Chambers Ireland
Advancing business together

Luas Cork

Preferred Route Public Consultation

June 2026

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About Chambers Ireland

Chambers Ireland is an all-island business organisation with a unique geographical reach. Our members are the Chambers of Commerce in the cities and towns throughout the country – active in every constituency. Each of our member Chambers is central to their local business community and all seek to promote thriving local economies that can support sustainable cities and communities.

Key Points

- We strongly support the development of Luas Cork as nationally significant transport infrastructure critical to improving connectivity, competitiveness and sustainable growth.
- Luas Cork should be delivered as a fully integrated transport system, aligned with bus, heavy rail and active travel networks to maximise usage and impact.
- The project should be recognised as critical infrastructure of national importance, aligned with the objectives of the proposed Critical Infrastructure Bill to support timely delivery.
- Investment in light rail should be closely linked with compact growth, housing delivery and transit-oriented development principles to maximise long-term value.
- Engagement with the business community is essential, particularly during construction, to minimise disruption and protect economic activity.
- Delays or failure to proceed would carry significant costs and compound increased congestion, reduced productivity, higher emissions and lost economic opportunities.
- Successful, timely delivery carried out in a coordinated manner is essential for the project to serve as a paragon for other cities in Ireland.

Our Perspective

We strongly support the development of Luas Cork as a transformative and forward-looking public transport project. It represents a critical opportunity to deliver a modern, efficient and sustainable transport system that aligns with regional growth ambitions.[1]

It is critical that the proposed route aligns with the criteria set out in our submission regarding housing delivery, planning, is conducive towards meeting our climate targets, supports infrastructure delivery and sustainable development, is accessible, and helps bring about modal shift from private car use to public transport.

Congestion remains a key constraint on economic activity in our urban areas and travel delays manifest in a range of increased costs for businesses. By providing a reliable alternative to car travel, Luas Cork can significantly help alleviate such congestion and mitigate the impacts of such delays.

Maintaining delivery momentum is essential and any project delays will have direct cost implications. It should therefore be treated as infrastructure of national significance with a clear commitment to prompt delivery.

The success of Luas Cork will hinge on integrated planning and the delivery of a high-quality service. If delivered to a high standard, it may act as a model for similar investments in other cities.

We are fully aligned with the points made in Cork Chamber's submission in supporting the delivery of Luas Cork and in acknowledging the project as a critical investment in sustainable transport that will drive regional and national economic growth.

[1] https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-the-taoiseach/press-releases/positioning-cork-city-for-the-future-the-cork-city-futures-group-approved-by-government/

Housing Delivery and Spatial Planning Alignment

One of the most significant benefits of Luas Cork is its potential to support the delivery of housing at scale. The integration of transport and land use planning is essential to achieving sustainable urban development[2].

Luas Cork should be closely aligned with existing and planned residential developments, including strategic development zones and areas identified for significant population growth. By doing so, it can facilitate higher-density development along transport corridors and ensure that new housing is supported by adequate infrastructure from the outset. This approach will also reduce reliance on car use and help prevent urban sprawl.

Land use planning along the corridor should begin immediately, rather than after operations commence, to avoid the sterilisation of key development land and missed regeneration opportunities. Transit-oriented development should be actively supported around Luas stops, with a particular emphasis on higher-density residential and mixed-use development in strategic regeneration areas. Consideration should also be given to the project's role in supporting urban intensification and city-centre living, including the potential to unlock additional residential use above commercial premises and strengthen the long-term vitality of core urban areas.

Climate Action and Sustainability

Projects like Luas Cork play a role in supporting the State's climate commitments. Transport is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions[3], and meaningful progress in this area will require a shift towards low-carbon modes of travel. Transport remains one of the most challenging

[2] https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2012/05/compact-city-policies_g1g191f1/9789264167865-en.pdf pg.191

[3] https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/transport-decarbonisation/overview_en

sectors for decarbonisation and accounts for 15.9% of global greenhouse gas emissions[4]. Road transport is responsible for the vast majority of transport-related emissions, accounting for 95% of all transport emissions in Ireland[5]. Ireland will not meet its emissions targets in this context without a substantial shift in how people move within and between urban areas.[6]

Meaningful reduction in emissions will require a system that is reliable, frequent, accessible and fully integrated with wider public transport and active travel networks.[7] This is supported by the potential for the project to significantly reduce transport emissions at scale.[8] To that end the project should be advanced with the aim of advancing compact growth and 15-minute city principles. Rail investment is most effective when it supports denser, mixed-use development around stops, shortens travel distances and enables more daily needs to be met by public transport, walking or cycling.[9]

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[4] https://www.cargoson.com/en/blog/how-much-co2-does-the-transportation-sector-emit

[5] https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-transport/publications/why-your-journey-counts/

[6] Chambers Ireland has consistently called for increased investment in integrated public transport, including rail and active travel infrastructure, recognising its role in enhancing competitiveness, connectivity and environmental sustainability: https://chambers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Submission-to-the-Department-of-Transport-Statement-of-Strategy-2025-2028-March-2025.pdf

[7] We recognise the importance of delivering integrated transport systems across all modalities, alongside investment in active travel and mobility hubs, to ensure that sustainable transport options become the most practical and attractive choice: https://chambers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Submission-by-Chambers-Ireland-NTA-Statement-of-Strategy.pdf pg.6.

[8] The project is expected to carry greater than 18 million passengers per annum (2035): https://www.tii.ie/en/public-transport/projects-and-improvements/luas-cork

[9] The IPCC notes that cities can reduce transport fuel consumption by around 25% through a combination of more compact land use and less car-dependent transport infrastructure: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/chapter/chapter-10/; while it has also been noted that that transit-oriented development and 15-minute city approaches help drive a larger long-term modal shift away from private vehicles: https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/How-to-drive-a-modal-shift-from-private-vehicle-use-to-public-transport-walking-and-cycling?language=en_US.

This means ensuring that Luas Cork is treated as part of a broader urban development strategy that supports densification, urban regeneration and more sustainable land use outcomes.[10]. Comparators exist from other EU countries which highlight the successes of such integration that show tangible benefits; the scale of emissions savings are considerable when high-capacity electric light rail replaces road-based public transport.[11]

Connectivity, Integration and Network Efficiency

The effectiveness of Luas Cork will depend heavily on its integration with the wider transport network to maximise usage.

The project must be seamlessly connected with existing and planned transport services, including BusConnects, heavy rail and active travel infrastructure[12]. Key interchange points, such as Kent Station, should serve as efficient, user-friendly transport hubs that enable smooth transitions between modes of transport.

This integration should extend beyond simple interchange and support the development of Kent Station as a genuinely multi-modal hub for rail, Luas and bus services. Stop selection and network design should also reflect not only engineering feasibility, but passenger demand, destination value and the role of major civic, commercial, education and tourism corridors in generating all-day activity. Consideration should be given to how stop catchments connect into the wider active

[10] Well-planned light rail helps unlock higher-density housing, strengthens access to employment and services, and makes city-centre and corridor-based living more viable over the long term. Balanced regional growth depends on investment in essential infrastructure and on planning approaches that allow towns and cities to realise their growth potential in a sustainable way: https://chambers.ie/policy_submision/chambers-ireland-submission-to-the-department-of-transport-on-the-national-investment-framework-for-transport-in-ireland-may-2021 pg.6

[11] See further the Finnish example "Helsinki Espoo Light Rail Line 15", which is appended to this submission.

[12] https://chambers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Response-to-the-Public-Consultation-on-the-Cork-Area-Commuter-Rail-CACR.pdf

travel network, particularly in growing residential areas, so that the Luas system can maximise accessibility and network reach. In the longer term, corridor safeguarding and design flexibility should also support future network extensions, including a potential Luas connection to Cork Airport, recognising its role as a strategic gateway and economic driver for the wider southern region.

Service Quality and Modal Shift

Achieving a significant shift from private car use to public transport will depend on the quality of the service provided. Luas Cork must be designed to be a practical alternative to driving.

There must be a strong focus on service reliability and capacity. High-frequency services will reduce waiting times and improve convenience, while reliability will build user confidence and trust in the system. Adequate capacity will be essential to accommodate both current demand and future growth, particularly during peak commuting periods.

Public transport must compete with the private car not only on cost but also on convenience, journey time and overall experience. Delivering a high standard of service from the outset will be critical to encouraging change and ensuring long-term success.

Operational resilience should also form part of service planning from the outset. Given the complexity of Cork's city-centre street environment, network design should incorporate sufficient flexibility to manage temporary disruption, peak seasonal activity and other events without undermining reliability or wider city-centre function.

Accessibility and Inclusive Design

Luas Cork should be fully accessible and designed to serve all members of society, regardless of mobility, age or ability. The application of universal design principles should be central to the project, by ensuring that infrastructure, vehicles and services are accessible to persons with reduced mobility and other users with specific needs. Equitable access is essential not only from

a social perspective but also for enabling full participation in economic activity[13]. This approach will ensure that the benefits of the project are widely shared and that no communities are excluded from improved transport connectivity.

Supporting Infrastructure and Demand Management

In order to maximise its effectiveness, Luas Cork must be supported by complementary infrastructure. An integrated approach that considers the entire transport ecosystem will be essential to delivering an efficient and capable system that is capable of meeting future needs.

Park-and-ride facilities will play an important role in capturing demand from surrounding areas and reducing car traffic entering the city[14]. This will be important to intercept car-based trips and support modal shift. Integration with walking and cycling infrastructure will enhance accessibility and provide sustainable options for first- and last-mile journeys. In addition, sufficient investment in system capacity will be required to ensure that the network can accommodate demand during peak periods as well as seasonal fluctuations, including tourism.

Delivery, Governance and Stakeholder Engagement

Timely delivery of Luas Cork is critical. To support delivery at pace, it is imperative that the project is recognised as infrastructure of significant regional and national importance. This would be consistent with the principles underpinning the proposed Critical Infrastructure Bill[15], which seeks to accelerate the delivery of strategically significant projects. Recognising the project

[13] https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/improving-transport-planning-for-accessible-cities_fcb2eae0-en.html

[14] https://www.corkchamber.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Cork-Chamber-Submission-Black-Ash-Park-and-Ride-Consultation.pdf

[15] https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2026/37/

within this framework would support greater certainty in planning, streamline delivery processes and ensure that it is prioritised in line with its economic and societal value.

Appendix: Helsinki–Espoo Light Rail Line 15

A useful comparator is Helsinki–Espoo's Light Rail Line 15, which opened in October 2023 and replaced the region's busiest bus corridor. Project authorities estimate that the new light rail line reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 85%, NOx emissions by 95% and particulate emissions by 70% compared with the former bus-based corridor.[16]

The Finnish example is particularly notable for its integration with the wider transport network and active travel. Light Rail Line 15 provides connections to metro and commuter rail services, as well as buses and park-and-ride facilities, while station design incorporates cycling access and bike parking to support first- and last-mile journeys. The project was complemented by upgrades to pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and coordinated land use planning along the corridor[17].

The light rail line has also supported more compact urban development and sustainable growth, with new housing and employment planned along the route, including capacity for approximately 22,000 residents and 20,000 jobs[18]. This demonstrates that the climate benefits of light rail arise not only from cleaner vehicles, but from a broader combination of modal shift, integrated interchange, active travel and transit-oriented densification.

[16] https://raidejokeri.info/en/topic/jokeri-light-rail-and-environment/

[17] https://www.hsl.fi/en/campaigns/light-rail

[18] https://www.espoo.fi/en/locate-espoo/new-opportunities-along-jokeri-light-rail-line