

DROMAHAIR BACK TO THE FUTURE?

Seán Ó Conláin

ON SATURDAY 29th October 2016 Dromahair celebrated a series of unique events building from the past into the future. At the heart of the day was the disused railway line called SL&NCR (Sligo Leitrim & Northern Counties Railway).

The formal opening of 'The Long Stretch' (An Síneadh Fada) is by way of a demonstration—the culmination of phase one and also potentially the start of a new era for the region. The SL&NCR was the last privately owned railway undertaking to survive in Ireland, and is now getting a new lease of life thanks largely to local volunteers who have spear-headed the project, to the vision of the landowners in granting permissive access, and to the generosity of individuals and local businesses. The Long Stretch, which is in the Lough Gill Special Area of Conservation, runs along one of the banks of the Edergole River.

Engineering work has brought it to national trail standard, and enables walkers, cyclists and horse riders to enjoy the natural and unspoilt beauty of Leitrim, safe from motorised traffic.

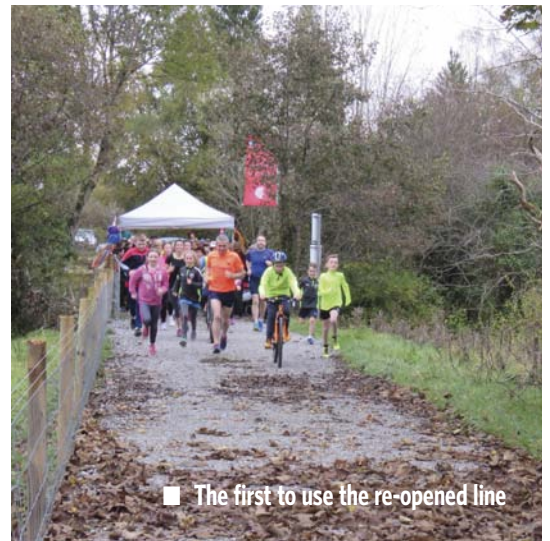
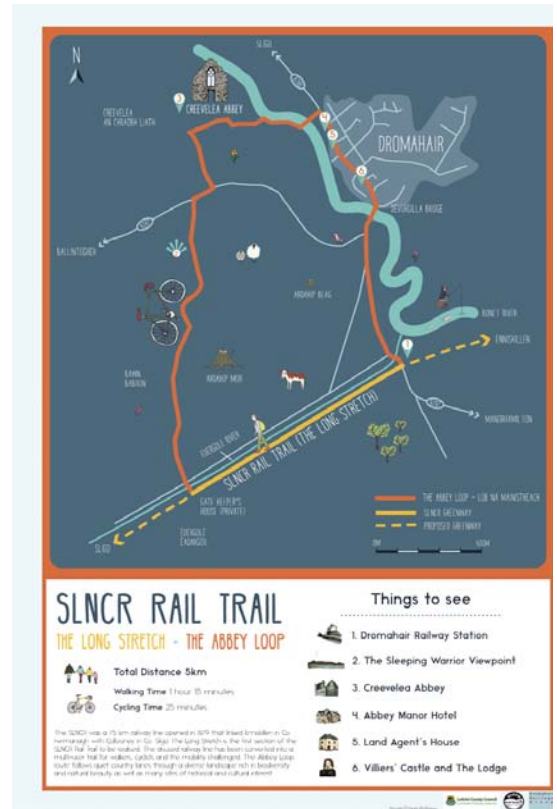
Perhaps the most exciting part of the initiative, however, is that the SLNCR working group, in full collaboration with the Local Authority, the Dromahair Heritage Group and Ciorcal Cainte has helped create a loop around Dromahair using the Long Stretch as an 'anchor'. The Loop, 5 km in length, links the line at Eadargóil

(Edergole) through Bábhún (Bawn), An Chraobh Liath (Creevelea) along the Bonet into Dromahair itself, and back out to the old Railway Station.

A recent study (funded by Leitrim County Council grant-aided under the Smarter Travel Initiative) estimated the capital cost of the Rail Trail works from Drumduff to Blacklion at €6.8m. It was also estimated that the spend in the local economy in year one alone would be €8.2m. This business-case analysis is complemented by a full engineering design study. Due to the increase in overseas and domestic visitors, the whole trail would bring both short and long-term employment (particularly in eco-tourism), sustainable travel opportunities, as well as recreational and health benefits to locals of all ages.

The SLNCR working group is looking forward to the further development works on the Demonstration Stretch and the Abbey Loop, made possible by the recent receipt of significant grant aid support from the Dept of Arts, Heritage, Regional and Rural Affairs in conjunction with Leitrim County Council.

Is chúis mhór bhródúlachta go raibh an spiorad agus an splanc ag an ngrúpa oibre – cuid mhaith lonaithe i nDroim Dhá Thiar – an tionscadal seo a thosnú ann. An chéad cheann dá shaghas sa chontae! Ar ndóigh tá bródúlacht ar leith ag baint leis an nasc lenár gcultúr tríd an bhéim atá ar leagan Gaeilge na logainmneacha.



■ The first to use the re-opened line



■ Locals enjoy the celebration