

Galway Harbour Company



Galway Harbour Extension

Response to An Bord Pleanála Sept. 2024

EIS Addendum Chapter 13.3

Rail



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13.3. Rail

13.3.1. Introduction

Chapter 13.3 of the original Environmental Impact Statement (“EIS”) relates to the Rail proposal aspects of the proposed Galway Harbour Extension. This element of the proposal is included to ensure the new development is future proofed for rail freight and sustainable modes of transport as and when required. The adjacent railway provides the ideal opportunity for a rail connection for viable freight transport.

This Chapter was drafted by Maria Rooney. Maria Rooney (TOBIN Senior Engineer: Roads and Traffic) is a Chartered Engineer and has a Bachelor of Engineering in Civil Engineering and Master of Engineering in Roads and Transport Engineering. She has over ten year’s work experience in roads and transport engineering. Maria has undertaken many Traffic and Transportation Assessments (TTA) and EIAR Traffic Chapters for various developments, including environmental projects, waste management facilities and energy projects.

13.3.2. Report Format

This update to the original EIS includes a review of any changes to the original EIS chapter, a summary of conclusions of the original chapter in the EIS, an overview of additional policy of relevance, an Assessment of the validity of earlier conclusions or any necessary amendments to same, cumulative impact assessment and methodology, followed by a conclusion.

13.3.3. Review of any material changes to relevant chapter in original EIS

Chapter 13.3 outlines the baseline environment, future baseline, design considerations, impacts and conclusions. The design is confirmed as feasible to construct the proposed rail siding from the existing Galway to Dublin rail line immediately adjacent to the site.

13.3.4. Summary of previous conclusion of chapter in original EIS

The previous conclusion outlined the following:

- From the review of track geometry, it is possible to gain access to the new port development through the construction of a rail link from the eastern side.
- A harbour freight capacity could be accommodated on a limited basis within the existing Galway – Athenry timetable. Sufficient gaps currently exist within the current timetable to allow the safe passage of a freight service along the line from the proposed port to a possible rail freight terminal. It would appear from the inspection of the existing timetable that it would be possible to service the freight element of the port outside of daytime hours.
- If freight trains between Galway and Athenry were required to run regularly during the day, then the provision of a passing loop would be needed at approximately the half way point for the parking of the freight train whilst the commuter services met their timetable.
- By the proposed port rail link operational date, only an overnight freight service could be operated on the existing single track arrangement due to the planned increases in passenger rail traffic projected by Iarnród Éireann. A regular freight train service would not be possible during the day even with the provision of a passing loop on the single line.

- We are of the opinion that Iarnród Éireann has already calculated that the existing single line capacity will be exceeded shortly under its own planned increases in commuter services which will require the existing single line track from Athenry to Galway to be double tracked. This would allow freight trains to run regularly during the day. The works on the main line will be undertaken by CIE and is not a matter for this Planning Application.
- The proposed rail link works will be facilitated within the construction sequence at the earliest possible date e.g. initial embankment and bridge to be constructed within Stage 2 and track to be laid in Stage 3. The proposed rail link within the site will be constructed and be ready to have linkage commissioned to the main line as soon as viable freight tonnage warrants the expenditure.
- Rail freight services will only begin when commercially viable and, it is likely to be a fraction of the new tonnage and specifically a newly won product e.g. woodchip as a bio-fuel to a specific site with own siding.

13.3.5. Any additional surveys, data or policy developments of relevance

A review of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review of 31 July 2024 has been undertaken. Figure E.1 from the Executive summary is extracted below in Figure 13.3.1. This Figure shows a potential future railway network on the island of Ireland and this is also shown in Figure 8 of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review document and both Figures show the proposed dual tracking between Galway and Athenry.



Figure E.1 | A future all-island railway

Figure 13.6.1 – A future All-Island Railway. Source: All-Island Strategic Rail Review of 31 July 2024

Table E.2 Review Recommendations is extracted below in Figure 13.6.2:




<p> Decarbonisation recommendations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and implement an All-Island Rail Decarbonisation Strategy that includes an electrified intercity network. 2. Develop plans to invest in the skills, supply chains, and rolling stock to deliver decarbonisation. 3. Procure hybrid and electric rolling stock in the medium term. 	<p> Sustainable cities recommendations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Connect Dublin, Belfast International, and Shannon Airport to the railway and improve existing rail-airport connections. 18. Extend double tracking in the Belfast area. 19. Segregate long-distance/fast services from stopping services. 20. Explore the case for developing new stations in the Belfast, Cork, Derry-Londonderry and Limerick – Shannon city regions.
<p> Intercity recommendations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Upgrade the cross-country rail network to a dual-track railway (and four-track in places) and increase service frequencies. 5. Upgrade the core intercity railway network to top speeds of 200km/h (125mph). 6. Develop short sections of new railways on congested corridors. 7. Develop a cross-Dublin solution. 	<p> Freight recommendations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 21. Develop a sustainable solution for first-mile-last-mile rail access for Dublin Port. 22. Reduce Track Access Charges for freight. 23. Strengthen rail connectivity to the island's busiest ports. 24. Develop a network of inland terminals close to major cities on the rail network.
<p> Regional and rural recommendations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Provide more direct services between Ireland's West and South Coasts. 9. Ensure regional and rural lines have at least one train per two hours. 10. Increase line speeds to at least 120km/h (75mph). 11. Upgrade Limerick Junction and the Limerick Junction – Waterford line. 12. Reinstate the Western Rail Corridor railway between Claremorris and Athenry. 13. Extend the railway into Tyrone, Derry-Londonderry, and Donegal. 14. Reinstate the South Wexford Railway. 15. Develop the railway to boost connectivity in the North Midlands. 16. Integrate bus service and rail service timetables to connect communities where direct rail access proves to be unviable. 	<p> Customer experience Recommendations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 25. Continue to invest in initiatives that deliver a seamless customer journey. 26. Continue to benchmark and monitor service quality and deliver continuous improvement. 27. Ensure future rolling stock specifications are aligned to the infrastructure-led interventions outlined in this Review. 28. Invest in improving integration within rail and between rail and other transport options. 29. Deliver 'clock-face' timetable calling patterns. 30. Develop cross-border structures to improve the effectiveness of cross-border infrastructure and rail service planning. 31. Invest in a rolling programme of accessibility improvements, including step-free access. 32. Review and update the All-Island Strategic Rail Review once a decade, taking account of latest policies and developments.

Table E.2 | Review Recommendations

Figure 13.6.2 – Review Recommendations. Source: All-Island Strategic Rail Review of 31 July 2024

This Figure outlines the recommendations and is also shown in Table 2 of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review document. The Review recommendations include the following:

- **Freight Recommendations**
Reduce Track Access Charges for Freight (See Item 22 on Figure 13.6.2).
- **Regional and Rural Recommendations**
Reinstate the Western Rail Corridor railway between Claremorris and Athenry (See Item 12 on Figure 13.6.2)

In the Final Package of Recommendations on pages 136 and 137 of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review of 31 July 2024, the following are included:

- Double tracking from Dublin as far as Mullingar, Athlone, and Kilkenny, as well as between Galway and Athenry
- A reinstated single-track line between Claremorris and Athenry via Tuam.
The review states that this recommendation would be particularly beneficial for freight, allowing a direct route for freight from Ballina and Westport to ports on the South Coast that avoid the most congested part of the rail network around Dublin. This would also reconnect Tuam to the railway and enable direct services between Galway and Mayo

The All-Island Strategic Rail Review also states the following regarding Freight on page 80:

*“Develop a network of inland terminals close to major cities on the rail network, especially where there is good access to major roads/motorways, limited impact on communities and passenger traffic, and good access to industrial clusters. Potential locations for new terminals include the Upper Bann area for Northern Ireland, Limerick Junction, a location north of Cork, **Athenry for Galway**, Sligo, and west of Dublin.” (Emphasis added)*

The above items as proposed under the All-Island Strategic Rail Review of 31 July 2024 are compatible with the proposed rail link to the Galway Harbour Extension.

The proposed rail link within the site will await viable freight tonnage and will be constructed and be ready to have linkage commissioned to the main line as soon as viable freight tonnage warrants the expenditure. The works on the main line will be undertaken by CIE and is not a matter for this Planning Application.

The original analysis remains valid and the conclusion remains the same as outlined above and a summary is provided in Section 13.3.6 below.

13.3.6. Assessment of validity of earlier conclusions or any necessary amendments to same

An analysis has been undertaken of the existing infrastructure and rail lines and it has been shown that a new rail link can be readily formed by way of sloped embankment from the existing line into the Port of Galway land area and on to the level at the quayside.

The existing Galway to Dublin rail line runs adjacent to the existing GHEP and is, therefore, immediately accessible to the Port of Galway development.

In order to future proof the Port of Galway and to facilitate the policy objective of the Regional Planning Guidelines for the promotion of rail freight, this rail link from the existing adjacent Galway to Dublin Rail line is proposed to be included as early as possible in the scheme, i.e. Construction of rail embankment during Stage 2 and construction of rail lines within the harbour during Stage 3. The track connection with the Galway to Dublin railway line will be carried out when rail freight becomes economically viable.

13.3.6.1. Potential Impacts

There is potential for freight trains to be used to haul goods / materials to / from the proposed Port of Galway, possibly running at times of spare capacity on the rail network, including during the evening, weekends and / or night. As noted, use of the rail link will provide a positive impact in taking HGV's traffic from the road network onto the rail network and thus reducing CO2 emissions

13.3.6.2. Mitigation Measures

The embankments and curvature design has been carried out to reduce any impacts on the surrounding areas and increase the possibility for viable freight tonnage entering and exiting the Port. A noise barrier is proposed along the top of eastern side of the proposed rail embankment where curved and sloping.

13.3.6.3. Conclusions

From the review of track geometry, it is possible to gain access to the new port development through the construction of a rail link from the eastern side.

At present a harbour freight capacity could be accommodated on a limited basis within the existing Galway – Athenry timetable. Sufficient gaps currently exist within the current timetable to allow the safe passage of 3 full freight services along the line from the proposed port to Athenry. Any potential rail haulage would be scheduled to avoid conflict with all existing and future planned passenger rail services.

Should more freight trains between Galway and Athenry be required during the day then a passing loop would be needed at approximately the half way point on the original twin line bed.

A Night Time freight service of up to 9 full freight trains could be facilitated outside the existing passenger train service.

The proposed rail link within the site will be facilitated within the construction sequence at an early stage and will future proof the Port of Galway and be ready to have linkage commissioned to the main line as soon as commercially viable freight tonnage warrants the expenditure.

13.3.7. Cumulative Impact Assessment

Purpose of this section

This section identifies updates to potential cumulative impacts from the GHE project in combination with other developments in the surrounding area which have been built or approved since the EIS was submitted. The EPA defines a cumulative effect as:

“The addition of many minor or insignificant effects, including effects of other projects, to create larger, more significant effects.”

Cumulative assessment area

Current best practice initially involves identifying the cumulative assessment area. This area encompasses:

- All potential impacts within range of the proposed development
- Other developments which are in potential range of these, including existing developments, developments under construction, and projects previously permitted but not yet built. Mooted projects which are widely recognised, or due to enter the planning process shortly, may also require consideration.

The size of this assessment area varies with discipline. In relation to Rail, the area typically extends out to 1 km for a project such as the GHE proposal. Taking into account the characteristics of the project, and the likely nature of other potential projects in the local area, the 1 km assessment radius is considered appropriate here.

Projects identified in assessment area

The project team identified an exhaustive list of development projects approved by various authorities in the Galway area since the 2014 EIS was submitted (See Chapter 2). Projects within a 1 km assessment radius of the GHE boundary have been reviewed to determine if:

- Any new relevant sites have been constructed since 2014 in closer proximity to the GHE site than impacts assessed in the 2014 EIS.
- Any new relevant sites have been permitted in proximity to the GHE site in recent years, but which have not yet built.
- Any new proposals of note have been approved within 1 km of the GHE site since 2014, which might affect Rail.
- Any new proposals within 1 km have received permission, but have not yet been built, and may thus result in construction or operational impacts of note in future years.

A fundamental component of the EIS is to consider and assess the potential for cumulative effects of the project with other projects, plans and activities.

The potential for significant effects is mainly due to proximity. In summary the potential for cumulative effects on Rail is as a result of localised disturbance of rail infrastructure. However, the only impact is localised and is not capable of giving rise to cumulative effects.

The cumulative impact is predicted to be localised, short-term, not significant and reversible. The sensitivity and magnitude of the cumulative impact are considered to be low to negligible. There are no significant cumulative impacts with other projects predicted. All residual impacts are predicted to be not significant.

Table 13.3-1 summarises a review of identified projects listed in the project databases searched. The review indicates that there are no projects of potential cumulative significance, and therefore cumulative impacts are not expected.

Table 13.3-1: Projects of potential cumulative significance.

Database	Analysis
Part 8 applications	No new sites constructed or proposed since 2014 nearer to the GHE boundary than the those assessed in the 2014 EIS, or which might themselves influence rail.
An Bord Pleanála cases 2014-2016	No new sites constructed or proposed since 2014 nearer to the GHE boundary than those assessed in the 2014 EIS, or which might themselves influence rail.
An Bord Pleanála cases 2016-2024	84 projects listed within 1 km of the GHE boundary. None of these are, or will be, nearer to the GHE boundary than those assessed in the 2014 EIS, and none currently, or will in future, influence rail.
Waste databases	Permission granted for four projects within 1 km (Colas oil depot, Topaz oil depot, Hazel Mountain Chocolate, wastewater treatment plant). The 2024 baseline survey indicates that none of these influences the rail proposal.
EPA licensed waste facilities	There are no facilities within 1 km.
EPA licensed IPC facilities	There are no facilities within 1 km.
EIA location point	Most identified points relate to the proposed N6 Galway Bypass, and the proposed Bus Connects scheme. The bypass project does not have any implications for the rail proposed GHE development. The Bus Connects scheme does not have any implications for the rail in the proposed project. Both projects will have localised impacts with their own mitigations measures similar to the Galway Harbour Extension.
Seveso points	The Circle K oil depot at the Galway Harbour Enterprise Park is the only site in proximity. This facility does not influence the rail.

Local authority planning applications 2014-2024	<p>136 projects located within 1 km of the GHE boundary. None of these are, or will be, nearer to the GHE boundary than in the 2014 EIS. The following projects were further considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ceannt Station original planning reference 1418, Ceannt Station amendment planning reference 2287, Augustine Hill most recent planning reference 2047: This development may increase passenger rail use but as described rail freight is a separate component with no impacts. - Planning reference 173: Bitumen storage facility at Galway Harbour Enterprise Park. The facility does not include any rail issues of significance. - Planning reference 1785: New playing pitch and walkway/cycleway at Ballyloughnane, Renmore. No impacts attributable to this development were noted.
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Conclusions in relation to impacts

From a Rail link perspective, the construction phase of adjacent projects may also be dealing with excavations and so were considered. As the works on the rail for the Galway Harbour Extension are localised, remote from the city the Galway Harbour area the cumulative impact is imperceptible. The Galway Harbour Extension project will have its own mitigation measures as will any projects that are adjacent. The rail proposals as outlined in the All-Island Strategic Rail Review dated 31 July 2024 show potential increases in passenger usage of the rail line and also potential twin track. Overall, the document is supportive of rail freight and allows potential for future rail freight and is positive.

- No projects of cumulative significance have been constructed since the original EIS was submitted in 2014, and there are no permitted but unbuilt projects of potential cumulative significance.

13.3.8. Conclusion

There are no changes to the previous conclusions in the EIS as published in 2014 due to the passage of time. The rail link proposal remains as originally envisaged and when a viable opportunity arises for rail freight, it will be possible to accommodate same. The assessment of the rail link in the 2014 EIS remains valid.

