



Department for

**Infrastructure**

An Roinn

**Bonneagair**

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From the office of the Minister for Infrastructure  
**Nichola Mallon MLA**

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Your reference: TJ/C240/20  
Our reference: CORR-2333-2020  
5 October 2020

Dear Mr Kelpie,

## **CONCERNS REGARDING PHASE 3 FEASIBILITY STUDY - DERRY-COLERAINE RAIL LINE**

Thank you for your correspondence addressed to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and also to Chris Conway CEO Translink, regarding the Council's concerns regarding the Phase 3 Feasibility Study timings for the Derry-Coleraine rail line. As Minister with responsibility for Public Transport, the letter has been passed to me for response.

At the outset, I would like to set out my commitment to addressing regional imbalance and, as part of this, I am committed to ensuring that the Phase 3 upgrade of the Derry – Coleraine rail line is delivered as soon as possible, given the importance of this transport for the North West. I fully recognise the significant interest in the future delivery of Phase 3 upgrade of the Derry – Coleraine railway line and I understand the Council's frustration in relation to the timeline for the restart of this project. However, I can assure you that I am working at pace to ensure that this project can be delivered within as short a timeframe as possible.

You will appreciate that, following previous Ministerial decisions, no funding had been allocated to progress this project, and officials could not undertake the necessary work to progress Phase 3. Recognising this, I have now made the necessary funding available for an updated feasibility study during 2020/21 to restart plans for this important connection for the North West and to ensure that progress is made quickly. While I face severe limitations in my Department's resource budget, I am pleased that, with this capital investment, we can take steps to address the regional imbalance in the North West.

As you may be aware, the previous feasibility study and business case for the overall upgrade to the Derry to Coleraine line was completed in 2010, and Department of

Finance rules state that capital projects that do not start within two years must be reappraised. To bring forward this updated business case, Translink must produce an updated feasibility study which will inform the new business case for this project.

In addition to this, it is my intention for the works to be carried out with the least possible impact to customers. This will mean carrying out the physical construction works at night time. This method of working is different from the 2010 business case which was based on options for a total and prolonged line closure. When Phase 1 was carried out, the railway line was closed to trains for 8 months between 2012 and 2013, so a new feasibility study is required to explore and cost this alternative method of working.

The Coleraine to Derry line also travels through and alongside a number of areas with special environmental classifications. These include Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Special Areas of Conservation (SCA) and wetland sites considered under the Ramsar Convention. These areas will also need to be revisited in the new study to determine any impact the project may have on them.

I am aware that Stakeholder Engagement will be an important part of this project. The nature of the method of construction of nighttime works means that Translink and its contractors will be working near many homes at nighttime and using local roads and farmland as access points at night. This will require comprehensive stakeholder engagement, and this will be commenced during the feasibility period to minimise the timeframes for this project.

Last month, I held a second and very constructive meeting with representatives of the rail lobby group, Into the West. Following on from my request for Translink to re-examine the timeline for the completion of the Feasibility Study and associated business case, I am delighted to announce that this has now been reduced by six months and should be completed in early 2022. In addition, a new study has also been initiated to examine the potential for additional halts on the Derry line.

As you will appreciate, it is important that my Department and Translink follow all appropriate processes and guidelines to ensure the timely and successful delivery of this important project. This will ensure a robust process that will seek to deliver the maximum benefits to the North West.



**NICHOLA MALLON MLA**  
**Minister for Infrastructure**