

Meath by Rail – why not...?



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by Tom Prenderville

A damning indictment by the high powered European Parliament Petitions Committee casts serious doubts on the government's plans to proceed with the €650 million euro M3 Motorway rather than using a disused railway line which runs the entire length of the proposed M3 route.

The 45 mile long Dublin to Cavan line runs from Connolly Station and Broadstone in the heart of Dublin, and travels through the principal towns of Meath and further a field to Kingscourt in County Cavan.

In its heyday, the train which stopped off at fifteen stations along the way, conveyed passengers from Dublin City Centre to the heart of drumlin country in less than an hour. A similar car journey today at peak time takes almost three hours.

Over 22,000 cars use the existing Dublin to Cavan road route every day, with considerable congestion around Navan, Dunshaughlin and Dunboyne.

The replacement 49 Km long M3 road will start at Clonee in West Dublin and terminate at the Meath Cavan border. The road which will cost €650 million euro to construct, will have the distinction of being the most expensive stretch of road in the history of Ireland, at €22.5 million euro per mile.

However, this figure is very likely to spiral closer to the billion mark as more and more archaeological monuments are uncovered, and inevitable legal challenges lead to endless hold-up's.

In stark contrast, it would cost less than €100million Euros to reopen the Dublin to Kingscourt line, judging by the price of similar railway upgrades in the recent past, which involved the laying of new tracks, signaling equipment and the building of new stations.

In June, the European Parliament Petitions Committee went on a fact finding mission to Meath to view the M3 in progress. Perplexed by what they saw, the Petitions Committee –which is made up of senior parliamentarians- lambasted the Government in their October report, which among other things went on to note:

“It is surprising that so much emphasis is placed by the Irish authorities on the development of road infrastructure and so little on developing an efficient and more sustainable rail network for passengers and freight. It is surprising that there is no commuter service between Navan and Dublin, and that none is planned before 2015 at the earliest, a fact which condemns and confirms an inevitable choice of motorway construction.

These are issues that seriously need to be addressed by the Irish authorities.”

Damien Cassidy who is Chairman of the North South Rail Committee has been campaigning for several years to reopen the Dublin to Kingscourt line, most of which is actually intact:

“It doesn’t make any sense not to open it, and to go ahead and build the M3 instead. The original line was abolished by Todd Andrews in 1960. The tracks actually exist I have walked them, and Nobber and Kilmessan and Navan stations are still there.”

“Parts of the line have been leased to farmers and a hotel has been built on one section of the line, but other than that, there are good concrete sleepers on much of the line. If you look at a rail map you will find Meath, Cavan, Monahan, Fermanagh and County Donegal are totally devoid of a railway- absolutely nothing,”

According to the Central Statistics Office, the population for Meath in 1961 - a year after the line closed down- was 65,122.

Since then, there has been a population explosion in Meath with 162,831 people now resident in the county. Cavan has also grown in the intervening years from 56,594 to 64,003 people.

Iarnrod Eireann have plans to eventually reopen part of the old line. However the plans may never see the light of day owing to deteriorating public finances and the fact that the M3 will be up and running long before the first railway sleeper is laid:

“We have no plans to open the Connolly to Kingscourt line at the moment. However, under the Transport 21 Plan, we will reopen a line as far as Dunboyne in 2010, and then as far as Navan in 2015. The line will need a complete renewal, but at the moment though we have no figures on how much it will cost. From Navan to Kingscourt, the existing line will be kept intact and we wont prevent it being reopened in the future,” explained Barry Kenny.

Damien Cassidy is skeptical about the Transport 21 initiative and Iarnrod Eireann’s plans, and points out that if they were serious about alleviating the traffic congestion on county Meath’s roads, they could - within a year - have a commuter service up-and- running on a separate railway line that runs from Navan to Drogheda and on into Dublin:

“The line was in use until four years ago when it was used for transporting gypsum and ore to Dublin. The line was reinforced to carry heavy loads and is in perfect condition. The route could be up and running within twelve months.”

Ironically, all the existing grassed-over rail routes were conceived of and privately financed by Victorian pioneers who viewed the railway as one of the greatest transport innovations of all time.

Only now in the early years of the 21st century is this self-evident truth being accepted, with planners forced to reinstate everything from Dublin’s tramlines to long-closed rural lines.

The old Dublin ~~~ Kingscourt Route

Connolly...Broadstone...Clonsilla...Dunboyne...Fairy House Bridge...Batterstown...Drumri...
Kilmessan...Bective...Navan...Gibbstown...
Wilkestown...Castletown Halt...Nobber...Kilmainham Wood ...Kingscourt.

