

Coach Tourism and Transport Council of Ireland

Submission by the

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On

“The School Transport Programme”

July 2017

Introduction

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The Coach Tourism and Transport Council of Ireland would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to make a Submission on this issue.

The Coach Tourism and Transport Council of Ireland (CTTC) is the representative body for Ireland's coach touring companies and Ireland's private bus operators. The CTTC's members are experts in all types of coach hire and transport solutions, including: airport transfers, day tours, extended touring, incentive travel, golf tours, school transport and provision of scheduled services. In addition to specialising in long distance scheduled services, many of CTTC's members also operate licensed bus services in town and cities throughout Ireland.

All CTTC members are family owned companies, with a combined fleet of over 1,500 coaches, employing over 3,000 people directly. The CTTC comments and makes representations regularly on matters of concern to its members such as public transport, school transport, the coach tourism sector and the transport industry generally. It is our opinion that every school going student has the right to the provision of School Transport.

Overview

CTTC believe that a cost effective and efficient School Transport Programme that is fit for purpose and ensures value for money is essential to provide transport for the 113,000 school-going students in a safe and punctual manner to the school network.

Currently 89% of services under the School Transport Programme are sub-contracted out by Bus Éireann to private operators. Bus Éireann currently receive in excess of €150 million to administer the programme, despite only providing 11% of their own fleet to deliver same. Since the review of the tendering process in 2011 significant savings have accrued, however, there is little evidence of these savings being passed to the state, nor is it reflected in any reduction of the state subsidy to administer the programme.

Recommendations

1. CTTC believe that the current tendering process is fundamentally flawed, as the weighting criteria is weighted more heavily in favour of price than the vehicle quality, thus allowing older vehicles to win contracts, thereby reducing quality standards.
2. The CTTC recommends a review of the interpretation of the tendering criteria as it appears there is no uniformity in the marking of same by Bus Éireann staff from region to region.
3. Additional cost is incurred in the programme, as it would appear Bus Éireann are of the opinion that the current national CVRT test is not fit for purpose and insist on an independent test carried out under sub-contract with an institution that is a representative body. CTTC recommends that the CVRT standard should be revised to satisfy the standards required by Bus Éireann under the School Transport Programme.
4. The present pricing structure is unsustainable as private operators who are engaged to complete the vast majority of the services will not have the funding to replace fleet in the future.
5. There is an urgent requirement for a review of the costing methodology in relation to apportionment of direct and indirect costs attributed to the programme to ensure clear financial transparency.
6. It is the duty of the State to provide specialised transport to facilitate students with special needs, however, there is currently no state funding available to private operators, who provide the majority of these services, to upgrade their fleets to meet this demand.
7. In view of the fact that the National Transport Authority was set up in 2009 to administer public transport in this country, it is our view that this programme should be overseen by that organisation.

Conclusion

The Coach Tourism and Transport Council of Ireland, in light of the above and the significant amount of state subvention given to this programme, recommend that the School Transport Programme should be the subject of an open procurement process to ensure it is fit for purpose, value for money and is open and transparent.