

Introductory Statement from Hugh Creegan, Deputy Chief Executive, National Transport Authority

Thank you for the invitation to attend. I am joined by my colleague Tim Gaston, Director of Public Transport Services. I understand that the Committee wishes to focus upon traffic congestion in the Dublin area, the proposed College Green civic plaza and Luas.

I propose to address the issues of general traffic congestion and the proposed College Green civic plaza in this opening statement.

Traffic congestion in the Dublin region

Following a period of reduced transport usage and suppressed transport growth, both in relation to private car use and also public transport patronage, 2014 saw the start of a reversal of these trends. Public transport usage has increased for all modes since then – bus, Luas and commuter rail. Paralleling the changes in public transport, car travel has also grown across the Dublin region since 2014. Demand for travel is now on the increase and patronage on public transport is growing. During 2017 overall public transport numbers grew by 8%, with increases recorded across bus, rail and Luas.

Major investment is needed in public transport to respond appropriately to this growth and to address the congestion problems of the Dublin region. Both the NTA and others have advocated for several years for a major increase in public transport investment to prepare the region to deal with the growth in travel that was becoming evident. However, due to Ireland's recent economic circumstances, funding for the required investment was not available during much of the last decade.

The overall framework for transport provision to meet the needs of the region over the next two decades is set out in the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy 2016-2035, which was approved by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in 2016. The strategy outlines the various networks to be developed – heavy rail, light rail, bus, road, cycling and pedestrian networks, together with supporting measures including park and ride provision, information provision, integration and demand management measures.

A welcome uplift in public transport funding has been provided in the recently published National Development Plan 2018-2027, which has allocated €8.6 billion towards sustainable transport measures. The three largest projects are MetroLink, the DART Expansion Programme and BusConnects, all of which will serve the Dublin region. However, resolving the transport deficiencies

caused by the unavailability of investment over several years will take time –major infrastructure projects take a number of years to deliver.

Supplementing those larger projects, other measures are being taken in the short-term to deliver additional transport capacity, including:

- A 10 minute DART service will be provided later this year, following the resolution of driver training issues;
- The current peak time rail services from the Kildare Rail Line linking with the City Centre through the Phoenix Park Tunnel will be expanded to provide an all-day service;
- Additional capacity will be provided on the Luas Green line with additional 55 metre trams coming into service;
- An order will be placed in 2019 for diesel-electric rail fleet to provide an extended DART service across the Dublin rail network;
- The Go-Ahead contract for bus services on 24 Public Service Obligation (PSO) bus routes in the Dublin metropolitan area will start operations in Q3 of this year;
- Additional bus fleet will be acquired and additional capacity will be added on busy routes currently experiencing high passenger numbers in peak hours;
- Additional investment will be made in park and ride provision; and
- There will be increased level of investment in cycling projects.

However, as stated earlier, it will take time to remedy the consequences of prolonged under-investment in public transport.

BusConnects

We believe that investing in our bus services is absolutely critical when it comes to tackling congestion in the Dublin area. That is why NTA is proposing to radically change the way bus services are delivered, through the implementation of the BusConnects programme. BusConnects is our plan to fundamentally transform Dublin's bus network so that journeys by bus will be fast, reliable, punctual, convenient, and affordable. There are three very significant milestones for BusConnects in the weeks and months ahead:

June 2018 – Publication of a discussion document, in which we will outline our thinking on the challenges and opportunities that will arise from our proposal to invest in infrastructure on 16 core bus corridors in and out of the city. Our intention is to develop these corridors so that each will have a continuous bus lane in each direction.

July 2018 – Publication for public consultation of the redesigned network of bus services for Dublin. This will include proposals on a major redesign of routes, schedules and fares structures.

October 2018 – Publication for public consultation of our detailed plans for investment in infrastructure on the 16 core bus corridors in and out of the city.

College Green Civic Plaza

The provision of a civic plaza at College Green has been an objective of Dublin City Council for many years. In May of last year, an application for planning consent was made to An Bord Pleanala to develop such a scheme. An Oral Hearing on the proposal commenced on 12th March of this year and concluded approximately three weeks later on 29th March.

This decision in relation to the College Green Civic Plaza proposal now rests with An Bord Pleanala, with a determination anticipated to be made before 26th July 2018.

That concludes my introductory statement. I trust that I can answer any queries that arise.