



IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council

PRESS RELEASE

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In a week that sees the inauguration of a dramatically upgraded high speed rail service between two of Europe's greatest cities, London and Paris – achieving an average speed in excess of 200 kph - IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council (JBC), in a submission to the North-South ministerial council, calls on the two Governments to set out a development strategy aimed at securing much needed improvements in service performance on the enterprise cross-border rail service linking Dublin and Belfast.

An immediate problem that needs to be addressed is service reliability, a particular concern for business travellers. While the published figures on on-time performance indicate some improvement, far too often services are subject to long delays of up to and even exceeding an hour. These performance issues need to be addressed by the operators in the short-term if the service is to maintain the confidence of users.

In relation to the enterprise service generally, figures set out in the submission indicate modest growth in traffic levels with passenger numbers up by 2% in 2006.

However, the JBC submission points out that this is against the background of a long term trend of strong growth in cross border road traffic which has grown by 85% over a decade, corresponding to an annual average growth rate of over 6%. Taken together, the figures on rail patronage and road traffic lead to the conclusion that the number of cross border trips is growing strongly but that the rail share is being eroded.

JBC also point out that current journey times at 130 minutes are not competitive against journey times by road. If the enterprise service were to operate at the average speed currently achieved on other mainline services, journey time would be reduced by 15% to 110 mins. The introduction of non stop services would reduce journey times even further to around 100 minutes – a reduction of around one third on today's performance.

IBEC-CBI Director Reg McCabe said:

'The main issue here is user perception of rail's journey time performance relative to other modes. Here rail should have a clear advantage as journey time by road between Dublin and Belfast - while only 2 hours on average - will vary markedly depending on traffic conditions'

'There is an opportunity now for the two Governments to set out a vision for a fast, frequent and dependable rail service between the two capitals which will deliver benefits to the business community and to the community generally'

JBC is calling for funding to be allocated under both Transport 21 and the Investment strategy for Northern Ireland to allow necessary investments to be accomplished within a 3 year timeframe.