

branch, a scheme not finding much favour with the Sligo Grand Jury. Lord Lucan now saw his chance of having a line to Mayo realised and he suggested that his proposal for a Tullamore to Sligo line should be subscribed to and worked jointly by the MGW and GS&W companies, the Midland from Sligo to Athlone and the balance by the GS&W. For once the two companies agreed on something: they did not wish to become involved – having said that, no agreement could be reached as to what they should do, and so three Bills went to Parliament.

After much wrangling, the Midland came to an agreement with Lord Lucan whereby the new line was to commence at Athlone and run as far as Castlereagh via Roscommon. The Great Northern & Western (of Ireland) Railway Company was incorporated by Act of Parliament dated 27th July 1857 with a capital of £240,000. The *Roscommon Journal* reported great public rejoicing at the return of Lord Crofton and the happy result of his indefatigable exertions in securing railway accommodation for the north-west. The discussions between the two companies were embodied in an agreement dated 22nd June 1857, whereby the Midland was to work the GN&W on terms to be settled, the latter company to provide railway accommodation to Castlebar, Westport and Ballina as soon as deemed prudent. In the event that for any reason the

MGW failed to obtain sanction for a Sligo extension, the GN&W could apply for such powers. The Midland was to provide one-third of the capital in return for which it could nominate one-third of the directors. The principal provisions of the agreement were embodied in the company's Act of 1858.

At this stage in the proceedings, the Athenry & Tuam Railway appeared on the scene. Early in 1858, the GN&W directors gave consideration to the Tuam company's Bill and came to the conclusion that such a line would be adverse to their interests and they were more than surprised to hear that the Midland was prepared to lend support to and work the new line. This course of action was totally inconsistent with the amicable relations which the GN&W board had hoped would have existed between the two companies. In June, there was a flurry of activity beginning with a meeting between Lucan, Ennis and Boyd on behalf of the MGW and Hemans and Bodkin for the A&T. Ennis stated that it was their intention to press for the withdrawal of the running powers and pecuniary assistance clauses in the A&T Bill.

Ennis went on to state that the Midland desired to be allowed to enter into a working agreement, but would guarantee to render it impossible that there would at any future time be an extension beyond Tuam.

The Earl and his fellow directors were far from happy with this situation and proposed an agreement between the two companies whereby the MGW would not promote or assist in promoting or work any line extending north-west from Tuam. If it did, it was to forfeit all rights in the GN&W and allow the latter to connect its undertaking with the GS&W by means of running powers over the Midland at Athlone. The Earl of Lucan obviously felt he was in a strong position to dictate terms, although the Midland rejected these proposals, counter-proposals from it in turn being rejected. In fact, the Midland directors soon agreed to the above proposals with a ten year exclusion on any extension.

In return, the GN&W withdrew all opposition to the Tuam Bill and the agreement was formally signed on 14th June. When the GN&W Bill came before Parliament in June, it was initially petitioned against by the MGW on the grounds that the proposed line would abstract traffic from its line. The petitioners believed the proposed line was uncalled for and unnecessary, the engineering details were defective and the estimate insufficient. Despite this opposition, the Bill was successful. At the board meeting on 6th July, Messrs Smith & Knight's tender for construction of the line at £179,923 was read, subsequently reduced to £175,000 to include the building of all over-bridges and culverts for a double line of railway. The contractors agreed to take 75% in cash, the balance in company shares.

In October, the board's attention was drawn to a projected line from Elphin to Swinford, a line which appeared 'so visionary and so improbable of realisation' that not much credence was attached to it. Nevertheless it was thought advisable to ascertain the Midland's views on it, and if there appeared any likelihood of success, plans for the Castlereagh to Castlebar extension were to be pushed forward with all haste. Ennis advised on the Midland's view that the time did not appear right to proceed with the Castlebar line so long as capital for the building of the portion of line already authorised remained unsubscribed. The GN&W saw it differently, as it would hopefully frustrate any attempt to construct the Swinford line which was in fact a resurrection of the NWR project promoted by French. In the following January, French contacted the GN&W offering to restrict his line to Ballina if the GN&W agreed not to oppose the proposed Enniskillen & Sligo Railway. It declined to become involved and instructed its solicitors to oppose the NWR Bill.

March 1859 saw a draft agreement being discussed as to working arrangements and the provision of trains. In the latter context, at least one composite coach was to run

PROPOSED RAILWAY FROM SLIGO TO ATHLONE.

It is in contemplation to seek for Parliamentary Powers, next Session, for the immediate construction of a Line of Railway from Sligo to Athlone, passing by the Towns of Ballisodare, Collooney, and Ballymote, in the County of Sligo, with divergence to Swinford and Ballina; and the Towns of Boyle, Elphin, Strokestown, and Roscommon, in the County of Roscommon.

For which purpose, Capitalists of ample means, and who are unconnected with Railway enterprise in this province, have been consulted on the subject, and are prepared to advance the necessary funds.

As the parties referred to, desire to be fully informed, relative to the extent of the local support, and countenance which will be given to the undertaking, by an expression of approbation, it is necessary to obtain this information before any further step is taken.

I approve of the object above stated, and will give it my support.

Dated _____ May, 1856.

(Signed.)