



Subject:	Notice of Opinion from the Department for Infrastructure: application SPD/2023/0991/F section 54 application to remove condition 5 (restricting the number of daily Belfast to Dublin train services) on planning permission LA04/2017/1388/F for a new integrated Public Transport Interchange (the Belfast Transport Hub)
Date:	19 th May 2026
Reporting Officer(s):	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control
Contact Officer(s):	Ed Baker, Planning Manager (Development Management) Lisa Walshe, Principal Planning Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	No
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	
After Council Decision	
Some time in the future	
Never	

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has issued a Notice of Opinion to the Council, stating its intention to approve a s54 application to remove condition 5 (restricting the number of daily Belfast to Dublin train services) on planning permission LA04/2017/1338F. The application relates to the operation of the new integrated Public Transport Interchange (the Belfast Transport Hub – Grand Central Station).
1.2	The Notice of Opinion asks the Council to confirm whether it wishes to appear before and be heard by the Planning Appeals Commission, or a person appointed by the Department for the purposes of a hearing, in relation to the application.

2.0	Recommendation
2.1	That the Council notes the Notice of Opinion and advises DfI that it does not wish to appear before and be heard by the Planning Appeals Commission, or a person appointed by the Department for the purposes of a hearing.
3.0	Main Report
	<u>Background</u>
3.1	DfI granted planning permission for the Belfast Transport Hub (now known as Grand Central Station) on 29 th March 2019 (ref. LA04/2017/1388/F). DfI had called in the application, which had originally been submitted to Belfast City Council, having deemed the proposal to be of regional significance. A copy of the decision notice is provided at Appendix 1 .
3.2	Condition 5 of the planning permission states that there shall be no more than 8 daily Belfast to Dublin train services each way into the approved development (16 in total).
3.3	DfI has received an s54 application from NI Transport Holding Company to remove condition 5 of the planning permission so that there are no limits on such train services (SPD/2023/0991/F). Having considered the application, DfI has issued a Notice of Opinion to the Council, dated 27 th April 2026, stating its intention to grant planning permission, setting out the proposed conditions. The Notice of Opinion states that DfI must receive any request for an opportunity for the Council to appear before and be heard by the Planning Appeals Commission, or a person appointed by the Department for the purposes of a hearing.
3.4	DfI's letter gives the Council 42 days to respond, i.e. by 8 th June 2026. This time period gives opportunity to report this matter to the Committee.
3.5	A copy of the Notice of Opinion is provided at Appendix 2 .
3.6	Members should note that approval of the application would create a new standalone planning permission.
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.7	The application to remove condition 5 was submitted to DfI on 27 November 2026. It can be viewed on the NI Planning Portal at the link below: https://planningregister.planningsystemni.gov.uk/application/680519
3.8	The full description of the proposal is: <i>'Application under Section 54 to remove Condition 5 (restricting the number of daily Belfast to Dublin train services) on planning permission Ref: LA04/2017/1388/F for a New Integrated Public Transport Interchange (the Belfast Transport Hub).'</i>
3.9	According to the applicant's Planning Statement, the original condition was imposed by DfI on the advice of the Council's Environmental Health team, because there was insufficient noise modelling information at the time to ascertain the impact of more frequent train services.
3.10	DfI's consideration of the s54 application is set out in its Case Officer Report and Addendum Case Officer report, provided at Appendix 3 .

3.11	As set out in the Case Officer Report, having assessed the further noise modelling information submitted with the application, Environmental Health is satisfied that there would be no adverse noise impacts as a consequence of Belfast/Dublin Enterprise services increasing to 32 movements daily, offering no objection to the removal of condition 5.
3.11	Environmental Health further advises that there would be no adverse impact in terms of amenity or impact on air quality.
3.12	DfI is satisfied that there would be no other harmful environmental impact, concurring with the Environmental Statement Addendum in this regard.
3.13	The Case Officer report also refers to the economic benefits of the proposal; the Environmental Statement Addendum referring to significant potential for economic development benefits through the growth of enterprise services for commuting and the growth of local urban economics through enhanced tourism, leisure and shopping opportunities. There would be further benefits in terms of enhanced access to hospitals and medical centres, education and leisure facilities. Any delay or restriction could result in the loss of €165 of EU funding and loss of revenue to Translink over 30 years of circa £157m.
3.14	The Case Officer report refers to the support for the application from the Council, citing the growth in cross-border workers and how there is opportunity to improve growth in cross-border trade of services with improved transport links. The proposal aligns with the all-island rail review 2024 which identified that service frequencies and speeds between Belfast and Dublin are relatively low compared to similar infrastructure in other capital cities. It's the Council's view that improved intercity connectivity is essential to business and communities in Belfast, providing linkages to facilitate trade, investment, tourism and labour mobility.
3.15	A full summary of consultation responses is provided at Appendix 3 of the Case Officer report.
	<u>Recommendation</u>
3.16	On the basis of Environmental Health's advice on the removal of condition 5, the assessment of the issues as set out in DfI's Case Officer and Addendum Case Officer reports, and the Council's corporate consultation response to the application, it is recommended that the Council notes the Notice of Opinion. Also, that the Council confirms to DfI that it does not wish to appear before and be heard by the Planning Appeals Commission, or a person appointed by the Department for the purposes of a hearing.
3.17	It should be noted that any request to appear before and be heard by the Planning Appeals Commission (or other body) would require a hearing to be convened and would push back the timing of the decision on the application.
6.0	Financial & Resource Implications
6.1	The Council's consideration of the Notice of Opinion has very minor resourcing implications. However, were the Council to request to appear before and be heard by the Planning Appeals Commission (or other body), there would be an impact on resources and costs in terms of preparing a statement of case and attending the hearing.
7.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
7.1	There are no equality or good relations / rural needs implications associated with this report.

8.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – decision notice for planning application LA04/2017/1388/F Appendix 2 – Notice of Opinion from DfI (dated 27 th April 2026) Appendix 3 – DfI Case Officer and Addendum Case Officer reports