

Submission to TII on the Cork City Public Consultation on
Cork Luas Emerging Preferred Route



CORK BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

9TH June 2025

Introduction

The Cork Business Association (CBA) has been representing Cork businesses in Cork City since 1957. The organisation has extensive membership throughout the city and has an ambitious membership growth plan for the future. Infrastructure is a key element of the CBAs 5 year strategic plan, which contains our vision and priorities for the organisation. Many of the themes and actions identified in our strategic plan align strongly with the key development priorities that are outlined in the Cork City Development Plan. Improved infrastructure and reliability on public transport are crucial outcomes in order for Cork City to achieve key growth and sustainability targets.

As a key strategic partner of Cork City Council we strongly believe that a renewed focus on improved transport and sustainability in our City Centre will benefit not only our members, but also local residents and visitors to our vibrant City. The CBA considers active engagement between agencies tasked with planning for our infrastructure, and businesses as an imperative component of successfully implementing any proposed scheme. In keeping with the core mission and objectives of the CBA, the CBA strongly advocates any new initiatives which will create a better business environment for traders, employers, customers and tourists. With this in mind, the CBA places a high level of importance on scrutinising any proposed initiatives against these key indicators in particular transport measures and measures which affect key sustainability indicators.

Our vision is to “unite our business community and members to deliver a prosperous, welcoming, sustainable and networked Cork City. Our champions, our projects and our campaigns will be data driven and evidence-based, and partnership will be at the heart of all we do. Our members are at the heart of everything we do.”

Our members represent many thousands of employees across the City, who will also have a part to play as citizens of Cork in the climate agenda. By educating and supporting the businesses and their employees, this knowledge will filter down into their everyday lives and positively impact the important decisions they make about how they travel, shop, live and engage with our City.

Submission

Cork stands at a pivotal moment in its development. As the fastest-growing city in Ireland, with a population projected to increase by 60% over the next two decades [an additional 125k people living in the city] the need for forward-thinking infrastructure has never been greater. To achieve this the City will need to achieve 10% - 17% population growth within each of the next four census periods. The Luas Cork light rail project represents more than just a transportation upgrade, it is a cornerstone of the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (CMATS) and a driving force behind the city's economic, environmental, and social future. For businesses, residents, and policymakers alike, Luas Cork offers a transformative opportunity to reshape Cork into a more connected, sustainable, and prosperous urban centre.

Driving Economic Growth and Urban Regeneration

One of the most compelling arguments for Luas Cork is its potential to fuel large-scale urban regeneration. By linking key areas such as Ballincollig, UCC, MTU, and Mahon, Luas Cork will not only facilitate daily commutes but also stimulate commercial activity along its route. International examples demonstrate that light rail systems consistently boost property values and retail sales by 20-30%, creating vibrant, high-footfall zones that attract investment and enhance local economies. The CLR will also support the delivery of the Cork City Docklands development, at 147 hectares and a planned investment of over €470m in enabling infrastructure Cork Docklands has the capacity to provide

10,000 new homes and up to 25,000 jobs. The redevelopment of Cork Docklands is of national strategic importance. Its inclusion under the National Development Plan and commitment of multiannual government funding has created an exceptional opportunity to deliver on its vision, such ambitious projects require reliable, high-capacity public transport to succeed. The CBA would like to see the CLR reflected in the National Development Plan. We would question whether the delivery of the CLR project would be possible without it being in the National Development Plan

Reliable and Efficient Transport for a Growing City

Cork's existing road network is already under strain, with congestion plaguing critical corridors like Wilton, Victoria Cross, Carrs Hill, South Ring Road and Mahon. CLR promises to alleviate these pressures by offering a dependable alternative to private car use. With trams running every six minutes, the system will provide a level of punctuality that buses and cars cannot match. This reliability will encourage a cultural shift away from car dependency, particularly among students and staff at UCC, MTU, and the College of Commerce. Reduced traffic volumes as a result of this modal shift will also benefit businesses by improving delivery times and ensuring smoother access for customers and employees. The west to east route linking the third level institutions to the city centre, docklands and train station and mahon will ensure that a growth in population does not necessitate a growth in car numbers.

Enhancing Accessibility and Inclusivity

A well-designed transport system must serve all members of the community, and it would appear that Cork Light Rail is being planned with this principle at its core. The project prioritises accessibility, featuring step-free boarding, dedicated spaces for wheelchairs and strollers, and improved lighting at stops. These measures ensure that the system is usable by everyone, from parents with young children to elderly residents and individuals with mobility challenges. By removing barriers to public transport use, CLR will foster a more inclusive city where economic and social opportunities are within reach for all.

Supporting Cork's Climate Neutral Ambitions

In 2022, Cork was selected as one of the European Commission's 100 climate-neutral cities and was recently (May 2025) awarded a mission label, with a target to achieve net-zero emissions by 2030. Given that transport accounts for 30% of greenhouse gas emissions, the CLR project is a critical component of this mission. Electric trams produce zero tailpipe emissions, significantly improving air quality and reducing the city's carbon footprint. Furthermore, by integrating with cycling infrastructure, BusConnects, and heavy rail services, the project will create a seamless, multi-modal transport network that makes sustainable travel the easiest choice for Cork's residents.

Learning from Past Projects: Avoiding Dublin's Luas Pitfalls

While Dublin's Luas system has been successful in many respects, its implementation offers valuable lessons for Cork. Issues such as poor integration with buses, overcrowded stops, and prolonged construction disruption highlight the importance of careful planning. Cork must ensure that the CLR is fully harmonised with BusConnects and heavy rail services, with coordinated timetables and unified contactless ticketing. Additionally, construction phases should be managed to minimise impact on local businesses, possibly through compensation schemes or temporary retail support initiatives.

A Vision for a Wireless, Aesthetically Conscious Tram System

Modern tram technology allows for innovative solutions that preserve Cork's historic character while delivering cutting-edge transport. Wireless systems, such as ground-level power supply or battery-operated trams, eliminate the need for unsightly overhead cables, maintaining the aesthetic appeal of streetscapes. This approach has been successfully implemented in cities like Bordeaux and should be a priority for Cork, particularly in heritage-sensitive areas. Smaller, modular tram designs could also be considered, ensuring the system is both efficient and adaptable to Cork's unique urban fabric. Preserving Cork's Charm should be a key priority, smaller wireless trams would be more in keeping with Cork City's aesthetic.

The Importance of Mobility Hubs and Active Travel

To maximise the benefits of Cork Light Rail, the project must be supported by well-planned mobility hubs. A major Park & Ride facility in Ballincollig, complete with bike parking, will encourage commuters from the N22 corridor to switch to public transport for their final journey into the city, additional park and ride locations should also be identified. Similarly, a mobility hub in Mahon could integrate trams, buses, car-sharing services, and cycling routes, creating a seamless travel experience. Parallel cycle paths along the tram route will further enhance connectivity, promoting healthy, active lifestyles while reducing reliance on cars.

Conclusion: A Call to Action for Cork's Future

Cork Light Rail is not merely a transport project, it is an investment in the city's long-term prosperity, sustainability, and quality of life. For businesses, it offers increased footfall, higher property values, and a more reliable workforce. For residents, it promises cleaner air, less congestion, and greater accessibility. And for policymakers, it represents a tangible step toward Cork's goal of becoming a carbon-neutral city.

The success of Luas Cork depends on collaboration between government, businesses, and the community. By embracing best practices in urban design, learning from past mistakes, and prioritising integration and sustainability, Cork can deliver a world-class light rail system that serves as a model for cities across Ireland and beyond. The time to act is now; the future of Cork starts with Light Rail and early delivery needs to be a national priority.

In conclusion, the CBA offers its full support for the CLR as a vital investment in Cork's sustainable future. We strongly encourage all stakeholders - businesses, residents and policymakers alike - to engage constructively in this consultation process to ensure the project's success. We look forward to continuing our partnership with Cork City Council and the TII in delivering this important initiative and remain steadfast in our commitment to championing infrastructure developments that deliver lasting benefits for our city's economy, environment and community with this in mind we have developed a number of recommendations which we recommend be taken into consideration as this project progresses.

Please contact the undersigned if there are any further queries.

Yours sincerely,



Clara O'Neill – Chair of 'Cork 2030', Cork Business Association

Recommendations for Engagement and Consultation on the *design and delivery* of Cork Light Rail

To ensure the successful delivery of Luas Cork, meaningful engagement with business owners, residents, and landowners must be prioritised. A well-structured consultation process builds trust, mitigates opposition, and results in a project that better serves the community. Below are key recommendations based on international best practices.

1. Early and Continuous Engagement

Why it matters: Late or limited consultation breeds mistrust and resistance. Early engagement allows stakeholders to shape the project before designs are finalised.

Best practice recommendations:

- Launch pre-consultation surveys before route finalisation to identify key concerns (e.g., parking loss, construction impacts).
- Establish a Business & Community Liaison Group with regular meetings to provide updates and gather feedback.
- Use "co-design" workshops where residents and businesses help refine station designs, pedestrian flows, and urban realm improvements.

2. Transparent and Accessible Communication

Why it matters: Misinformation spreads when official updates are unclear or hard to access.

Best practices:

- Dedicated project website with interactive maps, FAQs, and a timeline for key milestones.
- Plain-language summaries of technical reports (avoiding jargon).
- Multilingual materials to ensure inclusivity in diverse communities.
- Regular newsletters (digital and print) sent directly to affected businesses and residents.

3. Targeted Support for Businesses During Construction

Why it matters: Construction disruption can lead to revenue losses, creating opposition. Proactive support mitigates this.

Best practices:

- Business Impact Assessments (BIAs) to predict and address economic effects.
- "Open for Business" campaigns with signage, promotions, and local marketing to maintain footfall.
- Temporary parking solutions for customers if on-street spaces are lost.
- Small business grants, rent relief and rates waivers for severely affected enterprises.

4. Compensation and Mitigation Strategies

Why it matters: Landowners and businesses need clarity on how they will be affected and compensated.

Best practices:

- Clear compensation framework for property acquisitions, with independent valuation support.
- Rental assistance for businesses forced to relocate temporarily.
- Tax incentives for landowners who contribute to station-area developments.

5. Inclusive and Adaptive Public Participation

Why it matters: Marginalised groups (e.g., elderly, disabled, non-English speakers) are often excluded from consultations.

Best practices:

- Pop-up consultation stalls in markets, libraries, and community centres.
- Accessible formats (Braille, audio, easy-read documents).
- Online feedback portals with options for anonymous submissions.
- Youth and school engagement to involve future users.

6. Post-Construction Evaluation & Ongoing Dialogue

Why it matters: Engagement shouldn't end when construction does—feedback helps refine operations.

Best practices:

- Post-opening surveys to assess satisfaction with station access, noise levels, and economic impact.
- Annual stakeholder forums to review performance and suggest improvements.
- Data sharing on tram usage, footfall changes, and business growth to demonstrate benefits.

Conclusion: Building Trust for Long-Term Success

Luas Cork will only achieve its full potential if the community feels heard and respected. By adopting these best practices such as early engagement, transparency, business support, fair compensation, inclusive outreach, and long-term dialogue, the project can avoid the pitfalls seen in other cities and become a model for collaborative infrastructure development. With proactive and empathetic engagement, Cork Light Rail [CLR] can be a project that unites, rather than divides, the city.