



Opening Statement to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Agriculture and Food

Impact of Greenways, Railways and Roadways on Agriculture (Compulsory Purchase Order of Lands)

Paul O'Brien, IFA South Leinster Regional Chair
Wednesday, 6th May 2026

Chairman and Committee Members

I would like to thank you for inviting the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) to address you today on this important issue for farmers.

I am joined by Geraldine O'Sullivan, IFA Senior Policy Executive.

The IFA welcomes the opportunity to set out our views on Greenway development and the significant implications these projects have for farm families, rural communities, and land use, particularly in relation to use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs).

Greenways Should Be on Public, Not Private Farmland

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

This principle is set out in the Government's Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways (2018), which identifies public land as the preferred option. Unfortunately, this is not being consistently followed, and many proposed routes are now impacting private farmland.

For farm families, the consequences can be serious — fragmentation of holdings, operational disruption, safety risks, and long-term damage to viable farm enterprises.

Compulsory Purchase Orders and Legal Framework

The IFA is firmly opposed to the use of CPOs for Greenway development. Greenways are recreational amenities, not essential public infrastructure such as roads or utilities. Their delivery should be based on voluntary agreement, not compulsion.

The Code of Practice for Greenways, agreed between the IFA and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), provides a clear framework for voluntary land acquisition. This approach ensures that projects proceed on the basis of mutual agreement, respect for landowners, and community consent.

While the Government does have legal powers to use CPOs for infrastructure, the application of those powers to Greenways is fundamentally inappropriate.

The Code itself is not the issue. The issue lies in the underlying legislation that allows CPOs to be used in this context — and that is a matter for the Oireachtas.

A voluntary, cooperative approach must remain the standard for all future Greenway developments.

Waterford and Kerry Greenways

Let's take two contrasting examples of Greenway projects that are frequently quoted.

The Waterford Greenway is constantly hailed as a major success on how to develop a Greenway project. The facts are this 46km Greenway was developed predominantly on public lands. CPOs were not used and in general community support was secured. The project was launched in 2014, cost €20m and the Greenway was completed in 2017.

In contrast, on the South Kerry Greenway, consultation was very poor, the old railway line had passed into private farmer ownership and in a major error Kerry County Council decided to use CPOs to force the project through. The 27km project was launched in 2014, the costs are set to exceed €70m and completion is still a long way off. It is a real case of how not to develop a Greenway project.

The key differences are clear: land ownership and the use of CPOs.

The lesson is straightforward—Greenways should, wherever possible, be developed on public land, with community agreement, and without reliance on compulsory acquisition.

Government Review of Greenway Strategy

Following a recent Greenway review meeting with TII and the Department of Transport, the Department has confirmed it is reviewing the Government Strategy for Greenways and the Greenways Code of Practice. The IFA welcomes this review and has requested the terms of reference.

The IFA will prioritise the following key areas:

- A clear Government commitment that Greenways are developed primarily on public land, not private farmland.
- A commitment that CPOs will not be used for Greenway development.
- Recognition that the severance of farmland is not justified for Greenways and must be avoided.
- Greenway projects should proceed only where there is strong community support, including from farmers and landowners.

Need for a Budget-Led Approach to Greenway Development

At present, approximately 60 Greenway projects are being worked on by County Councils and consultants nationwide, with a combined proposed length of around 3,000km. Many of these proposals are already creating significant uncertainty and concern among rural families, farmers, and communities.

Using TII's indicative estimate of €2 million per kilometre, the potential overall cost could be in the region of €6 billion. This contrasts sharply with TII's current annual Greenway budget of approximately €60–65 million.

This highlights the absence of a clear, budget-led approach to Greenway planning and prioritisation. In practice, many of these projects are unlikely ever to be delivered, yet they continue to progress through planning stages, generating unnecessary anxiety and disruption in rural areas.

A more structured, budget-led framework should be considered as part of the Government review, ensuring that project ambition is aligned with realistic funding, prioritised delivery, and certainty for landowners.

Community Support, Consultation, and Local Concerns

Greenways can only succeed where there is genuine community support.

Farmers are central to rural communities and have a long history of cooperation, including facilitating permissive access across farmland. However, this cooperation depends on trust, transparency, and voluntary agreement. Where routes are imposed without consent, that trust is undermined and erodes community cohesion.

Across the country, many IFA members report a lack of meaningful engagement on Greenway projects. Too often, farmers are only contacted when routes are already largely decided, with consultation seen as a box-ticking exercise based on desktop planning. In many cases, early engagement with affected landowners has not taken place.

This approach is unacceptable.

Early, open, and respectful engagement must be the foundation of all Greenway planning if projects are to secure cooperation and public confidence.

Farmers also raise wider concerns, including loss of privacy, security issues, anti-social behaviour, rural crime, littering, dog control, and animal disease risks. These are legitimate issues that must be properly addressed in any Greenway development process.

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, compulsory acquisition, and any approach that disregards the rights of the people who live and work on the land. We are firmly opposed to the use of CPOs for Greenway development.

The IFA is calling on this Committee to ensure that future Greenway policy is clearly based on voluntary agreement, delivered primarily on public lands, and underpinned by meaningful consultation from the outset. The rights, livelihoods, safety, and wellbeing of farm families must be fully protected throughout the process.

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