



PASSENGER CENSUS AND RAIL SERVICE STRATEGY, GALWAY-LIMERICK INTER-CITY, 2015



REPORT FOR WEST=ON=TRACK BY
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Table of Contents

Brief	2
Methodology	2
Western Rail Corridor	2
Passenger Count.....	3
Infrastructure.....	8
Ticketing and Checking	8
Schedule and Speed	9
Passenger Survey.....	10
Survey Findings.....	12
Summary of Findings.....	21
Recommendations	24

Brief

In November 2015, Vistacon¹ was engaged by West=on=Track² to:

- Count the number travelling the Western Rail Corridor between Athenry and Ennis, on the Galway-Limerick intercity route, on sample weekday and weekend dates.
- Survey a sample of those people about their usage and views of this railway.

Methodology

The project studied **76 trains over 8 days**:

- Wednesday 11 November (10 trains)
- Friday 13 November (10 trains)
- Sunday 22 November (8 trains)
- Wednesday 25 November (10 trains)
- Friday 27 November (10 trains)
- Saturday 28 November (10 trains)
- Sunday 29 November (8 trains)
- Saturday 5 December (10 trains)³

A **passenger count and survey** were done on the two Wednesdays and two Fridays. A **passenger count** was done on both Sundays and one Saturday. Where a train was missed, the count was taken on the same service of the same day in the following week.

Western Rail Corridor

The Western Rail Corridor (WRC) is a railway in the West of Ireland that connects Limerick in the mid-west with Sligo in the north-west, via the towns of Ennis, Gort, Athenry, Tuam, Claremorris and Collooney. It has five sections, two of which are currently in use:

- Limerick to Ennis: 28 miles / 45 km (reintroduced in 1988)
- Ennis to Athenry: 36 miles / 58 km (reopened in March 2010)

The WRC connects with the Limerick-Dublin/Cork intercity route at Limerick. It crosses two other intercity routes: Dublin-Galway at Athenry and Dublin-Westport/Ballina at Claremorris. It also joins the Dublin-Sligo intercity route at Collooney. It runs largely parallel to two national primary roads – the N18 between Limerick and Galway and the N17 from Galway to Collooney. The section of the WRC between Limerick and Galway is 78 miles or 125 km – around 17 miles or 26 km longer than the road between the two cities.

¹ [Vistacon](#) is a corporate communication and corporate strategy consultancy in Galway.

² [West=on=Track](#) is a community-based campaign in the towns, villages and cities of the West of Ireland whose objective is the re-opening of the Western Rail Corridor between Limerick and Sligo.

³ Owing to disruption by Storm Desmond, it was feasible to survey only one Saturday. Accordingly, we assume the same number travelled on Saturday 5 December as actually did on Saturday 28 November.

Passenger Count

The 36-mile section of the Western Rail Corridor from Ennis to Athenry has been the subject of this study. The question is, how many people are travelling it in a year?

- The LeighFisher / MVA Consultancy report of 2012 said c. 50,000.⁴
- A report in the Irish Times on July 15, 2013 said that “while around 250,000 passengers travelled on the route in 2011, the vast majority used the train as a commuter service between Limerick and Ennis and between Athenry and Galway. Fewer than 35,000 made the trip between Ennis and Athenry.”⁵
- A more recent news report, again in the Irish Times, said Iarnród Éireann had recorded a 72.5% increase from 29,000 to 50,000 through the Ennis-Athenry section in 2014, having introduced online booking and promotional fares.⁶
- The numbers we counted in November, were they to be repeated consistently throughout the year, would generate over 140,000 journeys in a whole year.⁷
- However, since our survey was concluded, Iarnród Éireann has extracted seasonally-adjusted monthly numbers for the whole year. These indicate just over 102,000 passengers travelled between Ennis and Athenry in 2015 – over 100% up on 2014. This underlines that the 100,000 passengers projected in the business case for the Athenry to Ennis section of the Western Rail Corridor has been exceeded.

We now present, first the results of our passenger count in November-December 2015, and then the granular, seasonally-adjusted count from Iarnród Éireann for all of 2015.

⁴ LeighFisher in Association with MVA Consultancy, (2012). Western Rail Corridor Review. Public Transport Advisory Services Assignment 17. [online] Dublin: National Transport Authority. Available at: <https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Western-Rail-Corridor-Review.pdf> [Accessed 4 Dec. 2015].

⁵ McDonald, B. (2013). [Irish Rail told to come up with rescue plan for loss-making Galway-Limerick line](#). The Irish Times, Monday July 15.

⁶ O'Brien, T. (2015). [Iarnród Éireann passenger numbers up by 1 million](#). The Irish Times, Monday January 5.

⁷ The figure of 140,334 for 2015 was derived from counting the numbers of people travelling on all 76 trains from Athenry to Ennis in 8 days in November and December, and then extrapolating to estimate a number for the whole year. The passenger count was done on Wednesday 11, Friday 14, Sunday 22, Wednesday 25, Friday 27, Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 November. We assume, as pointed out earlier, that the same number would have travelled on Saturday 5 December as actually travelled on Saturday 28 November. Wednesday was chosen as a typical weekday and Friday as the customary day for most people for weekend travel.

The passenger account for the survey period is summarised in the table below:⁸

	Ex-Athenry going south towards Ennis	Boarded at Craughwell going north and south	Boarded at Ardrahan going north and south	Boarded at Gort going north and south	Ex-Ennis going north towards Athenry	Total
Wed. 11.Nov	128	12	5	5	132	282
Fri. 13.Nov	287	12	5	7	270	581
Sun. 22.Nov	288	30	14	22	298	652
Wed. 25.Nov	123	11	3	5	118	260
Fri. 27.Nov	219	18	6	19	249	511
Sat. 28.Nov	220	19	2	20	258	519
Sun. 29.Nov	316	8	2	4	235	565
Sat. 5.Dec	220	19	2	20	258	519
Total	1,801	129	39	102	1,818	3,889

Table 1: Passenger Count, Ennis-Athenry, Western Rail Corridor, Nov. and Dec. 2015 (Intel Consulting)

A few points to aid the reader's understanding:

- The section of the Western Rail Corridor between Athenry and Ennis has three stops between the two towns: these are Craughwell, Ardrahan and Gort.
- The column **Ex-Athenry** has the number on all trains departing Athenry and travelling south towards Ennis.
- The columns **Craughwell, Ardrahan and Gort** have the numbers boarding all trains at these stations and travelling either north or south.
- The column **Ex-Ennis** has the number on all trains departing Ennis and travelling north towards Athenry.

⁸ Appendix 1 has full details of all trains travelled and numbers of people departing all five stations.

A number of observations can be made and a significant conclusion drawn from Table 1:

- The number departing Athenry travelling towards Ennis is 46% of all passengers.
- The number departing Ennis travelling towards Athenry is 47% of all passengers.
- Just 7% board at Craughwell, Ardrahan or Gort. The figures in Table 1 show Craughwell is the busiest of the three stations, followed by Gort and Ardrahan.
- The conclusion is the Galway-Limerick train is used mainly as an InterCity link for Limerick and Galway, and commuting for Limerick-Ennis and Galway-Athenry.

To extrapolate to the indicative number that could be travelling north and south between Athenry and Ennis for the whole of 2015, three assumptions were made:

- Wednesday we regarded as a typical weekday, so the average passenger count for the two Wednesdays (11 and 25 November) was assumed to be the daily passenger count for Monday to Thursday in all weeks throughout the year.
- Friday is the day most people travel for the weekend, so the average passenger count for the two Fridays (13 and 25 November) could be assumed to be the daily passenger count for all Fridays. However, as our count was done on two Fridays in the first semester of the college year, the average daily passenger count for these 'student Fridays' applied for only 26 weeks. For all other Fridays, we assumed the count was the average of a typical weekday and a 'student' Friday.
 - Readers should note that passenger audits of all railways by the National Transport Authority make no assumptions about student numbers increasing overall figures during non-summer months. These audits are taken on a mid-November weekday and include thousands of students commuting daily in the Greater Dublin Area. In addition, they do not take any account of the prospect of replacement passengers during the summer months e.g. people visiting family/friends, going shopping or to a social event, or fine weather travellers.
- The average daily passenger count for Saturdays and Sundays was the average of those travelling on these days and was assumed constant through the year.

Weekday	$(283+260)/2 \times 4 \times 52$	272 x 209	56,848
'Student' Friday	$(581+511)/2 \times 26$	546 x 26	14,196
'Typical' Friday	$(546+272)/2 \times 26$	409 x 26	10,634
Saturday	$(519+519)/2 \times 52$	519 x 52	26,988
Sunday	$(652+565)/2 \times 52$	609 x 52	31,668
Total			140,334

Table 2: Estimated Annual Passenger Count, Ennis-Athenry, Western Rail Corridor, 2015 (Intel Consulting)

- Using this approach, the indicative number of passengers for November 2015 was 12,885. Were this pattern to hold across all months, it implies **the number travelling between Ennis and Athenry in 2015 could be just over 140,000**. This compares to:
 - 50,000 in 2014
 - 29,000 in 2013
 - 34,000 in 2012
 - 34,000 in 2011
- Iarnród Éireann have advised that, while the number of passengers we counted over eight days aligns with the numbers captured by their systems in that period, and with the return from NTA census on 12 November, the data need to be adjusted for seasonal factors. The company's seasonally-adjusted numbers are as follows:
- The monthly figures from Iarnród Éireann for 2015 are as follows:

Time Period	Passenger Journeys	% All Passenger Journeys
P1	6,479	6.3%
P2	8,654	8.4%
P3	8,713	8.5%
P4	8,185	8.0%
P5	7,467	7.3%
P6	5,296	5.2%
P7	5,978	5.8%
P8	7,991	7.8%
P9	7,916	7.7%
P10	10,217	10.0%
P11	10,112	9.9%
P12	9,912	9.4%
P13*	5,861	5.7%
All	102,481	100%

Table 3: Passenger Numbers, Ennis-Athenry, Western Rail Corridor, 2015 (Iarnród Éireann)

* The line closed for an extended period in P13 due to flooding caused by Storm Desmond

The company has highlighted a few points to aid the reader's understanding:

- Iarnród Éireann uses four-week periods rather than calendar months for financial recording. This explains why there are 13 reporting periods for 2015.
- The increase in passenger journeys on the Ennis-Athenry section in 2015 is explained, in part, by the flooding that closed the line and depressed numbers in 2014, and in part, by promotional fares driving increased passengers in 2015.
- The survey for West=on=Track took place on dates in November and falls into P12 of Iarnród Éireann's financial year. This was the third highest in passenger volumes and is not representative of the yearly average.
- Excluding P12, the sample period, which had 9,612 passenger journeys, the average number of journeys for the remainder of the year was 7,739. On that basis, the company calculates a seasonality over-index of 24.6%.
- Applying this 24.6% over-index factor to the West=on=Track passenger journey estimate would reduce the estimated journeys from c. 140,000 to c. 106,000.
- In essence, the numbers we counted over 8 days in November 2015 are consistent with the numbers captured by Iarnród Éireann in that counting period. Were the usage we quantified to be repeated throughout the year, it would indicate that just over 140,000 people are travelling the Western Rail Corridor between Athenry and Ennis. The railway company's numbers, extracted from their systems, indicate the number is just over 102,000.
- We would highlight, and the company does acknowledge, that we could not have known these seasonal variations without sight of their numbers, which could only be extracted once all passenger data for the year was finalised.
- At all events, the seasonally-adjusted passenger numbers indicate that, not only have passenger numbers on the Ennis to Athenry section grown by over 100% in 2015, but the projections in the business case have been exceeded.

Infrastructure

Iarnród Éireann uses a mix of InterCity and Commuter rolling stock on the line.

- On a minority of services, a three-car ICR set seating 190 is run. These trains (22000 Class Diesel Multiple Unit) have a top speed of 100 mph (160 km/h) and are both comfortable and well-appointed, with standard-class features including:
 - Air conditioning
 - 220v power points at every seat
 - Wheelchair seating areas
 - Wheelchair accessible toilet facilities
 - Bike accommodation
 - Luggage racks
 - Baby changing facilities
 - Wi-Fi
 - Seat reservation system with LED name displays above seats
 - Automatic PA and passenger information systems
- The majority of services are formed by the Commuter fleet (2800 Class DMU seating 85 people in a two-car or 170 in a four-car set). These trains have a top speed of 75 mph (120 km/h). Spartan in comparison with ICRs, they are less comfortable and have few of the ICR's creature comforts.
- There is no hard-and-fast rule with regard to which train type, ICR or Commuter, passengers can expect. This is incongruous for an InterCity route.
- While the maximum line speed on the Athenry to Ennis section is 80mph, neither InterCity nor Commuter rolling stock reaches in excess of 65mph other than for relatively short distances. This is due to the frequency of stops, the timetable, a small number of permanent speed restrictions, and speed restrictions associated with farmer accommodation crossings. It is noteworthy that all public road crossings on the route are fully automatic and the busiest farmer accommodation crossings have been replaced with overpasses. Line of sight has also been greatly improved by clearance work undertaken as part of the route refurbishment.

Ticketing and Checking

- Although ticket vending machines are provided at all stations, passengers boarding at Craughwell, Ardrahan and Gort can only purchase tickets to a station on three routes: Galway-Limerick, Galway-Dublin and Athlone-Westport.

- They cannot buy a ticket to Cork, Cobh, Mallow, Tralee, Waterford or Limerick Junction, even though some Galway-Limerick trains terminate at Limerick Junction and all connect with services to those other locations.
- To give one example, a passenger boarding at Gort for Cork can only buy a ticket to Castlebar, Castlerea, Clara, Claremorris or Clondalkin Fonthill. A seamless ticketing experience would enable them to buy one ticket for any stop on any InterCity route with which this InterCity route connects.
- In the course of this survey, there was no ticket-checking on trains to ensure people had paid the correct fare, or even if they have paid at all. The practice observed was ticket-checking at Galway for passengers travelling south, but not on-board and not at Athenry, Craughwell, Ardrahan or Gort. Only once (platform at Ennis) was a surveyor asked if they had a ticket but they did not have to produce it. At no stage did anyone from Iarnród Éireann board a train and ask passengers for tickets.

Schedule and Speed

- On weekdays and Saturdays, 10 trains run between Galway and Limerick – five in each direction. On Sundays, there are 8 trains – four in each direction.
- Trains departing Limerick call at Ennis, Gort, Ardrahan, Craughwell, Athenry and Oranmore⁹; while all trains departing Galway call at all stations to Limerick.
- The **journey time from Athenry to Ennis**, a distance of 36 miles by rail, **averages 51 minutes**, measured on the 10 trains running each day, Monday to Saturday.¹⁰
 - The **fastest train takes 43 minutes** (18:15 ex-Athenry, Monday to Saturday).
 - The **slowest train takes 67 minutes** (16:35 ex-Ennis, Sunday).
 - The slowest train lags the fastest by 24 minutes.
- The **journey time between Limerick and Galway**, a distance of 78 miles by rail, **averages 1 hour 55 minutes**, measured on the 8 trains running Sunday.¹¹
 - The **fastest train takes 1 hour 47 minutes**. (11:55 ex-Galway, Sunday).
 - The **slowest train takes 2 hours 25 minutes** (18:00 ex-Limerick, Monday to Saturday, albeit with a stopping time of 28 minutes at Ennis).
 - The slowest train lags the fastest by 38 minutes.

⁹ There is one exception: the 09:20 from Limerick to Galway does not stop at Oranmore.

¹⁰ The average journey time for all 8 trains running from Athenry to Ennis on Sunday is 54 minutes.

¹¹ The average journey time for the 9 Galway-Limerick and Limerick-Galway, Monday-Saturday trains, is exactly 2 hours. Although there are 10 weekday services, one (18:40 ex-Galway) terminates at Ennis.

- These calculations assume all trains run on time, which is often not the case. During this survey, all trains ran, meaning a reliability score of 100% was achieved. However, many trains often ran behind schedule, yet still attained a punctuality score of 100% because a train can be up to 10 minutes late departing and still be regarded as leaving on-time under the Iarnród Éireann Passenger Charter.
- **If the fastest train is scheduled to travel from Galway to Limerick in 1 hour 47 minutes, and from Athenry to Ennis in 43 minutes, stopping at every station along the way, should not that be the minimum requirement for all trains?**¹²
- However, 1 hour 47 minutes is still much slower than the 1 hour 20 minutes offered by Bus Éireann and City Link on their frequent, flyer services between Galway and Limerick. Bus Éireann is currently providing up to 19 of these services a day, while City Link runs a further 10. Their journey time could fall to c. 1 hour 15 minutes when the M17-M18 Tuam-Gort motorway opens in late-2018. Even if all trains run at the current best time of 1 hour 47 minutes once the new motorway has opened, the train still could be c. 30 minutes slower than the express bus.

Passenger Survey

We surveyed a sample of passengers on both Wednesdays and both Fridays.

Participants were chosen at random. To each, we said that West-on-Track with cooperation from Iarnród Éireann was counting the number of passengers travelling between Ennis and Athenry, and getting the views of some about the service.

Of the 193 that took the survey, 100 did it on paper, the other 93 used a smartphone.

We used the SurveyMonkey® software in developing, administering and processing the questionnaire. This was shown to Iarnród Éireann and amended following advice that the format of the questions be more closely aligned with their standard research approach.

The full results are at Appendix 2 and the survey itself at Appendix 3.

¹² The LeighFisher / MVA Consultancy report quotes the Iarnród Éireann Infrastructure Manager, that the journey time delay of stopping per stop is c. two minutes at both peak and off-peak times. This report also notes that some capital works are necessary for lifting the current Permanent Speed Restrictions (PSRs).

Nine questions were asked:

1. How often do you travel this route?
2. What is the main purpose of your journey today?
3. Did you buy a ticket at the station or online; or did you use a free travel card or other scheme such as Tax saver?¹³
4. Where did your journey start?
5. What is your destination?
6. Are you travelling one way or return?
7. What do you think of this service?
 - a. Frequency of trains
 - b. Punctuality: arriving / departing on-time
 - c. Speed of journey
 - d. Space for luggage
 - e. Comfort of seating
 - f. Toilet facilities
 - g. Ease of getting on / off train
 - h. Value for money of the price of your ticket
8. What (if anything) would you like to see done better / differently on this service?

¹³ The TaxSaver Commuter Ticket Scheme was introduced in Ireland in 2000 as an incentive for workers in some parts of the country to use public transport. You can avail of public transport commuter tickets if you are travelling for work by public transport bus or rail. Employees receive tickets either as part of their salary package (salary sacrifice), in lieu of an annual cash bonus, or as a benefit-in-kind. Tickets are not subject to tax, PRSI or USC. According to Dublin Bus and Irish Rail, employers can achieve PRSI savings of up to 10.75% and employees can save between 31% and 52% of travel costs as a result of tax, PRSI and USC savings. Citizensinformation.ie, (2015). Public transport commuter tickets and tax. [online] Available at: http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/travel_and_recreation/public_transport/public_transport_commuter_tickets_and_tax.html [Accessed 5 Dec. 2015].

Survey Findings

1. Frequency of Travel

- i. 28% travel the route at least once a week.
- ii. 25% travel it more often than once a week.
- iii. 14% are travelling it once a month.
- iv. 16% are travelling it for the first time.
- v. **In summary, more than two-thirds of passengers are travelling at least once a month, or once a week, or more often than once a week.**

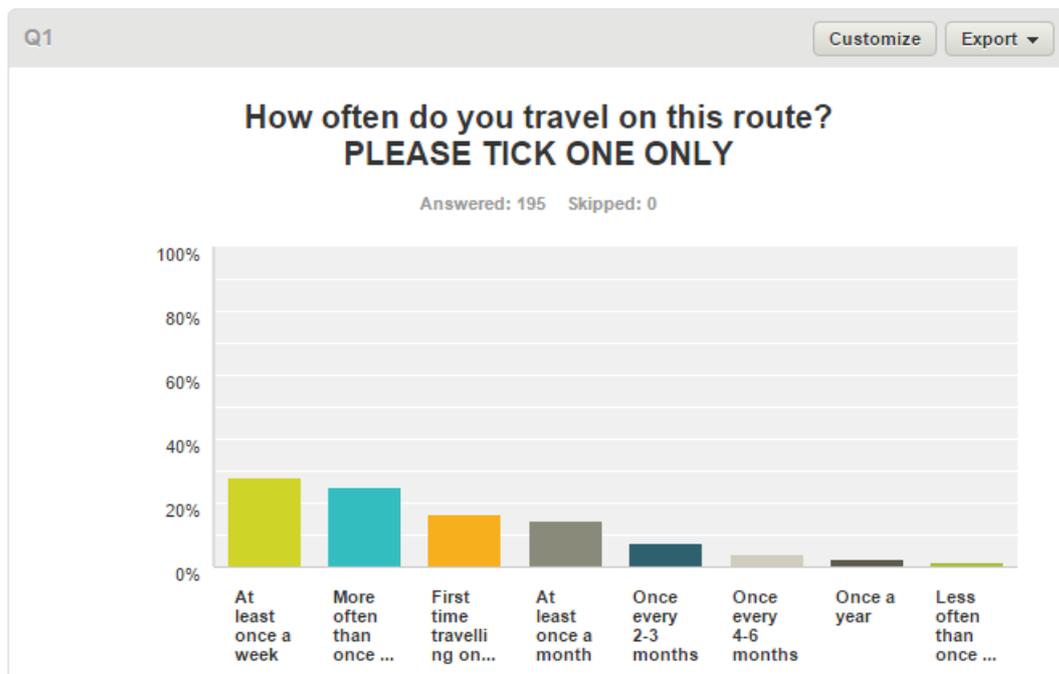


Figure 1: Frequency of Travel

2. Purpose of Journey

- i. Almost 85% are commuting to College or University; or using the train for Leisure e.g. visiting, shopping, holidaying, or travelling to / from a sporting or entertainment event. A higher percentage (44%) use the train for getting to College or University than use it for leisure (39%).

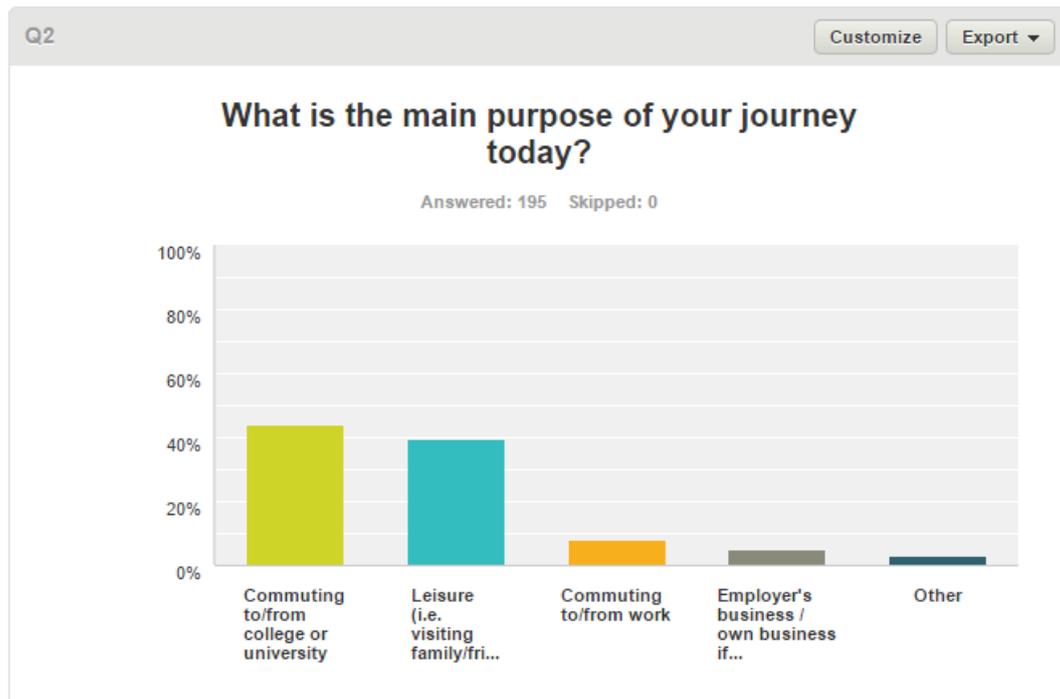


Figure 2: Purpose of Journey

3. Ticket, Travel Card, Tax saver

- i. More than half (55%) of passengers buy a ticket at the station.
- ii. A little more than one in five passengers (22%) use a free travel card.
- iii. Almost the same number (21%) as use a travel card buy a ticket online.
- iv. Only two respondents use the Tax saver Scheme.
- v. **In summary, three-quarters of passengers buy a ticket online or at the station; most of the remaining one-quarter have free travel.**



Figure 3: Ticket Purchasing and Travel Card Usage

4. Departure

- i. Almost 85% of passengers set off from Galway, Gort, Ennis or Limerick.
- ii. Fewer than 14% began their journey from one of the other five stations: Oranmore, Athenry, Craughwell, Ardrahan or Sixmilebridge.
- iii. **These findings highlight the fact that the Western Rail Corridor is used mainly as an InterCity connection between Galway and Limerick.**

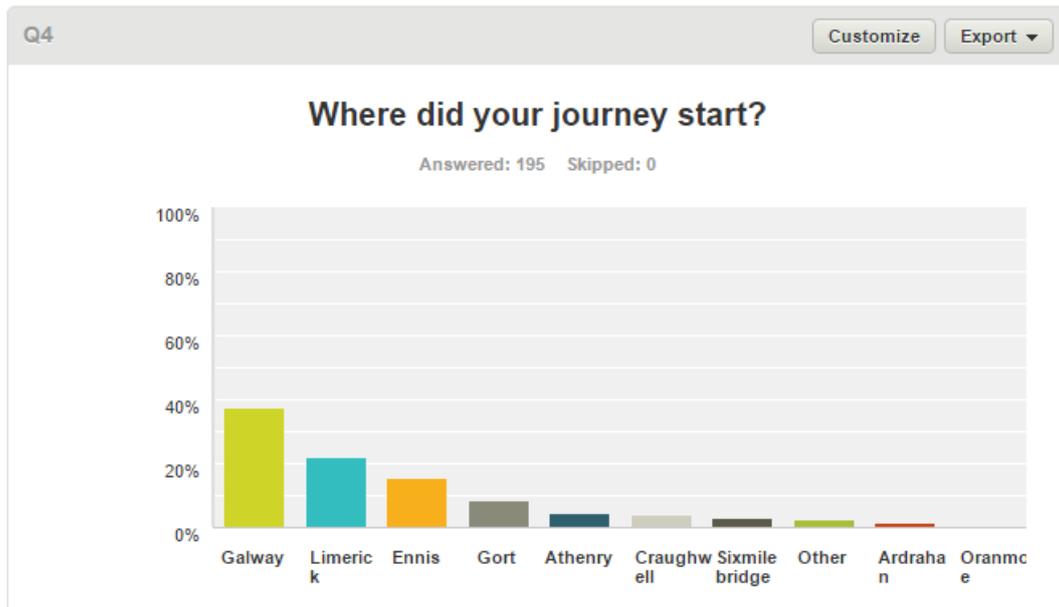


Figure 4: Departure

5. Destination

- i. More than 78% say their destination was Galway, Limerick or Ennis.
- ii. Just 14% say Oranmore, Athenry, Craughwell, Ardrahan or Sixmilebridge.
- iii. **This confirms that this part of the route is mostly InterCity, with a strong commuting pattern on the Limerick-Ennis and Galway-Athenry sections.**

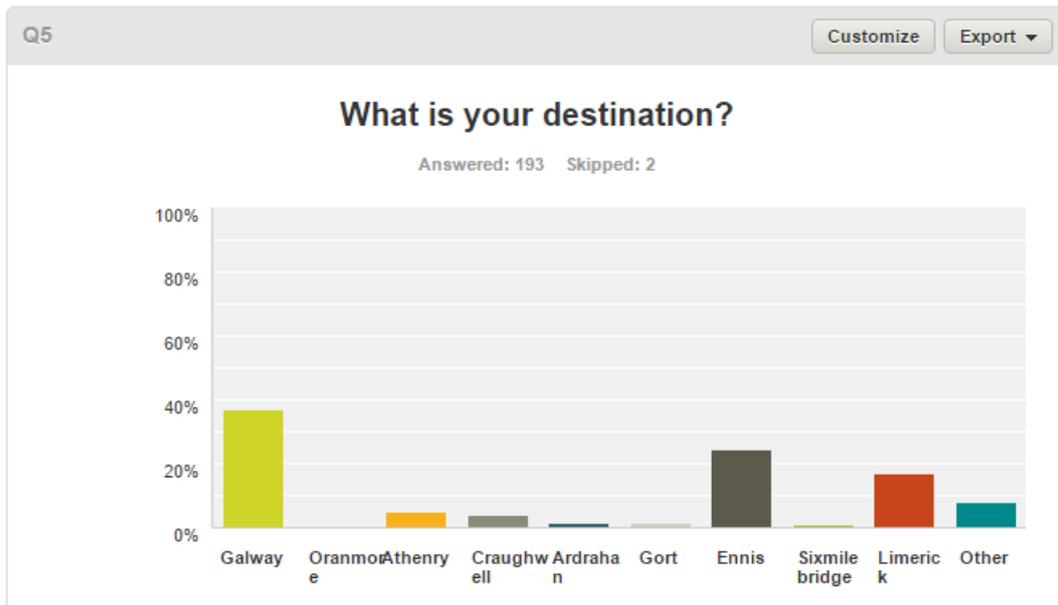


Figure 5: Destination

6. Single v Return

- i. Three quarters of journeys are return; just one-quarter are one-way.

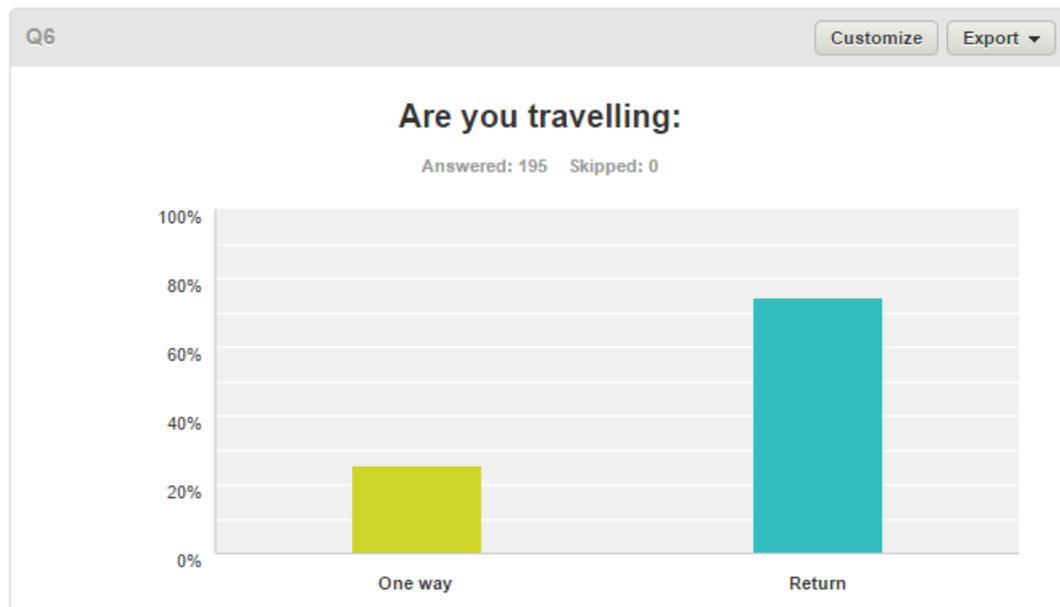


Figure 6: Ticket Type

7. Views on Service

- i. Almost 2 out of 3 say the **frequency** of trains is very good or fairly good.
- ii. Just over one-third say this is neither good nor poor, or fairly poor.

- iii. More than 4 out of 5 say **punctuality** is very good or fairly good.
- iv. Almost 3 in 20 say this is neither good nor poor, or fairly poor.

- v. More than 7 out of 10 say the **train speed** is very good or fairly good.
- vi. More than 1 in 4 say this is neither good nor poor, or fairly poor.

- vii. Over 85% say the **luggage space** is very good or fairly good.
- viii. However, 13% say this is neither good nor poor, or fairly poor.

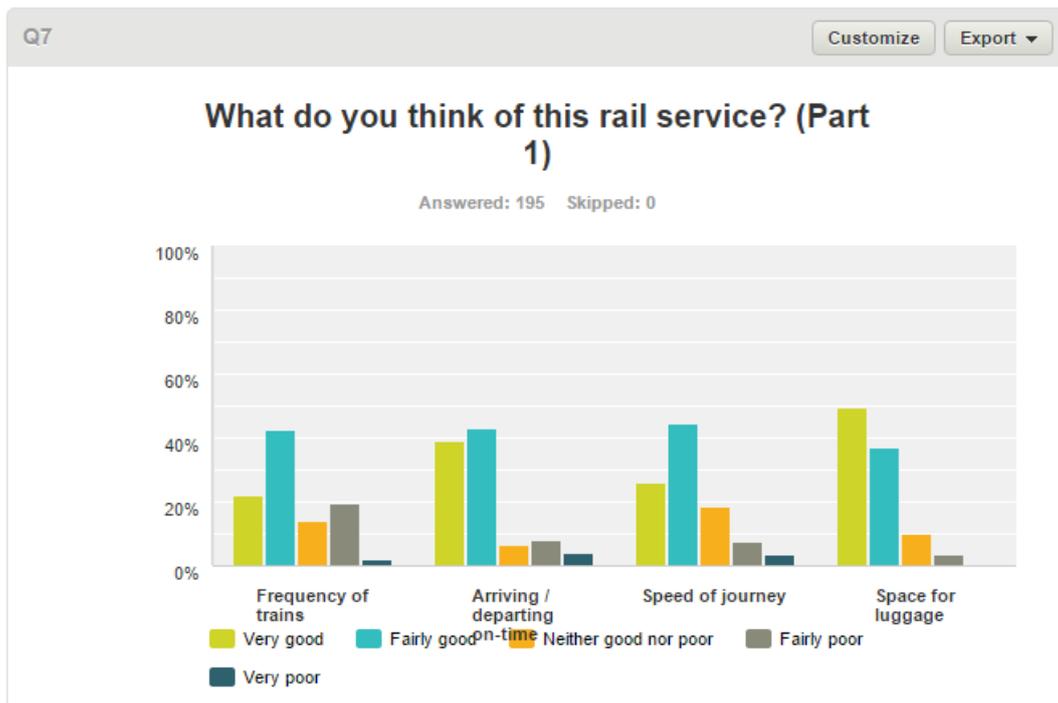


Figure 7: Perceptions of Service (Part 1)

8. Views on Service (Part 2)

- i. Over 80% say the **comfort of the seating** is very good or fairly good.
- ii. However, 17% say it is neither good nor poor, or fairly poor.

- iii. More than 7 out of 10 say **toilet facilities** are very good or fairly good.
- iv. However, 3 out of 10 say they are neither good nor poor, or fairly poor.

- v. Almost 90% say the **ease of getting on and off** is very good or fairly good.

- vi. Almost 84% describe the **value for money** as very good or fairly good.
- vii. However, 14% say this is neither good nor poor, or fairly poor.

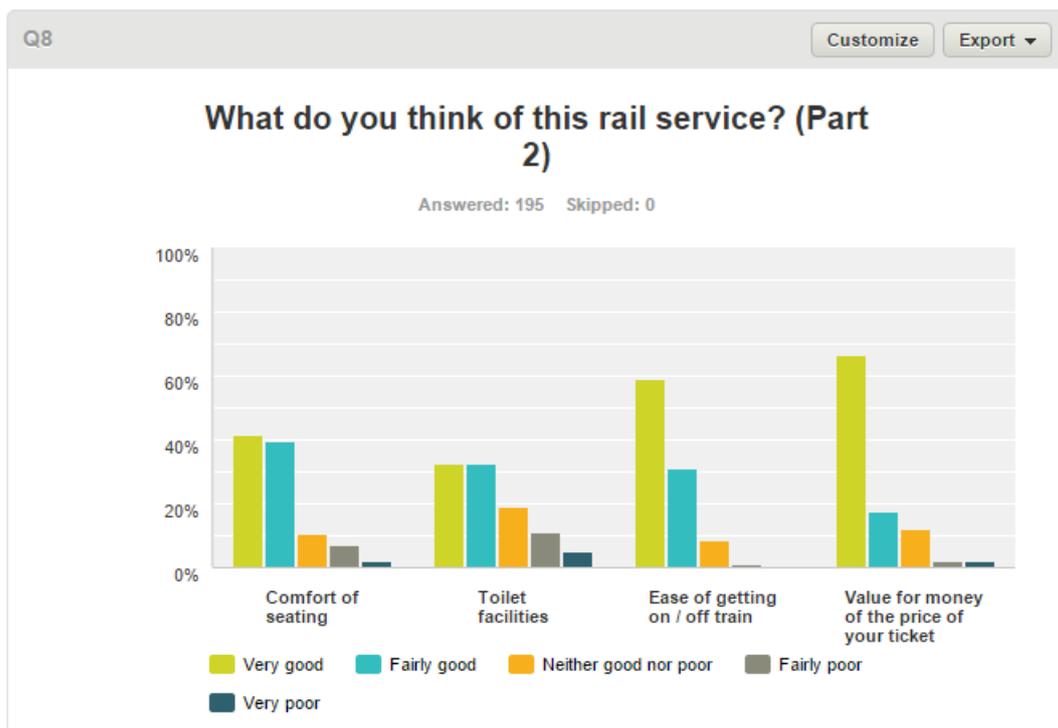


Figure 8: Perceptions of Service (Part 2)

9. Desired Changes

Half of all respondents (N=93) highlight changes they would like made.

The top six issues received 80% of all mentions.

- i. **Frequency:** 22 mentions (many passengers wanted an extra train to Galway on weekday mornings to facilitate commuters; the first at 08:10 is too early for some, and the second at 11:13 is of no use at all. Some mentioned the need for feeder buses to the industrial estates in Galway and for Bus Éireann coaches to serve all stations).
- ii. **Quality and comfort:** 15 mentions (passengers like the ICR train sets but are far less complimentary about the Commuter rolling stock, especially the lack of table space for papers and computers).
- iii. **Food and drink:** 11 mentions (most would like just tea or coffee).
- iv. **Special fares:** 11 mentions (especially for students).
- v. **Speed:** 10 mentions (several asked about eliminating some stops).
- vi. **Wi-Fi and power:** 6 mentions (passengers using laptops).
- vii. A variety of other issues were mentioned, including the difficulty in getting a buggy on/off, a broken lift at Athenry, and no lift at Ennis.
- viii. One issue that annoys some is the apparent daily delay to the evening train from Galway to facilitate the evening train from Dublin. As one passenger said, “The wait in Galway at 6:15 pm is awful. We have to wait every evening for the Dublin train to arrive. Can something be done about this? It’s an ongoing issue.” Some people highlighted the disparities between scheduled and actual departure times and called for enforcement of the timetable and better information about delays.

Summary of Findings

1. Passenger Numbers

- If the passenger numbers we counted in November / December 2015 were to be repeated consistently throughout the year, journeys on the Ennis-Athenry section would reach in excess of 140,000 in a whole year. Iarnród Éireann's granular data, which take account of seasonal factors unknown to us and were extracted once all passenger data for 2015 had been collated, indicates there were just over 102,000 passengers for 2015. On that basis, there has been in excess of 100% growth in passenger numbers on the Ennis-Athenry section in 2015. This is twice the 50,000 recorded in 2014 and three times the 34,000 recorded in 2011 and again in 2012.
- The number departing Athenry travelling towards Ennis is 46% of all passengers.
- The number departing Ennis travelling towards Athenry is 47% of all passengers.
- Just 7% board at Craughwell, Ardrahan or Gort. The passenger count shows that Craughwell is the busiest of the three stations, followed by Gort and Ardrahan.
- **The conclusion from these findings is that this section of the Western Rail Corridor is used almost exclusively as an InterCity link between Limerick and Galway; and as a Commuter route for Galway-Athenry and Limerick-Ennis.**

2. Train Speeds and Journey Times

1. The journey time from Athenry to Ennis, a distance of 36 miles by rail, averages 51 minutes, measured on the 10 trains running each day, Monday to Saturday.
 - a. The fastest train takes 43 minutes (18:15 ex-Athenry, Monday to Saturday).
 - b. The slowest train takes 59 minutes (16:35 ex-Ennis, Sunday).
 - c. The slowest train lags the fastest by 24 minutes.
2. The journey time between Limerick and Galway, a distance of 78 miles by rail, averages 1 hour 55 minutes, measured on the 8 trains running Sunday.
 - a. The fastest train takes 1 hour 47 minutes (11:55 ex-Galway, Sunday).
 - b. The slowest train takes exactly 2 hours 25 minutes (18:00 ex-Limerick, Monday to Saturday, albeit with a stopping time of 28 minutes at Ennis).
 - c. The slowest train lags the fastest by 38 minutes.

- **The conclusion from these findings is that if the fastest train is scheduled to travel from Galway to Limerick in 1 hour 47 minutes, and from Athenry to Ennis in 43 minutes, stopping at all stations, there is no evident reason why all trains can't keep to the same schedule, for efficiency, predictability and punctuality.**

3. Reliability and Punctuality

- Iarnród Éireann's Passenger Charter includes targets for reliability and punctuality.
 - a. In terms of reliability, measured over a four-week period, the commitment is to ensure that 98% of all timetabled InterCity, DART and Commuter rail services run as planned.
 - b. With regard to punctuality, also measured over a four-week period, no train will leave a station earlier than advertised in the timetable, and performance is measured on timetabled services at the end of the line.
 - c. Instances of delays or disruption outside of Iarnród Éireann's control are excluded, for example due to extreme weather conditions.¹⁴
- There was 100% reliability achieved – all scheduled trains did run.
- The question of punctuality is more nuanced. While our survey did not run over a four-week period and did not capture the time of arrival at the end of the line, it did find 77% of trains departed on time (as defined in the Passenger Charter), but delays were commonplace. For 57 of 66 trains for which we noted departure times:
 - a. 1 departed early (2 minutes) = 1.8%
 - b. 13 departed dead on time (at scheduled time) = 22.8%
 - c. 31 departed on time (2 to 10 minutes late) = 54.4%
 - d. 12 departed late (12 to 36 minutes late) = 21.1%
- In other words, while at least three-quarters of trains departed on time as defined in Iarnród Éireann's Passenger Charter, more than half were 2 to 10 minutes late, and more than one in five were over 10 minutes late. These delays are unsatisfactory for the customer and do not help build public confidence.
- While some trains did make up some time en route, clearly the longer a train is delayed departing, and bearing in mind that there is much contingency in the timetable and a number of Permanent Speed Restrictions (PSRs) along the route, the less likely it is that lost time could be made up by journey's end.
- **The conclusion from these findings is that the 10-minute target is too generous and could be reduced as part of a drive to improve efficiency and counter the perception that train speeds are too slow and journey times too long.**

¹⁴ The weather was inclement on some of the dates surveyed but not extreme on any of them.

4. Passenger Survey

- More than two-thirds of passengers using the Western Rail Corridor are travelling at least once a month, or once a week, or more often than once a week.
- Almost 85% use it for leisure or to commute to College or University, with more (44%) using it for getting to College or University than for leisure (39%). This tallies with the observed experience of a great many young people, particularly on certain services e.g. mid-morning trains coming up from Limerick and mid-morning onwards services travelling down from Galway, especially on Friday.
- About 3 in 4 passengers buy their ticket but only 1 in 4 uses free travel. As free travel is predominantly used by older people (being one of the ‘free schemes’ provided by the Department of Social Protection for old-age pensioners), this tends to contradict the “negative” perception that this is a “grey” route only.
- Almost 85% of passengers start their journeys from Galway, Ennis or Limerick and close to 80% of passengers say their destination is Galway, Ennis or Limerick. In other words, the Western Rail Corridor is mostly InterCity from Limerick to Galway; and Commuter for Limerick-Ennis and Galway-Athenry.
- Most passengers say all aspects of the service are very good or fairly good but around half mentioned specific improvements they would like made e.g.
 - a. **Frequency:** 22 mentions (many passengers wanted an extra train to Galway on weekday mornings to facilitate commuters).
 - b. **Quality and comfort:** 15 mentions (passengers seem to prefer the ICR trains but appear indifferent to the Commuter rolling stock, especially the lack of table space for papers and computers).
 - c. **Food and drink:** 11 mentions (most would like just tea or coffee).
 - d. **Special fares:** 11 mentions (especially for students).
 - e. **Speed:** 10 mentions (several asked about eliminating some stops).
 - f. **Wi-Fi and power points:** 6 mentions (passengers using laptops).
- *Surveyor Note:*
 - a. Where we engaged with rail staff, they were courteous, friendly and helpful. A good and courteous service was also observed for wheelchair users.
 - b. Trains are for the most part clean and warm. The ICRs are quieter, more comfortable and not prone to admitting diesel fumes to carriages while trains are standing, which is the experience on Commuter-type stock.

Recommendations

1. Better Trains

- The 2800 Class Commuter trains should, ideally, be replaced by 22000 Class ICR trains. As well as being unsuited to this InterCity route, their ongoing, indiscriminate deployment on this line damages the InterCity brand and contributes to a poor public perception of rail vis-à-vis road.
- Iarnród Éireann should either deploy the 22000 Class trains on all services between Galway and Limerick rather than some as at present; or cascade its Mark IV or De Dietrich (Enterprise) trains when these are replaced, as has been proposed in the LeighFisher / MVA Consultancy report.

2. Faster Speeds

- One solution is to **run all trains to the current best time of 1 hour 47 minutes**, rather than the current average of 1 hour 56 minutes, or the current slowest of 2 hours. This **saves 9 to 13 minutes at a stroke**.
- Another is to **eliminate the three least-used stops** (Ardrahan, Craughwell and Gort) for off-peak services, or put them on a ‘Request Stop’ basis which is the practice in e.g. Switzerland and the UK.¹⁵ This facilitates the commuter, who gains at least 9 minutes from a guaranteed 1 hour 47 minute journey time, and **speeds up off-peak services by up to 6 minutes**.
- A third is to **carry out the capital works to lift the PSRs**. The maximum speed on the Ennis to Athenry section is 80mph. This does not appear to be availed of, though could be if a small number of PSRs were addressed. Trials should be taken in an effort to achieve **a journey time of 1 hour 28 minutes**.¹⁶ This **saves 19 minutes** on the current best time and is only 8 minutes slower than the current best time for Bus Éireann and City Link express coaches.
- The effect of these changes could cut journey times by 9-19 minutes:
 - Save 9-13 minutes by running all trains at the current best time.
 - Save 6 minutes by dropping the three least-used stops off-peak.
 - Gain 19 minutes by doing the works necessary to lift the PSRs.

¹⁵ In Switzerland, some trains only stop on request at very small stations. The timetable shows if that’s the case and so do the train intercom and/or displays. Passengers need to press a button near the doors a few minutes before arrival to signal to the train driver they want to get off. In Wales, passengers wishing to get off at a request stop must inform the conductor, while those wishing to board must give a hand signal to the driver. In England, the timetable for the Yorton-Manchester Piccadilly line, has request stops in red.

¹⁶ Calculated on the basis that all trains average 60mph en route and take 10 minutes for all 7 stops.

- The first two options are cost-free ways of improving efficiency, countering perceptions that the train is too slow, and positioning rail as a fair alternative for the frequent, flyer coach services using the motorways.

3. Improved Punctuality

- Adherence to the timetable should be tightened up and there should be an effort to cut the number of ‘on time’ trains departing behind schedule.

4. Customer-Centric Timetabling

- An additional train should run on weekday mornings for northbound commuters. The current 20:20 service from Ennis to Galway could be deferred to become a second “next morning” commuter service to Galway. This change should be supported with special fares and active marketing.
- The timetable should be further changed so that, for example, the evening train from Galway is not held up by the InterCity services from Dublin.
- Consideration should be given to running additional student trains on Friday and Sunday and marketing these, especially on Facebook.
- The three least-used stops could be eliminated except at peak times, or put on a ‘Request Stop’ basis, which is the practice in Switzerland and the UK.
- Iarnród Éireann should integrate the Galway-Limerick InterCity route into other InterCity routes, ensuring a seamless service embracing ticket availability, customer-centric connectivity, and consistent use of ICRs.
 - To get more custom from Gort for the Galway-Dublin InterCity route, for example, customer-centric connectivity to Athenry outbound and return is needed. (Some people in the survey mentioned better connectivity to e.g. Athlone, Mallow and Tipperary.)
 - In addition, onward connections which minimise delay at Limerick Junction could grow the Galway-Cork element of the business.

5. Competitive Fares

- There should be more competitive fares, more active marketing of the Tax saver scheme to major employers in Galway and Limerick and at stations on the route, and more active marketing of good-value weekly and monthly student tickets.¹⁷ Bus Éireann and City Link are offering student return to

¹⁷ Students are increasingly likely to be commuting daily because of the lack of affordable accommodation. Moreover, as traffic congestion is once again becoming a serious problem in Galway and commuter rail can

Galway or Limerick for €17.58 and €20 respectively when buying online. Iarnród Éireann's €20 return is good value, except the train is a lot slower and the online option needs to be made available on all services.

- The LEAP Card, recently introduced in Galway, should be extended from bus services on already-congested roads to faster-flowing commuter rail.
- Special promotions should be considered to increase the profile of the railway in Gort. The railway bridge offers an ideal advertising point.

6. Product Development

- The Western Rail Corridor Limerick-Galway trains serve the Wild Atlantic Way, which is wide open to be branded as a Wild Atlantic Railway stretching from Tralee to Galway and beyond to Mayo and Sligo.
- Options should be explored to attract day trippers, cyclists and walkers, in association with the community groups that give such initiatives the best chance of success. Ardahan, for example, though one of the quieter stations, is about 5 miles along country roads from Kinvara and the coast.
- The opportunity to introduce a tea, coffee and light food service should be explored commercially, having regard to examples of similar cross-country routes in the UK, on which tourist/visitor information is also provided.

7. Human Touch

- Consideration should be given to having staff travel on the Athenry to Ennis section. As well as protecting revenue on the route, periodic stop-offs by personnel would enable ticket vending machines to be checked to ensure they are working properly (both machines at Gort were out-of-order on Saturday 5 December, meaning 9 people boarded the 10:20 train service without tickets), and increase the visibility of Iarnród Éireann staff, especially at Gort. Although centrally located and well-lit, this station is out of sight of the main street, which may be an issue on dark evenings.
- Staffing Gort would add to the operating costs of the Western Rail Corridor but the increased revenue accruing from better marketing, and the visibility of strengthened revenue-protection measures, would offset this.

alleviate this, account should be taken of the further potential of commuter rail in the current joint study by Galway City Council and the National Transport Authority.