



All aboard! Deputy Mayor Clif Michael Hourigan and Deputy Peter Power prepare to board the train to Galway on Monday

Limerick rail link with Galway is back on track

Nick Rabbitts

THE train line between Limerick and Galway is open to the public this Tuesday after Transport Minister Noel Dempsey officially cut the ribbon at Colbert station.

Up to 100 representatives from the business, commercial and tourism sectors across the city were at Colbert Station on Monday morning to travel on the inter-city route, reopened at a cost of €106.5m.

There are five journeys daily from Limerick - 06:00, 09:35, 11:55, 14:15 and 18:05 - while the train will return from Galway at 06:40, 09:45, 12:10, 14:30 and 17:25.

Irish Rail will no doubt be hoping that the maiden service will not be an indicator of things to come - for, due to Minister Dempsey's late arrival, Monday's one-off 10:30 service was 15 minutes late leaving Limerick.

Speaking at the official opening - where he unveiled a special plaque - Minister Dempsey said: "This emphasises again the importance of opening up the region. It's the first major rail opening for God knows how long. It gives an opportunity for people in the west of Ireland to show their support for a project which they have campaigned for for a long time."

"What people can do now by showing their support in using this is give me the backing to go back looking for the funding for this."

"Usage of this will be a huge indicator of how badly the west of Ireland needs this."

The two hour journey is to serve Sixmilebridge, Ennis, Gort and Athenry en route to Galway, and it is the first time the line has been open since 1976.

But there has been criticism of the service, after it emerged it would run at a loss in the first few years - plus the road journey to Galway takes just 90 minutes.

However, Shannon Develop-



Transport Minister Noel Dempsey and Minister of State Ciaran Cuffe launching the Limerick to Galway rail service on Monday

ment chief executive Dr Vincent Cunnane said he thinks the benefits of travelling by rail outweigh the drawbacks.

"By rail, you can work, do your business, prepare for meetings, read your material."

"It's a much easier way to travel. Road is fantastic, but when I go to Dublin, I travel by rail, and when I am going to Galway, I'll be travelling by rail as well," he told the Limerick Chronicle.

Labour colleagues, Deputy Jan O'Sullivan - who joined the inaugural service - and Clif Joe Leddin have also been critical of the fact there is no stop in Moyross or spur line from Sixmilebridge to serve Shannon Airport.

Dr Cunnane said this is something which could be looked at in

the future: "We would have loved to see something happen from Sixmilebridge into Shannon Airport, but we are getting closer to that."

"We must see the opportunity in this. Maybe in the future we can get these links."

Iarnród Éireann chairman Dr John Lynch said, despite projections that just 300 people a day would use the new service, there is "tremendous public support" for the line.

He added: "We have boosted capacities on trains throughout launch week such is the level of enquiries from people right along the route, and we are very confident that demand will easily outstrip the projections made for this service."



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