



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Regional Development

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into the Coleraine to Londonderry  
Rail Track Phase Two Project:  
Stakeholder Event (Table 2)

27 January 2015

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Regional Development

### Inquiry into the Coleraine to Londonderry Rail Track Phase Two Project: Stakeholder Event (Table 2)

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#### **Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr John Dallat  
Mr Cathal Ó hÓisín

#### **Witnesses:**

Mr Gavin Ervine	Committee for Regional Development
Mr Barry McLernon	Committee for Regional Development
Mr Desmond McKibbin	NIA Research Office
Ms Mary Hunter	Derry Farm Cottages
Mr Alan Devers	Headhunters Railway Museum
Mr Jim McBride	Into the West
Ms Madeleine Coyle	
Mr John McBride	
Mr Jim Nash	Royal National Institute of Blind People

**Mr John Dallat:** I am a member of the Regional Development Committee. I have been involved for many years, initially in saving the railway and then constantly suffering the setbacks that it had. I am very confident that we are now on the right track, if you will pardon the pun. The subject that I need you to discuss with me is the role of the Derry/Coleraine railway service in the economy of the north-west. Others will talk about tourism and so on, but for 10 minutes, we will focus on the relevance of the railway to the economy.

I have a habit of not allowing free speech, but, the experience in other places is that, where you have a real hub, it becomes the catalyst for generating the economy and, of course, the social aspect of life. You are free to discuss how better the railway could be used to improve the economy. I am not suggesting that it should be used to move goods or things like that; perhaps that is something that it could do. I do not know. What we really want to focus on is whether the railway is relevant to the development of the economy of the north-west.

It looks like, with this background noise, everybody is going to have to talk a wee bit louder.

**Mr John McBride:** I represent myself as a passenger, so my focus is probably less about the economy in Derry and the north-west and more about the improvements to commuting or the challenges that I face.

**Mr Dallat:** That is entirely relevant. Where do you travel between?

**Mr John McBride:** I travel from Derry to Belfast central four or five times a week. I have started to do it over the last few months. Previous to that, I was travelling on the 212 Translink bus on the same route. So, this is an improvement, but there are still challenges.

**Mr Dallat:** It must have been quite a decision to leave the 212 bus and choose a mode of transport that takes quite a bit longer.

**Mr John McBride:** I remember being on that train 25 years ago. It used to go on to Lisburn and Portadown. It took three and a half hours. Now, it is quite reliable and punctual. I can leave the station just after 6.00 am and be in my office by 8.30 am, plus I can get work done on the train, whereas on the coach I cannot really work on my laptop or do much.

**Mr Dallat:** What are your observations from when you are on the train? As an individual passenger, do you see indications that the train is contributing, in any way, to the economy of the north-west?

**Mr John McBride:** I see it probably going more in the other direction. Once the train passes Coleraine and Ballymoney, the number of people on it increases substantially. By the time we get to Belfast central, it is packed, but that can work both ways. Had we the employment and opportunities here, we could start drawing that two-way traffic. The train is full in the morning, but empty in the afternoon, and it could be about reversing that.

**Mr Alan Devers (Headhunters Railway Museum):** I am from Headhunters Railway Museum in Enniskillen. I live in Portrush and, like John McBride, I travel considerably along the full length of the line at different times. I take the point that more people get on from Coleraine, but one of the reasons for that is the frequency of service. This city does not have the frequency of service that it deserves. It is the second city of Northern Ireland and it does not have an hourly service. Had it an hourly service, more people would use it, just as more people have started to use the train from Coleraine since the hourly service was introduced. It is a chicken-and-egg problem: once you get one, the other comes. I think that, as long as this city has this two-hourly service, it will be handicapped. It needs that incentive. Over a long distance, train travel is much preferable to bus travel, as was said. It offers more comfort, it is certainly a lot warmer and you can work with the laptop. You can also move about, whereas movement on a coach is more restricted.

**Ms Mary Hunter (Derry Farm Cottages):** I know that tourism is further down the list, but I really want to address the economy. Is that OK?

**Mr Dallat:** That is fine.

**Ms Hunter:** Derry Farm Cottages hosts many visitors from all over the world, and one of the highlights for them, when they come to Derry, is to go on the train, particularly on the journey from Derry to Portrush. Obviously, I would like them to go from Derry to Belfast. If we want to become a hub for tourism, one of the things is that you can see Northern Ireland in a day. Visitors' time is finite, and they want to go to Titanic Belfast and the Giant's Causeway. It is very difficult for us to host Derry as a destination venue if the infrastructure is not there. It is not the same for international tourists to go up on a bus. We have the most wonderful scenic route along the railway, and I think that it is very important that we also have a fast train so that people can get from A to B. To go to Belfast at the moment by train takes two hours and 20 minutes, but, as you say, you can go on a bus and it takes one hour and 20 minutes. Time is of the essence.

The other aspect is education. At the minute, we have a huge brain drain to Belfast. Most of our third level and A level students go to Belfast, Queen's and Jordanstown. People will not be coming to Derry unless there is the attraction of good business in the future and investment in it. I think that the railway is key to that.

**Mr Jim McBride (Into the West):** I have been fighting this issue since 2001, when it was proposed to close the line beyond Ballymena. It runs from Ballymena to Coleraine and from Coleraine to Derry. They wanted to close the Coleraine to Derry section. Tonight, it is very important to highlight that phase 2 must be implemented as soon as possible to provide an hourly train service to Belfast. It will increase employment chances. Better train services will enable students to go to university. Past pupils of mine have to wait for 50 minutes every morning at Coleraine to go to university because of the poor service. A better service will boost the economy and bring people here. If there is a modern rail service, it will attract investment to industry. We are the only large city in Ireland without a modern

rail service or proper road connection. It would be better for tourism, because the line should be promoted for tourism and its scenic beauty, just as the scenic railway lines in Scotland, Wales and England are promoted. People are attracted to travel these scenic railways and special trains are run.

**Mr Dallat:** Sorry, could I stop you there? You will have an opportunity to cover tourism when somebody else comes around.

**Mr Jim McBride:** Are we just doing the first point? Sorry, John.

**Ms Madeleine Coyle:** Sorry, am I allowed to speak? There seems to be quite strict rules about what to do and how you do it.

**Mr Dallat:** Have you finished?

**Mr Jim McBride:** Yes, I have.

**Ms Coyle:** I wish to make a very small point. As a native of Coleraine and a resident of the Waterside, I think that, aside from all the obvious issues which we all know about and have been discussing for many years, there are some practicalities that need to be addressed. The timing of the trains is important. It is crazy that I, living here, cannot attend a performance in the Riverside Theatre in Coleraine and get back home on the train in the same evening. You cannot do that at the moment; it is not possible. It should be possible; it is not rocket science. That is a small issue that I think needs to be addressed.

**Mr Dallat:** It might be a small issue, but it is very important, because —

**Ms Coyle:** It is absolutely critical.

**Mr Dallat:** — the economy is absolutely vital. There may be people who would want to go from Coleraine to the Millennium Forum and there is no train to take them.

**Ms Coyle:** Exactly. It works both ways.

I think that the evidence is already there. We all saw what the trains were like in 2013. I came up from Coleraine on a train, and they had put something like five extra carriages on, and the thing was bursting at the seams. All those people were talking about the wonderful journey. This is such a small place; I could not believe that these people, who lived in Bangor and Belfast, had not done that journey before. This is a tiny place. Anyway.

**Mr Jim McBride:** Are we on point 2?

**Mr Dallat:** No, after 10 minutes, somebody else will come along.

**Mr Jim McBride:** A number of years ago, transport planners predicted that, if the Derry line was upgraded, its numbers would increase by so much over 25 years. It achieved its 25-year target in under four years. In the first six months of 2014, the Derry/Coleraine/Belfast line carried 750,000 passengers in just six months. The trains are running at 90% capacity. That figure came from Mal McGreevy. If you provide the service, people use it.

**Mr John McBride:** Is it fair enough to make another point regarding the economy?

**Mr Barry McLernon (Committee for Regional Development):** If you are quick.

**Mr John McBride:** On my way back today, it took me the entire journey to send one email of about 200 words with one small attachment. It is important that the Wi-Fi is reliable, high-speed and capable of handling the Internet traffic on it, because, if you are arriving in a city for a meeting, that last-minute preparation is sometimes crucial in making a difference in how successful your pitch goes. So, in hand with the business and economy aspect of it, the service provided on the train and the punctuality need to be upgraded.

**Ms Ursula McCanny (Northern Ireland Assembly):** I am the community outreach coordinator in the Assembly. I will facilitate the next discussion, which is on life in the north-west without a fit-for-purpose rail service. If you want to comment, indicate and I will give you the recording device. Does anyone want to start?

**Mr Jim McBride:** I am part of the Into the West rail group. We have been campaigning for 14 years to have a proper rail service to the regional capital of the north-west because we believe that, if you provide a proper rail service, people will use it. That has been proven by the increased number of trains for the Derry/Coleraine line over the last number of years. They are running at 90% capacity on average. Rather than a two-hourly service to Belfast, we want an hourly service that is reliable, as the new trains are. It is not just that the trains should be comfortable but it would be good to get a cup of tea or coffee on a two-hour journey to Belfast. I do that journey at least once a week, and it would be great to have a cup of tea or coffee. On the Stansted express, you can get a cup of tea or coffee. That would give you a fit-for-purpose service. Cullybackey has 19 trains today to Belfast, and 3,000 people live there. We have nine trains a day to Belfast. We want a modern, efficient rail service. People will use it.

**Mr Devers:** I come from Enniskillen, which lost its rail service in 1957. We do not have a fit-for-purpose rail service. I mention that because, when the G8 held its meeting in Enniskillen, journalists and people from abroad who arrived for that conference could not understand that you could not take a train to Enniskillen. They were dumbfounded that Enniskillen was holding that important G8 summit and that there was no rail service. You do not want to be in that position. So, fight for your rail service and make sure that you are getting an hourly service, which a city of this size needs.

**Ms Coyle:** I do not represent anybody other than myself. I want to continue the point that we were making on the viability of trains or, in other words, times. This gentleman just mentioned the Wi-Fi capability, which, at the moment, is really not adequate. I lived in Fermanagh for 10 years, so I know Fermanagh very well. It seems crazy that, in the 21st century, we do not have these things. I really do not understand. I have asked several times if the Minister is coming and nobody has answered me. Can anybody tell me if the Minister will be here?

**Mr McLernon:** He is not scheduled to be here.

**Ms Coyle:** The information that I got was that was going to be here. However, I dare say that you will pass it all on.

**Mr Devers:** They said that there are problems because they are putting through the Budget in Stormont at the moment.

**Ms Coyle:** We have all heard that one before.

**Mr John McBride:** I am regular traveller. On the question of life in the north-west without a fit-for-purpose rail service, a number of things jump out. People go daily to Belfast for specialist health services such as cancer, problems with their heart etc. Quite a lot go in minibuses and/or on the Translink 212. The train is a much more comfortable way to travel. It is easier to access the train and you can get up and stretch. So, there is an advantage in terms of the health benefits, especially in the wake of the Donaldson report today, and, if the services and the provision of hospitals changes, that can put more people towards those specialist services.

For me, the work/life balance is the most difficult thing that I am trying to manage this year. I regularly do a 13-hour day to do an eight-hour working day. I have my son beside me. I do not see him as much as I would like to. The jobs are not here at the moment in Derry. I work for a great organisation, and I intend to keep working for it in Belfast, but the biggest challenge is the toll that it is taking on me at the moment. I do not know what impact that might have on my health in the long term.

I want to add something about airport links. Yesterday, in Dublin, they were talking about links to Dublin airport. I am coming back from London this Friday, and, looking at all permutations of the rail service, I cannot get back here after an early evening flight. So, I must use private coach transfer, which is much more expensive, yet I have already paid for my monthly ticket. So, there are finance issues as well. Those are the key things.

**Ms Hunter:** I said earlier that I have a tourist business called Derry Farm Cottages. Apart from anything else, I find it incredible that there is no rail link from the two Belfast airports. I travel quite extensively in England, and one of the major aspects is that our visitors quite often fly into Dublin. Sometimes, they hire a car, but many do not. They expect, when they get into an airport, to jump on the train. We always say that it is very difficult to bring visitors to the north-west. They come to Dublin, head over to Galway, go right round Dingle and so forth and then fly out. We will not increase our tourist economy in the north-west unless we have good travel options, either through roads, rail or whatever. I take the point that somebody else made about the wonderful journeys in Scotland, Canada and so forth by rail. A fit-for-purpose services means that you can bring people in and take people out. At the moment, as you quite rightly say, you either go by car or else by bus. If you have the time to wait for two hours, you can go by train. One of the most important things is to bring people in and take people out, but time is a commodity, and people will not come here unless they have lots of time to spend.

**Mr Jim McBride:** Phase 2 is essential. It has now been delayed for 18 months. Phase 2 would give us an hourly, modern train service. The proof is there that, if you provide the service, people will use it. Look at Scotland. The railway shut in the 1960s. It opens next year, the borders railway. We need an hourly train service, and, by 2021, you could have a train service every 30 minutes to Belfast. I was going to Dublin on Saturday and it was shocking: you often arrive at Belfast central five minutes after the Enterprise train has departed. It will cost you £25 to get a bus to Dublin on Saturday. The train was £42.50. It does not add up.

**Ms Coyle:** I was just about to point out that the whole situation is about to repeat itself. The Tall Ships were in Belfast in 2015. We are going to have the same thing again for people here. It is going to be more difficult if you want to take your family. Having seen the Tall Ships in Cork, I have to say that they are worth seeing. It is already more difficult for people in the north-west to organise a family outing to something that is going to be Belfast's biggest thing this year. It is just yet another practical example of the ridiculousness of not having a good working railway.

**Mr Devers:** The facilities that Waterside station offers are, to my mind, quite limited. There was a proposal to restore the old Waterside railway station. I think that, if that was carried out, with the investment needed, it would give the city a more worthwhile terminus, which it deserves, rather than that pagoda effort that was built in the 1970s. That would also enhance the terminus, which would be a help as well. Perhaps I should mention the phase 2 relay, because ordinary passengers may not be sure what it will do. There is a need for the loop in Bellarena so that two trains can pass each other. When that happens, the line will be able to take increased capacity of trains. That is why phase 2 is necessary. It does not do any harm to mention that for some of you.

**Mr John McBride:** I will come back to the reference to culture here. In 2013, there was a great effort by many people and citizens here to show our cultural wares and offer them to everybody. It is important that we are not just able to do that here but that we can go and experience it elsewhere. There is no doubt that developing cultural appreciation within the city is a great step forward, so that people can come here and see what we have to offer and people here are exposed to those cultures. That is what will lead us towards a more cosmopolitan approach and lifestyle here, which, I think, lifts the mood, lifts the head and shows a bit of ambition.

**Mr Jim McBride:** Can I just make a point to John? I live here and use the train regularly. Translink planned two extra trains for the City of Culture, but neither of those two trains ran. They became buses. So we had no extra trains once for the City of Culture. The trains were overcrowded. People could not physically get on or off them. There were horrendous conditions here. We have the golf coming to Portrush in a few years' time. We will need to get ready now.

**Mr Jim Nash (Royal National Institute of Blind People):** Is there a phase 3?

**Mr Jim McBride:** Yes, phase 3 is —

**Mr Nash:** The reason why I am talking about that is that we are talking about phase 2 and those guys are talking about phase 3 already. That means that phase 3 is now in the bag.

**Mr Jim McBride:** No.

**Mr Nash:** You tell me.

**Mr Jim McBride:** You cannot get phase 3 without phase 2. In 2011, they decided to break the work up into three separate phases to save money. Phase 1 is done — the track relay and bridge repairs. Phase 2 is a resignalling system, passing loop and extra safety measures and level crossings. That would give you an hourly service to Bellarena or somewhere around that location. Phase 3 is more passing loops, finishing the track relay and more safety measures. Those are the three phases. Phase 3 is due by 2021. Phase 2 was due to be ready by 2015.

**Mr Gavin Ervine (Committee for Regional Development):** This discussion is on the future of rail services in the north-west. We are looking at best case. So, instead of talking about what has not been done, maybe this will be about what needs to be done and what you see as the future of rail services in the north-west. I am happy to open it to the floor.

**Mr Jim McBride:** The future is, first, that phase 2 should be implemented by December 2016. Secondly, we hope to see some progress on the Waterside station issue, because the current station is totally unacceptable. What we have here is a city with the last surviving railway terminal station in Northern Ireland. The Waterside station is a listed building, and we want to see it put back into purpose as a proper railway station in what is the second largest city in Northern Ireland. Our understanding is that Translink is in negotiations to buy the building and that it is applying for grants to do the building up as an historic terminal building that will serve the modern rail service that we will get once phase 2 is delivered. That will be a priority.

**Ms Coyle:** Following on from that, I am a native of Coleraine, and my understanding is that Coleraine station was the first integrated Translink station. I have felt very strongly for a long time that the old, rather beautiful railway terminus ought to be restored. It is not impossible to do that kind of thing. That modern, ghastly thing ought to be demolished, in my personal view because, going back to the issue of tourism, you would preserve a historic building, which is a very beautiful building. You notice that if you walk past it and look at it closely. It is a very urgent priority that that be addressed as part of the whole issue that we are talking about.

**Ms Hunter:** Further to the conversation regarding the station in Derry, one of the most important things when you go for the train is parking your car. At the moment, if you want to go for the train during the day, it is pot luck because there are government offices and private apartments there. They did a little bit of work down at the old station where you could park the car. There is a significant area of ground, which used to be old track, that is blocked off to the public. The next scenario is that you come flying out of the station, fly up round and come back down Bonds Hill, park your car and race across the road and hope that the train is still there. You cannot expect people to use the train every two hours if people park there all day for the government building or the private apartments. There is very little parking for people using the train.

**Mr Jim McBride:** Mary, if you put the old station back into use, you could use the Ebrington car park, which has just been built with £6 million of public money. The public cannot use the car park at Ebrington, which is adjacent to the old Waterside station. It is absolutely ridiculous; you could not make it up.

**Mr Nash:** I was saying that we should create a station right beside the Peace Bridge. That means that you have infrastructure for parking. You also have people who can use the railway station for tourism; they can walk around Ebrington and can go across the bridge to the Guildhall or whatever. You also have young guys and girls from the university who can walk across the Peace Bridge.

**Mr Jim McBride:** But it is less than 200 metres from the old Waterside station platform to the Peace Bridge. The Waterside station is very handy for buses etc. The car park issue is for the Civil Service. To me, the old station is the obvious solution. Three quarters of correspondents surveyed said that they wanted the old Waterside station as their first choice. A station at the Peace Bridge would be very expensive to build —

**Mr Nash:** Why?

**Mr Jim McBride:** Because of the difference in height between the railway and the bridge. We have a listed building that is at risk. We have very few listed buildings left in the Waterside, so let us use it for its original purpose.

**Mr Nash:** It is there, and you could use it, but the purpose could be anything.

**Mr Jim McBride:** The building is derelict.

**Mr Nash:** What I am saying is that it can be purposely made for anything.

**Mr Jim McBride:** But you want a proper historic station sitting in the second-biggest city for people to arrive in rather than the glorified chicken box that is there at present. If you get rid of the chicken box, you could open up the whole area for a greenway. It could be an open space for the council, for walkers or cyclists. It is a much better option.

**Mr Nash:** I do not agree with you.

**Mr Jim McBride:** Well, everyone is entitled to their opinion.

**Mr Nash:** Of course.

**Mr John McBride:** I have a few points. I certainly want it to be frequent. I want it to be fast. I want the journeys to be as short as possible. I want it to be connected in terms of Wi-Fi connectivity but also to other routes and services. It must be capable of accommodating the increased demand.

I can see a problem with the 212: there is congestion going into Belfast. That one-hour-and-forty-minute journey is not that; it is a two-and-a-half-hour journey. It is not comfortable. As well as that, there is the environmental impact of that congestion going into Belfast. Let us get some of that traffic off the roads and onto the rail. It is very important that it is affordable and that there are flexible options. At the moment, my best value is buying a monthly ticket, which costs £200. However, when it comes to my two weeks' leave or Christmas holidays, I have to time that and get the bus so that I am not paying for what I cannot use. There should be some options or flexibility in that regard.

I know that this is a bit 'Field of Dreams', but if we built it, they will come and go. That is what we would like. I also like the suggestion of the Peace Bridge as a point where you can embark and disembark. This weekend, I need to leave my car on the city side so that, when I come back on a private bus, I am at my car; I cannot come back to the station and get my car handy late on a Friday night. There are local connectivity issues as well.

**Ms Coyle:** I echo that point. I live in the Waterside. If I have a choice between the train and the bus, I will always choose the train. I just prefer to travel on it; it is more comfortable. I am a bit older, and I have mobility problems. The train is much more practical for me than the bus is. Yesterday, I did not have a choice. I had to get the 212 bus at 12.00 pm. When I get to Foyle Street, I have to get off the bus and walk through the station with luggage. By some miracle, I find a taxi and pay a taxi fare to take me from Foyle Street to the Waterside, where I live. This is crazy stuff in 2015. That just backs up your point.

**Mr Devers:** For visitors coming to the city who do not have their own car, the bus link is very important going in from Waterside station to the city. Certainly, older people would never manage that long walk across Craigavon Bridge. That should be continued and, if anything, enhanced because Ulsterbus tends to put on any and everything; there does not seem to be any logic in its bus provision. It seems to be very much the luck of the draw.

**Ms Coyle:** Sometimes, there is a double-decker with three people on it.

**Mr McBride:** At times, Alan, two buses have been provided because of the sheer number of people getting off the train. I want to see phase 2; I want to see the Waterside station and a proper terminal station. Every other terminal station building in Belfast no longer exists thanks to the activities of terrorists or the roads Department. It would be nice to see more park-and-ride facilities at Waterside station and maybe we could use the Ebrington car park that the taxpayers paid for and which the public are not allowed to use.



**Mr Desmond McKibbin (NIA Research Office):** Good evening, folks. I am from the Assembly's research department. I am going to let you talk while I write down everything you say. We are here to discuss the third topic, which is the role of the railway service in the north-west tourism industry.

**Mr Jim McBride:** I remember being involved in a BBC film 20 years ago called 'Great Railway Journeys of the World' about the train journey from Derry to Kerry. I had the pleasure of meeting Michael Palin and being in his company for two days. He called the Derry line one of the greatest railway journeys in Europe and the British Isles. Translink does not market the line for its tourist facilities. The problem with the train is that people are always talking about the beauty of the line, especially in the summer months when you see it at its best. There are fantastic views across to County Donegal and the line skirts along the banks of the Foyle. The entry into Derry itself is one of the most dramatic entries into any major city on any railway journey in Europe, and I have travelled across all of Europe by rail. Once the line is upgraded, we should market the tourist potential, as they do for certain lines in Scotland, Wales and England. We should market the tourist potential of the line, because that will attract even more visitors to Derry, to its hotels, and thus help tourism etc.

**Ms Hunter:** I totally endorse what Jim said. We host visitors from all over the world. A few years ago, we had Italians with us, and the gentleman explained to us, "We view Ireland as a must-see destination. You have been like China. You were shut for 30 years, and now you are open for business. We want to see it. Whenever you are sitting in heat of 50 degrees centigrade during the summer months, Ireland, with its soft rain, is an absolute delight. The reason we are interested in travelling by rail is to see the countryside. We want to be able to travel through the countryside and see the beauty of Ireland".

This is the point. It has resonated with me since. We tend to market Ireland, especially Northern Ireland, as cheap and cheerful. We almost market ourselves like Blackpool. We should be marketing Ireland, like Tuscany or Provence, as an aspirational product. Come and see the beauty of the countryside. Come and see the culture. It is unique. I am from a farming family, and visitors want to see the countryside, the vernacular buildings, the coastline; they want to come and walk and appreciate it. Yet, they cannot come by rail when they choose on a system that brings them up from Dublin quickly or from Belfast.

I also endorse what you say from an educational and a working point of view. Tourists do not have the time to look around when they are driving a car. If visitors could take the train, they could pass the beauty of these areas and maybe decide to come back and stay a bit longer next time.

**Ms Coyle:** May I make one more comment before I go? I do have to go.

**Mr John McBride:** Have you a bus to catch?

**Ms Coyle:** I would be very lucky to find a bus to take me to bed at this hour of the night, believe you me. No, I have my trusty mini stowed in a very expensive car park not far away. Now you have made me forget what I was going to say.

**Mr John McBride:** Sorry.

**Ms Coyle:** What was your last comment there, sorry?

**Ms Hunter:** I was making the point that Ireland should be marketed as an aspirational product. In Norway, it is a case of, "If you cannot afford it, don't come". Norway has no qualms about the beauty of their countryside, but it is extremely expensive. Yes, you have students who come back. Their view is that their landscape and what they offer is unique in the world, but there is nowhere more unique than Ireland. Think of our culinary skills, our scenery, our world-renowned hospitality. We are certainly an aspirational product, and the railways show the beauty of the countryside at people's leisure. It is not marketed like the railway through the Rockies in Canada or through Scotland.

**Mr Jim McBride:** I was in Dublin on Saturday, and I checked the tourist information. It stopped at Belfast; there was nothing beyond Belfast. A lot of people go to the Giant's Causeway — some three quarters of a million people a year. Of that figure, only a fraction come to Derry and the north-west. Why? Because of the very poor train service. You have to wait for half an hour at Coleraine for a connection. You will maybe wait another two hours for a train from Derry. A proper rail service would

attract more visitors. Translink's better marketing of rail and bus services in the north-west would also help attract people. We have got a major asset here, and nobody promotes it.

**Mr Devers:** As an outsider to this area, although we are talking about the attractions of the railway line in the summer, even on a cold January evening, as the light was fading, it was still highly impressive travelling from Coleraine this evening. It is a 12-month charm; it is not just summertime. The railway journey time between here and Coleraine is actually very competitive. It takes 43 minutes to get to Coleraine; the bus takes you one hour, and that is supposed to be the express bus.

**Ms Coyle:** The difficulty is when you lengthen that journey. To travel from Derry to Coleraine by train takes 40 minutes, as compared to one hour by bus. Once you lengthen that journey, it becomes disproportionate. I cannot remember exactly, but it takes around two and three quarter hours to get from Derry to Belfast central station. Then, you have to get yourself to wherever you are going. The Maiden City Flyer would take you there in an hour and 40 minutes.

**Mr Devers:** At the moment, to get between this city and Portrush by rail, there is a 15-minute delay when you get to Coleraine. When I came here this evening, I sat in Coleraine station for 25 minutes until the connecting train came. It is the same on the way back. If you were marketing this city and Portrush, that would not help. You could have quite a well-marketed journey whereby you would have tourists in Portrush in the summertime and market the line as far as Londonderry as a Michael Palin thing, but it would need improved connections at Coleraine. Those do not exist at the moment. There used to be. We used to have them, but they disappeared with the present set-up.

**Mr John McBride:** I was actually on Michael Palin's show at a time, too, at Norwich cathedral, but that is by the by.

In 2013, I was involved in managing the City of Culture volunteers. We had a minimum of 650 people who were out. Of them, 400 or so did WorldHost training; both one-day and two-day programmes. We have an abundance of people who are not only naturally adept at meeting people coming to this city, but have been trained to come and meet them. If we do not have tourists coming in here, that skill and catalyst is gone and lost. We have a brain drain. Yes, there could be attractive salaries and jobs that take people away from here, but what cannot be taken away is our location, history and tourist potential. We need to be able to bring people here. In doing so, we can develop the economy, as we talked about earlier; develop skills; and leave a lasting impact of all these things. This goes way beyond getting on and off a train: the impact that I can see is certainly massive. We are losing out with regard to tourism.

I also think that, if we did sort it out and had it running effectively on the current plans with phases 2 and 3, down the line, there could be potential with counties Donegal, Leitrim and Sligo to connect from Derry to there. Suddenly, you can come to Ireland and do almost a circuit of the country. That makes it so easy and attractive. When you go on holidays, the last thing you want is — let us make the railway the easy way. That is what we have got to do.

**Mr Nash:** As you guys said, tourism is an untapped wealth. It is something that we need to explore big time.

**Mr McKibbin:** I just have a question out of curiosity. I have listened to a lot of the discussion on this particular topic as I have gone round the tables. What kind of discussions are taking place at the minute looking ahead now to when the British Open comes here? It is in 2018. Surely, Derry must be an essential part of the accommodation and service mix for visitors.

**Mr Jim McBride:** Plans are ahead to improve the road links, rail service and hotel availability for Portrush. It seems to be concentrated on the Coleraine triangle. No one seems to think of Derry as, potentially, somewhere where people could stay. During the previous golf event in Portrush, all the hotels here were booked out. A couple of years ago, during the warm-up event, they were fully booked out. When the big one comes here, God knows.

**Mr Cathal Ó hOisín:** Folks, some of you will know me. I am an MLA for the East Derry constituency. We are discussing the importance of the railway line for connecting people to employment, education and essential services.

**Mr Jim McBride:** First, the railway is a unique link between the four campuses of the University of Ulster. The railway serves Derry, Coleraine, the new campus in Belfast, which will be right beside a planned railway station, and Jordanstown. So, the railway gives a unique linkage between the campuses, and, as a former teacher, I know that many previous students of mine use the train to go from Derry to Coleraine and back because they cannot afford to go to England for education and cannot afford a car. They are dependent upon the train service because the bus service to Coleraine is very poor. The train to Coleraine is much more competitive. A proper rail service can build Magee up, which is another long-term plan for the city, and you would have students transferring between Magee and Coleraine. The staff at the University of Ulster want to use the train, but they cannot because the timings are so unacceptable. If you have to wait 45 minutes at Coleraine for a train to University halt, that is just not acceptable in this day and age.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** We were hearing that, Jim, on the way here from Coleraine.

**Mr Devers:** There seems to be a new trend with students now. Students used to stay away from home and maybe go home at the weekends, but there seems to be an increasing trend for students to commute each day. I see evidence all the time now of students getting out at University halt. One Monday on the 10.00 am train, I counted over 70 students getting off at University halt. That was one train. I could not believe the numbers. The train had been full and then was suddenly empty.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Is that an affordability issue?

**Mr Devers:** It may be an affordability issue, but it has something to say about the role or the railway in the future because, if people cannot afford the accommodation costs and are going to live at home where, obviously, they are subsidised by their parents, the railway will be essential to bringing them between those places. Again, the existing service is not so good.

**Mr Jim McBride:** Only this morning, I was speaking to a lady whose 19-year-old daughter has just passed her driving test. The quote for the insurance alone is £1,200. Her daughter is a student at Coleraine, and she has to buy her a car and pay the insurance because the train service is just not acceptable.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Also, there is an issue with parking at the university campus in Belfast. I can envisage down the line absolutely huge wars going on between local residents of the likes of North Queen Street if that is not addressed in some way.

**Mr John McBride:** Employment is my primary focus. I use the train to get to my job daily. I made these points earlier, but it is captured in this section. I need to ensure that I can get work done on the train. There is a table there, and, if I am on early, I can get work done. I also need to rely on the Wi-Fi connection, so it is crucial that that is up to standard, especially if there is increased traffic because all the devices are then fighting for the signal. I am not sure what kind of investment is required to get signals into the countryside and what the environmental impact and so on would be, but it needs to be done for the train.

**Mr Jim McBride:** The Wi-Fi is usually very good, so you must have been just unlucky.

**Mr John McBride:** Usually, but it can be hit or miss.

**Mr Jim McBride:** On employment, we are trying to bring over 800 jobs to Ballykelly with the Civil Service move. To me, there is an ideal opportunity there. The train runs right past the former RAF base at Ballykelly. There is an old station called Limavady Junction, where Translink owns a lot of land. It is just over two miles from Limavady, which is one of the largest towns in Northern Ireland without a rail service, apart from the western counties. To me, there is an obvious location for a potential park-and-ride station. It would be just off the bypass and would serve Ballykelly with a feeder bus service to Limavady town. It would attract people to those jobs and get more people onto the railways. Limavady has a very poor transport service to Belfast. It is two miles away from a railway, so I am amazed that people in Limavady are not saying, "Why can we not have a station?" Things would get worse if the Department of Agriculture moved to Ballykelly. It would help the relocation of those jobs to that area if people had a rail service on their doorstep that they could use to commute.

**Mr Nash:** What the guy just said there is correct. Limavady is a hub, but, at the moment, they are using a bus to connect them to Dungiven. If you have a stop in Ballykelly, it would cover people who are going to their job, coming to government buildings for different interviews, or whatever.

**Mr Jim McBride:** You are less than two miles from the bypass there at the old station site.

**Mr Nash:** Yes, perfect.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Developing the Ballykelly site is something that I am very interested in Assembly Private Secretary to the Agriculture Minister, and we are looking forward to that very much. However, there is more to it than that. The DARD headquarters will act as an anchor tenant on that site. It is a huge site of 720 acres. There have been expressions of interest from 60 to 70 private-sector employers, including three major employers. This will be a win-win if we get it, but we have to get it right. We have to make sure that phase 2 and, indeed, phase 3 are delivered.

**Mr Jim McBride:** Cathal, if, under phase 3, you had a rail service with a passing loop at Bellarena, say, that would attract all the doubters and investors. You would have a train service with a five-minute connection from Ballykelly for a bus or whatever.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** We need the full package on that one.

**Mr Jim McBride:** A feeder bus service and a park-and-ride facility.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** It is a no-brainer to put in some sort of stop-and-halt.

**Mr Jim McBride:** You could park as many cars as you want there.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr Devers:** You would also be able to use that site for freight.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** In theory, you could. It is a major bugbear that the reality is that the railways to here do not do freight. We have a ridiculous situation where the railway goes through Lisahally docks, one of the five deep-water docks in the North, and does not stop. We have a ridiculous situation where it goes through City of Derry Airport and does not stop. We, as a Committee —

**Mr Jim McBride:** It goes past Aldergrove airport. There is a disused line, so it does not stop there.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** We, as the Committee for Regional Development, visited the three airports in the North; I think that it was before your time, Barry. The problem is getting the airport operators to buy into it, because they see car parking as important economically. I represent the East Derry constituency, so I am on the ground. A lot of my constituents use City of Derry Airport. I know one fella who flew out to Glasgow on a Saturday at 12.00 noon for a match. He then flew into City of Derry the next day at 12.05 pm and was charged £25 per day for parking. So, his car parking cost £50 and the flight to Glasgow cost him about £18. That is how mad it is.

**Mr Jim McBride:** It is ridiculous. It is like the rail connections in England; their prices are all hiked up too.

When we have an Assembly Member here, I want to say that it is very important that pressure is kept on the relevant people in relation to the delivery of phase 2 because of its wider economic benefits to the deprived north-west region. There is a feeling amongst the people of Derry that all the big infrastructure projects are Belfast-centric.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** That is not unjustified, Jim. Look at the delivery of the A26 at Frosses. The A31 Magherafelt bypass is another big bugbear of mine. I am Dungiven born and bred, so my great question is why the bypass there and the Moneynick section have not gone ahead. We also had the A2 and A8 Belfast/Larne roads. We visited the Ballynure bypass not that long ago. The people of Ballynure did not want a bypass because they reckoned that it would ruin the village and it does not get the traffic. So, there is a priority issue. We will have to fight for this and be united on it.

**Mr Jim McBride:** It is very important. Reading through Hansard, the answer to a question just before Christmas revealed that, if they want to upgrade the road from Caw to Maydown, it will cost £45 million to £50 million for less than three miles of road. We are asking for £40 million for 35 miles of railway. It is a no-brainer. Rail is much more environmentally friendly. I could not agree more about freight, Cathal. They want a freight siding between Portnoo and Lisahally, as there used to be, but no one is interested. Belfast dock wants a freight siding, and nobody is interested. The only parts of the EU that do not have a rail freight service are here and Malta, and Malta does not have any trains.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** I know. It is a valid point.

**Mr John McBride:** If I could just add, we have to be quite forward thinking and not just look at 2015 and 2020. Over a one-year period, I watched my bus journey on the 212 service increase on a daily basis. It started out at just over two hours, which was pretty good, and reached the stage that I was getting off the bus in Belfast early so that I would not have to do the last stretch, which was taking 20 minutes. Whilst the train takes about the same time, it is much more comfortable.

We have to think about what will happen away down the line. Those road problems will not get better quickly. Belfast will become a bottleneck, and we will be parking our cars at Antrim and getting on a bike and cycling on past the bus.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** I drive that road every day and know the problems on it. It is obviously lost time, and four hours out of every day is four hours lost. So, half your working day, or half a working day — it is not my working day — is lost driving. There is that issue.

There is also an issue with this bit-part way of doing things. The Toome bypass was great, but people are now going through Toome to bypass the Toome bypass, if that makes sense.

**Mr Jim McBride:** I have seen bus drivers do it.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** I tell you what: when you are sitting at that third roundabout, you see all these people. They are not from Toome; they are going in and around and back out through Toome and they get out in front of you.

**Mr Jim McBride:** I have seen bus drivers do that on the 212.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** People tell me that they do that regularly.

**Mr Jim McBride:** I was at a meeting with Mal McGreevy two weeks ago, and he told me that the train was keeping a minimum of five thousand cars on the road to Belfast each day. There is the ludicrous example of the Ballymartin park and ride. That will be built right beside the railway at Templepatrick, and people will be put onto a bus to go into Belfast and will sit in another traffic jam. If you built a station there to serve the park and ride, you would not get stuck in yet another traffic jam at Sandyknowes. The worst traffic jams are at Sandyknowes and the junction before. You know it yourself; it is a moving traffic jam.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Absolutely. I know all about it. Thanks very much everybody.