

Opening Statement by TDORA to the Oireachtas Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport

on Wednesday 27th Feb 2019

Thank you, Mr Chairman, for the opportunity to make a Statement to the Committee.

I am speaking on behalf of TDORA, which represents Taxi Companies, and has members in Carlow, Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

We are aware of the complaints of a lack of public transport services in rural areas. We present proposals for a service that can be offered within the framework of the Taxi Regulation Act, 2013.

The Act and its regulations already provide for:

- Local Area hackneys- after five years, however, there are only 13 of these nationally, and,
- A Community Transport Service -operated by volunteers which, understandably, has also not provided a solution for rural areas.

The **key features** of our proposals are:

- The service would operate only from the area surrounding a Village to the Village and then to home, a maximum distance each way of, for example, 15 Kms.
- The area surrounding the Village would be defined by regulation as being, a maximum of, for example, 1000 persons.
- Applicants to become Village Transport drivers would be examined only on the regulations in relation to that service, thus facilitating ease of driver entry.
- The return journey from the Village would be subsidised.
- Passengers would be required to share the journey with others as do bus passengers.
- The vehicles, unlike hackneys, would have a roof sign with the name of the Village followed by the word "Transport".
- The vehicle would be capable of carrying seven or eight passengers.

In common with other Small Public Service Vehicles such as hackneys and taxis,

- the drivers would be vetted and licensed by the Gardai and would be self-employed.
- the vehicles would be subject to the NTA rules on age and suitability, NCT tests and be wheelchair accessible.

The **beneficiaries** of the Village Transport service would be those who wish to visit or shop in their village, including:

- the elderly who may no longer be able to drive,
- persons with reduced mobility,

- persons with low incomes who do not own a car,
- those who want to drink alcohol and wish to comply with the drink driving laws, and who need transport to get from their home to and from their village.

Village services including small shops and pubs would, therefore, also benefit from the service.

A **subsidy** will be required to make it attractive for drivers to offer the service and for passengers to use the service.

Without a subsidy, there will be insufficient passengers to make the service viable. Almost all other passenger transport is subsidised. The level of subsidy needed per journey could be determined by a consultancy study.

The service could use licensed publicans, or others, to supply subsidy vouchers to persons living outside the Village to return to their homes.

With the involvement of self-employed drivers and village publicans, the booking of the journeys can be done informally. An app that could accept bookings could have a role to play but the nature of the service would not make an App essential as we are aware that some of those for whom the service is intended would not use smart phones.

Passengers would, of course, not be required to drink or eat in a pub or purchase other goods or services in the Village to benefit from the service.

TDORA is an associate member of the IRU- the International Road Transport Union and participates in the work of the IRU Taxi Group.

We are aware, through our membership of the IRU, of the EU Hi-Reach programme of “innovative mobility solutions to cope with transport poverty.” Solutions are being actively explored in areas of Luxembourg, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Greece and Romania. There is a HiReach workshop in Brussels on 27/28 March 2019 to consider the results so far.

We believe that our proposals are also innovative and that they can provide a solution to the transport poverty being experienced in Irish rural areas. Our proposals provide for a local, informal, adaptable service that would serve the people throughout the country who wish to get to and from their local village.

We commend our proposals to the Committee.