

Belfast-Dublin train: Hopes of hourly service by next year as Enterprise celebrates 75 years

A railway chief has said he hopes an hourly train between Belfast and Dublin can be in operation by as early as next spring, as the Enterprise service celebrates its 75th anniversary.

Some of the staff who worked on the service in its first years were among those who gathered at Lanyon Station in Belfast on this week to mark the date in 1947 when a seven-carriage steam train headed to Dublin, bringing about a new era in cross-border travel.

The cross-border railway service would feature in the island's history: including being the subject of bomb threats during the Troubles, leading to the establishment of the Peace Train Organisation in 1989; and the Contraceptive Train event organised by the Irish Women's Liberation Movement in May 1971.

The 1947 inaugural train was operated by the Great Northern Railway company. It is now jointly operated by Translink NI Railways and Iarnrod Eireann.

In its first year in service, one train travelled in each direction. Seventy-five years later, the Enterprise service has eight daily departures in each direction.

Chris Conway, chief executive of Translink, said they hoped to move towards an hourly Enterprise service at peak times as early as next spring.

“We’re really proud to be here celebrating the 75th anniversary, I think everyone has used the Enterprise over the years at some point, connecting Belfast and Dublin, and the stations in between,” he said.

“We want to bring an hourly service in as soon as possible, we’re already working with the SEUPB for funding, which they have committed a certain amount of funding for that, and also with the department for infrastructure and department for transport.

“We have already initiated a project team, and we hope to go into procurement for a new fleet next year which will allow us to get an hourly service within the next five years.

“We’re also working with Irish Rail, just using our existing fleet, to see if there is a way we can bring an hourly service in sooner, even at peak times, so maybe to do that by spring of next year.

“In the longer term, we’re working with the Irish government, with the Northern Ireland Executive, with the department of transport on the all-island rail review, and that will look at the feasibility of bringing high speed rail and extensions to the network right across the island of Ireland.”