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From the West = on = Track Community Campaign

“LIES, DAMNED LIES AND STATISTICS”

How Primetime Misrepresented the Truth about the Western Rail Corridor

There is considerable anger throughout the west of Ireland at what has been described as the hatchet job carried out by RTÉ's Primetime on the Western Rail Corridor on Tuesday night last. The following are the observations of West on Track in response to this seriously-flawed presentation by Primetime.

- Phase 1 of the Western Rail Corridor is the **Galway-Limerick route** and it can only be judged as such. It was launched as such and is described as such on the Iarnród Éireann timetable, readily available to reporter Mr. Diamond had he chosen to look. There is no such service as the Ennis-Athenry railway.
- The internationally accepted yardstick for the measurement of the performance of any rail service is the number of passengers who travel on that service at any point along the entire route until it terminates. Therefore the notion that the Ennis-Athenry section of the railway alone is the yardstick for the performance of the railway is simply daft. Yet, Primetime insisted on breaking up the WRC into pieces so that by singling out one section it could claim that the entire WRC was somehow “underperforming”.
- We are in no doubt that the real motive behind this programme was to prevent any further development of the WRC i.e. to Tuam and Claremorris. In our view the Department of Transport should seek to get value for money out of the expenditure made in the entire route and ensure that it is run properly.
- Serious questions need to be asked about Iarnród Éireann's ability to accurately monitor passenger numbers on this line. The figures from IE cannot possibly include all passengers as **tickets are not inspected** between Athenry and Ennis. Because stations between Ennis and Athenry are unmanned, Iarnród Éireann is unable to provide any figures for the numbers of OAPs and other exempted passengers being carried on that section. Yet they are all bona fide passengers.

- The reality is that the figures being bandied about on Primetime were unreliable. Iarnród Éireann issued a statement in June of 2011, one year after the opening of the Galway-Limerick route saying that more than 250,000 passengers had availed of services on the entire Galway-Limerick route in its first year (made up of pre-existing commuter services plus the new WRC trains). Mr. Diamond failed to refer to this inconvenient piece of good news because it would have meant that Colm McCarthy's risible statistic about 8 people per train would have been shown to be false.
- Mr. Diamond did not interview anyone from Iarnród Éireann, the national railway company, to ask about the reasons for the alleged "poor performance" of the railway. He did not raise any question as to whether the quality of the service provided had anything to do with the patronage. Why didn't Primetime insist on an on-the-record response from Iarnród Éireann in the interests of transparency? After all they were receiving complete co-operation from Iarnród Éireann in making the programme.
- IÉ has consistently refused to run intercity rolling stock between Galway and Limerick. While Mr. Diamond triumphantly proclaimed to viewers that people from Galway and Limerick seemed to be reluctant to make journeys to visit each other he conveniently did not point that the railway was the only intercity route in the state without such rolling stock. Even now, with many of these new trains becoming available, there is no indication that any of them will be provided on the Western Rail Corridor. Primetime didn't ask why.
- The subsidy for this railway covers the entire route from Galway to Limerick again giving the lie to the idea that Ennis-Athenry is the WRC. Mr. Diamond was told this but did not mention it as it would have completely undermined Colm McCarthy's ludicrous assertion that the subsidy for each passenger on the railway amounts to €85.
- It was repeatedly inaccurately asserted by Mr. Diamond, Ms. O'Callaghan et al that €105 million has been spent on Phase 1 of the WRC. Mr. Diamond was well aware that this was incorrect as it was pointed out to him that the railway station at Oranmore which is to be built this year will come out of the original allocation and that significant other expenditure had taken place during construction on works between Ennis and Limerick and Athenry –Galway.
- The railway station for **Oranmore**, a key part of Phase 1 (and outside the Ennis-Athenry section) will generate thousands of passengers **yet bizarrely none of them will be eligible to be counted according to the artificial yardstick of the Department of Transport (or Primetime).**
- It was pointed out to Mr. Diamond that despite the fact that the railway opened in April 2010 that works on the railway have been going on ever since, all of this expenditure still coming from the same alleged €105million. Mr. Diamond made no mention of this and Ms. O'Callaghan did not ask the Minister to clarify the situation.

- The tone and content of the commentary throughout from Messrs. Diamond, McCarthy and McDowell was insulting to older people, the suggestion being that OAPs were in some way not real passengers. Mr. Diamond failed to point out that Iarnród Éireann receives a payment from the State to cover such journeys on every railway route in the state.

The underselling of Phase 1 of the Western Rail Corridor.

What Primetime failed to report:

- the **tax-saver programme** has never been aggressively promoted to Galway commuters and businesses
 - the services have never been promoted among the student population and 3rd level institutions in Galway
 - incredibly **average running speeds** are now slower than in the era of steam trains in the 1960s
 - the practice of **stopping** all trains at all stations without distinction between commuter and intercity stations is inconsistent with the practice on all other rail routes in the country
 - there are still **speed restrictions as low as 5mph** on a what is trumpeted as a "new" railway
 - **fares** are significantly higher than for comparable commuter journeys in the greater Dublin area and when compared to opposing transport modes
 - a **commuter zone** within the Galway area, as far south as Gort and as far east as Ballinasloe, similar to those in the greater Dub and greater Cork areas was proposed but clearly dismissed by IÉ
 - when IÉ recently spoke of improving journey times on various intercity routes there was **NO mention** of improving Galway-Limerick times
 - it is still impossible to **purchase a ticket** online for the WRC
 - it is still impossible to get **any form of refreshment** on the 2-hr journey between the cities of Limerick and Galway
 - there is no reference to **commuter packages** outside of Dublin on the homepage of the Irish Rail website
 - there is **no signage or advertising** at Galway or at stations on the WRC promoting Galway commuter options or links to Dublin e.g. in the heritage town of Gort
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