



Opening Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport

Greenway Development on Farmland

Paul O'Brien, IFA Infrastructure Project Team and South Leinster Chair

Wednesday, 12th November 2025

Chairman and Committee Members,

I would like to thank you for inviting the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) to address you today on this very important issue for farmers. I am joined here today by Geraldine O'Sullivan, IFA Senior Policy Executive.

The IFA welcomes the opportunity to outline our views and concerns regarding the development of Greenways across rural Ireland and to highlight the serious implications these projects have for farm families, rural communities, and the agricultural sector.

Greenways Should Be on Public, Not Private, Farmland

The IFA's position is clear and consistent: Greenways should, wherever possible, be developed on public lands and not on privately owned farmland.

This principle is fully aligned with the Government's Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways (2018), which states that:

"The preferred model for future Greenways is to use lands already in the undisputed ownership or control of the State, either through Government Agencies, Government Departments or Local Authorities."

Unfortunately, this principle is not being upheld in practice. Many proposed Greenway routes are being planned across privately owned farmland rather than public or State lands. This approach is deeply problematic and is causing significant anxiety and hardship for farm families whose livelihoods depend on those lands.

The impact of a Greenway cutting through a working farm can be severe — disrupting normal operations, dividing holdings, creating safety risks, and undermining the long-term viability of farm enterprises.

Opposition to the Use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs)

The IFA is totally opposed to the use of compulsory purchase orders (CPOs) for Greenway projects.

Greenways are amenity projects, not essential public infrastructure such as national roads or power lines.

The Code of Practice for Greenways, agreed between the IFA and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), clearly provides for Voluntary Land Acquisition Agreements as the appropriate mechanism for securing access where required.

This approach ensures that projects proceed based on mutual agreement, respect for landowners, and community consent — not compulsion.

Farm Severance and Division Must Be Avoided

Many of the proposed Greenway routes, if implemented as planned, would sever and divide active farms. This is wholly unacceptable.

Dividing a farm disrupts its physical layout, management, and animal movement. It creates new and unnecessary biosecurity and safety challenges and may make some farms unviable.

The severance of farmland cannot be justified for recreational projects and must be avoided in all cases.

Old Railway Lines and Misleading Claims

It has been suggested by some local authorities that certain Greenways will follow 'old or abandoned railway lines'.

However, in most cases, these lands have long since been reintegrated into active farm enterprises. In many areas, the original railway corridor has been incorporated into private holdings for decades, and is now home to houses, yards, and productive farmland.

It is therefore misleading to suggest that these routes are available for public use or that they constitute 'abandoned' infrastructure.

In reality, they are essential to the day-to-day operation of family farms and cannot simply be reclaimed without causing major disruption and loss.

Greenways Must Have Community Support

Greenways can only succeed where there is genuine community support.

Farmers are key members of rural communities and have a long and positive history of cooperation — including facilitating public access on permissive walks throughout the country.

However, that goodwill must not be taken for granted.

Successful Greenway development requires trust, transparency, and voluntary agreement. The imposition of routes across farmland without consent damages that trust and erodes community cohesion.

Lack of Consultation and Engagement

Across the country, IFA members have reported a lack of meaningful and practical consultation and engagement on Greenway projects.

In many cases, farmers have had no direct contact from project promoters until the project is gone too far and at the emerging preferred route corridor stage. Prior to this stage, farmers feel the consultation is a box ticking exercise and a lot of the work and design on the route is a desk top exercise. Most local authorities have declined to attend IFA-organised meetings with affected landowners.

This approach is unacceptable.

Constructive dialogue — not confrontation — should be the starting point for all Greenway planning. Early, open, and respectful engagement is essential if projects are to gain the confidence and cooperation of local communities.

Broader Concerns Raised by Farmers

Farmers have raised a range of genuine concerns relating to Greenway developments, including:

- Loss of privacy and intrusion on family homes and farmyards
- Security risks and potential for anti-social behaviour
- Rural crime concerns, with Greenways providing new access routes to private lands
- Animal disease risks, particularly the spread of bovine TB through disturbed wildlife habitats
- Environmental disruption, especially where works impact badger populations or established field systems
- Littering and dog control issues, with implications for livestock welfare and local amenity

These are not theoretical issues — they are daily realities for rural communities and must be taken seriously in project design and management.

IFA Engagement with Local Authorities

The IFA continues to engage constructively with local authorities across Ireland, highlighting farmers' concerns and seeking practical, fair solutions.

Our approach is based on cooperation, respect for private property, and the recognition that the people who live and work on the land must be partners in any development that affects them.

The IFA has assisted farmers on Greenways in many counties across the country including; Kerry, Galway, Louth, Clare, Sligo, Leitrim, Cork, Donegal, Mayo, Westmeath, Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny, Offaly, Laois, Wicklow, Meath and Limerick.

Legal Context and Code of Practice

While the Government has legal powers to use CPOs for public infrastructure, it is important to recognise that Greenways are not comparable to roads or utilities.

In recognition of this, the IFA engaged with TII and local authority representatives to negotiate a Code of Practice for Greenways.

This Code established a fair and transparent framework for Voluntary Land Acquisition Agreements, providing an alternative to compulsory purchase and ensuring that the rights and interests of landowners are respected.

The Code of Practice is not the problem. It's the law which provides the legal powers to use CPOs on Greenways which is the problem and that can only be changed by the Oireachtas.

This voluntary, co-operative approach must remain the standard for all future Greenway developments.

Conclusion

Farmers are not opposed to Greenways. The IFA supports rural development, tourism, and community recreation where these can coexist fairly with farm livelihoods.

However, we are opposed to unfair practices, compulsion, and disregard for the rights of the people who live and work on the land. We are strongly opposed to the use of CPOs on Greenways.

Greenways can be developed in a way that works for everyone — through voluntary agreement, proper consultation, and respect for private property.

The IFA calls on this Committee to reaffirm the principle that Greenways must be developed primarily on public lands and that the rights, livelihoods, and safety of farm families are fully protected throughout the process.

Thank you, Chairman and Members, for your time and consideration.

ENDS.

Background

The IFA is Ireland's largest farming organisation, with over 72,000 farmer members covering all production systems. The Association is structured with 947 branches and 29 County Executives across the country. The IFA President and various Committee Chairs, along with branch and county representatives are democratically elected by the farmer membership.

IFA represents all farming sectors at national, European and international level. Through our office in Brussels, the IFA represents Irish farmers on the European umbrella body of farm organisations COPA/COGECA. In addition, the IFA is the representative for Irish farmers on the World Farmers' Organisation.