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### Minutes of the Stage Two INTERREG VA Review Panel Meeting

Thursday 03 November 2016, 11.00am  
SEUPB Offices, Belfast

**Project Applicant** – Leitrim County Council

**Project Title** – Sligo Leitrim Northern Counties Railway (SLNCR) Greenway -  
Manorhamilton to Enniskillen

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In Attendance:	Gina McIntyre	SEUPB (Chair)
	Dr Maura Farrell	MC Panel Member
	Avril Hall Callaghan	MC Panel Member
	Linda Stewart	MC Panel Member
	Robbie Davis	Independent Member
	Sarah Reid	SEUPB (Secretariat)
	Tara McCormick	SEUPB (minutes)

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#### 1. Introductions

The Chair welcomed Members to the first Stage Two Review Panel meeting of the INTERREG VA 2014 – 2020 Programme and explained the Review Procedure.

#### 2. Agenda

The Panel agreed the agenda

#### 3. Register of Interests/Conflicts of Interest

Linda Stewart advised that whilst she is a member of the INTERREG VA Steering Committee, she was not present at the meeting to consider the Greenway projects and had no involvement in the assessment process, including the decision to reject the application.

#### **4. Review**

The Chair reminded the panel that the applicant has requested a review on the grounds that; “the outcome was a decision that no reasonable person would have made on the basis of the information provided to the Steering Committee”.

The project was assessed under 7 scoring criterion, with a minimum score of 3/5 required in each. Following assessment and Steering Committee consideration, the application failed to score the minimum under three of the criteria, namely;

- Criteria One: Contribution of the project to the defined results and outputs of the Programme
- Criteria Two: Quality of project design
- Criteria Five: Value for money

The Panel noted the scoring.

The Chair confirmed that in line with Section 4.0 of the Review Procedure, the panel would consider ten-minute presentations from both the applicant and the Joint Secretariat; both parties then entered the meeting.

The Chair introduced the Panel to Joseph Gilhooly and Shay O’Connor, representing Leitrim County Council, and John Greer and Paul Boylan of the SEUPB’s Joint Secretariat.

The Leitrim County Council representatives proceeded to provide a ten minute PowerPoint presentation which outlined their reasons for requesting a review of the Steering Committee decision. The main points of the presentation included;

##### Contribution to defined results and outputs of the Programme

- The project has been developed to address car usage and emissions in a rural cross-border area, and is well-positioned to deliver cross-border public transport options;

- The project is contributing 38km of Greenway to the National Route, almost 50% of the 80km target for rural areas;
- The project covers a large geographical area and around 20km on either side of the border;
- Applicant feels baseline data supplied to the applicant identified 1,826 cross border commuters in a low-commute area of limited geographical relevance;
- Applicant surveys identified 173 cross-border commuters; 92% indicated modal shift intentions and 83% responded positively to the Greenway proposal;
- The application proposes early implementation of the Project Officer, to engage with the public and manage the early stages of the project;
- An increase in economic growth and number of commuters is expected.

#### Quality of project design

- 32 km of an existing narrow gauge railway line will be used, mirroring the only National Cross Border road in the area;
- Recently, an active trial group successfully opened an independent 1km demonstration section of the route to demonstrate project viability;
- The Permission Access Tenure proposed is an established method;
- Concerns from a small number of local farmers have been resolved and there are no underlying environmental concerns.

#### Value for money

- 99% of costs have been substantiated in the assessors view, and the 1% query relating to travel should not have been marked down;
- The Council wish to avail of a funding advance, as they are operating various programmes, and cross-subsidisation is not possible.

The Chair thanked the applicant for their presentation and invited the Joint Secretariat to provide their ten minute verbal presentation, which included the following main points;

#### Contribution to defined results and outputs of the Programme

- The specific contribution that the proposal would make to the result indicator of daily cross-border journeys or the potential modal shift was not sufficiently evidenced;

- JS felt the applicant survey into potential users utilised a limited sample and made a number of non- evidenced assumptions.

#### Quality of project design

- The applicant was not able to evidence that formal planning or land access permissions were in place which the Steering Committee felt greatly risked their ability to deliver the project as proposed.

#### Value for money

- The applicant relied on analogous estimating based on the N16 road construction project at Sradrine
- It was the Steering Committee's opinion that other applications under the theme had combined analogous estimating with specific QS supported costs and consequently the evidence base for costs in this application was considered to be less robust.

The Chair thanked the JS for their presentation, and invited questions from the Panel.

The Panel asked the following;

- if the application had given consideration to Ireland's National Cycling Policy or interest from local cycling groups;
- if the applicant had referred to the CSO/ NISRA 2011 Census for Ireland and Northern Ireland, which includes direct data on commuters' travel methods;
- if the applicant could explain the baseline data given the ten years of project development; and
- whether the trial group is in receipt of any funding;

In response, the applicant representatives provided the following points of clarification;

- while the application does not refer to Ireland's National Cycling Policy, the Greenway is complimentary to the Policy and the needs of cyclists;
- a local cycling club had not been incorporated into the application as it consists of recreational users only;

- The trial group was established over ten years ago and has examined all potential users, including tourists, commuters and recreational users between Sligo and Enniskillen equally, and did not prioritise commuters exclusively;
- The trail group received no formal funding, instead it has been proactive in sourcing and raising its own funding for the 1km demonstration route

Mr O'Connor made a final point on the value for money aspect, informing the Panel that, while the costs had been modelled on the N16 road works, they were calculated for this project using civil engineering work taking place within a mile of the potential Greenway area.

The Chair thanked the applicant and JS representatives, and advised they will receive written notification of the Panel's decision within 14 days of today's meeting.

The JS and Leitrim County Council representatives left the meeting, and the Chair opened the meeting to Panel discussion.

In relation to the score of 2 awarded to Criteria 1 – Contribution of the project to the defined results and outputs of the Programme, the Panel made the following points;

- Noted the applicant's point in relation to low commuter numbers in rural areas as a valid point which could have been elaborated upon in their application;
- The application contains no evidence of referral to the 2011 census, which provides significant statistical data on commuters within Ireland and Northern Ireland;
- The figures referred to are baseline data provided to all potential applicants and were not specific to the potential project's geographical area;
- Expressed disappointment in the absence of signed, formal agreement on land and planning permissions and noted that similar projects in Donegal had experienced withdrawal of landowner consent;
- While the project appears positive and worthwhile, the evidence provided in the application was disproportionate to the level of funding sought;
- There was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the project could affect the required modal shift;

- Questioned the substantial level of responsibility attributed to an MSc student as project assistant, which spans both social and environmental aspects of project implementation; and
- Expressed concern around Sligo IT's role in the project's financial management, while not represented on its Steering Committee

**The Panel agreed the Steering Committee score of 2 awarded to Criteria 1 – Quality of project design**

In relation to the score of 2 awarded to Criteria 2 – Quality of project design, the Panel made the following points;

- There was no evidence to support the applicant's statement that the Greenways route contains no underlying environmental obstacles;
- The Panel noted the key point on the 1km demonstration project however, they felt the application was misplaced under this theme;
- The project has the potential for impact under alternative funding for tourism and quality of life in the border region;
- Queried the reference to Leitrim County Council underwriting funding from the Accountable Departments; and
- The Panel felt the project could benefit from applying for alternative funding, for example, under the environmental sub-theme of DAERA's LEADER Programme.

**The Panel agreed the Steering Committee score of 2 awarded to Criteria 2 – Quality of project design.**

In relation to the score of 2 awarded to Criteria 3 –Value for money, the Panel made the following points;

- The Panel had concerns around the independent figures for the project being extracted from a nearby piece of council work, and reused for this project;
- The Panel felt the project did not produce a sufficiently robust and positive value for money assessment;

- Noted modification between Stage 1 and Stage 2 in relation to two key employment posts and the optimum bias, which they felt were not adequately explained;
- The Panel felt the long term planning of the project was not conducive with the development of financial figures between Stage 1 and Stage 2;
- The Panel felt the 173 identified cross-border commuters represented a very small number, inappropriate for the level of funding sought;
- Discussed potential issues around partially lighting the Greenway in terms of cycling safety;
- The sections on accommodating wheelchair users and people with disabilities felt perfunctory and could have been better developed;
- The 1% query in relation to travel was justified, given the €17 million in funding being requested; and
- Expressed concern around the €12,000 student supervision costing, which does not represent standard practice.

**The Panel agreed the Steering Committee score of 2 awarded to Criteria 3 –Value for Money.**

**In conclusion, the panel agreed that based on the information presented to the Steering Committee and that presented to the Review Panel, the decision of the Steering Committee was not unreasonable and therefore should be upheld**

The Chair thanked the Panel for their participation and closed the meeting.