

NATIONAL RAIL PASSANGER GROUP RESPONDS TO IRISH RAILS 2005 ANNUAL REPORT

Like All Annual Reports IE's 2005 report is a snapshot of the organisation. As such you would expect it to highlight the positive and downplay the negative. Platform11 has decided to adopt a test. If you were to use the annual report as your first encounter with Irish Rail, how would it fare in the face of reality? We soon found out.....

- There are 10 photographs of the new Cork Dublin Express (CDE) trains only two of which are in service, and that 7 months late. Is IE so ashamed of the vast majority of its rolling stock that they cannot be reproduced in the annual report?

You may notice that the number of oldest of the DART rolling stock fleet has been reduced and you'll be right. More than a quarter of the fleet is in Leipzig in Germany being refurbished, and they are now over one year late. You may be also interested in the fact that the majority of them were due to be there – and back refurbished – by now. Even by Irish Rails standards this is appalling punctuality. So have a good look at the IE annual report to remind yourself of them, perhaps they are holiday photographs from Germany, we wish they were here. Despite the fact that they should be serving the hard pressed commuters of Dublin. They are 12 months late, a fact that you wont find in the IE annual report

The IE annual report appears to be the work of a schizophrenic:

- On page 3 it says that the safety and security of the railway remains a top priority and that there are improvements in safety statistics but on page 13 we discover that there has been a 12% increase in incidents of Signals Passed at Danger.
- On page 6 it tells us that there is a new commuter service from Kilkenny and also a new service from Waterford. This is the same service. You may also take heart in the new service from all the other stations along the line (in fact you do, Carlow's new service, the same one, gets mentioned on page 11). It is only a pity that there is no corresponding additional service back in the evening, but you won't find that in the report.
- IE is perhaps one of the most punctual railways in the world, if you accept page 6 of the report. It is, of course, very easy to be punctual when you set an arrival time at a destination which bears no reality at all to the actual time it takes to get there. The fact is that it is taking longer and longer to arrive at your destination but as IE continually increase the timings to get there you will, according to the report, arrive early. Even then IE allows itself to be 10 minutes late.
- IE likes to repeat the same things, but differently. As well as seeing the new, late, CDE carriages 10 times in the report we are told about them ad-nausea but this space filling exercise reaches a peak on page 8 where we are told that

they are push-pull operated (first used by CIE in the early 1970's), there are lights on the tables in first class, (exists already and has for 20 years) they are green not orange - so is the DART and has been for over 20 years, they comply to international standards of safety (legally required) and mobility – is this anything to brag about, when all stock purchased since 1999 has been so? Maybe they do not want to mention the remaining intercity carriages which aren't. IE doesn't appear to know what an intercity service is and what a commuter railcar is for. On page 8 we are told that the Dublin/Sligo service is “augmented” by Commuter railcars. This is a unique use of the word “augmented” as apart from one service on Friday and one on Sunday the Dublin/Sligo service consists entirely of Commuter Railcars.

The IE annual report also on page 3 assumes that the reader has abandoned all sense of irony when it speaks of a workforce which contributes with enthusiasm to the expansion of services and of continuous industrial peace. The report omits to mention the attempt by DART drivers to hold Dublin commuters to ransom on the 16th August 2005 where several trains were cancelled before the unions folded in the face of public opinion and a lack of candour in light of the impending dispute over the new CDE train.

The report only mentions in passing the totally un-necessary second round of weekend closures of the DART system during 2005, a process that was so obtrusive that it was blamed for the closure of the AerDart bus service. Luckily enough for IE on page 5 of the report we find that passenger numbers are “unadjusted for DART weekend closures”. So that's all right then.

Another passing reference to this closure programme is on page 8 where we are told that all DART platforms have been extended to 8-carriage length. In true IE fashion as soon as this was done 20 carriages were sent on a tour of Europe thus rendering the closures of last summer a virtual waste of time for the amount of 8-carriage services on the line today and the result is that full eight carriage service are now put back to December 2007

The report makes several references to the modifications and the additions to the DART service in Dublin. On page 6 we find that there are additional service to Portmarnock and Malahide, of course there are no extra trains they simply don't serve Howth anymore. It fails to mention the 20 carriages on holiday in Europe and which are **12 months** late. This is particularly ironic as it is on this page we find the biggest spin that IE has in its impressive PR weaponry: Punctuality statistics.

It is heartening indeed to know that 99% of all services ran last year. We await seeing how the unofficial action by IE drivers will affect that statistic this year. Of course if your train broke down and you had to transfer to another one, or if your train was so full you had to get off or not get on at all well, it wasn't cancelled, even though for you it was as if it had been. Well, perhaps it was late..... Well, actually it wasn't as it is impossible for an IE train to be late.

Also on page 6 we are told that IE is increasing its customer service facilities. Sadly they have failed to create any post where Customers can liaise with the company in relation to complaints of which there are many. IE is unique in European rail

operators in that it has a policy of refusing to recognise passenger representative bodies. They do, of course, recognise such representative bodies in the form of trade unions.

The IE board surprisingly doesn't control much property. All of the Dublin docklands, Cabra, Broadstone, Glasnevin areas do not appear on the balance sheet. Total value of land and buildings nationwide at the end of 2005 amounted to €1,275,000 (page 36). But we do learn on page 8 that CIE received land and buildings, which ultimately, are utilised by the parent company for commercial and property development. It's a pity that the profits of such aren't posted back into the IE company or ring fenced. The CIE board being of course a separate entity and holds the freehold

On page 9 IE make passing reference to the new Docklands Station. The passing reference is apt, for this is a station in passing. IE fails to mention that it will operate for 10 years, at a cost of €30 million and will then be sold for development, ie apartment construction.

On page 10 of the report we are told, not for the first time in the report, that IE has enjoyed the fastest growth in passenger numbers in Europe. We are also told that as soon as a service is introduced it is at capacity within weeks. This is in no way to be taken as an admission of bad planning at all

IE takes great pride in its role under Transport 21, and there three pages devoted to it in the report. There is vague mention of an expansion of rail services to Navan, after expansion to Dunboyne from the Maynooth line. IE fail to mention that they could start a commuter rail service tomorrow from Navan to Dublin, via existing rail lines using existing carriages and existing locomotives, but you won't find that in the report either.

Surely IE was tempting fate by starting their report on industrial peace on page 13 of the report. If industrial peace means commuters being held to ransom by drivers until the 11th hour as happened during the term of this report then that's ok. Otherwise, in the Orwellian world of IE, such a dispute never happened. Well, it's not in the report, so it mustn't have happened at all. We look forward to the non-mentioning of the drivers dispute this year in next years report. After all, it was unofficial.

Somewhat amazingly, we have only examined the first 15 pages of the report, which is all that will be read by the majority of its readership. The fact that we have identified enough ignoring of the facts, bending of the facts, distortion of the facts and spinning of the facts to fill three pages, and no photographs, is a damning testimony of IE's 2005 annual report.

So, we have found on our trip through the report that if you make up arrival times for trains they can never be late, that if you have an industrial dispute you can pretend it never happened, you can send much needed trains to be serviced and virtually lose them and if you simply keep putting back the date when things are supposed to happen you don't have to admit its actually late happening.

Hard pressed passengers know that their trains are running late, slow and are crowded; they know that on many occasions they don't turn up, but you'd never guess this from the 2005 Irish Rail Annual Report.