



Belfast – Dublin Economic Corridor

21 May 2014

Opportunity Challenge: Call to Action

Introduction

The function of an economic corridor is to connect economic agents acting in a defined geographical area. It involves the creation and/or improvement of economic links, co-operative initiatives and social cohesion between two or more large urban areas. The economic links created in an economic corridor are not only infrastructure links but also links between markets, educational facilities and societies. The economic corridor model of development has been used in many regions across the globe to generate “inclusive growth”, that is, economic growth that generates benefits for many different sectors of society.

The Belfast-Dublin Economic Corridor

The Belfast-Dublin economic corridor has existed as a concept for 20 years but often matters political have taken precedence over economic issues in the region. A recent meeting between Dublin and Belfast’s Lord Mayors (Lord Mayor of Dublin, Oisín Quinn and Lord Mayor of Belfast, Mártín Ó Muilleoir) highlighted the opportunity to revitalise public and private sector interest in the economic corridor and, on 28 March 2014, an event known as the Lord Mayor’s Forum was held in City Hall Dublin and City Hall Belfast (and on the train between both cities) to discuss what actions might be taken to develop the economic corridor between the Greater Dublin Region and the Greater Belfast Region.

The purpose of this report is to document six actions that emerged during the course of the event and to explore the following with respect to each action:

- 1) What has prevented it happening to date,
- 2) What impact the action could have on the economic corridor if it were to be implemented,
- 3) Who are the lead players who could make it happen, and
- 4) What are next steps and resource implications of each action.

The event took the form of a discussion forum with keynote speakers outlining their thoughts of how the corridor could be developed and encouraging attendees from public, private and voluntary sectors to highlight opportunities and challenges from their own perspectives.

The themes explored in the forum by the keynote speakers and attendees were those of smart technology, sustainability, tourism, infrastructure and the creative industries. The actions outlined in this document cover each of these themes. This report is prepared by KPMG which, as the only all-island firm in Ireland, is a living embodiment of Belfast/Dublin co-operation due to the strong links between our Belfast and Dublin offices and the daily interaction between our people in both cities.



Action 1: Breaking down barriers to travel

A number of practical barriers to travel between Dublin and Belfast were highlighted by forum participants including:

- Separate visa requirements for travel into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland
- Currency and foreign exchange costs
- Separate ticketing and tolling systems

A lack of cohesive thinking was highlighted as the main cause of these issues.

Recommendations

It was recommended that action should be taken to introduce and/or promote the following:

- A unified UK and Ireland visa for travel for students, tourist and business/conference visitors between Dublin and Belfast. There should be a harmonisation of visa arrangements between Ireland and Britain allowing for movement of students, tourists and business/conference visitors between Belfast and Dublin. It was noted that in addition to the Visa Waiver Programme there has been significant development of reciprocal short-stay Common Travel Area Visa arrangements which exists between Ireland and the United Kingdom.
- A system of integrated car park ticketing so that a single ticket purchased in Dublin or Belfast will allow the user to park their car in specified locations across both cities and in major towns along the corridor within a particular time limit.
- An "Ireland Debit Card" to be issued by banks in the North and South of Ireland which attracts no currency handling fees for the tourist and can be topped up online and which can be used to purchase goods and services anywhere in Ireland.
- There should be no "roaming" charges for phone users across the island of Ireland and issues regarding loss of coverage at the border should be addressed.

Benefits

The key benefits which are anticipated are:

- The removal of practical barriers will promote intercity travel by tourists and non-tourists alike which will bring economic benefits to both cities and to areas along the corridor.
- An improved telecommunications service and removal of virtual barrier caused by connectivity issues at the border.



- The use of the Ireland Debit Card can facilitate the collection of data on tourist movements bringing greater transparency to visitor numbers and the behaviour of tourists. This is a vital tool for use by both the tourist boards and service providers.
- The use of the above data collection and transport infrastructure tools would promote the concept of Dublin and Belfast as two of Europe's "Smart Cities". The "Smart Cities" concept seeks to identify which major urban areas are most innovative in terms of their infrastructure, use of technology, energy and water consumption and government. Cities like Barcelona, Copenhagen and Amsterdam are at the forefront of this movement.

Resources and Next Actions

The resource implications for local government are not expected to be material given that the suggested initiatives such as integrated parking and tolling and the "Ireland Credit Card" could be promoted by the City Councils but funded, at least partly, by private business. Through the promotion of these initiatives, the businesses would expect to see increased usage of their services.

The key lead players to make this happen would be:

- Unified Visa - Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (DOJE), UK Home Office.
- Integrated Parking – City and Town Councils and Private Car Park Operators
- Ireland Debit Card – Commercial banks in the South and North of Ireland
- Phone connection - Telephone operators (e.g. Vodafone, O2, Three)

Action 2: Cross-Border Education

A general theme which emerged in a number of discussions was the lack of movement by students across the border and the opportunities for further collaboration between educational institutions and educational bodies in both regions.

Specific issues which were raised include:

- There is concern with regard to the fairness of the methodology used to assess the value of school leaving qualifications (A-Levels, Leaving Cert) from the alternative jurisdiction when dealing with cross-border applications for third level study. Dundalk Institute of Technology was cited which has no students from Newry even though geographically it is very close.
- While Dublin has a significant number of language students from outside of Ireland, Belfast does not have the same level of numbers.
- There is a perception of a general lack of willingness amongst the student bodies to travel across border.
- Other parties such as corporate groups and entrepreneurs can play a leading role in designing, promoting and delivering initiatives which extend educational participation and strengthen educational links within the economic corridor. Examples included the Citi Group's "upStart" programme and the "Women Who Code" initiative.

The concerns relating to the assessment of the value of school leaver qualifications is one clear cause of the lack of mobility. Also historically there have been few incidences of cross-border collaboration between educational institutions. The University of Ulster and Dublin City University have however recently announced a new strategic partnership which will encourage collaborative research projects and in doing so should increase cross-border mobility of students between the universities.

Recommendations

It was recommended that action should be taken as follows:

- Examine the methodology used to assess the value of school leaving qualifications and, to the extent possible, redress the balance.
- Meet with DCU and University of Ulster to understand the nature of the strategic partnership and the benefits that are expected to accrue, and on this basis to develop a strategy to encourage other universities to enter into these types of strategic partnerships.
- Provide grant aid to language schools which operate in both cities and which promote cross border student mobility.
- A system of mutual recognition of student discounts and subsidies could be developed to promote cross border travel.



- Encourage large corporate groups, entrepreneurs and other “market leaders and innovators” to contribute to the design, promotion and delivery of initiatives which extend educational participation and strengthen educational links within the economic corridor.
- Encourage students from Northern Ireland to attend colleges / universities in the South (and vice versa) as an alternative to England, Scotland or Continental Europe, for example through clarifying the “transfer value” of educational qualifications for each region (as described above) and through collaborative marketing of further and higher educational opportunities within the economic corridor.
- Encourage greater Research & Development co-operation among Educational Institutions within the economic corridor.

Benefits

The key benefits which are anticipated are:

- Economic benefits arising from: (i) retaining greater numbers of students within the economic corridor; (ii) attracting greater numbers of external / overseas students to the colleges / universities within the corridor; and (iii) increasing student mobility, travel and tourism within the corridor.
- Collaboration between universities, and between universities, companies and entrepreneurs and other market leaders and innovators, will promote innovation and collaborative research projects. Research projects which are jointly supported by colleges / universities in the North and South of Ireland will find it easier to compete internationally for funding.
- Social benefits due to increased travel between the cities and a merging of the student cultures of both cities.

Resources and Next Actions

The resource implications for local government are not expected to be material (although the cost/benefits of grant aiding language schools would need to be considered).

The key lead players to make this happen would be:

- Universities in both regions
- Departments of Education in both regions
- Private Language Schools which operate in both regions
- Corporate groups, entrepreneurs, market leaders and innovators

Action 3: A new "Enterprise"

The rail link which serves the Dublin-Belfast route is seen a key feature of the economic corridor. In most of the regional "economic corridor" development models worldwide, improvements and investments in transport infrastructure are a key driver of the "corridor effect". While it is acknowledged that the service has been upgraded in recent years, it is clear that further improvements are necessary to support economic growth.

Recommendations

The suggested improvements are as follows:

- The service is jointly operated by Iarnród Éireann (IE) and NI Railways (NIR). While the section of the track which is operated by IE is capable of facilitating speeds of 145 kph, these speeds cannot be reached on the northern part of the route. Further investment and upgrades are required to reduce the journey time.
- Ultimately the service should be run on an hourly basis and should be direct to Dublin (where the rail track currently runs through Portadown).
- Creation of a new modern integrated transport hub for Belfast on the Great Victoria Street station site, which is served by the Enterprise Service, and offers an attractive, and well connected Gateway for visitors arriving in Belfast, and for passengers leaving Belfast to travel south through the economic corridor.
- The technology exists to run a fibre optic link on the track from Dublin to Belfast and to install "repeaters" on the line to boost the Wi-Fi signal. This would encourage business passengers to make productive use of the journey time.
- Carriages on the Enterprise service could be designated as meeting room carriages with smaller spaces partitioned off to facilitate meetings and conference calls on the carriages.
- The electrification of the route and replacement of the diesel locomotives is the ultimate long term aim and it is acknowledged that the Enterprise has fallen behind the pace in comparison to other international rail providers and has become uncompetitive when considered in the context of the improvements to the Dublin/Belfast road journey.

It is acknowledged that the above improvements would require a material capital investment in infrastructure and this is the main reason for the lack of action to date.

Benefits

The key benefits which are anticipated are:

- Economic benefits due to increased inter-city travel and tourism.
- Promotion and facilitation of increased levels of business travel between the two cities.



- Social benefits due to increased travel and a stronger sense of connection between the cities.
- Environmental benefits due to the replacement of the diesel locomotives with faster and more fuel efficient electric trains.

Resources and Next Actions

As noted above, the capital cost of making the necessary improvements is significant, although, as the route is currently uncompetitive, the improvements should, over time, increase the profitability of the route.

The importance of having an efficient and reliable rail service acting as the main link between the two urban hubs (and servicing stops along the way) cannot be underestimated in terms of the promotion of the “economic corridor” effect. Without establishing efficient and effective transport links, it is difficult to link the economic agents acting within the corridor.

The key players to make this happen would be:

- Iarnróid Eireann
- NI Railway
- Department for Regional Development
- Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, and the National Transport Authority



Action 4: "Trade is Key"

There is widespread acceptance that the key to developing an economic corridor effect is through "trade, not aid" and that it was important to create links between businesses in both regions. It is believed that, to date, one of the fundamental barriers to the creation of these links has been the perception that businesses in the Dublin region are in competition with businesses in the Belfast region for the same pool of customers. The speakers at the forum were urging businesses to set aside the concept of competition and to collaborate to embrace what lessons businesses might learn from each other and what they might achieve working together. Two of the keynote speakers from Glen Dimplex and Intel spoke about the links that they had discovered between their businesses and how they were working together to provide a innovative heating solution.

Another keynote speaker from Intertrade Ireland explained the work they were doing in the SME sector to support cross-border trading opportunities and the conferences and mentoring programmes that they operated.

Recommendations

Some of the suggestions made by people were as follows:

- A twinning programme should be established whereby grants are made available by the City Councils to support corporate groups which engaged in activities to promote cross border twinning links. Examples of such activities would involve collaborative projects, employee exchange programmes, development of co-working spaces etc.
- Development of a cross border "start up" community online where entrepreneurs can access information on start up ventures in both regions and provide their services as mentors.
- Produce a "map" of the trade organisations and bodies, both North and South, to provide transparency to start up ventures and entrepreneurs so that they know who to approach.
- More collaboration by the IDA and INI on winning business for the island of Ireland in its entirety. There are many examples of cross border benefits arising as a result of the IDA or INI winning new foreign direct investment for their region.

Benefits

The key benefits which are anticipated are:

- Expansion of markets for businesses in both the North and South. Provide businesses with a greater understanding of the markets in the other region which in turn will generate opportunities for those businesses.
- By encouraging collaboration between businesses, new products and ideas can emerge (e.g. Glen Dimplex and Intel).



- Lessons can be learned from “twinning businesses” which drive efficiencies.
- Social benefit derived from cross border movement of employees and entrepreneurs.

Resources and Next Actions

Funding would be required for the twinning programme and the development of an online start up community. The expected cost of mapping the trade organisations and bodies should not be material.

The key lead players to make this happen would be:

- Belfast and Dublin City Councils
- Intertrade Ireland



Action 5: The Dublin/Belfast Electric Car Route

The route from Dublin to Belfast could be piloted as Ireland's first "electric car friendly" route which would deliver many benefits across a wide number of areas. There is a perception that electric cars are not suitable for long distance driving due to insufficient range but with advances in battery technology and charging infrastructure, this so called "range anxiety" should reduce as electric cars become more acceptable.

The Dublin-Holyhead Ferry already provides charging facilities for electric cars and there are already many charging facilities in the corridor. However, there is an opportunity to improve the infrastructure and services whilst at the same time branding the route as "electric car friendly".

Recommendations

It was recommended that action should be taken as follows:

- Invest in Dublin Belfast Electric Car "Journey Way" that would enable car rentals with dedicated charging points along the current motorway route where the rental car could be exchanged and recharged. This "Pony Express" system would allow flexible "Green Travel" along the corridor and would facilitate tourist trips from the major urban centres and provide a cost effective alternative to the rail and bus links.
- Agreements with car rental companies in Belfast and Dublin Airports to ensure that electric cars make up a certain percentage of their fleet. A review should also be carried out on the charging infrastructure along the corridor and an examination of how it can best be upgraded or improved.
- Promotional material focused on tourists arriving in Ireland by air or on ferry outlining where the charging infrastructure is located on the route and what services are available on the route. Consider the introduction of appropriate signage along the route.
- Alliances with hotels in the corridor who offer charging of electrical cars in their hotel car parking and inclusion of their details in the promotional material.
- Use of smart grid technology in the "overnight stay" car parks so that car batteries are only recharged when excess power exists on the grid.

Benefits

The key benefits which are anticipated are:

- Economic benefits at towns in the corridor due to "stop offs" en route at charging locations.
- Environmental impacts due to reduction in emissions and more efficient use of the electricity grid.



- Route adds to the branding of Dublin and Belfast as European “Smart Cities”.
- A unique selling point from a tourism perspective, it would appeal to the “green tourist”.
- Practical example of the application of smart grid technologies, Dublin-Belfast can export the technologies developed to other regions who will seek to implement similar “electric-car friendly” routes.

Resources and Next Actions

Depending on the findings of the review of charging infrastructure, the initial resource requirements may not be material. The promotion of the route as electric car friendly can be achieved in stages. Possible to enter into co-funding arrangements with hotels, ESB/ecar NI and car hire providers.

The key lead players to make this happen would be:

- ESB/ecar NI
- Local authorities
- Private business (hotels, car hire operators).

Action 6: Collaboration between Tourist Boards

Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board work together in strategic partnership. Each agency has a distinct role and remit and each complements the work of the other to expand Ireland's valuable tourism market. Tourism Ireland is responsible for marketing the island of Ireland as a holiday destination overseas. However, there is a perception of a lack of collaboration between the two Tourist Boards and as a result there is little crossover by tourists and both regions suffer.

Recommendations

The idea of a jointly marketed “themed” Ireland experience was suggested. This would involve the following:

- Collaboration by both Tourist Boards on the promotion of “themed” experiences in Ireland which would highlight destinations both North and South of the border which would be of interest to tourists seeking a particular type of holiday.

Some of the themes suggested were, “Adventure Holiday”, “Golfing Holiday”, “Art and Culture”, “Food and Drink”, “Science and Engineering” and “Historic sites”.

- Promotional material to be branded along these lines which would take advantage of technology where possible (e.g. a downloadable app which supports your “theme” and directs you to places of interest and services in the region).
- Iarnróid Éireann and Translink to introduce a themed rail ticket to facilitate tourists travelling to the highlighted destinations.
- Hotels and destinations to support the branding adopted.

Benefits

The key benefits which are anticipated are:

- Greater disbursement of economic benefits amongst the destinations.
- The “themed” experience will appeal to certain tourists and make the island of Ireland a more desirable destination.
- Removal of psychological barriers for tourists who should view the island as one destination.
- A different approach to the tourist experience which is more in keeping with the “package holiday” ethos.
- Collection of data on tourist movements would provide more transparency on the behaviour of tourists which facilitates more strategic selling.



- Collaborative effort between the Tourist Boards removes the spectre of “competition” for the tourist market.

Resources and Next Actions

Investment would be required by the tourist boards and transport providers in devising the themes and promoting the concept. Businesses which are included as supported destinations may be willing to provide discounted tickets or services to support the concept.

The key lead players to make this happen would be:

- Failte Ireland
- Northern Ireland Tourist Board
- Local authorities
- Private business (hotels, golf courses, restaurants etc).