

The disabled community have had some fantastic advocates like the late Martin Naughton and Donal Toolan. They are sadly missed. But people like myself, Jess Ni Mhaolain, Padraig Moran and Alannah Murray need to continue that legacy. Minister Shane Ross has been an excellent advocate for people with disabilities when it comes to transport. He took the time to listen and act on what the issues are for our community.

Dermot O'Leary from the NBRU is extremely supportive and has become a firm friend.

It would be very remiss of me not to mention, John Moloney who has recently retired from Bus Éireann – he is a legend in his own lifetime and what he and his Cork based colleagues have done for people in the disabled community, especially those within COPE is and shall be treasured.

Jim Meade of Irish Rail and Ray Hernan of Bus Éireann have also engaged in a positive manner regarding the issues facing people with disabilities travelling on their services.

The Dublin Bus Chairperson, Ultan Courtney is a unique person. He actively sought me out to ask what the issues were in

Dublin Bus for People with Disabilities. He insisted that I take his PERSONAL email address and if there were any issues that came across my radar, that I was to contact him directly if I was not getting traction.

Awareness of the issues facing people with disabilities is very important to minimise the stress they can encounter when using public transport. Changing attitudes towards people with disabilities will require a cultural shift.

Management and staff however, of both public and private transport companies can play their part. Not everyone who is disabled looks disabled.

I would just like to outline some of the solutions that could be put in place to make travelling a more enjoyable, less stressful experience.

- Priority seating for people with mobility impairments and disabilities on both trains and buses needs to be appropriately sign posted and enforced.
- Kent Station, Cork was once a reasonably accessible rail station. This station has now become highly inaccessible. The planning of Stations both Bus and Rail needs to be assessed for full inclusivity of access.

- Quiet carriages need to be provided. Sensory overload is a common cause of distress for people with autism. Rattling doors, seats, loud phone conversations, music leaking from headphones etc can lead to a autistic meltdown. These were unilaterally withdrawn without consultation.
- Wheelchair ramps need to be retrofitted to all existing rolling stock and to the new rolling stock due to enter service. This is also applicable to buses.
- Wheelchair accessible bus stops need to become the norm rather than the exception. This is the responsibility of the local authorities.
- The amount of wheelchair spaces in what are classified as ICRs are abysmal 2 versus 5 in the Mark 4 class.
- The amount of wheel chair spaces in new trains set needs to be increased and sign posted appropriately.
- Audio announcements within the toilet areas on the trains need to be checked to ensure that they can be heard as there is no visual display in the toilets.
- The €5.00 seat reservation charge for disabled free travel pass holders can be an issue and needs to be removed. Under EU legislation people with disabilities cannot be singled out for additional charges.
- It is virtually impossible for wheel chair users to access the Luas at peak times. This needs to be addressed. Training could be given to staff to teach them to assist people with mobility issues to access the Luas.

- Taxis: Currently there is no legal obligation for a taxi to carry an assistance dog. It is up to the individual driver to decide if they will carry them or not. Enforcement needs to be looked at.
- Bus Éireann: Not all city fleets are currently wheel chair accessible, for example The 221 Parnell Place to Hazelwood service has private hire buses on it in the evenings on a fairly regular basis which are not wheelchair accessible. Also, the 226A service from Kent Station to Parnell Place Bus Station to Cork Airport is not wheelchair accessible. The Real Time Passenger Information signs have the wheelchair accessible logo placed beside it. This route is primarily serviced by high sided coaches, roughly 99.9% of the time.
- Unlike Dublin Bus, a huge proportion of Bus Éireann buses do not have either next stop audio announcements or dot matrix signage. There is currently no evidence of retrofitting this type of technology on Bus Éireann Cork the only announcements I have personally heard for a next stop have been for UCC and Parnell Place Bus Station.
- There is no time factored into timetables to facilitate the operation of wheelchair lifts on high sided coaches.
- Private buses are not required to match bus Éireann expressway as regards accessibility requirements such as wheelchairs.

- Written within the RSA mandatory professional bus driver CPC course people with disabilities are referred to as “persons with peculiarities”. The language around disability needs to be addressed.

This is not an exhaustive list, it is however, a starting point that the management of public transport entities and the NTA can introduce to assist their passengers who have a disability and aid an inclusive transport experience.

I will be happy to expand on these points to members and answer as best I can any queries when it comes to questions later in the hearing.