly aims to be inclusive of those with disabilities.

Other

There are also a number of other important issues which can be tackled to make Cork and transport in Cork better. These include :

- Car free weekends, to show that the city center is at its best when it is open for people, not for cars. In future years, the Jazz Weekend would be an excellent candidate.
- Continue pedestrianization of streets, especially outside of the city center. The much publicized pedestrianization of 17 city center streets was an excellent step forward for rejuvenating Cork City, and it would be excellent to see similar schemes in Cork's urban towns and suburban areas.
- Schemes to tackle dereliction in Cork, such as the acquisition and refurbishment of derelict properties.
- The creation of more urban parks. For a green country, Cork has a surprising dearth of green areas and public plazas. However, useful steps to tackling these absences include acquisition of parking lots or other brownfield sites.
- The pursuing of other 'quick win' policies in the meantime, encompassing everything from building painting schemes, to free transport weekends, and everything in between.
- Other infrastructure to support both cycling and walking as methods of sustainable transport, including major investment in segregated cycle lanes, and schemes to improve permeability (especially in boom-era estates).
- Support of the Lee2Sea greenway, which would create an essential urban greenway spine for both commuting, tourism, and leisure.