



Eire Rail (R)evolution

For decades, one could have been forgiven for thinking that, beyond the suburbs of Dublin, with its efficient DART local services, the Irish railway network had been put out to grass; indeed in the 1980s the government announced that there would be no further state investment in railways! But like the Irish economy, the train has subsequently made a remarkable recovery from years of stagnation. In 2007 Iarnród Éireann's annual report was entitled „The Green Light to Revolutionising Public Transport“. It stated how, in that year, a record 45.5 million passengers were carried on inter-city, DART and local services (up by 5 % on 2006), while in just two years, 2006 and 2007, patronage had risen by more than 21 %.

Transport 21, launched on 1 November 2005, is a suite of government- and EU-funded projects forming part of the 2007 to 2013 National Development Plan, addressing the need to revitalise the rail and road networks. Among the rail schemes are line reo-

penings, resignalling, upgrading, new stations, and a cross-city line underneath the centre of Dublin, with five new stations. Large quantities of new trains are being bought, with new and modernised depots being provided, and passengers are benefiting from more frequent services and reduced journey times. So Iarnród Éireann can today boast owning one of the fastest-growing rail networks in the whole of Europe! Much of the spending, however, is to compensate for too many years of neglect of the infrastructure.

Locomotive-hauled long distance passenger services are on the wane, now that deliveries of the 46 Class 22000 DMUs (31 three- and 15 six-car units; see R 3/07, p. 10) from Rotem are well under way. The first 30 of these had entered service by late summer 2007, on the lines from Dublin to Sligo and Limerick, and are looked after at the new Laois Traincare Depot in Portlaoise completed in 2008. All 46 trains are scheduled for delivery by the end of the year.

One of the biggest infrastructure projects under way is the imminent revival of the southern half of what is now known as the Western Rail Corridor, from Ennis, north of Limerick, to Athenry, near Galway. Passenger services between Limerick, Athenry and Claremorris (on the Dublin to Westport line) were withdrawn in 1976, and freight traffic ceased in the mid-1990s. The Limerick to Ennis section of the route was revived in December 2003, and track renewal is now well advanced on the 58 km north from Ennis to Athenry, this phase of the project costing 74.7 million EUR. The line will be reinstated on a phased basis, in the following order: Athenry to Ennis (2009), including Galway to Athenry commuter services (2009), Athenry to Tuam (2011) and Tuam to Claremorris (2014). The line from Claremorris to Collooney is to be preserved.

Track relaying between Ennis and Athenry started in October 2007. The intermediate stations at Gort, Ardahan and Craughwell are being refurbished,

with 90 m long platforms, facilities for handicapped travellers, and surfaced car parks, and passing loops will be provided at Ennis and Gort. Remedial work is being realised on civil engineering structures, and new protection systems are being installed at level crossings.

This line will deliver direct, regular Galway to Limerick services, timed to meet commuter needs and serve many intermediate stations. It will also provide connections, a range of inter-regional services currently not available through linking with Limerick-Dublin and Galway-Dublin services. ***The left-hand photo shows the passing loop at Gort being reinstated on 3 October 2008, while on the right one of the GM-built 950 HP Claass 141 diesels, dating 1962, waits at Ardahan the same day while its train of ballast wagons is loaded. 21 of these elderly machines are still in service.***

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