

# New Zealander Is Named Project Director of MetroLink After Global Hiring Search

*World-recognised expert in large infrastructural projects hired to deliver major public transport programme*

MetroLink has reached another significant milestone with the hiring of a Project Director following a global search for the most suitable candidate to head up the largest ever public transport investment project in the history of the State.

New Zealander Sean Sweeney will take up the position to bring the public transport 'megaproject' to Dublin after a proven track record of success over three decades in leadership roles on major infrastructure projects in Australia, New Zealand and the US.

Sweeney is an expert in the procurement and delivery of large capital works and tunnelling. More recently, he was the Chief Executive Officer of City Rail Link a transformative underground rail link in Auckland's city centre, and New Zealand's largest-ever transport infrastructure project.

Other notable positions held by Mr Sweeney include Executive Director for Major Projects Victoria in Australia, where he managed a multibillion-dollar portfolio of projects and Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), and chaired the Victorian Government Project Management Leadership Forum.

He later served as Chief Executive Officer for Justice Infrastructure in New South Wales, delivering a \$2.4bn programme and establishing the project delivery unit from scratch. He holds a PhD in Construction Economics and a Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering.

It was recognised ahead of the recruitment process that there would only be a small group of professionals across the globe with the expertise to deliver MetroLink. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Major Projects Advisory Group (MPAG) noted: "*There will be a limited number of individuals internationally who fulfil the relevant criteria [for the Project Director role].*"

Given the specific expertise and experience required for this transformational project, the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform sanctioned a base salary of €550,000 for the role. This is below the mean equivalent rate for this level of expertise globally.

## **Minister for Transport, Eamon Ryan, said:**

"Recruiting a world-recognised Project Director with a track record of getting massive infrastructural projects over the line is another important step in ensuring that this time MetroLink will be delivered. We now have one of the best people in the world on our team to get the job done.

"This transformational project is currently before planning. Once we get through the planning process, I am keen for us to go full tilt to get construction under way so that we meet our milestones and deliver a world-class metro system as quickly as possible.

“This important recruitment is not just about getting this project over the line in the next decade, it’s about ensuring that we have a transport system that is fit for purpose for decades to come.”

**NTA Chief Executive Officer, Anne Graham, said:**

“MetroLink is about providing a frequent, reliable, sustainable alternative as part of an integrated public transport system, by making Swords, the northern suburbs and Dublin Airport more accessible to the city.

“Today’s appointment represents a significant step in this crucial project and is a clear indication that progress is being made.”

**Transport Infrastructure Ireland CEO, Peter Walsh, said:**

“I am very pleased to welcome the appointment of Sean Sweeney to the position of Project Director for the MetroLink project. The appointment followed an extensive national and international recruitment competition, carried out on behalf of Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) by Newsom Consulting.

“In addition to his professional accomplishments, Sean is known for his collaborative and engaging leadership style. He is also a recognised expert in the procurement and delivery of large capital projects.

“As our new MetroLink Project Director, Sean will be responsible for leading the development and delivery of this programme, which aims to provide a new high-frequency, environmentally friendly public transport service.

“Through its connectivity with mainline rail, DART, Luas and BusConnects, MetroLink will transform public transportation in Ireland, addressing critical issues such as congestion, accessibility and sustainable growth.”

**Of his appointment, Sean Sweeney said:**

“My late father was born and raised in Castlebar, Co. Mayo. He would be thrilled and immensely proud, as I am, to know his son was going back to lead this major project for Dublin. MetroLink is a once-in-a-generation project that will transform the public transport system in the capital city and I am delighted and honoured to have been selected to spearhead its delivery.”

**ENDS**

## **NOTES to EDITOR**

The recruitment of a project director was led by TII which held a competitive, international competition to appoint an individual with the relevant skills and experience for this role.

TII engaged UK-based specialist recruitment agency Newsom Consulting to assist it in conducting the recruitment process. Following a comprehensive benchmarking exercise of remuneration in the transportation sector, it found that the mean average total remuneration, excluding any additional benefits, was €623,516.

Terms and conditions for the post were subject to sanction by the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform and key terms include –

- Employment with TII on a fixed-purpose contract
- Annual salary of €550,000
- Membership of Single Public Service Pension Scheme
- Provision of private health insurance
- Provision of a leased EV company car, subject to appropriate benefit-in-kind tax
- Moving and relocation expenses not exceeding €30,000, subject to standard Revenue rules

## FAQs

### 1. What exactly is MetroLink?

MetroLink is designed as a fully segregated, driverless and mostly underground high-capacity new metro between Swords and Dublin city centre, the first of its kind in Ireland.

MetroLink will run for 18.8km from Swords to Charlemont Station in the south of the city. The alignment will link Dublin Airport, Irish Rail, DART, Dublin Bus and Luas Services and create a fully integrated public transport network for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). MetroLink will serve 15 stations on opening and ultimately 16 stations. It will connect multiple residential communities such as Swords, Ballymun and Glasnevin, as well as the city centre, Dublin Airport, major employment zones, education, transport and other facilities.

MetroLink's end-to-end journey time between Swords and the south city centre will be about 25 minutes. It is therefore a transformative railway project, expanding bus and rail access and connectivity for circa 1.5 million people in the Dublin Area as well as an even greater number across Ireland.

### 2. Why does Dublin need a metro?

Ireland, especially Dublin and the eastern region, has a growing population and hence increased demand for the type of high-capacity, high-frequency, modern and efficient public transport that MetroLink can provide. From 2016 Ireland's population grew by 8% to over 5.1 million people in 2022 as per the Census in 2022. All indications are that the population has increased further since then.

The National Planning Framework expects Ireland's population to grow by an additional million people by 2040. Specific to MetroLink's immediate catchment area, Fingal was one of the fastest-growing administrative areas in Ireland between the Census of 2016 and 2022, at a 12% population increase.

Traffic congestion costs people money, time and well-being. In the Greater Dublin Area, congestion was estimated by the Department of Transport to cost the economy €336m in 2022, rising to about €1.5bn per year by 2040 (both in 2016 prices) as the population grows.

For these reasons, a high-capacity segregated and mostly underground railway line is required to meet the demand on the proposed route.

### **3. What stage is MetroLink at?**

In July 2022, the Government approved the preliminary business case for MetroLink, which enabled the project to enter the planning system with An Bord Pleanála.

Accordingly, the project was submitted to ABP in September 2022. ABP commenced an Oral Hearing in relation to MetroLink on February 19<sup>th</sup> 2024, which finished on March 28<sup>th</sup> 2024.

As part of the Oral Hearing process additional documents were submitted and ABP advised that it would request a further consultation period for the project to allow consultation on any new or amended information. TII are awaiting confirmation from ABP on when this further consultation shall be required.

Subject to there being no legal challenges, it is expected that detailed project procurement will commence next year. If approved by Cabinet, construction of MetroLink is earmarked to commence over the coming years with a view to operation by the mid-2030s.

### **4. What are the economics of MetroLink?**

The analysis published in MetroLink's Preliminary Business Case, as approved by Government in July 2022, showed that the project will deliver benefits to the Irish economy and society to the tune of €13.7bn over 60 years, well in excess of expected project costs. Based on the modelled costs and benefits (excluding potential wider benefits), the Benefit-to-Cost Ratio of MetroLink is 1.4. This means that for €1 of incremental economic cost, MetroLink delivers €1.40 of incremental economic benefit to the Irish economy.

A definite capital cost estimate for MetroLink will be known after the planning and procurement stages, and will be brought to Government for consideration. The final cost for MetroLink will not be known until after the planning process and completion of tendering and procurement.

### **5. What processes are in place to ensure oversight of MetroLink?**

The Department of Transport sets the policy, allocates funding and oversees the governance arrangements for MetroLink in line with the Public Spending Code/Infrastructure Guidelines.

The NTA is the "day-to-day" Approving Authority for MetroLink, with TII the designated "Sponsoring Agency". The Sponsoring Agency is the primary body responsible for the preparation, management, and delivery of the project. It must obtain the necessary approvals from the Approving Authority and ensure that the project proceeds along the lines approved by the Approving Authority.

Under the Infrastructure Guidelines, Government approval is required for exchequer-funded capital project proposals with an estimated cost in excess of €200 million, as is the case with MetroLink.

Hence final approval will be required from Government for MetroLink, following the planning and procurement stages, in order for the project to proceed to construction.