

YOUNG FINE GAEL

Action Plan For Irish Public Transport

A NATIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT CAMPAIGN

The logo for Young Fine Gael (YFG) is located in the bottom right corner. It consists of the letters 'YFG' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, with a small white star positioned to the left of the 'Y'. The logo is set against a teal rectangular background.



Contents

Forword	4
Overview of Bus Services	5
Overview of Rail Services	5
Overview of Taxi Services	5
Bus Services	6
Rail Services	9
Taxi Services	12
Disability Accessibility on Public Transport	14
Conclusion	15
Acknowledgements	

Foreword

As a fully autonomous youth wing of the Fine Gael party, we have been calling for greater emphasis to be placed on our national public transport infrastructure. Affordability and accessibility are two of the key elements required to improve our national transport services. YFG has been vocal on this issue and has passed several motions at our summer schools over the years calling on the government of the day to improve our transport infrastructure.

Currently, Ireland's public transport system is amongst the most expensive in Europe in nearly all categories. This is something that must be changed if we are to increase national usage and to make it more accessible for all strands of Irish society. Additionally, if Ireland wants to reach its Paris Agreement targets for the environment, a greater emphasis and focus on increasing our use of public transport and on improving the various services is long overdue. Now is the time for action. Important projects such as the long-proposed 'Metro-North' must soon become a reality if we are really serious about improving our public transport system in the long-term.

This document is a specific list of measures for internal reforms and actions designed to bring political engagement to all four corners of our island. Throughout this document we have sought to review problems and offer solutions to the issues that are challenging within our current public transport system. While many advances have been made in developing our public transport infrastructure over the last 2 terms of government, notably the introduction of new rail and bus routes and improvements to existing routes, the development of real time information technology and the delivery of large projects such as the Luas Cross City on time and within budget, much work remains to deliver a dynamic and effective public transport system across all regions on the island. Ireland has the potential to create an excellent public transport system and YFG wants to be involved in helping the government to achieve this goal.

This action plan is a culmination of work by various people within YFG who are committed to delivering on improved and more affordable public transport service in Ireland. I am proud of this document and of the ambitious action plans we have set out in it. I would like to acknowledge and thank the excellent work done by the members of the Policy and Campaigns Committee who assisted me in making this document.

Dylan Hutchinson

Young Fine Gael Director of Campaigns





Overview of National Bus Services

Bus services in Ireland are currently too expensive for consumers and oftentimes do not offer adequate services. In many cases, there is a lack of resources provided for bus transport in communities across Ireland. It is important that our public and private bus routes serve all strands of Irish society.

Dublin commuters are paying the highest average cash fare for a single bus ticket among 16 EU countries. Dublin is also the fourth most expensive EU city to buy a monthly ticket covering bus, train and tram travel. According to Eurostat, adult commuters in Dublin pay around €2.20 for a bus trip – almost double the EU average of €1.12.

In our larger cities, the introduction of more 24-hour bus routes is an important step in broadening our urban bus services. The introduction of local link Bus Éireann services in more rural and semi-urban areas would also provide significantly better transport alternatives to Irish commuters who may currently be dependent on using private vehicles for their travel needs.

Overview of National Rail Services

In 2017, Irish Rail suffered a €6 million negative variance, meaning they were €6 million short of their expectations for the year 2017. Furthermore, for 2018 Irish Rail had budgeted for a profit of €1.1 million but by the end of the year had ended up with a loss of €6.5 million. Both of these results occurred despite both years experiencing record journeys, particularly on the DART, and with increased financial backing from the exchequer. This highlights that Irish Rail is experiencing financial difficulties which must be addressed.

The aim of trying to improve Irish Rail's financial position is rooted in the belief that if the organisation is in an improved financial situation, it is better able to not only fund improvements and the delivery of new services, but also provide lower fares to consumers.

Overview Of National Taxi Services

There is a great deal of variance within the Irish taxi industry in rural parts of the country as outlined by the National Transport Authority's review of the industry. Taxi drivers can expect an average salary of around €382 a week in Athlone or around €19,800 a year, whereas in Cork one can earn on average, €650 a week or €33,800 annually and in Dublin €635 a week or €33,000 annually. One can see that some of this difference in earnings is partly due to hours worked on average but by no means all the difference. In Athlone, for example, taxi drivers work 3.7 hours per day compared to Dublin taxi drivers who work for 4.8 hours or 5.4 hours in Cork.

One can see that due to a lower population, the incentive does not exist in much of rural Ireland to provide vital public transport infrastructure to the same extent as in more urbanised areas.

Due to the lack of public transport services in large swathes of the country, we will need to incentivise increased usage of taxis in the medium term. To this end, a review of current tariff rates must take place with the goal of differentiating rates in different regions to encourage more consumers in rural areas who would not otherwise undertake journeys to use taxis. This would improve rural connectivity and nightlife in rural Ireland. The increased presence of more affordable taxi services in rural regions would not only fill the gap left by an underdeveloped public transport service but may also help to reduce automobile accidents.



Transport for Ireland

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Bus Services

1 Provide the necessary financial support to introduce 24 hour service for popular Dublin Bus routes

While acknowledging the need to delay provision of such support due to considerably reduced bus usage, this policy is crucial to ensure the proper supply of adequate bus services. Dublin City is in need of such services not only because more and more people are being employed to work late working hours but this policy will also be crucial for the future survival of the hospitality and nightlife industry.

2 Investigate the feasibility of launching a fleet of Dublin Bus coaches which will serve less densely populated areas as well as replacing double decker buses on unprofitable routes

A major hindrance to the introduction of more Dublin Bus services has been the financial limitations of such a policy. In an effort to mitigate these issues while providing necessary bus services to less densely populated areas, the use of a cheaper coach fleet could service both areas that would otherwise not get a bus service and the coach fleet could replace the double-decker buses used on routes which are acutely loss-making.

3 In the cities of Cork, Waterford and Limerick, increase the number of hourly city bus services ensuring they arrive every 15 minutes on the four most popular routes, such as the 208 in Cork.

Recognising that after the global pandemic ends there will be growing passenger numbers on these routes, such as the one mentioned above, provision should be made for services on these popular routes to arrive every 15 mins. This measure will also increase customer satisfaction and incentivise more people to use public transport.

4 Upgrade the current fleet of city buses in Cork, Waterford and Limerick to double deckers as they are in the city of Dublin.

At present in all these cities all buses are single decker buses and are not at times in a position to accommodate the number of people presenting themselves to use the service. This problem could be rectified by the introduction of a double decker fleet of buses.

5 Direct bus links from Shannon International Airport to Limerick, Cork Airport to Cork City Centre and Kerry Airport to Killarney/Tralee.

Currently, when someone who arrives at any of the above airports and wishes to avail of public transport to access the regional centres such as Cork City Centre, Limerick City Centre and Killarney/Tralee the services are often poor and infrequent. The measure required to rectify this issue would be to introduce an hourly bus service to and from these airports to the regional centre.

6 Town bus service for major regional towns such as Clonmel, Tralee, Mallow, Killarney and Ennis.

These towns are rapidly expanding in population size and have no town bus services in them. As they continue to grow, the towns will require a bus service which will alleviate traffic congestion and provide a much needed service for commuters, particularly students and older people.

7 Increased investment for bus lanes in the cities of Cork, Waterford and Limerick.

Currently, these cities have not seen the same investment in bus and cycling lanes as Dublin and the Greater Dublin Area. If more investment were placed in bus lanes in the above cities, it would reduce journey times and make public transport a far more viable option for road users.

8 Limerick City bus service route that will run between University of Limerick and Mary Immaculate College to the city's train and bus station.

At present, students find it difficult to easily access public transport that will take them from the campuses of the above colleges to the train and bus station. If a special route were designed to cater for this route, the burden of commuting for students in these colleges would ease dramatically.

9 Grants need to be made available to people in rural areas so they can be encouraged to provide a rural bus service in towns and villages.

At present, it would be impossible for Bus Éireann to provide services for the entirety of towns in rural Ireland. Nonetheless, these areas still require some action to resolve the issue of the lack of transport services. By providing grants to local people this would provide an initiative to begin providing a rural bus link serving many rural areas.

10 All bus fleets need to be able to accommodate for persons who have a disability.

It is unacceptable that disabled people who require public transport like anybody else and pay their fare cannot get access to some vehicles.

11 Shuttle Bus to and from Kerry Airport to Farranfore Railway Station.

At present there are no methods other than walking if one was to arrive at Kerry Airport (Farranfore) and wants to go to Farranfore Railway Station. To rectify the lack of public transport, a shuttle bus should be provided that will take arrivals from the airport to the station to get trains.

12 Run earlier services on the Galway to Dublin Bus Éireann route.

For example, the Bus Éireann No.20 service operating between Galway and Dublin caters for towns such as Enfield, Kinnegad, Kilbeggan and Moate, but only serves these commuter towns 5 times a day with no early service for these towns, affecting commuters moving between Galway and Dublin. An earlier service should be introduced in order to cater for commuters who need to be at work by 9am.

13 Increase Frequency of Stops on the Dublin to West of Ireland Bus Éireann route.

The frequency of other bus services in the North West should also be addressed. There can be waits of up to 3 hours between services, which does not adequately serve the community. This can be seen on the Sligo to Dublin route, the Derry to Galway route and the Galway to Dublin route. We recommend that Bus Éireann should be held to account over the frequency of services in the North West in order to improve the transport options for commuters in the region.

14 Improve and Develop the No. 73 Waterford to Athlone Bus route.

The No. 73 bus route between Waterford and Athlone runs all the way up through West Leinster and the Midlands and could be a very valuable service to the area if it was extended to Longford train station and increased its frequency from 2 services a day to 4 services a day. This route could become very beneficial to the West Leinster region and improve accessibility for those living there.

15 Introduce a stop at Portlaoise on the Dublin to Cork Bus Éireann route.

There is currently no way of getting from Portlaoise to Cork via bus. This has led to overcrowding on the train service between Cork and Laois, particularly on Sundays during the college term. People from Laois and surrounding counties Kildare, Carlow, Kilkenny and Offaly are thus put at a disadvantage. It would be sensible in our view to introduce a stop at Midway, Junction 17 on the Cork to Dublin service.

16 Standardise fares and permit the use of Leap Cards on Local Link Services.

Local Link is a bus service that caters for smaller population centres and rural areas throughout the country and has 15 transport coordination units outside of Dublin. This service is a vital lifeline in rural Ireland for areas that lack mainstream transportation hubs. However there is a large fluctuation in price depending on what area you are in. In the Midlands and North West fares are generally reasonable however an adult return ticket in Cavan-Monaghan can range from €4 to €11 whereas the same ticket in Laois-Offaly only ranges from €3 to €5. Also,



for many students who use the TFI Leap Card, it is only accepted in Fingal and not on other services in Ireland. The acceptance of Leap Cards on all Local Link services should be prioritised and pricing parity should be encouraged.

17 Develop a pilot scheme for Local Link midnight routes nationwide.

In 2018 it was announced that the service would run night-time services in order to give people in rural areas opportunities to socialise, without having to worry about driving home. Lack of transport at night time is a serious issue in rural Ireland and a significant contributor to isolation in rural areas. Usually, these late services run on Fridays and Saturdays with the latest times ranging from 9 pm to 11 pm. The effectiveness of these services vary. Overall they are successful, having carried approximately 8,500 people between July and October 2018. In a review carried out by the National Transport Authority, it stated that the general consensus was that services that run later into the evening were more popular than ones that finished earlier. Therefore, we recommend that the government introduce a pilot scheme to run Local Link services until midnight.

18 Introduce a direct and frequent bus service from Claremorris to Knock Airport.

Claremorris is the town where the closest train station to Knock Airport is located. This bus service would link up the airport and make it more accessible for people travelling to and from Dublin, as well as other parts of the country.

19 Ensure the bus timetable is correlated with flight times at Knock Airport.

It has been criticised by a review of public transport in Mayo that bus links to the airport do not effectively correspond with flight times. This causes great inconvenience for passengers.

20 Introduce direct bus services to Westport and Castlebar.

Existing bus services from Knock Airport fail to offer direct services to nearby town centres. A direct route to these towns mentioned would shorten journey times. This is because Local Link bus services have, since being established, been a fantastic service for people in rural Ireland particularly older people, young people and people with disabilities. This service transported 2 million people in 2018 with the number of passengers increasing by over 5% for 2017 and 2018.



249
2



Rail Services

1 Initiate an exploration of viable cost cutting measures in Irish Rail.

Taking into account recent internal reports from Irish Rail which highlight severely loss-making routes there is a need to reduce financial pressure. The particular focus of this endeavour should not be to close down such loss-making stations, but rather to look at methods of minimising losses.

2 Conduct a review of Irish Rail's current facilities which allow for corporate advertising.

The review should be done in an effort to find suitable locations where Irish Rail would be able to expand the number of outlets in which companies could purchase advertising space. This could contribute to increases in advertisement revenue.

3 Review consultation, auditing and contractor fees.

Although they make up a small portion of the deficits incurred at Irish Rail, this measure nonetheless would alleviate some of the financial burden that Irish Rail currently bears.

4 Expand rail links to and from larger towns in the Greater Dublin Area.

Currently, the predominant locations that the DART serves are along the coast of Leinster, with little to no attention being paid to smaller, but nonetheless vital locations in more inland regions. Road-dominant commuter towns such as Ratoath, Ashbourne, Navan and Skerries (to a lesser extent) are without any significant rail services. While acknowledging the National Transport Authority's (NTA) plans to expand DART services to Maynooth, Drogheda and Hazelhatch, the need for the presence of

DART services in the aforementioned commuter towns is essential for the continued success of these areas. Taking into account the financial burden that both the NTA and Irish Rail have been under, the construction of these new stations under the historically successful Public Private Partnerships scheme, with an emphasis on Design, Build and Finance (DBF) contracts would likely eliminate a considerable portion of the financial deterrents.

5 Construct a complementary rail track in the Waterford to Dublin route.

The continued neglect of the unitrack route between Waterford and Dublin is undesirable because it limits the number of journeys that can run on this route. Moreover, the regular disruption of rail services due to signalling errors should not continue. Therefore, the construction of a second track, complementing the existing track as well as a particular focus on more permanent repairs to the signalling system is recommended.

6 Make the Waterford to Dublin Heuston and Tralee to Dublin Heuston train lines a double track line.

If this were to become the reality it would enable the services on these lines to become far more frequent and punctual. In the event that a locomotive breaks down on these lines it takes hours for them to be moved and enable the passengers to reach their destination.

7 New train route from Shannon International Airport to Limerick Corbett Station.

Shannon is a busy international airport which sees millions of passengers each year. It is no longer tenable for the airport's arrivals to have no proper public transport infrastructure that will get them to the regional centre, in the case of Shannon International Airport this being Limerick. We call for a new train route that will connect

and run a service between Shannon and Limerick. From Limerick passengers will have the opportunity to connect to other rail services, particularly Limerick to Dublin.

8 Two more additional direct services per day each way on the Tralee to Dublin Heuston route.

It is unfair that passengers on the Kerry line who have the longest railway journey in the state have to rely on the Cork to Dublin Heuston service each day for one direct service each way per day. This is in contrast to other similar lines such as Westport to Dublin Heuston and Limerick to Dublin Heuston who both have many more direct services a day each way on their lines. It must be noted that the Kerry line is also one of the busiest in the country. If the proposal were to be accepted, it would also prevent passengers for the Kerry line from being dependent on Cork services, reduce overcrowding on trains and encourage more people to use public transport.

9 Greater access and information for the purchase of Leap Cards.

The Leap Card initiative is an excellent one, but public transport users outside Dublin and the Greater Dublin area have less incentive to buy them as there are few places you can purchase them. The Leap Card initiative could also incentivise more public transport use in Munster, the Midlands and the North-West.

10 One service per day each way between Limerick Corbett Station and Waterford Plunkett Station.

Many people in the Munster region cannot access the cities of Waterford and Limerick by means of a rail service. If this service were to be provided that would change. It would also allow passengers from the rest of Munster on the Tralee line and Cork line to connect with the service at Limerick Junction.

11 Light rail for Cork similar to the Luas in Dublin.

Cork is the second city of the country, with a population of 210,000 and growing. It is now time to up the pace of development of public transport in the city. We are calling for a light rail service to be introduced. This will greatly reduce most of the city's carbon footprint.

12 Reinstate the Waterford to Rosslare train line.

Many people depended on this line and due to budget cuts following the 2008 financial crisis, Irish Rail took the decision to close it. This closure seems unjust considering the number of people living between Waterford and Rosslare who would use it if it were still available. At present, if you wished to travel from Waterford to Rosslare you would have to take a train from Waterford to Heuston, then cross Dublin to Connolly and then travel from Connolly to Rosslare adding five additional unnecessary hours to a train journey that should only take under an hour.

13 Reopen Killucan & other dormant train stations.

The station at Killucan is emblematic of issues surrounding rail across the Midlands, North West & Connacht. Killucan and stations like it need to be reopened and rejuvenated. The station is on the Dublin to Sligo line and was closed to passengers in 1963 with signal functioning stopped in 2005. Since the station closed in 1963 the population of the area has grown by 250%, the majority of whom commute to Dublin on a daily basis. The two nearest stations to Killucan are Mullingar and Enfield which are 23 miles apart. This often means that people living in this area have to go in the opposite direction to Mullingar in order to get the train to Dublin. The train station building and platform are still in place and according to the Killucan Kinnegad Transport Lobby Group, it would cost between €1.5 and €2 million to reopen the station. This station would not only service Killucan and Kinnegad (one of the fastest growing towns in the country) but also the eastern portion of Westmeath as well as parts of Meath West. We see the potential in reopening new lines and stations in the Midlands, North West & Connacht.

14 Rectify Flooding on the Galway to Limerick Line.

The Galway to Limerick train line runs from Limerick Station to Athenry before connecting with the Dublin line and going to Galway City. The line serves a number of stations in Clare and South Galway including Ennis, Gort and Craughwell. Even though this line reopened as recently as 2010, the line constantly suffers from flooding mainly in the winter and early spring months. This often means that sections of the line have to be closed and passengers have to be bussed between stations before getting on the train



and continuing their journey. This greatly impacts the time the journey should take and means that using this route is less desirable. The best solution is to look at further raising the track and installing flood barriers at sections that are prone to flooding.

15 Light rail service for Galway City (GLUAS).

The city is struck with excessive traffic largely due to its poor road network. The Galway bypass is in jeopardy due to environmental and logistical issues. Therefore, the most workable way to reduce congestion in the city is to introduce a light rail system that would serve areas of the city as well as suburbs and commuter towns (Ballybrit, Barna, Salthill). Galway may be a small city but there are cities of similar sizes that have light rail systems such as Le Mans and Angers in France or Cosenza in Italy. As it is the largest urban centre in the West, Galway's potential must be enhanced. We believe a light rail system would significantly improve the city and reduce emissions.

16 Improve lines, services and connections across the West.

Rail lines in Connacht are dilapidated, sparse, unused and poorly connected. We believe to help the region reach its full potential, its rail lines must be reopened and connected to the rest of the country. An example would be a rail line connecting Athenry to Claremorris which would then be connected to towns such as Westport and Sligo and then to major urban centres such as Dublin and Cork. Ireland once had one of the best railway services in the world, particularly west of the Shannon. However, the persistent decline of railways since the 1960s has adversely affected this region. Dormant lines must be reopened and redeveloped.

17 More frequent & improved services to urban centres.

We also believe that services on the Sligo to Dublin line must be increased due to overcrowding. The increased services would also include a more direct service with trains stopping at Ballymote, Carrick-on-Shannon, Longford, Mullingar and Maynooth. Alongside the current service, these new services would run twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening.

18 Establish a railway service in Donegal.

Donegal has no rail station whatsoever, the nearest being in Sligo. This has contributed to the isolation of the county from the nation and has made travel to and from the county difficult. Therefore, we call for the establishment of a rail service in the county that would serve the towns of Letterkenny and Donegal in the north and south of the county, thereby enabling travel to, from and within the county of Donegal and linking it to the rest of the country.



Dublin Bus
Serving the entire community

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TAXI



Taxi Services

1 A review of current tariff rates must take place differentiating rates in different regions with the aim of making rural area rates cheaper.

Due to the lack of public transport services in large swaths of the country, in the short to medium term we will need to incentivise increased taxi usage. This review is needed in order to encourage more people in rural areas who would not otherwise be able to undertake essential journeys to use taxis. The increased presence of more affordable taxi services in rural regions would not only fill the gap left by an underdeveloped public transport service but may also help to reduce automobile accidents.

2 Offer specific grants to taxi drivers for purchasing electric vehicles (EVs).

We must reduce fuel costs for Irish taxi drivers. By introducing grants, we can incentivise drivers to switch over to more environmentally friendly vehicles. Moreover, taxi drivers will save up to 70% on fuel costs if they use EVs.

3 Maintain the construction of more EV charging hubs.

The government must ensure the currently pledged funding of €20 million for 50 more electric charging hubs is not cut due to economic uncertainties. Making it easier for taxi drivers to find charging locations is vital to the future viability of taxi drivers using EVs.

4 Reduce insurance premiums.

It must be emphasised that the issue of insurance reform is also relevant as a significant portion of the associated costs of owning a taxi is insurance. This involves incentivising increased competition within the insurance sector. Currently the Irish insurance market is relatively unattractive to providers due to relatively high compensation rates and the low risk of recourse for fraudulent claims. Efforts must be taken to keep

compensation rates at a rate more in line with the E.U. average as well as tackle insurance fraud.

5 Reduce barriers of entry to taxi drivers.

According to taxi drivers who responded to 2016's EU consultation, the main barriers to entry are the requirement of financial standing, the purchase of a licence, training costs of a rate of €300-€450 and the technical requirements for vehicles. We would recommend a review of such specifications on vehicles with the goal of optimising inflow rates into the taxi industry whilst maintaining quality standards. This is especially important since overall taxi numbers from 2008 to 2016 have fallen by 18% according to the NTA.

6 Improve online competition amongst taxi companies.

In terms of online presence there is a significant lack of competition within the market. The major operator in Ireland is FREE NOW who, since gaining dominance has introduced booking fees of €2 and cancellation fees of €5. The Irish market is not particularly competitive due to the smaller number of operators in the country making customers more vulnerable to price increases in the future.

7 Reduce taxi licence fee to €75.

This initiative will make it more appealing for people to set up hackney services. At present, it is unappealing to run local hackney services at the current rate of €250.

8 Allow hackney carriages to operate within 15km of their home and allow them to drive their client to the next city if needed.

This proposal will be more appealing to road users in order to incentivise them to use taxi services if they reside outside the city boundaries.

9 Allow those who drive hackney carriages a 40% tax rebate on their car tax up to band B2 (€280) to make sure rural areas can have reduced carbon emissions.

This will make the taxi service more appealing to road users who may otherwise drive themselves. This initiative will additionally decrease carbon emissions, especially in cities.

10 All taxis need to have a taxi meter.

This will ensure transparency around pricing when people use taxi and hackney services and increase competition in taxi and hackney services in rural areas.

11 Abolish Band A0 for electric taxi/hackney services.

This will encourage more people with electrical vehicles to enter the taxi and hackney market and provide services themselves. This will also help reduce Ireland's carbon footprint.

12 Ultra-low emission zones should be applied in the main cities of Ireland.

This will encourage more taxi drivers to avail of a grant from the government and buy EV's:

- €6 24 hour (midnight to midnight) charge for petrol and diesel cars. €3 charge for hybrid cars.
- EV's are exempt from the charge.
- Create an app for people to pay the fee online (fee lasts for 24hrs).

If this plan is introduced it will encourage the government to invest in the public transport infrastructure and incentivise the public to use public transport. All vehicles that enter the cities of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford that are diesel and petrol operated should be made to pay the above fee of €6 and a fee of €3 for hybrid vehicles.

13 Liberalise the availability of taxi and hackney licences to allow rural people to operate a part-time business on the side.

We believe that the future of taxis in rural Ireland lies in making licences more readily available for the ordinary driver to operate their taxi or hackney as a business on the side. This would have benefits for demand and make overall cost cheaper. This taxi and hackney part-time jobbing style is perhaps the best way to increase use of taxis in rural Ireland.



Disability Accessibility on Public Transport

1 Ensuring all lifts are fully functioning and operational at all times at train and light rail stations and platforms.

The "Access for All Ireland" campaign highlights the issue of broken lifts with a high point of 11 stations operating with broken lifts this year, with the worst affected mode of transport being the DART. All lifts should be monitored 24/7 and the engineers should be alerted when a lift is out of order so that it can be fixed swiftly and ensure no disruption to people's accessibility while using public transport.

2 The introduction of a card to give people with invisible disabilities priority seating on our public transport system.

People with invisible disabilities using public transport often need extra support and assistance but due to the nature of their condition it is harder for them to seek this. Although there have been welcome introductions such as the JAM card for better support for people with disabilities, we are calling on the Minister for Transport to introduce a card which can be shown by people with invisible disabilities to secure a seat in the priority seating area of public transport. This scheme has been piloted in the city of London and has proven to be hugely successful and would be hugely beneficial if introduced to the Irish public transport system.

3 All resources and equipment used on our public transport services should be suitable for people with visual impairments.

This includes ensuring there is warning tape at all platforms, stairs, entrances and exits for improved visual guidance as well as functioning stop signs, overhead

screens and voice-overs on all buses, trains and coaches for people with visual impairments. This step will help to increase the people's independence and autonomy.

4 The penalties for illegal use of wheelchair parking spaces should be increased.

Thousands of spots are used inappropriately every year in Ireland. If caught, a person is currently only subject to a fine of €150. The Disabled Drivers' Association has called for more stringent measures such as a steeper fine of €300 and 2 penalty points to discourage motorists who are not badge holders from using wheelchair parking spaces.

5 Increased investment in new models of Bus Éireann coaches to cater for wheelchairs.

Currently 86% of Bus Éireann's fleet is wheelchair accessible, meaning 14% of buses are still not accessible. This can mean that sometimes buses are not able to accept wheelchair users as there is no designated space for them for their journey. This is unacceptable as most of these 14% of buses serve rural Ireland and the network is infrequent. Due to the age of Bus Éireann's fleet, new buses are necessary in order to phase out any inaccessible buses.

Conclusion

We hope that the Minister for Transport Éamon Ryan, Fine Gael's Minister of State at the Department of Transport Hildegard Naughton and the members of the Fine Gael Parliamentary Party will consider the ideas we have outlined in this document and support us as we strive to improve our national public transport system. If the proposals within this document are to succeed, YFG hopes that the government can listen to our concerns and proposals and help us to implement them within the current Dáil term. An all-round national debate is necessary if we are to improve our transport policies nationwide.

Going forward it is imperative that Ireland's public transport system can compete with that of other European countries. The overall development of Ireland's transport infrastructure should be a priority for the current government so that Ireland's economy can continue to grow in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. A well-connected country serves all of our interests. For too long our public transport services have not been as efficient as they have the potential to be and have not been accessible for all. Now is the time to change that.



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