Tithe an Oireachtais
Houses of the Oireachtas

An Comhchoiste um Iompar, Turasóireacht agus Spórt

Inrochtaineacht Iompair Phoiblí do Dhaoine faoi Mhíchumas

Samhain 2018

Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport

Accessibility of Public Transport for People with Disabilities

November 2018

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Table of Contents

Chairman's Foreword 3

Recommendations 5

1. Introduction 13

1.1 Accessibility 13

1.1.1 A Whole Journey Approach 15

1.2 National context 17

1.2.1 Demographic characteristics 17

1.2.2 Recent policy developments 17

1.2.2.1 The link between transport and employment 19

1.2.2.2 Urban/rural divide 19

2. Engagement Process 21

2.1 Meetings 21

2.2 Submissions 22

3. Key Points 23

3.1 Disability organisations, disability activists and transport users 23

3.1.1 Impact of an inaccessible public transport system 23

3.1.2 Commonalities in Experience of Public Transport 26

3.1.2.1 Advance Notice 26

3.1.2.2 Unstaffed stations 27

3.1.2.3 Free Travel scheme 27

3.1.3 Diverse public transport usage and experiences 28

3.1.3.1 Wheelchair users or passengers with a mobility impairment 28

3.1.3.2 Passengers who are blind or visually impaired 33

3.1.3.3 Passengers who are deaf or hearing impaired 34

3.1.3.4 Passengers with an intellectual disability 35

3.1.3.5 Passengers with autism or autistic spectrum disorder 36

3.1.4 Customer service training and feedback 37

3.1.4.1 Training 37

3.1.4.2 Customer feedback 38

3.1.5 Licensed bus and coach services 39

3.1.6 Planning 40

3.2 Transport operators 42

3.2.1 Dublin Bus 42

3.2.1.1 Provisions for passengers with disabilities 43

3.2.1.2 Dedicated wheelchair spaces 43
3.2.2 Iarnród Éireann 44
3.2.2.1 Provisions for passengers with disabilities 45
3.2.3 Bus Éireann 46
3.2.3.1 Provisions for passengers with disabilities 48
3.2.4 Luas 49
3.2.5 Private operators 50
3.3 Governance 51
3.3.1 National Disability Authority (NDA) 51
3.3.1.1 An integrated approach 53
3.3.1.2 Proposed future developments 54
3.3.2 National Transport Authority (NTA) 54
3.3.2.1 Funding 57
3.3.2.2 Proposed future developments 57
3.4 Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Mr. Shane Ross (T.D.) 58
3.4.1 Boards of public transport operators 59
3.4.2 Pilot scheme – DART services 59
3.4.3 Tendering of PSO services 60
3.4.4 Proposed future developments 61
Appendix 1: Bibliography 63
Appendix 2: Submissions 65
Appendix 3: Committee Membership 80
Appendix 4: Terms of Reference 82

Chairman's Foreword

An inaccessible public transport system negatively impacts on the capacity of people with disabilities to engage and participate in all spheres of Irish society, including economic, educational, civic and social. In undertaking this body of work, the Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport wished to explore the challenges experienced by people with disabilities in accessing the public transport system and identify potential policy solutions for these challenges.

A broad range of stakeholders engaged with the Committee, including representatives from a number of disability organisations (Disability Federation of Ireland, Irish Deaf Society, Irish Wheelchair Association, National Council for the Blind Ireland and Inclusion Ireland), disability activists and transport users. Representatives from transport operators (Dublin Bus, Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann, Transdev and the Coach Tourism and Transport Council of Ireland) also appeared before the Committee on this matter, as did the National Disability Authority and the National Transport Authority. Finally, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Mr. Shane Ross (T.D.), gave evidence before the Committee at the culmination of its hearings on this matter.

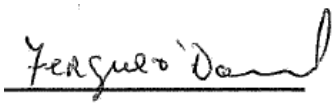
The witnesses who appeared before the Committee clearly and starkly articulated their experiences of disadvantage, exclusion and unequal treatment in the course of engaging with the public transport system in Ireland. In light of Ireland's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities earlier this year, it is all the more disquieting that the use of public transport was described as a "battle".

The recommendations contained in this report pave the way towards a fully accessible public transport system, whereby all citizens of the State have access to this vital and necessary resource on an equal basis. It is time to prioritise the transition to a fully accessible public transport system for all and to put in place the resources necessary to

deliver this as soon as practicably possible. In addition, it is necessary to ensure that accountability is embedded into the core functioning of our public transport system.

To that end, this Committee will meet with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to monitor the implementation status of these recommendations on a periodic basis.

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank all stakeholders who engaged with the Committee, particularly those witnesses who shared their deeply moving personal accounts of the difficulties and challenges encountered in the course of their use of public transport.



Fergus O'Dowd, T.D.
Chairman
Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport

Recommendations

The Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport recommends that Government seeks to achieve the following:

Recommendation 1: **Equal access**

Strive for equal access to all public transport services for people with disabilities (across all operators, physical infrastructure and facilities) as soon as practicably possible.

To achieve this, the Committee calls on the Government to adequately fund and provide a clear policy plan to move towards full accessibility on all public transport, including a breakdown of funding and project timelines.

Recommendation 2: **Planning and decision making**

Ensure that the transport requirements of people with disabilities are a core feature of all public transport planning, funding and development.

Recommendation 3: **Towards a fully accessible public transport service**

In advance of the systemic reform necessary to achieve a fully accessible public transport system, and recognising that achieving this will require resources (including time and monetary investment), it is recommended that the following measures be taken to improve the accessibility of public transport services in the short term:

3.1 Across all modes of transport

3.1.1 Ensure that passenger information is available in accessible formats at all stages of a journey, including providing information in an appropriate format in the event of cancellations, delays and other service interruptions (e.g. visual and audible modes)

3.1.2 Ensure regular monitoring of the accuracy of automated announcements systems

3.1.3 Ensure that emergency procedures and protocols take accessibility into account (e.g. communicate in accessible formats[1] and plan emergency routes that are accessible for all passengers)

[1] Adherence to best practice principles are particularly relevant in the case of emergencies: Belter and Finster (2011) state that alarm signals should always be presented to at least the two-sense principle (and potentially the three-sense principle) with smoke and fire detectors and alarm sirens issuing warnings with acoustic signals in multiple frequency ranges complemented by unequivocal flashing or strobe lights (p.20).

3.2 Bus transport

3.2.1 Ensure that vehicles stop immediately adjacent to kerbs at bus stops (with bus cage access vis-à-vis parked vehicles protected as necessary)

3.2.2 Ensure that all passengers are seated and/or in place in advance of pulling away from bus stops

3.2.3 Clearly announce route number and destination to awaiting passengers at bus stops

3.2.4 Clearly announce bus stops during travel on routes where a fully automated announcement system is not in place or is temporarily out of service

3.2.5 Prioritise and accelerate the roll-out of accessible coach stops in cities, towns and villages across the entire bus network on an inter-agency basis (with coordinating action between the National Transport Authority, local authorities and Bus Éireann*)*

3.2.6 Review policies and procedures with a view to securing access to allocated spaces for wheelchair users on Dublin Bus vehicles

3.3 Rail transport

3.3.1 Ensure clear announcements of all station stops

3.3.2 Ensure that access is available (e.g. ramps, working lifts) in all stations

3.3.3 Ensure that emergency call buttons for wheelchair users are active and live

3.3.4 Consider the unstaffing of stations with particular reference to the implications of this for the accessibility of services for people with disabilities

3.3.4.1 Review capacity to safeguard access, particularly in instances where multiple journeys occur concurrently

3.3.4.2 Discontinue the unstaffing of stations if such a policy proves to result in difficulties for disabled passengers

Recommendation 4: **A whole journey approach**

4.1 Secure mobility for people with disabilities on a 'whole journey' basis[2]

4.2 Establish a centralised hub[3], or a single point of access portal, to provide travel information and journey planning on an intermodal basis, to include:

4.2.1 A dedicated customer service contact point specifically to address queries in relation to accessibility (via phone, text messaging, email and live chat)

4.2.2 Information provided and produced in a range of formats[4] (e.g. mobile apps, accessible leaflets, hardcopy timetables, subtitled audio-visual content and Irish Sign Language videos)

[2] The focus being on 'door-to-door' journeys as opposed to public transport drop off/pick up points (Aarhaug, and Elvebakk, 2015).

[3] An example of such a hub is Scotland's Accessible Transport Hub (http://accessibletravel.scot/).

4.3 Provide accessibility information concerning route linkages between locations as part of travel information provision[5] so as to facilitate passengers to make informed decisions regarding their journey

4.4 Provision for passengers to discretely indicate the requirement for extra time and consideration in their engagement with staff or services (e.g. the JAM card[6])

4.5 Ensure adequate facilities are available at major transport hubs (e.g. provision of Changing Places facilities[7])

Recommendation 5: **Orientation and wayfinding**

Provide (appropriate) orientation[8] and familiarisation programmes[9] for people with disabilities (re services, infrastructure and facilities)

Recommendation 6: **Service interruptions**

6.1 Establish common standards of service for ongoing journeys of people with disabilities in the event of service disruption, curtailment or cancellation

6.2 In the event of curtailed/cancelled train services, replacement bus services should be accessible. If this is not possible:

- Any change to the accessibility status of services should be clearly communicated to all passengers
- Passengers should be provided with appropriate assistance to enable access (e.g. use of ramps)

6.3 If accessible replacement options for disrupted train/bus journeys are not possible due to operational reasons (i.e. a high floor coach or a low floor bus with a non-functioning ramp is utilised), wheelchair accessible taxis to facilitate passengers to complete their journeys should be provided by the operator

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[4] Whilst some passengers might opt for smartphone apps and other technological innovations to plan their journey, others might prefer to speak to customer service personnel in person or to use hardcopy information sources (i.e. leaflets, printed timetables) (Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, 2017:16).

[5] For instance, include details of step-free routes on journey planners in order to provide people with sufficient information to facilitate them to adequately plan journeys in advance of travel (Transport Scotland, 2016:54).

[6] JAM – Just A Minute – is a card created by NOW Group service users in Northern Ireland to indicate the need for more time whilst engaging with services such as public transport (www.nowgroup.org/jamcard). The Now Group provides access to online disability awareness training to organisations that subscribe and sign up to become a 'JAM Card Friendly organisation' (https://jamcard.org/jam-for-business).

[7] Further information available at: https://changingplaces.ie/

[8] For example, passengers with a visual impairment can avail of a service provided by TFL London whereby they are escorted to their train on arrival at the station and are met at their destination station (beside their carriage). This service does not need to be booked in advance (UITP, 2018:59).

[9] For instance, Guide Dogs Queensland has a facility with three replica bus stops to enable people who are blind or visually impaired to become familiar with the navigation of such infrastructure (Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, 2017:29).

Recommendation 7: **Clear feedback and/or complaint pathways**

7.1 Establish a centralised contact hub[10] for customer feedback regarding barriers to accessing public transport across all modes

7.2 Ensure both the existence and role of the contact hub are widely publicised and accessible via a variety of formats

7.3 Ensure that the contact hub is responsive, with clear and transparent protocols for addressing the feedback and/or complaints received

7.4 Collect data to track both the types of complaints received and the nature of the responses and/or actions arising on foot of these complaints

Recommendation 8: **Performance**

8.1 Conduct a baseline audit of the public transport system taking a 'whole journey' approach, with periodic audits thereafter

8.1.1 Develop performance measures to assess accessibility standards across transport modes, operators, infrastructure and facilities

8.1.2 Monitor performance metrics to track the extent to which accessible public transport is being delivered

8.2 Undertake research with people with disabilities concerning their perceptions and experience of using public transport

8.2.1 Periodically survey passengers with disabilities to obtain their views on the accessibility of public transport services

8.2.2 Conduct longitudinal research with specific cohorts of passengers (e.g. wheelchair users, guide dog users) to track mobility patterns over time

8.2.3 Engage in research with people with disabilities not currently using public transport services to ascertain perceptions and/or previous experience of public transport, as well as any potential barriers to public transport usage taking a 'whole journey' approach (whilst also including a modality specific perspective)

Recommendation 9: **Travel costs**

9.1 Review the Free Travel scheme on an interdepartmental basis with a view to ensuring that it adequately takes account of the additional costs associated with travel for people with disabilities

9.1.1 Uncouple the link between receipt of a particular social welfare payments (e.g. Disability Allowance) and eligibility for this scheme

9.1.2 Establish eligibility criteria solely on the basis of the presence of (dis)ability rather than employment or socio-economic status[11]

[10] This could be incorporated into a broader portal or one-stop-shop *(as per Recommendation 4.2)*.

9.1.3 Provide alternative forms of travel support (e.g. taxi tokens[12]) where access to public transport is not possible on account of geographical location given that the value of the scheme is dependent on the availability of transport services

9.2 Accelerate the implementation of the Transport Support Scheme[13]

9.3 Review the level of State support available to people with disabilities regarding travel and travel costs, especially given the removal of the Motorised Transport Grant and other state supports, and ongoing delays with the Transport Support Scheme.

9.3.1 As part of this review, the additional costs often faced by rural dwellers lacking access to public transport services and thus reliant on private taxi providers should be recognised

Recommendation 10: **Unplanned travel**

10.1 Remove barriers to impromptu or spontaneous travel for people with disabilities

10.1.1 Eliminate the requirement for notice time in advance of travel

10.1.2 Ensure that the necessary accessibility infrastructure and/or assistance is available without pre-booking

Recommendation 11: **Technological innovation**

11.1 Actively explore ways in which technology can enhance the accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities

11.1.1 Utilise evolving smartphone and wayfinding technology[14] to better inform people with disabilities about their surrounding environment, as well as any potential service disruptions

11.1.2 Provide real-time service information (including details of service interruptions) via dynamic mediums[15]

Recommendation 12: **Commercial bus and coach services**

12.1 Accelerate the transition to a fully accessible licenced bus and coach service

12.1.1 Set minimum accessibility standards for the issuing of licences to operators

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[11] Disability Allowance is a means-tested payment.

[12] Of note is the fact that the National Platform of Self Advocates (2016) recommended that the Free Travel scheme be extended to include a set number of taxi trips per year (p.5).

[13] This replaces the Motorised Transport Grant, which was closed to new entrants in February 2013.

[14] For example, the *Wayfindr* project in the UK facilitates blind and partially sighted people to digitally navigate urban spaces (via audio navigation) based on data from beacons located in their environment (Department of Transport, 2017:66).

[15] For instance, DPP Prague utilises a remote-control activated navigation system for passengers who are blind, which informs them of the number and direction of incoming vehicles. In addition, it sends the driver a notification signal of the person's intention to board the service (UITP, 2018, 15,17).

12.1.2 Stipulate accessibility standards on a par with those required by public operators as a prerequisite for eligibility for PSO tenders

12.1.3 As part of the tendering process for transport services to be provided on behalf of the State and its agencies (e.g. the HSE), establish minimum accessibility standards for bus/coach services

12.2 Accelerate the transition to a fully accessible commercial bus and coach service

12.2.1 Establish the National Transport Authority, with legislation if required, as the competent authority to ensure that commercial operators provide fully accessible services (as opposed to the minimum accessibility mentioned during the Round Table Discussion on Public Transport Policy in the Mansion House some weeks ago)

12.2.2 It is to be noted that this transition to a fully accessible service on the part of commercial operators is not a matter for the State to financially support

Recommendation 13: **Accessible taxis**

13.1 Accelerate the transition to a fully accessible taxi service

13.1.1 In the interim, ensure that the increased availability of accessible taxis occurs nationwide, in a regionally balanced way

13.1.2 As part of the tendering process for transport services to be provided on behalf of the State and its agencies (e.g. the HSE), establish minimum accessibility standards for taxis

13.2 Establish a reporting mechanism whereby the National Transport Authority reports, on a biannual basis, the proportion of accessible taxis available on a national level, as well disaggregated on a county-by-county basis

13.2.1 Ensure ongoing engagement with relevant stakeholders within the disability community to ensure that the experiences of people with disabilities in accessing taxi services are reflected in this reporting process

13.2.2 Ensure that there is an appropriate mechanism whereby members of the public can directly report difficulties in terms of gaining access to an accessible taxi service

Recommendation 14: **Role of the National Disability Authority**

Examine the role of the National Disability Authority with a view to providing it with the necessary powers to ensure monitoring and enforcement

Recommendation 15: **Accountability**

15.1 Formalise the obligations on transport operators to deliver an accessible service by instituting sanctions in situations of service failure, such as those below:

- An operator fails to provide an accessible service for a pre-booked journey
- An operator fails to provide an adequate service (i.e. stranding passengers on trains with no means to disembark)

15.2 Provide redress for passengers with disabilities in situations where a transport operator fails to provide an adequate service (e.g. failure to provide a pre-booked accessible service or stranding of passengers)

15.3 Establish accountability measures for the National Transport Authority with a view to monitoring its actions in relation to the provision of accessibility measures across the public transport system

15.3.1 Devise KPIs relating to levels of transport usage by people with disabilities

15.3.2 Devise KPIs relating to the accessibility of public transport services

15.3.3 Devise KPIs specifically relating to complaints concerning accessibility (e.g. number of complaints, nature of complaints, responsiveness of operator)

15.4 Publish quarterly figures detailing service provision failures (e.g. number of failures to provide a pre-booked accessible service or number of incidents of stranding)

Recommendation 16: **Implementation of Government policy**

Provide regular updates to the Committee as to the status of actions relating to accessible transport as laid out in current (and future) policy documents (e.g. *National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021* and *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024),* including:

- detailed timelines,
- current implementation status,
- outputs, and
- evaluation of outcomes.

The Committee requests that the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport update the Committee as to the implementation status of each of these recommendations within six months of the publication of this report (and every six months thereafter).

Notes

1. Introduction

1.1 Accessibility

Earlier this year, Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[16]. The Government, despite previous commitments to ratify the Optional Protocol under the Convention, decided not to do so. This unfortunate decision means that the people in Ireland who have disabilities have yet to be granted their full rights under the Convention. The overall purpose of the Convention is to promote and protect the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities.

Accessibility is one of the general principles upon which the Convention is based [Art. 3(f)], with the *European Disability Strategy 2010-2020* identifying accessibility as the first (of eight) main areas of action necessary to implement the Convention at EU level.

> "'Accessibility' is defined as meaning that people with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, transportation, information and communications technologies and systems (ICT), and other facilities and services… Accessibility is a precondition for participation in society and in the economy, but the EU still has a long way to go in achieving this." (European Commission, 2010:4)

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[17] commented:

> "Accessibility is a precondition for persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully and equally in society. Without access to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communication, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, persons with disabilities would not have equal opportunities for participation in their respective societies." (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2014:1)

In the context of this report, *Article 9 – Accessibility* of the Convention has particular relevance in terms of the physical environment (including transport infrastructure and facilities), as well as implications for the provision of services and information. The provisions of Article 9 are set out below:

[16] Ratified by the Dáil on 7 March 2018 and deposited at the UN on 20 March 2018.
[17] This is the body of independent experts which monitors implementation of the Convention by States Parties.

Article 9 – Accessibility

1. To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. These measures, which shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, shall apply to, inter alia:

    a. Buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces;

    b. Information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services.

2. States Parties shall also take appropriate measures:

    a. To develop, promulgate and monitor the implementation of minimum standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services open or provided to the public;

    b. To ensure that private entities that offer facilities and services which are open or provided to the public take into account all aspects of accessibility for persons with disabilities;

    c. To provide training for stakeholders on accessibility issues facing persons with disabilities; easy to read and understand forms;

    d. To provide in buildings and other facilities open to the public signage in Braille and in easy to read and understand forms;

    e. To provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public;

    f. To promote other appropriate forms of assistance and support to persons with disabilities to ensure their access to information;

    g. To promote access for persons with disabilities to new information and communications technologies and systems, including the Internet;

    h. To promote the design, development, production and distribution of accessible information and communications technologies and systems at an early stage, so that these technologies and systems become accessible at minimum cost.

The World Health Organisation (2011:169) observes that, whilst accessibility has a particular relevance for people with disabilities, an accessible environment has positive benefits for society as a whole. For instance, ramps can be of assistance not only to wheelchair users but also to people pushing prams or wheeling luggage. Similarly, route announcements on public transport services can be of assistance to passengers who are unfamiliar with the route (e.g. tourists) as well as blind or visually impaired passengers.

> "Universal design is a way of designing buildings, products and environments, that are inherently accessible not only to people without disabilities, but also to people with disabilities, including older people and many other people, often excluded by traditional design." (Zając, 2016:1272)

1.1.1 A WHOLE JOURNEY APPROACH

The concept of the "travel chain" is particularly relevant to the achievement of a fully accessible public transport service. In this context, the "travel chain" refers to *all* the elements that constitute a journey from starting point to destination rather than the implementation of accessibility in a piecemeal fashion (e.g. retrofitting main transport stations or providing a limited number of accessible vehicles per route) (World Health Organisation, 2011:179). To that end, accessibility is characterised as not being successfully achieved via partial implementation, but, instead "only achieved when people are able to make the whole journey" (Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, 2017:3).

> "Whole-of-journey planning is about creating complete, seamless journeys for public transport users – journeys from A to B and to C to D and back again." (Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, 2017:4)

Core to this concept is the contention that accessibility is central to each element of a journey:

> "Each trip is composed of several elements that can be depicted as the 'mobility chain': It is of utmost importance that the whole mobility chain is accessible! If there is a barrier in one of the elements, then the whole mobility chain does not work." (FGM-AMOR, 2013:6)

According to Aarhaug, and Elvebakk (2015), ensuring predicable and dependable accessibility on a 'door-to-door basis'[18] is an essential element of securing mobility for people with disabilities. To that end:

> "Whole-of-journey accessibility requires that accessible provision is consistent and reliable. It only takes one 'stranding' or one barrier along the journey for a person to lose confidence with the transport system and to disable further participation." (Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, 2017:3)

The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development in Australia disaggregated the whole journey into the following constituent elements:

i. *Pre-journey planning:* decision making about a planned journey on the basis of available information[19]

[18] As opposed to simply accessible ingress and egress points of access to public transport services.

[19] For instance, *The Rocks Accessibility Map* (Sydney) (www.therocks.com/media/141657/c4f853b8-d9d7-c228-b1d9697fdc0d8c6d.pdf) provides information about accessibility by detailing accessible routes through

ii. *Journey start and end:* journey points originating outside the public transport system (e.g. real time information regarding upcoming services in a variety of formats[20])
iii. *Public transport stop/station:* dedicated locations to access public transport services
iv. *Public transport service:* the experience 'on board' the service
v. *Interchange:* transfers between services (including intermodal)
vi. *Return journey planning:* decision making about the journey back to the point of origin
vii. *Disruption:* interruption to the journey (including service disruptions)
viii. *Supporting infrastructure:* infrastructure and facilities (e.g. wayfinding, seating)

(Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development in Australia, 2017:14)

In a similar vein, the ISEMOA[21] project charted the door to door 'mobility chain'[22] to evaluate the accessibility of journeys across all phases, from pre- to post- travel.

In order to achieve accessibility on a whole journey or travel chain perspective, and thus ensure that there are no missing links (i.e. segments of inaccessibility in the chain), Wennberg and Hyllenius (2011) assert that accessibility needs to be addressed at the macro, meso and mirco level. Of particular relevance to this report are the latter two:

- Meso level accessibility concerns transport services (e.g. information provision, and the availability, frequency and cost of routes), and
- Micro level accessibility focuses on physical barriers on pavements (e.g. high kerbs, uneven surfaces, slopes) and in public transport stations/stops and vehicles (Wennberg and Hyllenius, 2011:8-9:8-9).

However, the World Health Organisation (2011) characterises the achievement of fully accessible public transport systems (including the surrounding physical environment) by establishing continuity of access throughout the entire travel chain as a long-term goal, with the progressive realisation of this "the most practical short-term response" (p.179,183).

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the area, as well as accessible paths, lifts and bathrooms (Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, 2017:18).

[20] Potential formats include signs, audio announcements and 'beacon' technology to communicate with smartphone devices.

[21] ISEMOA was a 3-year project which ran until May 2013. As part of this project, 20 organisations from 16 European countries collaborated to support efforts by local and regional authorities to improve accessibility.

[22] Diagram available at: www.isemoa.eu/pics/mobility_chain/MobilityChain_Graph_EN_1024px.jpg

1.2 National context

1.2.1 Demographic characteristics

In Census 2016[23], a total of 643,131 people stated they had a disability[24], accounting for 13.5 per cent of the population, up from 13 per cent of the population in Census 2011. Turning to socio-economic status, Census 2016 found that the unemployment rate amongst people with disabilities was 26.3 per cent, more than double the rate for the population as a whole (12.9 per cent). Ireland's employment rate for people with disabilities has been identified as low, with particularly low rates of employment for people with physical disabilities, those with intellectual disabilities and those with mental health difficulties (Department of Justice and Equality, 2015:24).

Global trends in ageing populations and the higher risk of disability amongst older people mean that further increases in the population affected by disability are likely. Moreover, the Department of Health has highlighted that the rate of ageing in Ireland is "considerably higher" than average for EU Member States (Department of Health, 2017:4)

1.2.2 Recent policy developments

'Transport and accessible places' was identified as one of the themes for inclusion as part of the *National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021*, with a range of actions identified including (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017):

No.	Action	Responsible body	Timeframe
100	We will improve the accessibility and availability of public transport, especially inter-city buses and rural transport and accessibility of train and bus stations. We will focus on linking up the different forms of transport and make connections accessible as well as transport information, including audible announcements. We will prioritise the maintenance, management and monitoring of systems and services which make transport accessible.	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport National Transport Authority Local authorities	Ongoing
103	We will monitor user experience of public transport and make recommendations as appropriate based on the findings.	National Disability Authority	Q4 2017
109	We will ensure further roll-out of accessible inter-city coaches and accessible regional / rural coach and bus stops.	Bus Éireann Local authorities National Transport Authority	Ongoing

[23] www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp9hdc/p8hdc/p9d/
[24] This compares to a figure of 595,335 in Census 2011.

110	We will review operational issues in relation to the need for advance notice of accessibility requirements for train travel with a view to removing barriers for service users with disabilities.	Iarnród Éireann Bus Éireann (coach travel)	Q4 2017
111	We will commit to the implementation of consistent and reliable on-board audio and visual announcements on all public transport vehicles including buses, coaches DART, trains and trams and to monitoring and maintaining this aspect of accessibility.	Córas Iompair Éireann Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport National Transport Authority Public transport operators	Ongoing

(Department of Justice and Equality, 2017:43,44,45)

Turning to the *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024,* which identified transport as a facilitator of the employment activity of people with disabilities, Strategic Priority 2 concerned the provision of supports and bridges into work (Department of Justice and Equality, 2015:16).

To that end, the Strategy highlighted the development of accessible transport as a key support in the securing of employment by people with disabilities. As part of this Priority, a number of specific actions were identified in relation to the continuing development of accessible transport, including:

No.	Action	Responsible body	Timeframe
2.12	Develop the passenger assistance concept further for assisting people with a disability to plan their public transport journeys.	National Transport Authority	Q.2 2015
2.13	Examine the introduction of conditions on licensed commercial operators of public transport services to provide wheelchair accessible vehicles.	National Transport Authority	Q.1 2015
2.17	Provide a subsidy to fund the provision of public transport services throughout the state.	National Transport Authority	Continuous
2.18	Invest in bus fleet to increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles in the provision of public transport services.	National Transport Authority	Continuous improvement on other fleet[25]

[25] The *Strategy* notes that Dublin Bus is 100% accessible and Bus Éireann is 100% accessible in regional cities.

2.19	Invest in supporting infrastructure to increase their level of accessibility i.e. bus stops, bus and rail stations, bus ramps.	National Transport Authority	Continuous
2.20	Develop the information tools that are currently available to ensure that they include the information that a person with a disability needs to know in order to take a public transport journey e.g. the National Journey Planner on www.transportforireland.ie is being developed to have an option to plan a journey with no steps.	National Transport Authority	Q.1 2015 and continuous improvement
2.21	Implement on-board announcements of next stops on all public transport to assist those with a visual impairment.	National Transport Authority	Q.4 2015

(Department of Justice and Equality, 2015:54-55)

1.2.2.1 The link between transport and employment

The Make Work Pay Interdepartmental Group[26] (2017) noted that the potential loss of transport supports immediately upon entering employment constituted a barrier to taking up employment. Moreover, the Group noted that the linking of travel support for people with disabilities to the receipt a disability-related welfare payment was "somewhat out of line with international experience" (Make Work Pay Interdepartmental Group, 2017:69). To that end, the Group recommended a review of travel supports for people with disabilities with a view to enhancing the options available in relation to transport to employment for people with disabilities (Make Work Pay Interdepartmental Group, 2017:20).

On publication of the Make Work Pay Report, the then Minister for Social Protection, Leo Varadkar, T.D., announced the immediate introduction of a number of measures to address the barriers identified in the Report, including a 5 year extension to Free Travel entitlement for people moving from a long-term disability payment into employment[27].

1.2.2.2 Urban/rural divide

The value of travel supports for people with disabilities is unevenly distributed on the basis of geographical location, with a lack of public transport services available in some rural areas. Research suggests that, whilst Free Travel is a valuable support for people in urban areas as there is a high degree of usage of public transport by people with disabilities, public

[26] This group was established by the Department of Social Protection on foot of a key strategic priority within the *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024* aimed at ensuring that "work pays" for people with disabilities. This Interdepartmental Expert Group were charged with examining the complex interactions between the social welfare system, the costs of work associated with disability and the net income gains in employment.

[27] https://www.welfare.ie/en/pressoffice/Pages/pr060417.aspx

transport options are more limited in rural areas. Thus, the Free Travel scheme “may have limited practical value” for those living in areas with limited or no public transport services (Make Work Pay Interdepartmental Group, 2017:83,90).

2. Engagement Process

2.1 Meetings

The Committee held four days of hearings during the period from December 2017 – February 2018 to engage with relevant stakeholders to discuss the accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities. The Committee met with a diverse range of stakeholders, including disability activists, representative bodies of/for people with disabilities, transport operators, officials from the National Disability Authority and the National Transport Authority. The series of meetings culminated with the Committee taking evidence from Mr. Shane Ross, T.D., Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. The Committee held an additional meeting on this matter in June 2018.

Table 1 below identifies the witnesses who appeared before the Committee. This appearance in front of the Committee took the form of an opening statement, followed by a question and answer session. The transcript of each meeting can be found on the Oireachtas website at: www.oireachtas.ie/en/committees/32/transport-tourism-and-sport/.

Organisation/Affiliation	Representative(s)	Links
Meeting of 13 December 2017		
Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI)	Senator John Dolan, CEO	Transcript
Irish Deaf Society (IDS)	Mr Eddie Redmond, CEO	
Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA)	Ms Joan Carthy, Head of Advocacy	
National Council for the Blind Ireland (NCBI)	Mr Chris White, CEO	
Inclusion Ireland	Ms Sarah Lennon Ms Sandra McCullagh	
Disability Activist	Dr Margaret Kennedy	
Meeting of 17 January 2018		
Dublin Bus	Mr Ray Coyne, CEO	Transcript
Iarnród Éireann	Mr Jim Meade, Operations Director	
Bus Éireann	Mr Ray Hernan, acting CEO	
Transdev	Mr Seamus Egan, Performance Director	
Coach Tourism and Transport Council of Ireland	Mr Kevin Traynor	
Meeting of 31 January 2018		
National Transport Authority (NTA)	Ms Anne Graham, CEO Mr Hugh Creegan, Deputy CEO	Transcript
National Disability Authority (NDA)	Ms Siobhan Barron, Director	
Meeting of 7 February 2018		
Public transport user	Ms Alannah Murray	Transcript
Public transport user	Mr Padraic Moran	
Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	Mr Shane Ross, T.D., Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport	

Meeting of 13 June 2018		
Now Group	Ms Diane Hill, Director of Business Development	Transcript
National Bus and Rail Union	Mr Dermot O'Leary, General Secretary	
Disability Activist	Mr Ciarán M. Delaney	

Table 1 Details of witnesses who appeared before the Committee during the series of hearings

2.2 Submissions

Following its public hearings on this matter, the Committee invited written submissions from interested parties through its webpage[28]. The details relating to the submission received, as well as a number of additional submissions received, can be found in Table 2 below.

Name	Link
Mr Tom Newton Ms Caitriona McClean	Submissions available in Appendix 3
Bus Éireann	
Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	

Table 2 Details of written submission received by the Committee

[28] www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/oireachtasbusiness/committees_list/transporttourismandsport/

3. Key Points

In this section of the report, the pertinent themes that arose during the Committee's engagements with stakeholders will be presented.

3.1 Disability organisations, disability activists and transport users

Representatives from a number of disability organisations (Disability Federation of Ireland, Irish Deaf Society, Irish Wheelchair Association, National Council for the Blind Ireland and Inclusion Ireland), disability activists and transport users appeared before the Committee at its first hearing in relation to the accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities.

3.1.1 Impact of an inaccessible public transport system

A prevalent theme which emerged from contributors from the disability sphere concerned the nature of the inaccessible public transport system experienced by people with disabilities, and the resultant frustration and lack of confidence in the service.

> "When we turn on the light in the morning it works, as does the kettle. Similarly, when we go to the bus stop or train station, we expect them to arrive on time and to be able to bring us to our destinations … think for a couple of seconds about the frustration that would build up if a person went to the bus stop or the train station to get to his or her place of work and, as he or she neared it, that person did not know whether he or she was going to be able to get on the train or bus … [People with disabilities] are never in a position to feel confident that the public service will be there." (Senator John Dolan, 13 December 2017)

> "..people with physical disabilities have no faith in public transport due to repeated bad experiences. This unreliable, disjointed service would not be accepted or tolerated by any other group in society." (Ms Joan Carthy, 13 December 2017)

> "Lifts in particular can be poorly maintained, leaving it in the lap of the gods as to whether they will be even available." (Ms Sarah Lennon, 13 December 2017)

> "My life is complicated enough without having to chew anxiously on my fingernails, wondering whether I will be able to make my pre-booked journey." (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)

The inaccessibility of what is classed as a *public* transport system was noted by witnesses:

> "Public transport is what it is called and it needs to be for all of the public, including those who are part of this important demographic group." (Senator John Dolan, 13 December 2017)

> "Concrete action is urgently needed on transport provision for disabled people of Ireland. So far, we are in an apartheid of travel discrimination, which must change. What is broken needs fixing and what is inaccessible needs to be made accessible … This is our public transport too and we deserve, as full citizens of Ireland, simply to be able to get to the station or bus stop, get on, get off and travel freely, safely and without fear and anxiety." (Dr Margaret Kennedy, 13 December 2017)

Also highlighted was the unequal access to transport services for people in rural areas as compared to those in more urban areas:

> "Everything regarding inclusivity and integration for people with disabilities on public transport has been Dublin-centric. Every vehicle in the Dublin Bus fleet has both audio and visual next-stop announcements and is wheelchair accessible. Bus Éireann is the polar opposite ... The visual assistive technology scenario for city services throughout the State is sporadic. The next-stop announcement is virtually non-existent." (Mr Ciarán Delaney, 13 June 2018)

An inaccessible public transport system was characterised as having far reaching consequences for the capacity of people with disabilities to fully engage with society on the same level as people without disabilities, with associated negative impacts on participation in the economic, social and civic domains of society.

> "It is clear that a high quality, reliable and accessible public transport system is a critical component of a life in the community." (Ms Sandra McCullagh, 13 December 2017)

> "There are still considerable barriers within our public spaces and built environments, and these are coupled with barriers created by inaccessible public transport. Those barriers hugely limit the rights and choices of people with sight loss, leaving them unable to fully participate in the workforce, education, training and, fundamentally, in Irish society." (Mr Chris White, 13 December 2017)

The instrumental role that public transport plays in ensuring connectivity was also highlighted, as was the isolating impact of inaccessible public transport services:

> "[Public transport] is a vital connector of people to services and opportunities. A person does not go on a journey just to go to the end and then turn back. He or she goes on the journey to get someplace and to engage in some way or other … Without accessible public transport, the person with a disability is being left outside and left behind." (Senator John Dolan, 13 December 2017)

> "Transport is key to people with physical disabilities realising their independence. When it comes to holding down a job, socialising or going on holidays, just getting there can often be the greatest challenge to overcome … For how many more years will people with disabilities have to wait before they can access a bus and can travel like everyone else, to enter the workforce or education or be able to travel for social reasons?" (Ms Joan Carthy, 13 December 2017)

> "One of the main problems was transport links. They play a big part in helping people find employment, and also in promoting well-being in everything they do." (Ms Diane Hill, 13 June 2018)

The result of inaccessible public transport is a system which was characterised as depriving people with disabilities of their right to free movement:

> "People with disabilities do not have their basic right to free movement." (Senator John Dolan, 13 December 2017)

This rights-based approach, and the link between inaccessible public transport and the denial of equality of access for people with disabilities, was echoed by other witnesses:

> "Wheels are my focus. Freedom is my focus. Equality of participation in all areas of society … The causes of our transport difficulties are not our disabilities but, rather, issues ranging from the failings of county councils and bus design to broken ramps … It is not our bodily conditions or diseases that make us disabled but, rather, the structures in place. Our disability is politically constructed. The real cause is disability discrimination and an unwillingness to sort out access issues or regard us as equal passengers." (Dr Margaret Kennedy, 13 December 2017)

> "I should be free to hop on a bus and explore our country, a country whose Constitution was built on the idea of freedom and equality. When did we stray so far from the visions of our forefathers? ... I should not have to sit here and make my plea to be able to get on a bus. Revolutions have started on buses before and they will do so again unless the system is fixed." (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)

> "In terms of transport, we should be fully independent and autonomous to get on a bus or train without having to give four or 24 hours' notice. The current requirements are unfair. If any of the able-bodied population had to do that, people would not stand for it because it is against human rights." (Mr Padraic Moran, 7 February 2018)

For both Dr. Kennedy and Ms. Murray, the travel difficulties experienced by people with disability are the result of discriminatory attitudes and practices:

> "The fear and anxiety of travel cannot be underestimated. Will they get me on? Will they get me off? Will I end up in some godforsaken place? It happens … Why? Is the answer because we are disabled? No, it is because we are not considered. It is not about equality but, rather, discrimination and we must label it as such ... Why can we not be part of the travelling passenger community and go our own way with freedom and access? We cannot because of discrimination. Our bodies are not accepted and we are marked as being different and, being different, cannot expect equality of travel." (Dr Margaret Kennedy, 13 December 2017)

> "There must be no more being left on the side of the road, no more having to call in favours just to get home, no more missed opportunities, no more feeling like a burden

for wanting to live independently in society and no more discrimination against people with disabilities … Enough is enough." (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)

3.1.2 Commonalities in Experience of Public Transport

A number of common barriers to public transport were described by witnesses.

3.1.2.1 Advance Notice

A pervasive theme emerged during hearings with disability organisations, disability activists and transport users – namely the widespread criticism of the requirement for people with disabilities to provide notice in advance of travel.

> "People with disabilities have to give 24 hours notice of travel, thus preventing them from making travel plans spontaneously or in emergencies … The notice time for the DART has been reduced from 24 hours to four for people with disabilities who are supposed to be grateful for this change. However, it does not make the experience any different for them." (Ms Joan Carthy, 13 December 2017)

> "Requiring 24 hours' notice of travel is an apartheid rule. It is a separation from the rules for non-disabled people … Non-disabled people can arrive, hop on and hop off any time they want, but we are marked by our disability … The Minister, Deputy Shane Ross has jubilantly declared that we will now only have to give four hours' notice under a pilot scheme, as if that means equality. It does not … To have to give four hours' notice means that I have no choice, cannot change my travel plans or go somewhere on the spur of the moment and that I am not free. ... We do not want to have to give any notice, as non-disabled people do not. I want to arrive, get on, get off and enjoy my freedom. To have to plan every single journey is a nightmare. It is discrimination." (Dr Margaret Kennedy, 13 December 2017)

> "[Advance notice] should not exist. Rosa Parks in the United States was allowed on the bus, although she had to sit at the back. We do not get on the bus much of the time. What happened there was wrong and so is this." (Senator John Dolan, 13 December 2017).

> "I can guarantee that if Irish Rail said tomorrow or RTÉ 'Six One News' announced that every citizen in this country had to give four hours notice to use transport, it would not happen because it would be sorted out … A minority group is being discommoded and it is almost like we are not respected as humans.." (Mr Padraic Moran, 7 February 2018)

> "Public transport should not be a human rights issue, but in its current form it is … How many more people are going to give up and be forced to become isolated, wards of a system that is exclusionary and ultimately dangerous? I reject the idea that I should have to book my journey. I reject being in any way different from the committee members or their colleagues. They do not have to book transport in advance so why should I?" (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)

Ms. Murray further described the impact of this requirement to provide advance notice on her lived experience:

> "First and foremost, I am an award-winning filmmaker … I am a TEDx speaker and I am fluent in Irish. I am about to graduate with a BA honours degree in film and television production … Despite these impressive attributes, I cannot board a bus of my own free will. I am forced give details about where I will be, what time I will be there and what time I intend returning … I am 21 years old. At that age I should be allowed to be spontaneous." (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)

3.1.2.2 Unstaffed stations

A second issue which arose concerned the unstaffing of stations and the impact that this would have on passengers, including passengers with disabilities. For instance, the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) described such a mode of service provision as problematic because "commuters with disabilities are faced with the uncertainty that ramps or space will be available when they arrive at a station" (Ms Joan Carthy, 13 December 2017). According to the NCBI, unstaffed stations lead to situations where "people with impaired vision are faced with uncertainty as to the availability of a member of staff to offer assistance on and off the train" (Mr Chris White, 13 December 2017). Similarly, Inclusion Ireland identified unstaffed stations as problematic:

> "Unstaffed stations are a significant barrier to people with intellectual disabilities travelling independently. Travelling independently is a massive issue for people with intellectual disabilities in terms of their dignity and inclusion in their community. Often, in our rush towards technological solutions, we simply forget what human support is required for people … We can train people to use ticket machines, but we cannot necessarily train them in what to do if the ticket machines are not working. Having humans available to provide support is very important for people.." (Ms Sarah Lennon, 13 December 2017)

For Dr. Kennedy too, unstaffed stations were a matter of concern:

> "I do think one of the prime issues is unmanned stations … There is no doubt that people can become ill very quickly in the cold. If they are left in an unmanned station, they will need help. One might have diabetic episode or a heart attack and may need help. The whole idea of unmanned stations is really contrary to safety and equality." (Dr Margaret Kennedy, 13 December 2017)

3.1.2.3 Free Travel scheme

The extra costs associated with travel for people with disabilities were also highlighted by witnesses. Concerns were raised in relation to the Free Travel scheme and the limits associated with this, particularly its link to the receipt of a social welfare payment (e.g. Disability Allowance).

> "Due to the fact that I am in full-time employment, I am no longer entitled to the travel pass because, according to the system, I was cured when I got a job … my travel pass was taken back by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Welfare because it is means-tested and linked to the disability allowance and, because I am now over the means test, the system effectively says I have been cured because I got a job, which is ironic." (Mr Padraic Moran, 7 February 2018)

The matter of a charge levied on users of the Free Travel scheme to prebook a seat was also raised:

> "Irish Rail insists that people with free travel passes who wish to reserve a seat pay €5 per journey each way even though the Oireachtas is underwriting the cost of the journey by providing a free transport pass. If someone without a free travel pass wants to book a seat, he or she faces no extra cost. That is a blatant infringement not only of fair play but also of the regulations we have through the EU." (Senator John Dolan, 13 December 2017)

> "Compliance with EU regulation is an issue. It provides that people with a disability should be allowed to reserve their seats free of charge. It is stated categorically that there is to be no extra charge." (Mr Ciarán Delaney, 13 June 2018)

For Mr. O'Leary, General Secretary of the NBRU, the characterisation of the Free Travel Scheme as providing recipients with a "free pass" is problematic:

> "We should have long ago changed the emphasis and perhaps the title of such travel into something which supports the entitlement of our most vulnerable. Perhaps the committee might lend its support to changing it to something more appropriate and potentially less stigmatising such as the social mobility card." (Mr Dermot O'Leary, 13 June 2018)

3.1.3 DIVERSE PUBLIC TRANSPORT USAGE AND EXPERIENCES

As people with disabilities are not a homogenous group, diverse public transport usage and experiences were evident amongst the witnesses. As a corollary, the accessibility barriers experienced also differed at times.

> "Everybody experiences issues in different ways, but the discrimination is very clear for everyone." (Mr Eddie Redmond, 13 December 2017)

To that end, the importance of awareness of a broad range of disabilities, including hidden, sensory, and those with sensitivities to noise/intense environment was highlighted (Senator John Dolan, 13 December 2017).

3.1.3.1 Wheelchair users or passengers with a mobility impairment

A number of specific issues were highlighted in relation to wheelchair users or passengers with a mobility impairment.

- The IWA noted that just 5% of taxis nationwide are wheelchair accessible. Whilst acknowledging that grants are available to increase the wider availability of wheelchair accessible taxis, the IWA asserted that this scheme is not sufficient to incentivise taxi drivers at the scale necessary to ensure an accessible taxi service.

  IWA recommendation: That considerable additional weighting in the tendering process for large State contracts (e.g. HSE) should be given to taxi operators with accessible vehicles.

- The IWA observed that whilst the Dublin Bus fleet is fully wheelchair accessible, there are difficulties relating to access to the allocated wheelchair spaces as a consequence of these being inaccessible at times due to items such as buggies and bags being present in the space. This was reiterated by other witnesses, with Ms. Murray describing a recent experience in which she was unable to gain access to the vehicle to travel due to the blocking of the allocated wheelchair space by other passengers (non-wheelchair users):

  > "..it was snowing and raining last week and I was waiting for a [Dublin] bus. The bus drivers did their best and asked people to fold up their buggies but people refused to do so. I sat with blue hands, shivering, because I could not get on the bus because people would not fold up their buggies as not all buses have a designated spot for buggies. I was left in the freezing cold and do not know how I did not get pneumonia. I sat at the bus stop and decided I would go for a coffee, cry and try again. That is the system. One sits, cries, gathers oneself and tries again." (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)

  IWA recommendation: That legislation is required to empower Dublin Bus drivers to ask persons to vacate wheelchair spaces and to impose a penalty on those refuse.

- The IWA highlighted the difficulties associated with Bus Éireann services on account of a lack of accessible coach stop infrastructure.

  IWA recommendation: That funding should be made available to ensure a nationwide network of accessible coach stops by 2020.

- The IWA asserted that the stopping of the motorised transport and mobility allowance for new applicants in 2013 has had a "major knock-on effect in many aspects of people's lives, including their health" (Ms Joan Carthy, 13 December 2017).

  IWA recommendation: That the motorised transport grant and mobility allowance be reinstated.

To illustrate the accessibility concerns or barriers that might arise for a wheelchair user intending to travel of a DART service, the IWA outlined the following scenario:

> "Imagine getting up in the morning and deciding to go to town to do some shopping or visit a friend, or, worse, a sick relative. People with disabilities first have to arrange a time to meet, always keeping in mind that they need to give four hours' notice. They then need to find their guide to travelling on the DART for people with disabilities, ring the number provided and state the station from which they will start

their journey and the station to which they will return. They must go to the station hoping a member of staff who is being deployed from another station will be there in time to assist with the ramp and that no one else with a disability will need assistance at another station at the same time. They must live in hope that when they reach their destination, there will be a staff member there to assist them to exit the DART. Now add to this scenario that, owing to their disability, they have a speech impediment and that their hand function is so poor that using a phone does not work for them. Perhaps someone is a tourist with a disability and does not have a guide or perhaps it is someone who works and has to go through this every day. That is the reality for people with disabilities." (Ms Joan Carthy, 13 December 2017)

Dr. Kennedy elucidated her rights-based approach to public transport accessibility for people with disabilities with a range of specific experiences, including the example below:

> "Frank travels from Donegal to Dublin. He says he is lifted bodily, under his arms and legs, out of his wheelchair and up the bus steps. He says it is humiliating, degrading and dangerous. Sometimes the bus staff do not want to help him, so the other passengers do it. This should not be happening in 21st century Ireland."

Ms. Murray gave an account of her early experience of public transport, prior to understanding the requirements placed on her to pre-book her travel:

> "There was an incident years ago that will never leave me … having to crawl on my hands and knees onto a coach because I did not know at the time that one had to pre-book. I just assumed I was an equal citizen, and I have learned from that. I have learned that is a mistake and that I am not an equal citizen ... I have not had to do that since, but I have had to be carried onto coaches. I have had great experiences and things are improving but not enough." (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)

A number of witnesses highlighted specific issues in relation to the usage of public transport:

- It was asserted that wheelchair level emergency call buttons were disabled on services such as the DART to counteract children activating them in non-emergency situations:

> **"..**broken or switched off emergency call buttons on the DART are an almost permanent feature because children press them.." (Dr Margaret Kennedy, 13 December 2017)

> "Emergency buttons at wheelchair level on the DART are never armed and are mere decoration … [because] a child might hit them … I do not understand why a driver cannot get out, arm it and then disarm it with his carriage key … If one does not have a carriage key one has to try to do what I did, namely, stand up, break the glass and hit the one that located very high up … When they are armed they light up green and when there is no light it means they are disarmed … It will not communicate with anyone unless I physically manage to stand up and hit it or ask a passenger to keep the door open until the driver remembers that I am sitting there." (Mr Padraic Moran, 7 February 2018)

- Witnesses described situations where staff were not present to facilitate passengers with disabilities to exit the train at their destination:

> "Disabled people have to endure … [station staff forgetting to] get them off the train. That happened to me once … It was late, around 9 p.m., and I was exhausted. My neuro-muscular degenerative disease does not cope well with tiredness. I was flopping all over the place and needed my bed, but the staff forgot about me. The train arrived at Heuston Station and everyone got off but me. I was left in darkness at the end of a very long platform with not a soul in sight and became very scared. About 20 minutes or half an hour later a single cleaner arrived and I was rescued." (Dr. Margaret Kennedy, 13 December 2017)

> "Last August, I was going home … after work … and it was communicated to Bray that I was on the DART. I got to Bray but there was nobody there to assist me to disembark. I realised I was stuck ... I had to wedge my chair against the wall and try to stand up and break a little piece of plastic in order to push the button that is high up on the wall. The alarm went off. When I ended up in Greystones, the driver advised me that the alarm had gone off but he thought it was an error and never checked … Anything could have been happening. The driver did not bother checking what had happened." (Mr Padraic Moran, 7 February 2018)

> "On 17 December last, I was on my way home on a Sunday evening … I telephoned Pearse station and a staff member from Sandymount was sent up to put me on the train. He communicated to Bray. I got to Bray and nobody was there to assist me. I could not press the higher emergency button because I could not break the piece of plastic, so off I went to Greystones … The DART had to get out of the way because the Rosslare train was approaching, so the doors began to close. I had to stick my legs out the doors to keep them open. It took the driver five minutes to come down to check why the doors were not closing, as a result of which I ended up with a swollen ankle. If I had not stuck my legs out the doors, I would have ended up on a siding because the DART had to be moved out of the way to allow the Rosslare train past. Having got off the DART, I then had to hope and pray that the Rosslare train driver would get out and put me on his train as not all Irish Rail drivers are insured to put down ramps and are not insured to leave their cabs because if there is an incident, they are in trouble." (Mr Padraic Moran, 7 February 2018)

Dr. Kennedy asserted that in situations where a passenger is stranded or unable to complete their journey, transport operators should face sanctions:

> "If a disabled passenger is left stranded, there must be an immediate sanction for the company and an immediate compensatory scheme for the disabled person. Monetary sanctions always make companies work better. They should be fined. There has to be accountability for leaving disabled people sitting on freezing platforms for two, three or four hours and only monetary sanctions will ensure that." (Dr Margaret Kennedy, 13 December 2017)

Ms. Murray expressed similar sentiments, noting that sanctions of this nature would ensure not only accountability on the part of transport operators but might also serve as a mechanism to advance the public transport service offerings for people with disabilities:

> "A system of fines must be put in place. People must be answerable for the system … Transport providers have a duty to the people of this country … There must be consequences because otherwise there will be no incentive for people to change. It is well and good for transport providers to say they will change but they will not do so out of the goodness of their hearts." (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)

- Witnesses described failures of the advance notification system – incidents where they were not able to access a service, notwithstanding the fact that they had provided advance notice of their intention to travel – and the impact of this failure on their economic, employment, educational, social and emotional lives:

> "Time and again, I and others like me are let down by this deeply flawed and unrealistic system. Even when jumping through all these transportation hoops, the system continues to let me down. Last year alone, I would say I was let down by our transport system over 20 times. I have missed out on business meetings that could have secured a job for me. I have had to miss appointments because I have showed up for my pre-booked bus only to be told that there has been a mis-communication and I will be unable to travel as the bus has not been properly adapted to allow me onto it … I have missed out on valuable opportunities to spend time with my friends, leaving me isolated from them and ultimately cutting me off from the wider world. I cannot begin to describe the emotions that go through one's body when one is seated at a crowded bus stop and a driver has to step out to say that one cannot travel simply because one has a disability … One is seated there and sees the crowds of people whispering to each other. Sympathetic looks are exchanged. Then the bus pulls away and one is left there alone, feeling like one is nothing. Then there is the email one has to send to let one's prospective business partner, employer, friend or whoever know that one will be unable to attend the pre-arranged meeting. Who is going to salvage my reputation when I am labelled 'unreliable', when I am unable to get a job and am forced to feed into the stereotype that people with disabilities do not work or when I am cut off from the rest of society because the thought of getting a bus is too much for me and I decide I am better off staying home? I am too young to feel this jaded by a system that can be fixed. We are fighting, but we cannot do it alone." (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)

- Witnesses described safety concerns arising out of incidents where service interruptions or cancellation resulted in disruption to onward journeys:

> "One night I sat in Busáras and I was told I would not be travelling but that the company would try to accommodate me on the next bus. The next bus came and it could not accommodate me and the same happened with the next one that came. It was getting dark and I was genuinely concerned I would not make it home … I was terrified that I would end up stranded or abandoned with no way home. That is the reality of the system." (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)

However, ensuring that onward travel journeys could be completed in the event of such disruption through the provision of a wheelchair accessible taxi by the transport operator was noted as being problematic due to the limited availability of such vehicles:

> "There would still have to be an overhaul in the taxi system. Taxis are just as bad. I can never get an accessible taxi. I go to college in Dundalk and there is one accessible taxi for the entire town. One cannot get it after 6 p.m. If I wish to go out and socialise with my friends or to be a regular 21 year old student who goes out and makes horrendous life decisions, I cannot be equal with my peers because that provision is not in place for me." (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)

- Difficulties relating to the use of accessibility equipment were noted (e.g. incorrect usage of clamps by untrained operators).

- Issues concerning the accessibility of trams during peak hours were highlighted:

> "A simple challenge for any member of the committee or the NTA is to try to board the Luas at peak times in a wheelchair. One has no chance." (Mr. Ciarán Delaney, 13 June 2018)

- Difficulties relating to the use of taxi services by passengers with assistance dogs were also described:

> "Last weekend our good friend, Padraic Moran, had an issue with a taxi driver who did not want to carry Gail, his assistance dog … When I rang the NTA taxi consumer line, I was informed that there is no statutory obligation on a taxi driver to take an assistance dog. A driver can refuse access or could fine the passenger by imposing a soil charge." (Mr Ciarán Delaney, 13 June 2018)

- Issues relating to the accessibility of the school transport fleet were noted:

> "..a lot of the school transport fleet is cascading down from public service obligation, PSO, vehicles and the old vehicles do not have wheelchair lifts … It is going to take probably 20 years before one has any hope of a wheelchair accessible bus." (Mr Ciarán Delaney, 13 June 2018)

3.1.3.2 Passengers who are blind or visually impaired

A number of specific issues were highlighted in relation to passengers who are blind or visually impaired.

- The NCBI highlighted the lack of reliable audible announcements on buses, trains and trams, which it asserted are "essential to effective public transport for people who or blind or sight impaired and essential for independent and safe travel" (Mr Chris White, 13 December 2017)

NCBI recommendation: That all public transport should operate audible announcements both on services and at stations to ensure that people who are blind or visually impaired have access to basic information (e.g. destination of services and location of next stop/station) and that audible announcements should be prioritised as part of the licensing process to private transport operators. (Mr Chris White, 13 December 2017)

- The NCBI noted the importance of the full accessibility of information and resources on websites and apps (including travel information, ticket booking and timetables) and the necessity of designing such infrastructure in an accessible fashion.

  NCBI recommendation: That public transport operators prepare for the full implementation of the Web Accessibility Directive (European Union).

To illustrate the accessibility concerns or barriers that might arise for passengers who are blind or visually impaired, the NCBI outlined the following scenario:

> "Fundamentally, even with well-developed mobility skills … it is sometimes very difficult for a person to engage with public transport. The challenges start with the booking or buying of tickets and finding information online or via an app and at the station. They continue as the person makes his or her way around the station or Luas platform, awaiting the correct train, bus or Luas and tries to figure out which direction he or she will travel. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of safe spaces when using public transport.." (Mr Chris White, 13 December 2017)

In addition, attention was drawn to specific accessibility difficulties in relation to the Iarnród Éireann fleet:

> "There are issues regarding the audio announcements not working in the toilets for people who are visually impaired. I invite Irish Rail management to inspect the high-visibility strips that are supposed to delineate the door frame from the rest of the carriage. They have been rendered useless with age." (Mr Ciarán Delaney, 13 June 2018)

3.1.3.3 Passengers who are deaf or hearing impaired

A number of specific issues were highlighted in relation to passengers who are deaf or hearing impaired. Fundamentally, the primacy of aural communication was characterised as problematic by the IDS:

> "Public transport in Ireland relies to a great extent on sound and there is not a lot of visual information … There is too much reliance on auditory information provision ... auditory emergency announcements … would bypass deaf people and people who are hard of hearing … It is astounding that in the 21st century there is still a lack of visually accessible information for deaf and hard of hearing people." (Mr Eddie Redmond, 13 December 2017)

The barriers to purchasing a ticket for a person who is deaf or hearing impaired were highlighted, particularly in situations where there is a requirement to engage in conversation with staff who may not use an accessible language (e.g. Irish Sign Language).

> "While the Leap card is a great novel invention which allows a person to tag on and off, because the person also needs to tell the driver where he or she is going, deaf people are often misunderstood by a driver and then overcharged for their journey because the amount charged is based on the destination communicated to the driver. Also, while ticket machines are welcome, deaf people, including those who have free travel passes, still have to obtain tickets from people in kiosks who do not use a language that is accessible to those deaf people. There are electronic machines from which people can buy tickets without interaction but deaf people are forced to go to kiosks to obtain tickets." (Mr Eddie Redmond, 13 December 2017)

The IDS posited a number of solutions to remove such barriers to accessible travel for people who are deaf or hearing impaired, including:

- Installation of a touchscreen allowing the selection of journey destination to increase the accessibility of the Leap card, and
- Provision of live scrolling displays to ensure that emergency announcements are communicated aurally *and* visually without delay.

3.1.3.4 Passengers with an intellectual disability

Inclusion Ireland highlighted a number of specific issues in relation to the accessibility of public transport for passengers with an intellectual impairment, including:

- Poorly accessible information (e.g. lack of easy to read timetables)
- Unequal treatment on account of using a Free Travel pass
- Late changes to routes or timetables

Along with the NCBI, inaccurate audio/visual displays were deemed a barrier to travel, with Inclusion Ireland noting that such misinformation might result in passengers alighting services early or missing their station/stop. As with the IWA, Inclusion Ireland raised concerns about the stopping of the motorised transport and mobility allowance:

> "The decision in 2013 to close the mobility allowance and the motorised transport grant scheme to new applicants has placed an additional burden or risk of social exclusion on people with disabilities … There is an urgent need to introduce a scheme to replace the other schemes … Its absence has left families in desperate financial distress and has left many people in rural areas without transport." (Ms Sandra McCullagh, 13 December 2017)

3.1.3.5 Passengers with autism or autistic spectrum disorder

A number of specific issues in relation to the accessibility of public transport for passengers with autistic spectrum disorder were highlighted, including:

- Lack of quiet carriages and other accessibility measures for those with noise sensitivity:

  "For me, as an autistic person, travelling on Irish Rail can be a nightmare … Maintenance issues, such as doors not being serviced properly, resulting in a whistling noise going through the bus, or panels rattling owing to their not being screwed in properly when changed, cause stress for members of the autistic community. Inconsiderate passengers with their headphones blaring, which creates a hissing noise, is the equivalent of a teacher dragging his or her nails down a blackboard … When sensory issues become too much … I wear noise-cancelling headphones that cost me €199." (Mr Ciarán M. Delaney, 13 June 2018)

- Lack of consultation with people with autism to ascertain the nature of supports required:

  "Consultation … is vital. We engage on an ongoing basis with our participants regarding their needs. It is not okay to assume what is required for them." (Ms Diane Hill, 13 June 2018)

  "While engaging with Irish Rail management, it honourably admitted that it had never factored autism into the corporate thought process … [and] confirmed it had no one on the autistic spectrum on its disability consultation group." (Mr Ciarán M. Delaney, 13 June 2018)

- Lack of consideration of the impact of service changes on the travel experience of passengers with autistic spectrum disorder, such as the difficulties that can be encountered when deviations to route training might occur:

  "Jack was shown how to get to his place of work. However, his family got a telephone call to tell them that Jack had not turned up for work … Jack was found still waiting at the bus stop. When he did his [familiarisation] training … there was a single decker bus. On that particular morning double decker buses were allocated but the change did not factor in for him." (Mr Ciarán M. Delaney, 13 June 2018)

- Difficulties associated with unclear or inconsistent signage were also highlighted:

  "..when one route is on the dot matrix destination board and another is on the decal on the side of the bus. That is extremely confusing for somebody on the autistic spectrum … Yesterday, on my way here I saw a single decker bus, number 233, which at the front of it displayed Macroom as its destination but on the side displayed Frankfield as the destination … That is an issue." (Mr Ciarán M. Delaney, 13 June 2018)

3.1.4 CUSTOMER SERVICE TRAINING AND FEEDBACK

3.1.4.1 Training

The importance of training for staff in relation to the provision of services for customers with disabilities was raised.

> "Accessible public transport requires a thoughtful and welcoming approach from all staff involved. Training and an insistence on standards of customer service are crucial." (Senator John Dolan, 13 December 2017)

> "NCBI recommends all Irish Rail staff, be they a train operator or the chief executive, engage in disability awareness training to ensure an organisation-wide standard for customers with disabilities." (Mr Chris White, 13 December 2017)

The IDS highlighted the necessity of such training, particularly awareness training, in light of experiences in relation to communication:

> "As a deaf person I might be asked to try to lip read in an effort to understand what people are saying, but nobody would ever ask a person who is a wheelchair user to try to walk. It can be very offensive for deaf people when they are asked to do this because they are not being respected for who they are." (Mr Eddie Redmond, 13 December 2017)

Inclusion Ireland also referenced problematic encounters with public and private transport operators, notably in relation to the usage of the Travel Pass scheme:

> "Many of the citizens with disabilities we encounter through our advocacy work reflect interactions with public transport providers that are undignified and discriminatory. Of particular concern recently is … the issue of private bus companies not accepting the free travel pass, or private services on public routes prioritising non-free travel customers and leaving disabled passengers behind." (Ms Sandra McCullagh, 13 December 2017)

Ms. Hill highlighted the importance of community involvement in the successful roll out of the JAM card in Northern Ireland and asserted that, beyond this, disability awareness is vital in the provision of customer services[29]:

> "Community engagement has been a big factor in the success of the JAM card … We piloted much of our training, and have realised that the JAM card can only go so far. We need organisations, every council area and all interested parties to get behind

[29] Ms. Hill envisaged a two-year plan (involving e-learning and face-to-face training) to implement the JAM card throughout transport links across Ireland and to ensure that usage is "embedded into the culture of the companies". Ms. Hill indicated that cards are issued to service users without charge "at the moment". Further, she stated that the funding for the programme comes from participating organisations and businesses, which pay for their staff to be trained in the use of the JAM card and disability more generally.

this and make sure that staff are aware of the cards. Staff may also need support to provide customer service for everybody. We believe that everyone should be provided with excellent customer service, regardless of his or her ability. We hope that people start to value that." (Ms Diane Hill, 13 June 2018)

For Dr. Kennedy, beyond disability awareness, disability *equality* training is what is required:

> "This is not about poor little 'crips' who need a little extra help. We are citizens of the State who need equality, and that is where it has to start; equality, equality, equality. People have spoken about undergoing disability awareness training programmes with some companies. It is true that we need awareness about what our disabilities and illnesses are about. More often, however, we need disability equality training. What does it mean to make everybody equal?" (Dr Margaret Kennedy, 13 December 2017)

Inclusion Ireland concurred, noting that *awareness* is not sufficient*:*

> "Awareness is not enough. The barriers disabled people face in terms of different structures are often very unique; therefore, equality training is definitely the way forward." (Ms Sarah Lennon, 13 December 2017)

In the course of his engagement with the Committee, Mr. O'Leary, General Secretary of the NBRU, took the opportunity to emphasise that its members are fully supportive of implementing accessibility initiatives:

> "It has been a source of great disappointment to all of us at the NBRU that some commentary on the accessibility issue has sought to lay the blame at the door of front-line bus and rail workers. Nothing could be further from the truth. I want to make it abundantly clear to the committee that there are absolutely no industrial relation impediments to accessibility for any of our fellow citizens across the bus and train services run by CIÉ. Our members will fully co-operate with any initiative which will assist towards making all locations 100% accessible." (Mr Dermot O'Leary, 13 June 2018)

3.1.4.2 Customer feedback

Current mechanisms for the addressing customer feedback and/or complaints were criticised:

> "An embarrassing apology and expressing the hope that something will not happen again is not a response. The response is a working service … All operators whether public or private, must have effective and efficient complaints systems." (Senator John Dolan, 13 December 2017)

Ms. Murray described her attempts to secure a satisfactory outcome on one of the occasions that a wheelchair accessible vehicle was not provided for pre-booked journey:

> "On one occasion when it was raining and I was so fed up with the system that I was driven to tears, the driver of the bus, with a passenger, lifted my chair into the cargo hold. I rang the company to complain and told it that if there was not a wheelchair accessible bus available for my return journey, there would be trouble and there was because the bus was not wheelchair accessible ... I am reliant on others. I rely on the kindness of strangers … that is wholly unacceptable." (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)

Moreover, Ms. Murray explained that she no longer complains on account of the lack of action which follows:

> "I have stopped ringing to complain because it makes no difference … the system remains broken … Whenever I have complained … I am told that they are sorry I have had the experience and where I can log the complaint, which they will then do nothing about." (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)

Mr. Moran expressed a similar sentiment:

> "There is no reason to lodge a complaint because nobody will follow up on it. One is told that the company is very sorry and so on but nobody does anything … I am tired of getting apologies. It has got to the point where Irish Rail does not even apologise to me because it happens so often." (Mr Padraic Moran, 7 February 2018)

He later expressed the view that the lack of action following complaints of this nature is due to the absence of accountability on the part of transport operators:

> "If something keeps happening, one fixes it rather than keep papering over the cracks, which Irish Rail is very good at doing and getting away with because nothing is happening and no one in Irish Rail seems to be answerable or trying to fix it. That is a fundamental issue." (Mr Padraic Moran, 7 February 2018)

Linking this lack of accountability to equality and human rights, Mr. Moran described the impact of the current service as follows:

> "Where is the accountability? Irish Rail is not being held accountable for anything. It just gives an apology. An apology means nothing. We want equal rights and equal access. We want the same human rights. We do not want to beg, plead and be a pauper to ask for help to get on a train. That is a fundamental right. I am unable to drive because I have a startle reflex. I depend on the DART." (Mr Padraic Moran, 7 February 2018)

3.1.5 LICENSED BUS AND COACH SERVICES

Difficulties in relation to the accessibility standards set for private operators licensed to provide public transport were highlighted.

> "Where non-State transport providers have been licensed by the State to provide public transport, they must provide the same access and compliance that is required of the public operators … as a State we give them a licence, so why give this to a for-profit entity without ensuring it is responsible for providing an accessible service? The person who is disabled should be blind to operators.." (Senator John Dolan, 13 December 2017)

> "..[NCBI] are very concerned about private bus operators and the ability to deliver an equal and accessible service. We must ensure that the NTA and the licensing process are rigorous in how they police private operators of bus lines around the country so as to enable equal access … It cannot just be about public services providing accessible transport. It must be universal." (Mr Chris White, 13 December 2017)

> "The NTA appears to have given the private sector a free ride on accessibility. There is not a level playing field when it comes to the Expressway service Bus Éireann provides. There are three bus services operating the Cork to Dublin and Dublin Airport route, the X8, 704X and 707. However, only one is required to have a wheelchair lift, signage in both Irish and English, and accept the free-travel pass. There is a very simple solution. Those seeking to operate a bus under a licence awarded by the NTA must match the requirements imposed on Bus Éireann or otherwise they do not operate. When licences come up for renewal, the operators need to be told that these are the criteria and factor in the cost when they are tendering for the service or seeking the licence." (Mr Ciarán Delaney, 13 June 2018)

Senator Dolan illustrated this point in relation to the lack of requirement for accessible replacement vehicles by referring to the replacement service provided on the Clonmel to Dublin Airport route:

> "Bus Éireann was removing its fleet … The Minister, departmental officials and the National Transport Authority, which is the regulator, said there was sufficient capacity to meet the need. Not one of the privately operated buses was accessible for wheelchair users. What is worse, not one of them needed to be accessible." (Senator John Dolan, 13 December 2017)

3.1.6 PLANNING

There was consensus amongst witnesses that embedding the principles of universal accessibility into a project from the design phase is preferable as it obviates the requirement for retrofitting work to be undertaken at a later date[30].

> "The best system is one in which fleets and premises are accessible to everybody. When one has to retrofit … that is where issues arise." (Senator John Dolan, 13 December 2017)

[30] This is line with the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (2013:3), which asserted that: "The social value of transport and accessibility needs to be explicitly considered in policy-making and in the planning system and should no longer be seen as a second-order criterion".

Such an approach was characterised as a more cost effective way of achieving universal access:

> "We recommend a "disability-proofing" approach that is not expensive or retrospective, and that does not make disability an afterthought." (Mr Chris White, 13 December 2017)

> "Provision for people with disabilities can be made at no extra cost to the tax payer if the principle is incorporated at the planning stage rather than … as an extra to the plan thus incurring expense.." (Mr Tom Newton and Ms Caitriona McClean, Public Submission)

The benefits for all passengers of such an approach to design and planning were also highlighted:

> ."..our motto is that if it's good for users with a disability, its great for everybody." (Mr Tom Newton and Ms Caitriona McClean, Public Submission)

Drawing on international best practice to evaluate the mechanisms and measures by which other jurisdictions have embedded accessibility into their systems was identified as an important element of ensuring a fully accessible public transport system for the future. For instance, a number of witnesses explicitly highlighted their experiences of increased accessibility whilst traveling outside of Ireland:

> "I am really lucky in that I have travelled and seen different systems ... I have travelled around the world to places like Beijing, Portugal, Brazil and Canada. I have seen many different transport systems. When I was in Porto in 2016, I could get on its tram system and get into the city centre by myself without assistance. I could do it in Paris. I visited Wales for the Ireland match last November and I got on a train. If Europe can do it, why can Ireland not do it?" (Mr Padraic Moran, 7 February 2018)

> "It would be beneficial to look at other systems. I have been really fortunate in my film career to have travelled the world. I have been to Berlin, the United Kingdom and many other countries. In the United Kingdom all buses have ramps which are lowered with the push of a button by the driver. In Berlin it is the same. All taxis in London are also accessible." (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)

3.2 Transport operators

Representatives from public transport operators (Dublin Bus, Iarnród Éireann and Bus Éireann), as well as Luas (Transdev) and the Coach Tourism and Transport Council of Ireland (representing private operators) appeared before the Committee at its second hearing on this matter.

3.2.1 DUBLIN BUS

The CEO of Dublin Bus, Mr. Ray Coyne, described the progress that the operator has made in terms of increasing the accessibility of its service:

> "As Ireland's largest public transport provider, with over 139 million customers a year, we play a key role in the provision of accessible public transport in the communities we serve. The primary barrier for customers with disabilities to our services in the 1990s related to step-entry vehicles and the challenges they posed for customers with mobility difficulties. In the late 1990s, Dublin Bus introduced its first low-floor vehicle and in the 2000s the company adopted a progressive policy that all new vehicles purchased would only be accessible low-floor vehicles. In 2013 Dublin Bus achieved a long-held goal of having a fleet that is 100% low-floor accessible … This was good news not only for wheelchair users but for customers with mobility impairments, older customers and customers with buggies."

In terms of current accessibility provisions for passengers with disabilities, Mr. Coyne stated:

> "The enhancement of the accessibility of our services requires a continuous programme of improvement. Our buses are now equipped with a low-floor chassis, kneeling suspension to further reduce step-entry height, a retractable ramp at entrance and a priority space for wheelchair users as standard. In addition to this, almost 50% of our fleet now has space for both a wheelchair user and a buggy. All buses provide a range of on-board facilities to assist visually, hearing and mobility impaired customers. These include multiple accessible seats in the lower saloon, colour contrasting handrails, and on-bus audio and visual location announcements on all buses."

Mr. Coyne continued by noting that the roll out of accessible bus stop infrastructure[31] is ongoing.

Stating that Dublin Bus is an "industry leader" in terms of the provision of accessible transport, Mr. Coyne acknowledged that additional work was necessary to address the accessibility barriers experienced by people with disabilities:

[31] Including accessible kerbing, as well as tactile and colour contrasting paving.

> "As chief executive officer of Dublin Bus, I am very proud to lead an organisation that is an industry leader in accessibility. Public transport enables all people in our society to fully participate in the work, social and leisure activities that Dublin offers. We are not complacent and I acknowledge that more work is needed to address issues experienced by people with disabilities. Dublin Bus will continue its commitment to playing a leading role in helping to create an accessible and inclusive public transport system in Ireland."

3.2.1.1 Provisions for passengers with disabilities

Dublin Bus launched its travel assistance programme in 2008, which provides a personalised travel service to passengers:

> "Provided by Dublin Bus, the scheme assists customers in the independent use of Dublin Bus, DART and Luas, in particular those with mobility and learning disabilities. It is funded by the NTA. Through this scheme, customers can avail of personal assistance and practical advice on how to travel independently on public transport. Our travel assistant will meet a customer at his or her home before he or she makes the next step of using public transport. With the help of our travel assistant, a tailor-made travel plan is drawn up to meet each individual customer's needs … Since its launch, the scheme has gone from strength to strength with over 1,200 travel assist programmes provided in 2017." (Mr Ray Coyne, 17 January 2018)

In addition, Dublin Bus developed and launched an awareness campaign[32] to highlight the dedicated wheelchair space on all Dublin Bus's PSO services:

> "A series of awareness videos, featuring wheelchair users captures the effects and illustrates the challenges that arise if the wheelchair zone is occupied by another customer, including those travelling with a buggy. The series of videos launched as part of the campaign illustrate the simple process which IWA, Dublin Bus and TFI are encouraging all customers travelling with buggies to support and follow." (Mr Ray Coyne, 17 January 2018)

Mr. Coyne stated that a key element of the operator's "progressive accessibility policy" was its provision of disability awareness training, which is designed with the input of disability groups. He noted that all customer facing employees[33] receive both customer care training and disability awareness training.

3.2.1.2 Dedicated wheelchair spaces

When queried as to the feasibility of ensuring that wheelchair users have access to dedicated wheelchair spaces, Mr. Coyne indicated that enforcement was a complex matter and that challenges would arise if legislation was enacted to enforce access:

[32] In conjunction with the Irish Wheelchair Association and Transport for Ireland.
[33] Including drivers, inspectors and customer service employers.

> "If that was legislated for today what one would find is that all of our buses are full in the morning peak and generally in the evening peak so one would have to move six people off a full vehicle to allow for wheelchair access. All the buses have the space but six people would have to be moved off the bus which is difficult to do. Those who would have to move would have to leave the bus and that would involve complexities around refunds and which six people would come off the bus. I do not say the issues are insurmountable but we would have to face very difficult challenges if legislation were to specify that a disabled person is fully entitled to the access space." (Mr Ray Coyne, 17 January 2018)

Consequently, Mr. Coyne indicated that legislating with a view to enforcing access to this space was not the solution:

> "Our view is that, all things considered, the system we operate today is based on the goodwill of passengers and, by and large, that works. It does not work on some occasions and when that happens it is a 100% bad experience for the person. Our drivers are very well aware of the situation and generally customers make a situation known to us. Incidents occur but it is very rare. I do not think the answer is for the Government to legislate in favour of having a total dedicated space at all times … I accept issues arise from time to time but, thankfully, they are minimal and, by and large, everybody gets accommodated. It is a system we have worked towards for the past 15 years and it is working well now. All things considered, it is probably the best solution we have at this point in time for the system we operate today." (Mr Ray Coyne, 17 January 2018)

3.2.2 Iarnród Éireann

Mr. Jim Meade, Director of Railway Undertaking at Iarnród Éireann, highlighted the legacy of the Victorian era to existing rail infrastructure:

> "Virtually the entire Iarnród Éireann rail network was originally developed in the 19th century and when significant renewal investment returned to the railway in the 1990s, it is fair to say that the legacy of that Victorian era still remained with us."

To that end, Mr, Meade acknowledged significant accessibility issues across the network, observing that trains (apart from DARTS) and stations were not upgraded to the modern accessibility standards prior to the 1990s. However, with the appointment of an Accessibility Liaison Officer in 1995, the operator "adopted the latest accessibility standards for fleet and buildings". Mr. Meade noted that this era of investment in the railway network lead to advancements in accessibility for people with disabilities:

> "..the benefits of Exchequer funded investment in trains, stations and customer systems throughout the intervening decades were enjoyed by all customers, with direct input to design via our disability users group. This has ensured that all our Intercity trains have dedicated wheelchair spaces, and wheelchair accessible toilets, and all are accessible via a mobile ramp. All DART and commuter trains are accessible via a mobile ramp and have an open area which can accommodate

> wheelchairs as well as designated areas. All new stations and all major station refurbishment programmes ensured accessibility was incorporated into the design, including ramps and-or lifts for access to all platforms. Design features for the visually impaired such as tactile markings on platforms and colour contrasts on board services have enhanced the safety and usability of the travelling environment." (Mr Jim Meade, 17 January 2018)

However, the impact of the economic crisis on accessibility works was highlighted:

> "An ambitious programme was well under way to complete necessary accessibility works at all stations. However, it was regrettable that this proved to be one of the many casualties when the country's economic crisis caused major rail investment grind to a halt. While significant progress was made, we are acutely aware that there is much more to be done." (Mr Jim Meade, 17 January 2018)

In terms of future provision, Mr. Meade stated that as part of any tender processes: "we will request companies bidding to build fleet to include solutions such as automated ramps from the train to facilitate independent use of our services by the mobility impaired". Nonetheless, the hindrance of Victorian era infrastructure to the effective operation of some automated ramps was referenced, with implications for major stations such as Connolly Station (Dublin) and Kent Station (Cork) as a consequence of curved platforms.

3.2.2.1 Provisions for passengers with disabilities

Addressing the matter of the notice period in advance of travel by passengers with disabilities, Mr. Meade stated that such as period is advised but not required:

> "I would stress, however, that this is advised and not essential, and we make every endeavour to provide assistance at all times, whether notice is less than the advised 24 hours or whether no notice is possible." (Mr Jim Meade, 17 January 2018)

Such notice was noted as ensuring that trains are directed to accessible platforms where stations are partially accessible (26 in total).

Notwithstanding the current arrangements in relation to notice, Mr. Meade indicated that Iarnród Éireann is endeavouring to ensure that notice to travel is eliminated: "we want to work towards a future where any notice is ultimately eliminated".

Referencing the DART pilot programme, he advised that the 'hub station' will reduce response times and thus improve assistance. Whilst the advised notice period has been reduced to 4 hours with this pilot programme, Mr. Meade stated that all requests for assistance will continue to be responded to.

A further initiative being introduced by Iarnród Éireann is the availability of Customer Service Officers on the Intercity network. This will result in a "turn up and go service" for the "vast majority" of customers as it will ensure that assistance is available when boarding and alighting these services.

> "Reducing from 24 hours to four hours is a guideline and we regularly do far better than that. As we move on to our on-board service where we help put people on board, people will again turn up and go because a member of staff will be on board to assist people." (Mr Jim Meade, 17 January 2018)

When queried by Members as to the rationale for shifting towards unstaffed stations as a mode of service provision, Mr. Meade stated:

> "The unmanning of stations is about bringing people from behind the booking office window because many of our interactions are now web-based or machine-based. The number of transactions through the booking office is quite small - barely above 10%. We now want to bring them to the front of house to interact directly with the customer and have more touch-time with the customer." (Mr Jim Meade, 17 January 2018)

3.2.3 Bus Éireann

Bus Éireann stated that it is "committed to providing fully accessible services", with 100% accessible city and town services in certain locations. It also noted that all "major" bus stations have been made fully accessible. However, it was acknowledged that intercity commuter and rural services are not fully accessible.

The operator advised that it is policy to procure accessible vehicles during the replacement and upgrading of its fleet.

> "In terms of our fleet, all new vehicles purchased in the last number of years for PSO services are accessible through low floor access. This includes kneeling access, which involved the vehicle being lowered to bring the entrance stop area in line with or close to the curb, or a wheelchair lift. In addition, all our vehicles also feature handrails that assist with ascending or descending the entrance steps and contrasting strips that define each step." (Mr Ray Hernan, 17 January 2018)

Also, Bus Éireann stated that it intends to roll out on-board audio announcements for all 6,000 stops across its network this year and noted that work is in progress to ensure that its online timetables, and thus its website, is fully compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines[34].

[34] In a subsequent submission to the Committee (please see Appendix 2), Bus Éireann advised that the conversion process of its online timetables into HTML format has been completed. This means that web timetables will now be accessible to passengers interacting with the website using a screen reader.

Notwithstanding the progress to date, the operator acknowledged that there are shortcomings in terms of the accessibility of its service provision:

> "While there has been a significant amount of investment surrounding accessibility, we accept that there are still shortcomings … Over the past number of years, we have invested in our bus stations in order to ensure that they follow best practice and are fully accessible. While this investment is ongoing, common features in our bus stations now include, but are not limited to, automatic doors, accessible toilets, ticket offices with audio hearing loop, accessible ticket vending machines, and wheelchair accessible bus bays in the majority of bus stations." (Mr Ray Hernan, 17 January 2018)

In terms of current accessibility provisions for passengers with disabilities, Mr. Hernan stated:

> "Currently, 86% of Bus Éireann's road passenger fleet of 680 vehicles is wheelchair accessible. With the investment plan for 2018 this figure will increase to 92% by the end of this year. Bus Éireann operates a mixture of vehicle types, from low floor city buses to high sided coaches. All low floor buses operating on city services, along with a small number of commuter routes, are 100% accessible and advance booking is not required for these services. The majority of intercity commuter and rural services are operated with high sided coached featuring a wheelchair lift. This necessitates a minimum of 3.5 m of space in order to accommodate the wheelchair user and operate the lift in a safe manner. Local authorities are responsible for pathways and kerbing." (Mr Ray Hernan, 17 January 2018)

In terms of future provision, Mr Hernan asserted that Bus Éireann "remains fully committed" to enhancing the accessibility of its services, subject to "logistics and financial constraints".

> "We are conscious of our special role as a State transport provider and the operator of the largest nationwide public transport network, to comply with the higher standards expected of us as a public body. While much work remains to be done I am very much committed to ensuring we meet those standards as best we can as we continue to recover from the financial and operational challenges of the past year." (Mr Ray Hernan, 17 January 2018)

Responding to Members, Mr. Hernan acknowledged the practical challenges associated with the roll-out of audio announcements in the coming year:

> "The issues that we face this year do not concern funding as much as they do the logistics and practicalities of trying to set up audio and visual responses for 6,000 bus stops. Approximately 550 of the main stops have been recorded so far. A degree of co-ordination is required … in order to ensure consistency in the naming of bus stops … we need to ensure that whatever name we are using is also being used by other parties." (Mr Ray Hernan, 17 January 2018)

Further, in a later submission to the Committee, Bus Éireann provided further details as to complexities involved in the nationwide provision of audio announcements:

> "Many Bus Éireann services do not have on-board audio announcements for our customers, but we are embarking on a roll-out programme of these. However, they are also linked to the development and implementation of the NTA's Short Common Name project – where all transport operators, including Dublin Bus and private bus companies – will adopt the same name for each bus stop in the country. This is a large scale project that requires agreement and the changing of names on signage, timetables and online, and this in turn will impact the timeline for inputting of the announcements."(Submission from Bus Éireann)

3.2.3.1 Provisions for passengers with disabilities

Bus Éireann indicated that it employs a full-time accessibility and information officer to "ensure high quality accessible and safe services are, where possible, available to our customers". In addition, it was noted that all training inspectors located at main depots are qualified to provide accessibility training.

Turning to the matter of the provision of notice in advance of travel, the operator confirmed that intending passengers are required to book 24 hours in advance of a travel on weekdays and 48 hours in advance of travel at the weekends and on Monday[35]. Mr. Hernan stated that an advance reservation system is required due to limited available capacity to accommodate wheelchair users:

> "There is one wheelchair space on all our vehicles. A reservation system is in place for passengers who wish to book a space on a Bus Éireann coach. In order to accommodate a wheelchair, all coach types used on an accessible service require the removal of up to four seats, prior to the journey, along with an operational check on the wheelchair lift and the accompanying restraint mechanisms to ensure the wheelchair can be securely clamped into place." (Mr Ray Hernan, 17 January 2018)

Mr. Hernan indicated that such reservation requirements are the "prevailing practice" across the EU. Further, in response to Members, he stated that he would be "hesitant to commit to less than 24 hours notice" on account of the operational challenges associated with preparing a vehicle to accommodate a wheelchair.

> "A bus must be brought to a garage so that they can be removed … It takes time. We also need to ensure that the lift is working. I would prefer to be 100% sure that, when we commit to something, we can deliver on it. Unfortunately, that has not occurred in some instances for various reasons, including a breakdown in the chain of responsibility. We need to get that right before we can reduce the timelines." (Mr Ray Hernan, 17 January 2018)

[35] In its subsequent submission to the Committee, Bus Éireann advised that the advanced notice period required had been reduced to 24 hours irrespective of the day of travel.

When queried as to the possibility of ensuring that such a space is available permanently for potential passengers who use a wheelchair rather than being created on foot of a booking request, Mr. Hernan rejected the routine provision of wheelchair accessible spaces as a viable solution:

> "We are trying to achieve a balance between - I hate to say it, but I will be upfront - the commerciality of the situation with our absolute obligations. We need to get that right in terms of the 24-hour notice ... We are trying to improve the fleet and ensure that, even if the seats have already been removed, buses are accessible. That has been a problem. We will be at 92% accessibility by the end of this year. Where it is realistic and we believe there is a necessity to provide a permanent reduction in capacity to facilitate a wheelchair user, we will consider that … To clarify, we are a public service body, so commerciality is not the priority, but capacity is a challenge. There are numerous routes on which we do not have sufficient capacity and we leave passengers behind. I do not want to augment that unnecessarily, but if there is a demand, we will recognise and respect" (Mr Ray Hernan, 17 January 2018)

3.2.4 LUAS

Transdev, which operates Luas under contract to the NTA and TII, described the light rail system as "a state-of-the-art light rail transit system that provides an accessible, attractive and unique mode of public transport in Dublin". It noted that Luas "offers accessibility for all", something which "has been a cornerstone of the design and development of the system from the initial phases of the project" (Mr Seamus Egan, 17 January 2018).

As part of the development of Luas, the Luas disability user group was consulted during construction, with on-site visits to evaluate accessibility features. To that end, the necessity to retrofit accessibility solutions post construction was noted as being "greatly reduced".

> "Design for accessibility on Luas has focused on people with mobility and sensory impairments. Well thought out surfacing, furniture, stop facilities, clear signage, audio announcements and destination displays all serve to make the system easier to navigate." (Mr Seamus Egan, 17 January 2018)

Responding to matters raised during the previous hearing on this matter, Transdev acknowledged that there are improvements to be made with Luas:

> "We understand that Luas is not perfect. There are improvements to be made in areas such as audio announcements at key times and locations. Through regular and formal consultation we aim to meet the needs of all transport users, to deliver a transport system that is as equally convenient for a person with a disability or a carer, as it is for the rest of society so that anyone can use public transport to get on with his or her life, without additional challenges or having to rely on the kindness of strangers." (Mr Seamus Egan, 17 January 2018)

3.2.5 PRIVATE OPERATORS

Whilst acknowledging the importance of accessible public transport, the Coach Tourism and Transport Council of Ireland stated that significant barriers to the provision of fully accessible services exist:

> "CTTC believes the availability of and access to public transport is essential for many people with disabilities to play a full and active part in society, engage with their communities and to access services and work. … Private operators currently operate quality scheduled route services throughout the country under licence from the National Transport Authority and are uniquely placed to improve transport services in a cost effective manner. There are, however, significant barriers currently, which are restricting the continued positive growth in the provision of fully accessible services that I will set out for the committee." (Mr Kevin Traynor, 17 January 2018)

With cost a factor, Mr. Traynor stated that accessibility in private sector transport is restricted on account of "limited financial resources and the substantial cost of providing accessibility features". According to the Council, the solution to this is the provision of incentives at national and EU level:

> "There is a requirement for positive national and EU incentives to create a sound business case for owning and operating accessible vehicles. In addition, funding should be provided from State resources to private operators for increased staff training, pre-journey information and access point of contact in order to put systems in place to deal with requests for accessible vehicles." (Mr Kevin Traynor, 17 January 2018)

In relation to the provision of commercial services, Bus Éireann observed that it was required to provide an accessible fleet as part of its Expressway service notwithstanding the fact that it did not receive any funding to achieve this:

> "With regard to the cost of vehicles, Expressway is an arm of Bus Éireann, which is a 100% commercial operation that does not get any State funding. However, because it is part of a semi-State company, we have to ensure that all of its buses are fully compliant with disability regulations and, therefore, we incur the additional cost of acquiring a bus that is wheelchair accessible without any funding. I would welcome a level playing field in respect of commercial arrangements … Expressway [must purchase vehicles] at the higher specification … to allow us to provide disability access, which private operators do not have to provide at the moment." (Mr Ray Hernan, 17 January 2018)

The lack of shared use of existing infrastructure was identified by the Council as a further challenge:

> "There is no point in providing accessible vehicles if the infrastructure is not available to support these services … Other infrastructural barriers include managing the accessibility of infrastructure in small towns and villages to curb illegal parking in bus stops and provide accessible toilets and associated facilities at private resting areas and stations." (Mr Kevin Traynor, 17 January 2018)

3.3 Governance

At its third meeting on the accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities, the Committee engaged with the National Disability Authority and the National Transport Authority.

3.3.1 National Disability Authority (NDA)

The NDA was established to "provide independent and evidence-informed advice[36] for the Minister on matters of policy and practice relevant to the lives of people with disabilities" (Ms Siobhan Barron, 31 January 2018). It also operates the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, which promotes universal design:

> "The NDA's view is that a universal design approach to transport would benefit everyone, particularly those with disabilities and older people, especially as it could maximise their participation in society and control over their own lives." (Ms Siobhan Barron, 31 January 2018)

The NDA indicated that a large part of its role concerns measuring the outputs, outcomes and impacts of policies, with assessment reports produced for the relevant monitoring committees of strategy documents such as the *National Disability Strategy* and the *Comprehensive Employment Strategy*. The NDA observed that there are challenges involved in establishing high quality measures to monitor progress[37] in relation to the accessibility of public transport:

> "There is a challenge in terms of the quality of data when measuring outcomes at the highest level because people measure and report different things. Different organisations are measuring apples and oranges. One is very reliant on a very good data source, which is dependent on the questions asked, what is recorded and how the information is categorised." (Ms Siobhan Barron, 31 January 2018)

The NDA advised that it will be working with the NTA on devising criteria to measure accessibility across the transport sector. In addition, it is working with academics from DIT

[36] It was further noted that whilst the NDA is not a regulatory body but rather a policy advisory body, it does have a role in monitoring programmes.

[37] In other words, to gather data beyond action (i.e. acquiring low floor busses) and instead measure overall impact (i.e. the difference that this had made in the lives of people with disabilities).

and Trinity College Dublin on data analytics, and this engagement will inform the development of effective measures of accessible transport.

Commenting on the current levels of accessibility across the public transport system, Ms. Barron observed:

> "Unfortunately, despite positive developments, there are still many people with disabilities who are experiencing barriers in accessing transport. This needs to be seen as a quality customer service issue rather than as an add-on solution to the problem of disability access. That entails applying the principles of universal design … Even where accessibility has been advanced, it can break down, unless it is maintained and resourced by trained staff. Challenges remain in accessing information, as not everyone has a smartphone. Data systems for each service need to be consistent and inter-operable."

In addition, noting the limited support available to passengers, the NDA raised concerns as to the procedures in place in the event of an emergency:

> "Health and safety need to be key considerations. There is little or no support at stations or on trains, particularly where emergency evacuation is required." (Ms Siobhan Barron, 31 January 2018)

Referring to the provision of notice in advance of travel, the NDA stated that this requirement "limits people with disabilities in their right to get around". Issues relating to training and awareness were also raised by the NDA:

> "It is crucial that all staff across all public transport services are trained to build awareness and competence. It should be easier for persons with disabilities to communicate with service providers and easily access complaints procedures." (Ms Siobhan Barron, 31 January 2018)

Concerning the delivery of accessible transport, the NDA asserted that an improved mechanism to track progress is required:

> "There is a need for a more robust system to measure and track how accessible public transport services are operating on the ground." (Ms Siobhan Barron, 31 January 2018)

In addition, the NDA recommended that actions relating to accessible transport in national strategies are implemented and that this implementation is monitored:

> "We advise the continued and full implementation of actions already committed to in national strategies and that further actions be committed and set out in those strategies which are, in effect, living documents whose implementation is regularly monitored. It is important that there is buy-in and accountability for those actions

> throughout the Departments, agencies and service providing bodies within mainstream policy and services and that a universal design approach is adopted, as well as ensuring adherence to new and existing European directives and legislation on accessibility." (Ms Siobhan Barron, 31 January 2018)

The NDA summarised its assessment of the accessibility levels within public transport as follows:

> "The NDA considers that accessible transport is key to ensuring equal participation for people with disabilities. The NDA acknowledges many positive developments but the reality is that many people with disabilities still face barriers on a daily basis. The NDA recommends that … the action on all key agencies working together to deliver an integrated, universally designed transport system." (Ms Siobhan Barron, 31 January 2018)

3.3.1.1 An integrated approach

In order to successful achieve universal transport for all, the NDA advised that:

> "..an integrated, planned approach would be required … This would entail joined-up working, involving the different Departments, related agencies and stakeholders working together to provide a co-ordinated policy approach that worked nationally and at local level. The focus is on the customer's end to end journey. It requires mainstream policies and services that have been designed to include the needs of persons with disabilities and that have been disability-proofed in line with the Government's commitment to disability mainstreaming." (Ms Siobhan Barron, 31 January 2018)

Ms. Barron also noted that whilst there are good initiatives currently in place, these take place "in isolation … [and] are not connected":

> "While we welcome the fact that transport is a core element of strategies like the comprehensive employment strategy and the national disability strategy, there is a need to look at transport in the round in the context of all those different Departments and how that all joins up and works together, how funding can be more effectively used and how those services can be better linked." (Ms Siobhan Barron, 31 January 2018)

To that end, Ms Barron advocated the development of a centralised transport plan, with universal design embedded within it as opposed to accessibility being considered as a separate matter to be implemented at a later point:

> "We feel there is a need to bring Departments and agencies together to create some kind of transport for all plan and looking at it from a universal design approach so it is not, as I said earlier, about an add-on service." (Ms Siobhan Barron, 31 January 2018)

In addition, the NDA indicated that forthcoming EU legislative acts will result in additional obligations in terms of monitoring and reporting performance. To that end, the NDA stated that consideration of these additional obligations:

> "..should be very much a strong feature of [the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport's] strategic corporate plan and how it measures and accounts for its performance as a Department and sector." (Ms Siobhan Barron, 31 January 2018)

3.3.1.2 Proposed future developments

- Development of a monitoring mechanism to facilitate a detailed analysis of the status of accessibility within the transport sector [roll out due later this year]

> "We started that with research on the kind of tools and mechanisms that would be effective for measuring accessibility. Other jurisdictions struggle with how to ensure strong, clear, concrete standards to measure accessibility. There is very poor quality data, and differing data from service providers. We considered trialling a system and self-assessment questionnaires, we did mystery shopping and customer satisfaction surveys and we analysed performance measurement systems. We worked very closely with the NTA, the Department and the public service providers and disability stakeholders to try to devise something that would be workable and would give the quality information required."(Ms Siobhan Barron, 31 January 2018)

- Commencement of the monitoring of access officers in transport services and advising as to the actions which such entities could implement to improve accessibility [absence of a power to enforce]

> "We would produce an independent assessment and report for the Minister on that with recommendations on what needs to be addressed. We would also use the monitoring to advise further actions the various bodies could implement but we do not have the power to enforce the implementation of those actions." (Ms Siobhan Barron, 31 January 2018)

3.3.2 NATIONAL TRANSPORT AUTHORITY (NTA)

The NTA observed that:

> "In terms of accessibility of public transport services, they are largely determined by when particular services or infrastructure came into existence. Accordingly, older public transport infrastructure is largely not accessible or has limited accessibility features. However, more recent infrastructure is designed and built with the needs of disabled users in mind. The NTA is actively committed to ensuring that new public transport services and infrastructure are fully accessible. We are committed to securing the retrofitting of all older public transport infrastructure as quickly as resources will allow." (Ms Anne Graham, 31 January 2018)

In terms of current levels of accessibility, the NTA noted that the Dublin Bus fleet is 100% low floor wheelchair accessible and will be maintained as such through the infrastructure investment programme. The NTA noted the following levels of accessibility at regional level:

> "In terms of the regional bus fleet, regional bus services are primarily delivered by single-deck or double-deck coaches. The double-deck coaches are accessible by ramp but require the removal of seats to provide the wheelchair space and the required restraint. The remaining coach fleet that is accessible uses an external wheelchair lift to lift the passenger onto the high floor of the coach. Approximately 86% of Bus Éireann's coach fleet is wheelchair accessible. That percentage will increase as the coach fleet is replaced. As this fleet requires the removal of seats, 24-hour notice of travel is required. With regard to bus stops, all city bus stops are fully accessible as they can be served by wheelchair ramp and kneeling suspension on buses. In regional cities they are wheelchair accessible where there is a hard standing at the stop. A bus stop that can facilitate the operation of a wheelchair lift from a high-floor coach requires a minimum of 3 m space to the back of the footpath. Currently, very few bus stops that receive coach services have this space." (Ms Anne Graham, 31 January 2018)

Referring to the approximately 10% of public transport services delivered by commercial operators licensed by the NTA, the NTA indicated that 16% of services in 2016 had low-floor wheelchair accessible vehicles and a further 28% had vehicles with lift access for wheelchair users[38].

In respect of the use of commercial operators to provide tendered services, the NTA advised that they "have moved and are moving towards requiring" that the service is wheelchair accessible (preferably utilising low floor vehicles in the case of shorter journeys).

The NTA noted that the rural transport programme is "largely wheelchair accessible", with demand-responsive services provided under this programme:

> "The NTA has invested in improving the wheelchair lifts on the fleet owned by the rural transport companies. The current services are being retendered in 2017 and 2018 with a provision that all services must be fully wheelchair-accessible within two years of contract award." (Ms Anne Graham, 31 January 2018)

In terms of heavy rail services, the NTA noted that whilst the fleet operated by Iarnród Éireann is accessible internally, the problematic aspect of accessibility from the point of view of wheelchair users is the inaccessibility of stations and platforms[39]. In addition, whilst in-service announcements (visual and audible) are available on all intercity and commuter rail services, the NTA stated that such provisions are "not up to the required standard" on the DART service and require replacement.

[38] Figures based on the annual returns the NTA received from operators
[39] Details were provided as to improvements to specific stations.

Focusing on wheelchair accessible taxis, the NTA indicated that the availability of wheelchair accessible taxis has fallen with the decline in the number of licensed vehicles in the industry. A number of measures have been introduced to increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles in the taxi fleet:

- New licences are issued only to wheelchair accessible vehicles (since 2010)
- New regulations were introduced to permit smaller wheelchair accessible vehicles to operate (since 2014)
- Wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) grant offering up to €10,000 for the purchase of or conversion to a wheelchair accessible vehicle (since 2014); all recipients of the grant must complete a disability awareness training programme (run by the IWA)

The NTA summarised its assessment of the accessibility levels within public transport as follows:

> "..overall the level of accessibility in the cities is quite high. The challenge is outside the cities and we have an issue with the fleet and bus stop infrastructure and information. There is a very low level of accessibility outside the city areas." (Ms Anne Graham, 31 January 2018)

In response to Members' queries as to a timeframe for the achievement of a fully accessible service, the NTA stated that it was not possible to indicate this:

> "I could not give a timeframe for getting all our services 100% accessible. It depends on the level of funding available, on some changes we hope to see in the fleet, and working together with our agencies and operators to deliver the infrastructure on the ground. There are definitely challenges in all that and I would not be able to give a timeframe." (Ms Anne Graham, 31 January 2018)

In terms of the requirement to provide advance notice of travel, the NTA indicated that the shift in fleet strategy to using low floor vehicles in respect of shorter journeys will remove the requirement for notice in respect of services. However, intercity journeys were characterised as problematic in this respect on account of the use of high floor vehicles and the associated accessibility challenges. Nevertheless, the NTA stated that its ultimate goal is to eliminate the requirement for advance notice:

> "We want to move away from the 24-hour notice. We would like to have no notice period associated with public transport services. We are moving incrementally by considering the short journeys initially, removing the requirement for notice on the basis that we have a low floor fleet available with the right bus stop infrastructure … We are moving slowing [sic] to improve and move as much as possible towards a low-floor accessible fleet that does not require notice, and that does not require the removal of seats." (Ms Anne Graham, 31 January 2018)

Addressing the matter of unstaffed stations, the NTA observed that such a situation would pose an accessibility challenge in terms of accessing train carriages:

> "Even if we have the stations fully accessible so that they are independently accessible there is still the issue about accessing the trains themselves. Assistance is required to board trains. If there is nobody available at the station or it is unmanned, there is an issue about accessing the train fleet itself. While we may move towards upgrading the stations and having them accessible there is still notice required currently to actually board, and to make sure that there is somebody available both to allow the wheelchair to board through the use of a ramp or return to the station. We know work needs to be done in that area." (Ms Anne Graham, 31 January 2018)

Responding to Members' queries, the NTA stated that the proposal to have a host available on every intercity service could ensure that there is no issue with boarding or alighting the carriage, with a fully accessible train station ensuring independent access to services.

Concerning Members' queries in relation to ensuring a proportional distribution of wheelchair accessible taxies nationwide, the NTA stated that targeting grants at specific counties would be problematic as it could "create tensions within the industry". In addition, the NTA asserted that it is "still keen on raising it not just in specific counties but across all the counties" (Mr Hugh Creegan, 31 January 2018).

3.3.2.1 Funding

The NTA observed that funding has been "considerably constrained" in recent years, with "difficult choices and prioritisation of projects" the result. Budget 2018 saw a four year capital envelope announced including a multi-annual allocation of almost €28 million for the accessibility retrofit programme (2018-2021). The NTA stated that this constitutes a "trebling of the previous allocation for accessibility under the Capital Plan" and will facilitate programmes such as the installation of accessible bus stops, the upgrade of train stations and the continuation of the WAV grant scheme.

3.3.2.2 Proposed future developments

- Utilisation of low-floor single-deck vehicles rather than high-floor coaches for shorter regional commuter services of less than 50 km [procurement process underway with service commencement expected from 2019]
- Regulation of the accessibility of public transport services operated by commercial operations [proposals to be published this year setting out minimum accessibility standards[40]]

[40] These will apply to fleets operating public transport services for new licences and on renewal of existing licences.

- Continuation of the upgrade of bus and rail stations [subject to funding]
- Continuation of the upgrade of bus stops with the aim of ensuring that "main towns" have at least one wheelchair lift-accessible bus stop[41] in each direction[42] [design work undertaken by the NTA, street works to be undertaken by local authorities[43]]
- Continuation of the WAV grant with the aim of achieving a minimum of 10% of wheelchair accessible taxis by 2020 [subject to funding]
- Consideration of the provision of additional information on the national journey planner app to include options such as step-free journeys [work underway to audit public transport infrastructure to determine levels of accessibility]
- Improvement of on-board and at-station communication with passengers [scoping to commence on this shortly]
- Consideration of the legislative changes necessary to the by-laws of Dublin Bus to allow enforcement of priority for wheelchair users[44] [in consultation with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport]

3.4 Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Mr. Shane Ross (T.D.)

After detailing recent changes in terms of the accessibility of the public transport system, Minister Ross noted the following:

> "Since becoming a Minister, I have been particularly struck by the personal experiences related to me in my meetings with people with disabilities who use public transport. They make the case that the current improvements are inadequate. There is a convincing consistency to their stories. The improvements made may look impressive on paper but when put into practice, they fall short of providing full access for people with disabilities. Examples of this are where there are accessible buses but bus stops are not accessible, and the interface between accessible rail infrastructure and accessible trains where a ramp is required between the platform and the carriage." (Minister Ross, 7 February 2018)

[41] The NTA explained that as high-floor vehicles require a large area of adjacent footpath to operate wheelchair lift mechanisms, it is challenging to achieve the necessary footpath width in many areas.
[42] The NTA stated: "It does not make sense to try to do this in every location. It is physically very difficult." (Mr Hugh Creegan, 31 January 2018)
[43] The NTA indicated that it has a role in identifying suitable stops, preparing designs for wheelchair accessible stops and funding the works. However, it indicated that: "unless the council is behind it, it does not get delivered so it does need support at councillor level to make it happen in these towns" (Mr Hugh Creegan, 31 January 2018).
[44] The NTA advised that Dublin Bus has indicated that its by-laws and primary legislation does not allow drivers to enforce movement, instead, they can only "encourage" people blocking access to wheelchair spaces to move (Ms Anne Graham, 31 January 2018).

He further indicated that, since taking office, he had held a number of meetings with people with disabilities and their representative bodies:

> "..who have outlined to me, in stark terms, the obstacles they experience in every day life in accessing public transport … [they] have all helped to inform my view that we must do more." (Minister Ross, 7 February 2018)

3.4.1 Boards of public transport operators

Minister Ross announced that all public transport entities[45] will have a minimum of one board member with personal experience and expertise of disability:

> "The most appropriate expert voice for the views and difficulties of the disabled is not that of able-bodied politicians or semi-State company directors; it is their own. The most appropriate place for them to express these views is not only in the media or at meetings of these committees, but in the boardroom. Disabled people need a place at the table, the place where the decisions that affect them are made. As a result of wide consultation with members of the disability community and with disability bodies striving to make an impact, I have decided that no public transport company in my Department shall in future function without a minimum of one board member who has personal knowledge and experience of the needs and difficulties of people with disabilities using public transport. Well-meaning board members offering sympathy to those with disabilities are self-evidently less able to make practical and informed decisions than those who overcome the physical obstacles daily. It is easy for financial experts to calculate the figures and allocate funds for more accessible buses and trains, but ensuring those funds make a difference where it matters is much more challenging." (Minister Ross, 7 February 2018)

A number of Members welcomed this announcement, noting that this was a positive development in enhancing the link between those with experience and expertise in the area of disability and those charged with making decisions in relation to public transport.

3.4.2 Pilot scheme – DART services

Referencing the pilot scheme reducing the notice period for DART users requiring assistance from 24 hours to 4 hours, the Minister stated:

> "While I absolutely acknowledge that this falls short of my Department's commitment to access for all, it is a further step in the right direction." (Minister Ross, 7 February 2018)

[45] National Transport Authority, CIÉ, Iarnród Éireann, Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann

Responding to the dissatisfaction that some Members expressed in relation to this scheme, Minister Ross indicated that Iarnród Éireann will be reporting as to the success of the pilot. To that end, Minister Ross stated that this information will be publically released[46] so as to inform relevant stakeholders:

> "It should not be stored up and kept secret in the vaults of Iarnród Éireann." (Minister Ross, 7 February 2018)

In terms of the broader implications of this scheme, Minister Ross indicated that this pilot scheme will inform policy decisions in relation to the unstaffing of stations:

> "The pilot will hopefully come up with the answer … on whether hubs are effective. The purpose of that pilot is to answer its question … If the answer comes up that this is not working, we will have to face it. Let us give the pilot a chance. It should throw up the difficulties, if there are some. If there are three unmanned and 15 partially manned, it should reveal whether that is adequate." (Minister Ross, 7 February 2018)

Minister Ross further stated that if the unstaffing of stations was established as constituting a barrier to equal access to public transport services for people with disabilities, alternatives would then be required:

> "The objective is that eventually those with a disability should be able to travel in exactly equal circumstances and with equal ease as anybody else. That is it. If we can do it by having stations which are unstaffed that is fine but if we cannot, we will have to find a better solution." (Minister Ross, 7 February 2018)

3.4.3 Tendering of PSO services

In relation to the accessibility standards required in relation to PSO services being operated by private operators, Minister Ross stated that these vehicles must be accessible. He continued by noting:

> "The role of private companies in the transport sector is not a noble one in terms of accessibility. It is not satisfactory and it is one we have to address. There is no point in beating about the bush and saying that they are stepping up to the plate; they are not. It is not acceptable that private companies should not conform.." (Minister Ross, 7 February 2018)

Observing that the NTA is proposing to regulate the accessibility requirements of public transport services operated by commercial operators, the Minister indicated that proposals for minimum accessibility standards are due to be published later this year:

[46] The *DART Accessibility Pilot Review* was subsequently published in April 2018 (www.irishrail.ie/news/accessibility-pilot-review).

> "We will not continue the kind of regime whereby they do not have to conform in a way which is acceptable." (Minister Ross, 7 February 2018)

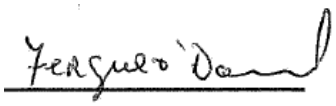
3.4.4 Proposed future developments

Minister Ross advised that increased funding has been secured to address the issue of inaccessible public transport services, noting that investment in public transport will be accelerated under the *National Development Plan (NDP).* Investment under the NDP includes proposed new major transport programmes (with full accessibility embedded into the design of such projects) and the continued retrofitting of existing public transport services and facilities to enhance accessibility. Queried as to the potential to "ring fence" funding for accessibility works, the Minister indicated that such funding is being increased at present and stated his belief that ring-fencing funds can hamper spending efforts as the designed amount can instead become a spending cap. Members also queried the nature of accessibility expenditure and the extent of the remaining shortfall in funding necessary to achieve universal accessibility of public transport services in Ireland (i.e. to cover the remaining work required to realise a fully accessible service nationwide).

At national policy level, Minister Ross noted that there are 19 actions relating to public transport in the *National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021* and the *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024* to which the relevant entities (including the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport) are "wholly committed".

At Departmental level, the Minister stated that a process of consolidation is underway to compile these actions/commitments into one document, which will the form the basis of the work programme of the Accessibility Consultative Committee within the Department.

This report was considered by the Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport and adopted by the Committee at its meeting on 19 September 2018.



Fergus O'Dowd, T.D.
Chairman
Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport

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Appendix 2: Submissions

1. Mr Tom Newton and Ms Caitriona McClean
2. Bus Éireann
3. Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport

A Submission to Oireachtas Committee on public transport access and disability in response to invitation for written submissions from the public.

Thank you for inviting submissions on this important subject. We propose an integrated transport system that is fully compliant with the needs of those with personal mobility issues, the elderly, and parents with young children.

The premise upon which we have designed an integrated transport plan for Dublin and the rest of Ireland is that if it's good for people with a disability, it's good for everyone. Provision for people with disabilities can be made at no extra cost to the tax payer if the principle is incorporated at the planning stage rather than adding facilitation as an extra to the plan thus incurring expense as special provision must be added to a plan designed primarily for those users of public transport without disabilities and without small children. Users of public transport have a bigger requirement for easy access and minimum change during their journey time than may have been assumed in earlier designs which have been inherited by planners today partly because the typical journey times are longer and urban sprawl has dictated longer distances are covered by public transport uses on a regular basis than previously experienced. Hence we have the disabled, the elderly, and mothers with young children depending more than ever on the empathy of planners to foresee difficulties and understand their perspective.

The principle of avoiding unnecessary change of vehicle mid journey is the key to good design and when change is necessary it must be planned from the perspective of those with reduced mobility. Acknowledging that structures are already in place and that we are not starting from scratch, we have taken a prudent approach of seeking value for money by building on to existing structures.

We now consider each mode of public transport in turn:

Buses

It's essential that bus users have convenient places for interchanging from on vehicle to another in the city. We propose two changes:

1. Quay bus contra - flow is an essential part of bus routing in the city. This allows all bus routes in Dublin interlink at one place. See map for contra flow proposal in detail and link up.
2. Bus stops must be located closer to junctions without being on the corner itself. This reduces the amount of walking involved. This may not seem significant to able bodied persons but it's significant to persons with disabilities.
3. The Quay bus contra - flow reduces many users having to cross busy junctions, great for users with a disability especially for wheelchair users. It also creates a public transport interchange in the city centre.

Luas

Overloading is a huge concern for disabled, elderly, and parents with young children and pregnant women. This can be addressed by the concept of the G Link which by providing a short link of a mile and a quarter will transform the experience of Luas passengers in particular during rush hours. See map provided for details of the G Link. This link ensures that all Luas at Heuston have capacity to take more passengers. The design of the G-Link ensures every second tram passing Heuston Station in both directions has spare capacity to avoid overloading. This greatly assists users with a disability as there is no congestion.

This problem of overloading can be further reduced by linking up the Luas on the outskirts to avoid all going by the city centre. For example see map showing Tallaght to Dundrum link.

Trains (Mainline and DART)

4. Linking the existing network with M50 Dart (see map) reduces excessive changes for passengers with disabilities and those with luggage and small children. The proposed plan essentially increases the range of possible easily accessible destinations for those with mobility difficulties. For example the Malahide DART going via the airport and inwards to the city and to Blanchardstown. This means on the Malahide line it will be possible for passengers to go directly to Blanchardstown and avoid have to change at the city. (see map)

5. The ramp for disabled passengers on the DART and other trains should be on the train and controlled by the driver. Passengers with a disability should use the carriage nearest the driver so the driver can be aware (via a bell if necessary) when the ramp is required. For health and safety reasons, it's important that the driver is aware of the position of disabled passengers.

Provisional Buses

Buses will be linked up for direct access to areas on the outskirts of the city via suitable interlinking hubs located in strategic positions. For example, Liffey Valley will be a hub with high quality bus shelters with heating and seating provided. This interlinking hub concept on outskirts benefits all but more so users with a disability.

Civic Plaza

The current plaza proposals do not facilitate those with mobility difficulties. Our proposal ensures everyone has access to the Civic Plaza. (See proposal).

Other Important Considerations:

1. Using standard rail gauge for Metro Dart ensures all areas and Dublin and Ireland can link up directly to each other. This is essential for users with a disability.
2. This plan is designed to ease city's traffic congestion with Land Use as the most important tool. At an estimated half the cost of any other system, this system is deliverable in a relatively short time ensuring all areas have an adequate transport solution. This would make Dublin a great city for public transport access and our motto is that if it's good for users with a disability, its great for everybody.

Because of the detailed plans being submitted, we would be happy to meet individual committee members if required to offer a fuller more detailed explanation of the proposals in this submission.

Tom Newton
Caitriona McClean

Bus Éireann submission for JOC accessibility report

Overview

Bus Éireann has 100% accessible city services in Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway and 100% accessible town services in Sligo, Athlone, Navan, Balbriggan, Dundalk & Drogheda. A further roll-out on our intercity, stage carriage and rural services remains a key priority for 2018.

Currently Bus Éireann has five Regional coach routes which are fully wheelchair accessible as follows:

1. 109a Navan to DCU, via Dublin Airport with wheelchair accessible stops at DCU, the Airport and Navan;
2. Waterford to Cork with wheelchair accessible stops in Cork Bus Station, Castlemartyr, Killeagh, Youghal, Waterford Institute of Technology and Waterford Bus Station (Route 40);
3. Galway to Athlone – this service operates end to end, bus station to bus station (Route 20);
4. Galway to Ballina – this service operates end to end, bus station to bus station (Route 456);
5. Letterkenny to Dublin with wheelchair accessible stops in Letterkenny, Lifford and Dublin (Route 32).

The next routes we are focusing for roll-out this year include Dublin to Belfast, Waterford to Dublin, Limerick to Dublin and Galway to Dublin, and these should be ready for travel next month (June). All routes also serve Dublin Airport. In addition we also plan to make a number of Greater Dublin Area (GDA) routes fully accessible including routes from Wicklow, Trim, Drogheda and Ashbourne, into Dublin.

Since our attendance at the JOC on this issue a few months ago progress has already been made in several areas including improved audio visual signage at Busaras, and a reduction in notice time for wheelchair travel reservations (now 24 hours, no matter what the day of travel is).

The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Shane Ross TD has also announced that a board member with disabilities will be appointed to the board of Bus Éireann, to ensure that accessibility remains an ongoing priority focus.

It is Bus Éireann policy to procure accessible vehicles as part of the continuing programme of fleet replacement and upgrading, and the company follow best practice when assessing and improving the accessibility of our services. This also applies to Expressway, our commercial intercity network.

Bus stations at Dundalk, Drogheda, Waterford, Athlone, Sligo, Cavan, Monaghan, Ballina, Letterkenny, Stranorlar, Cork, Ennis and Tralee are fully accessible, including accessible toilets.

The company have recently completed conversion of our online timetables into HTML format to allow for ease of use for those with visual impairments. This will facilitate those users who wish to access web timetables using a screen reader.

Working with stakeholders

Bus Éireann work with a range of stakeholders on accessibility. These include the National Transport Authority (NTA), Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, local councils, and our Disability User Group – which includes a wide range of user groups with different needs.

Bus Éireann have worked with the NTA to identify some priority routes on the network for wheelchair accessibility. Each route – outside of the city and town services, which have low floor vehicles with ramp access - requires the necessary infrastructure so that wheelchairs can be lifted onto, and off from, high line coaches. On Route 32 – which recently became accessible – the NTA funded a wheelchair accessible pad in Letterkenny.

The NTA are also in the process of assuming responsibility for all bus stops across Ireland, and are carrying out a nationwide audit of these bus stops. Bus Éireann - as one company alone - have 6,000 stops, and these range from bus shelters with RTPI (Real Time Passenger Information) to bus poles in rural Ireland. Many of these stops would not have the space dimensions to be accessible – which is currently 3.5 metres between the bus, and the verge - with the correct kerbing and paths in place.

Bus Éireann also work closely with city and county councils in relation to provision of these bus stops, where required. The NTA are also involved in this funding process as castle kerbing and upgraded pedestrian crossing are often required for visually impaired and wheelchair passengers.

Bus Éireann was asked at the JOC on Transport, Tourism and Sport last January to let the committee know what our working relationship with the local councils are, and if some of these are better than others. The nature of these relationships is changing as the NTA take more of a lead role in the provision of accessible stops, and we do wish to acknowledge the good working arrangements that there are between Bus Éireann staff and local authority officials.

Bus Éireann work with the DTTAS's Accessible Consultative Committee (ACC), which is required under both the Sectoral Plan and the National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021. Its role is to monitor and review progress on the implementation of respective actions by various organisations under the NDIS. The ACC in turn links in to the NDIS Steering Committee, which is chaired by Minister of State Finian McGrath.

The committee looks at the major accessibility/disability issues which emerge from the Bus Éireann Disability User Group, and these are then considered by the Steering Committee.

The company meets with the Disability User Group annually to receive their feedback on travel experiences with Bus Éireann and to hear any recommendations or requests they might have. This user group comprises the Irish Wheelchair Association, DeafHear, the National Council for the Blind (NCBI), the Disability Focus Group for the Dublin Community Forum, the NDA (National Disability Authority) and the Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind (IGDB). These groups' input has contributed to the development of Bus Éireann's accessibility services, and we will meet them again on May 18th next.

The challenges

While 90% of all Bus Éireann's road passenger fleet (710 vehicles) are wheelchair accessible – which will increase to 92% by the end of this year – only a small number of our intercity, rural and commuter routes are accessible to travel on. This is mostly due to the challenge of infrastructure, which is addressed below.

Many Bus Éireann services do not have on-board audio announcements for our customers, but we are embarking on a roll-out programme of these. However, they are also linked to the development and implementation of the NTA's Short Common Name project – where all transport operators, including Dublin Bus and private bus companies – will adopt the same name for each bus stop in the country. This is a large scale project that requires agreement and the changing of names on signage, timetables and online, and this in turn will impact the timeline for inputting of the announcements.

While all Bus Éireann town and city services are low floor and wheelchairs can roll on and off via a ramp, the requirements for coach travel – which are the main vehicles used outside of cities – is far more complex, as outlined earlier.

Specific bus stop infrastructure is required for wheelchair lifts to safely operate – in terms of space and special kerbing – and this infrastructure is not in place at the vast majority of stops outside of cities and towns. While work has been done to upgrade some bus stops, there is not a steady stream of significant funding to ensure the roll-out of more of these is identified and expedited.

Investment requirements

Bus Éireann do not receive directly ring-fenced long-term 'planned' funding in terms of provision to make our facilities, fleet, services or stops, more accessible. We believe this would be beneficial.

Our sister company Irish Rail stated that they received €2.4M from the NTA for accessibility measures such as platforms and lifts. They also stated that they had completed a cost survey with the NTA in relation to making all their services accessible and that it would cost €80m in total.

While Bus Éireann has not conducted such a survey with the NTA, we have previously undertaken research in relation to this. In 2013 we conducted comprehensive audits on our 11 main customer facilities and it was then costed at €11.45m, to make these fully accessible. We recently updated these costs to include inflation and interest and this would now have risen to an estimated €15.6m. We have these audits and updated figures if they are required, or if funding was to come on stream.

The need for an accessibility stakeholder forum

Bus Éireann believe that making the transport network more accessible necessitates a stakeholder forum, giving the different agents involved in the process. This could include the transport operators, the National Transport Authority, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and Local Government Management Association (LGMA) representatives, and all the disability groups.

This forum needs to look at an overarching plan and strategy that would explore the funding mechanism for accessible transport, the prioritisation of routes/services, the infrastructure requirements, the fleet requirements, and set targets and timelines for the achievement of these. Without such a joined-up 'big picture' the progression could continue to be slow and piecemeal.

Conclusion

Bus Éireann are very much committed to the ongoing roll-out of accessible routes, and we do believe those with disabilities should be able to travel on our network as independently as possible.

The company has invested very significantly in recent years in improving access to our stations, vehicles and services for people with a disability. However we are mindful that occasions do arise where customers have difficulty accessing our services, we greatly regret when this occurs and are doing our utmost to limit the occasions when such difficulties do arise.

However, to achieve this we are dependent on the provision of funding and working in partnership with the National Transport Authority (NTA) and local authorities. We welcome this report into the accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities, and believe there is much scope for recommendations, given all the stakeholders have made contributions at the various JOC hearings.

We will continue to invest in the provision of accessible fleet on our commercial Expressway buses/network – which receives no State funding – and progress our programme of rolling out more wheelchair accessible services throughout 2018, along with more on board audio announcements.

We look forward to meeting with our Disability User Group this month and will take on board all their feedback, as we strive to keep improving our systems and services for all our passengers.

Best practice

The DG Move, European Commission funded '*Comprehensive Study on Passenger Transport by Coach in Europe*' report of April 2016 by Steer Davies Gleaves gives a good snapshot of how Irish transport services measure up against our European counterparts. This country compares quite favourably with others such Germany and the UK, and is far ahead of countries such as Poland. The full report is available online here:

https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/modes/road/studies/doc/2016-04-passenger-transport-by-coach-in-europe.pdf

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7th March 2018

Mr Paul Kelly
Clerk to the Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism & Sport
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

JCTTS-R-244

RE: Accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities

Dear Mr Kelly

Further to Minister Ross's appearance before the Committee at its hearing on 7th February last, in relation to accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities, there were a number of issues on which the Minister undertook to revert to the Committee. The position in relation to these issues is set out below.

1. Meeting to be arranged between the CEO of Irish Rail and Padraic Moran

Following communication from the Department and letter from the Committee to Irish Rail, the company confirmed that an early meeting would be arranged with Mr Moran. A meeting arranged for last week was cancelled due to the bad weather.

Irish Rail has advised that it is in contact with Mr Moran with a view to finalising a date this week for the meeting which will now be with Mr Jim Meade who has taken over as Acting CEO of the company.

2. Reporting on the DART Pilot – 4 hour notice

Irish Rail launched a pilot project on 29th January 2018 for the DART. The pilot involves reducing the period of advance notice which people with disabilities who require assistance are advised to give, from 24 to 4 hours by guaranteeing staffing across grouped stations and ensuring flexibility to enable staff to move between stations to provide assistance. The pilot is to run for six months after which Irish Rail will review it, both for its expansion to commuter services and for further reductions in the advised notice period. The Department met with Irish Rail and emphasised the importance of appropriate monitoring of the DART Pilot to measure its effectiveness. The National Transport Authority (NTA) is liaising with Irish Rail on the submission of reports on the operation of the pilot which will be made publicly available. Work is underway to compile the data for the first report which is expected to be available in about a month's time and reports will issue every period whilst the pilot is running.

3. Launch of Irish Rail App

The Committee referred to concerns raised by Padraic Moran at the first session of the hearing on the 7th February, that an app Irish Rail is developing for mobility and sensory impaired customers had

been launched without testing and without staff being trained in its use. The Department raised this matter with Irish Rail which advised that the app has not been launched and is still in the development phase and that a number of users are assisting with the project, including Mr Moran, with a view to its deployment later this year.

4. Retro-fitting existing infrastructure

In Budget 2018 the funding provided for the accessibility retro-fitting programme was trebled as part of the 4 year capital envelope for public transport. An amount of almost €28m is being made available for accessibility upgrades for existing older infrastructure in the period 2018-2021. The additional funding will facilitate the continued roll-out of the programmes to install accessible bus stops, upgrade train stations to make them accessible for wheelchair users and provide grant support for the introduction of more wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) into the taxi fleet.

In 2018 funding under the programme amounts to €4m with indicative allocations as follows:

- WAV Grant Scheme - €2.25 million;
- Rail station accessibility upgrade- €1.0 million; and
- Accessible bus stops - €0.75 million.

The NTA has been requested to provide an update on the details of the works required to upgrade existing infrastructure and the works planned with the available funding which will be forwarded to the Committee when received.

Investment in public transport will be accelerated under the recently published National Development Plan (NDP) to support the development of an integrated, accessible and sustainable national public transport system. A number of key new major public transport programmes are proposed for delivery during the period to 2027. As with all new and recently developed public transport projects, these programmes will be fully accessible as part of the normal design. Under the NDP, there will also be a continued investment programme to fund retro-fitting of older existing public transport facilities to enhance accessibility.

5. Public Service Employment Target for People with Disabilities

The Committee sought details of the numbers of people with disabilities employed in the agencies under the aegis of the Department. The National Disability Authority (NDA) has a statutory role in monitoring employment of people with disabilities in the public sector, arising from Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005, including the obligation on public bodies to comply with prescribed targets relating to the recruitment and employment of persons with disabilities. Public bodies are required to submit a report by 30th March each year, in respect of the previous calendar year, to the Monitoring Committee in the relevant Government Department in relation to their compliance. Based on these reports each Department submits a report to the NDA on all agencies under its remit by 30th June in each year, following which the NDA prepares a report by 30th November each year for the Minister for Justice and Equality. The NDA report is published annually and it includes details of the number and percentage of people with disabilities employed by Departments and public bodies. The latest published report is in respect of 2015 and this can be found on the NDA website at http://nda.ie/Publications/Employment/Employment-of-people-with-disabilities-in-the-public-

service/Reports-on-compliance-with-public-sector-jobs-target/2015-Report-on-Compliance-with-Part-5-on-the-Employment-of-People-with-Disabilities-in-the-Public-Sector.html

6. Disabled Parking Spaces

The Minister announced on 5th March last that he has increased the fixed charge for motorists parking in a disabled bay without displaying a valid permit from €80 to €150. The Regulations giving effect to this came into operation on 1st March 2018, with both an Garda Síochána and the Local Authority Traffic Wardens (or their parking enforcement agents) serving fixed charge notices with the increased amount from this date.

7. Implementation of the NDIS and CES Actions

The National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) 2017-2021 and the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) 2015-2024, together contain 19 public transport related actions for which the Department, the NTA and/or public transport operators have lead responsibility for implementing. There are also a number of other Government strategies and plans which include accessible public transport actions and commitments e.g. the Programme for a Partnership Government, National Positive Ageing Strategy, Action Plan for Rural Development. With a view to strengthening the oversight and monitoring of the implementation of the various actions and targets, the Department is in the process of consolidating them into one document which will form the basis of the work programme for the Department's Accessibility Consultative Committee (ACC) whose role is to monitor and review progress in relation to the implementation of public transport actions under the NDIS. The consolidated document will include the current position on implementation of all of the actions and will be finalised shortly for consideration by the ACC at its next meeting on 21st March 2018, following which it will be forwarded to the Committee.

8. Proposed EU Accessibility Legislation

Existing EU Passenger rights legislation for air, rail, bus and coach and maritime include guaranteeing the rights of disabled passengers when travelling by these modes. These rights include non-discriminatory access to transport at no additional cost for disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility. The NTA is the National Enforcement body for passenger rights (bus, coach, rail and maritime) in Ireland.

The EU published a proposal in October 2017 to replace the existing Regulation 1371/2007 on rail passengers' rights and obligations. It would apply to Irish Rail passenger services but not to LUAS services. The proposed recast Regulation seeks to strengthen the rights of rail passengers and to place further obligations on rail operators, stations masters, ticket vendors and tour operators. The proposal should have mainly positive impacts on the public by improving and strengthening provisions that facilitate rail travel and in particular, for rail passengers who have disabilities and passengers with reduced mobility. The draft proposal is under negotiation by the Member States at Working Party level at present.

There is ongoing parallel work being undertaken in the negotiation of the proposals for the proposed EU Accessibility Act which is also being cross-referenced in the proposal for Rail Passenger Rights. The Department of Justice and Equality (DJE) is the lead department in negotiations in relation to the proposed EU Accessibility Act. Ireland has been a strong supporter of the proposed legislation which is designed to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities to a range of products and services

by harmonising accessibility requirements at EU level for those products and services, e.g. in relation to certain elements of passenger transport services including websites, mobile applications, real time passenger information, ticketing machines and interactive terminals. DJE obtained Government approval in 2016 to support the proposal after it was published in December 2015 and established an advisory committee chaired by DJE with relevant agencies and Departments, including the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Bus Éireann, Irish Rail and Transport Infrastructure Ireland, which advised on detailed issues throughout the course of the negotiations.

The EPSCO Council agreed to a general approach on the accessibility directive on 7th and 8th December 2017. Further to this mandate, the Presidency has commenced negotiations with the European Parliament.

9. Retrofitting of automated ramps on trains

Reference was made at the Committee to a study on automated ramps carried out by Irish Rail some 10 years ago. At its meeting with Irish Rail the Department raised this issue with the company who advised that while no study of this nature was undertaken, some work was done on costing the retrofitting of automated ramps 8 or 9 years ago. Irish Rail will communicate with the Committee in relation to this work.

10. Minutes of meetings of the Accessibility Consultative Committee

The Committee requested that the Department publish the minutes of the meetings of its Accessibility Consultative Committee (ACC). As the Minister indicated to the Committee, he is open to this request. However, given the ACC membership includes representatives of disability organisations, the Disability Stakeholders Group and relevant state agencies, their agreement would have to be sought. The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on 21st March 2018 and this issue will be put on the agenda for that meeting.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Private Secretary to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport

An Roinn Iompair Turasóireachta agus Spóirt
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13 June 2018

Mr Paul Kelly
Clerk to the Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism & Sport
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: Accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities

Dear Mr Kelly

I am writing further to my letter of 7th March 2018 (copy enclosed) and Minister Ross's appearance before the Committee at its hearing on 7th February 2018, in relation to accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities.

I wish to update the Committee on a number of issues raised by its members with the at the hearing on 7th February, as well as on the appointment of persons with personal experience of the needs and difficulties of people with disabilities using public transport, to the Boards of public transport companies. It is hoped that the information provided may be helpful to the Committee in preparing its report on this matter.

1. Meeting between Mr Padraic Moran and the CEO of Irish Rail

I can confirm that a meeting took place between Mr Moran and the newly appointed CEO or Irish Rail, Mr Jim Meade, on 21st March last.

2. Reporting on DART Advance Notice Pilot

As advised in my letter of 7th March, Irish Rail is monitoring the operation of the DART Pilot and is preparing monthly reports for publication. Enclosed are Irish Rail's reports for the four month period from its introduction on 29th January 2018 to 20th May 2018. These are published on Irish Rail's website at http://www.irishrail.ie/news/accessibility-pilot-review.

3. Retro-fitting existing public transport infrastructure

Enclosed are information notes provided by the National Transport Authority (NTA) which manages the Public Transport Accessibility Retro-fit Programme funded by this Department, in relation to (i) the accessibility status of current public transport infrastructure (position at March 2018), (ii) the

cost of making public transport services wheelchair accessible (position at May 2018) and (iii) the Accessibility Retro-fit Programme 2018-2021 (position at March 2018).

As previously advised there will be continued investment in the retro-fit programme under the National Development Plan in the period to 2027.

4. Implementation of NDIS and CES Actions

Enclosed is the Work Programme of the Department's Accessibility Consultative Committee (ACC) which is the basis on which the ACC monitors and reviews progress in relation to the implementation of the public transport, as well as any tourism and sport, actions contained in the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) 2017-2021 and the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) 2015-2024, for which this Department, its agencies and/or public transport operators have lead responsibility. The Work Programme also includes accessible public transport actions contained in a number of other Government strategies and Plans, e.g. the Programme for a Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Development. The enclosed Work Programme sets out the implementation status of all of the actions as of March 2018. Updates on the Work Programme are provided by the relevant agencies in advance of the quarterly meetings of the ACC.

5. Publication of minutes of meetings of the Department's Accessibility Consultative Committee

The Department has obtained the agreement of the members of the ACC to the publication on the Department's website of the minutes of the Committee's quarterly meetings. The minutes of the ACC meeting held on 21st March 2018 are the first to be put up on the website and may be viewed at http://www.dttas.ie/public-transport/english/accessibility The minutes of the ACC meeting held on 30th May 2018 will be published once they have been approved by the Committee at its next meeting in September.

I should add that the Accessibility webpage on the Department's website is new and will be developed further.

6. Proposed EU legislation on Accessibility

Rail Passengers' Rights – the EU proposal to replace the existing Regulation 1371/2007 is the subject of a Presidency progress report to the Transport Council meeting in June.

EU Accessibility Act – the Department of Justice and Equality which has lead responsibility for this proposed legislation, has advised that the negotiations on the proposals have moved to trilogues between the Commission, Council and European Parliament.

7. Appointments to the Boards of transport companies

At the Committee hearing on 7th February, the Minister announced that he intended to appoint, to the Boards of public transport companies under his remit, a person with personal experience of the needs and difficulties of people with disabilities using public transport. The Public Appointments Service (PAS) advertised these positions for the Boards of the NTA, Irish Rail, Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus on 26th March 2018, with a closing date for submission of expressions of interest of 20/04/2018.

This was subsequently extended to 27/04/2018. The PAS assessment process of the applications received is underway. The position for the Board of CIÉ will be advertised shortly.

You may also wish to be aware that PAS has also advertised to fill a disability advocate position for the Board of Sport Ireland, with a closing date of 30/04/2018.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Private Secretary to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport

Appendix 3: Committee Membership

Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport

Deputies

Ruth Coppinger[47]
Solidarity - People Before Profit

Imelda Munster
Sinn Féin

Catherine Murphy
Social Democrats

Fergus O'Dowd (Chair)
Fine Gael

Kevin O'Keeffe (Vice Chair)
Fianna Fáil

Noel Rock
Fine Gael

Robert Troy
Fianna Fáil

Senators

Frank Feighan
Fine Gael

Pádraig Ó Céidigh
Independent

John O'Mahony
Fine Gael

Ned O'Sullivan
Fianna Fáil

[47] Deputy Ruth Coppinger replaced Deputy Mick Barry on the Committee in October 2018.

Appendix 4: Terms of Reference

Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport

a. Functions of the Committee – derived from Standing Orders [DSO 84A; SSO 70A]

(1) The Select Committee shall consider and report to the Dáil on -

a. such aspects of the expenditure, administration and policy of a Government Department or Departments and associated public bodies as the Committee may select, and

b. European Union matters within the remit of the relevant Department or Departments.

(2) The Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order may be joined with a Select Committee appointed by Seanad Éireann for the purposes of the functions set out in this Standing Order, other than at paragraph (3), and to report thereon to both Houses of the Oireachtas.

(3) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments, such -

a. Bills,

b. proposals contained in any motion, including any motion within the meaning of Standing Order 187,

c. Estimates for Public Services, and

d. other matters as shall be referred to the Select Committee by the Dáil, and

e. Annual Output Statements including performance, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public monies, and

f. such Value for Money and Policy Reviews as the Select Committee may select.

(4) The Joint Committee may consider the following matters in respect of the relevant Department or Departments and associated public bodies:

a. matters of policy and governance for which the Minister is officially responsible,

b. public affairs administered by the Department,

c. policy issues arising from Value for Money and Policy Reviews conducted or commissioned by the Department,

d. Government policy and governance in respect of bodies under the aegis of the Department,

e. policy and governance issues concerning bodies which are partly or wholly funded by the State or which are established or appointed by a member of the Government or the Oireachtas,

f. the general scheme or draft heads of any Bill,

g. any post-enactment report laid before either House or both Houses by a member of the Government or Minister of State on any Bill enacted by the Houses of the Oireachtas,

h. statutory instruments, including those laid or laid in draft before either House or both Houses and those made under the European Communities Acts 1972 to 2009,

i. strategy statements laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas pursuant to the Public Service Management Act 1997,

j. annual reports or annual reports and accounts, required by law, and laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, of the Department or bodies referred to in subparagraphs (d) and (e) and the overall performance and operational results, statements of strategy and corporate plans of such bodies, and

k. such other matters as may be referred to it by the Dáil from time to time.

(5) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments -

a. EU draft legislative acts standing referred to the Select Committee under Standing Order 114, including the compliance of such acts with the principle of subsidiarity,

b. other proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues, including programmes and guidelines prepared by the European Commission as a basis of possible legislative action,

c. non-legislative documents published by any EU institution in relation to EU policy matters, and

d. matters listed for consideration on the agenda for meetings of the relevant EU Council of Ministers and the outcome of such meetings.

(6) Where a Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order has been joined with a Select Committee appointed by Seanad Éireann, the Chairman of the Dáil Select Committee shall also be the Chairman of the Joint Committee.

(7) The following may attend meetings of the Select or Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order, for the purposes of the functions set out in paragraph (5) and may take part in proceedings without having a right to vote or to move motions and amendments:

a. Members of the European Parliament elected from constituencies in Ireland, including Northern Ireland,

b. Members of the Irish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and

c. at the invitation of the Committee, other Members of the European Parliament

(8) A Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order may, in respect of any Ombudsman charged with oversight of public services within the policy remit of the relevant Department or Departments, consider -

a. such motions relating to the appointment of an Ombudsman as may be referred to the Committee, and

b. such Ombudsman reports laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas as the Committee may select.

b. Scope and Context of Activities of Committees (as derived from Standing Orders) [DSO 84; SSO 70]

(1) The Joint Committee may only consider such matters, engage in such activities, exercise such powers and discharge such functions as are specifically authorised under its orders of reference and under Standing Orders; and

(2) Such matters, activities, powers and functions shall be relevant to, and shall arise only in the context of, the preparation of a report to the Dáil and/or Seanad.

(3) The Joint Committee shall not consider any matter which is being considered, or of which notice has been given of a proposal to consider, by the Committee of Public Accounts pursuant to Standing Order 186 and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993; and

(4) any matter which is being considered, or of which notice has been given of a proposal to consider, by the Joint Committee on Public Petitions in the exercise of its functions under Standing Orders [DSO 111A and SSO 104A].

(5) The Joint Committee shall refrain from inquiring into in public session or publishing confidential information regarding any matter if so requested, for stated reasons given in writing, by:

a. a member of the Government or a Minister of State, or

b. the principal office-holder of a body under the aegis of a Department or which is partly or wholly funded by the State or established or appointed by a member of the Government or by the Oireachtas:

Provided that the Chairman may appeal any such request made to the Ceann Comhairle / Cathaoirleach whose decision shall be final.

(6) It shall be an instruction to all Select Committees to which Bills are referred that they shall ensure that not more than two Select Committees shall meet to consider a Bill on any given day, unless the Dáil, after due notice given by the Chairman of the Select Committee, waives this instruction on motion made by the Taoiseach pursuant to Dáil Standing Order 28. The Chairmen of Select Committees shall have responsibility for compliance with this instruction.

Notes