

Transport bosses asked to look at rail connections to Belfast International and City airports

Northern Ireland's Department for Infrastructure has asked officials to explore rail connections to Belfast's two airports and a line from Derry to Portadown.

It comes ahead of the anticipated completion of the All Island Rail Review in conjunction with Ireland's Transport Minister Eamon Ryan.

Outgoing infrastructure minister John O'Dowd said the outcome of the review is expected by the end of 2023.

He added: "I recently received an update from my officials working on the All Island Rail Review who confirmed that work on the Report is continuing and is due to be finalised at the end of this year.

"I want to keep the momentum of this vitally important work and to reaffirm my commitment to it.

"As we seek to connect communities and tackle the climate emergency, this Review will be vital in providing a vision of how our rail network can support our strategic objectives.

"With that in mind, I have asked my officials to continue to progress this work with their counterparts in the South.

"In addition – and without pre-empting the results of the All Island Rail Review – I have also asked my officials to explore funding opportunities for feasibility studies into the following areas:

- a new rail line between Derry and Portadown
- reopening the Knockmore line with a connection to Belfast International Airport
- electrification of Belfast to Newry line
- and better connections between the rail halt to Belfast City airport

"I am keen that we continue to be ambitious around our rail network and look forward to a future where people across this island, in particular those in rural areas, have greater access to rail travel," he said.

Campaigners have long been calling for better rail links to Northern Ireland's two main airports and trains to the west.