

## **Opening Statement**

### **Joint Committee on Disability Matters**

**Peter Walsh, Chief Executive**

**Transport Infrastructure Ireland**

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Chairman, Members of the Committee, I thank you for your invitation to attend today. I am joined by my colleague Sarah O'Donnell, TII's Assistant Chief Architect and Designated Access Officer. I understand that the Committee wishes to discuss Accessibility in planning and delivery of transport projects.

It is an objective of TII to provide an integrated and accessible transport system which enhances the quality of life for all members of the public. Access for All is central to any scheme design and operation carried out by TII, either directly or by third parties on its behalf.

The Disability Act 2005 imposes significant obligations on Government Departments and on Public Bodies to work proactively towards the improvement in the quality of life of people with disabilities.

The Red and Green Luas Lines opened in 2004 and represented a major milestone in accessible public transport. The strategic decision to follow the continental model of new generation light rail meant that people with a vision or hearing impairment, wheelchair users, or those with mobility issues could travel independently for the first time. Low platforms, level boarding, passenger information displays, on and off-board audio messaging, accessible ticket vending equipment, audio loops and other facilities were developed in consideration of - and in consultation with - people with disabilities. This ethos of close engagement continues today.

As a forum, the Luas User Group (LUG) has proved extremely effective in achieving consensus with marginalised groups, in hearing their needs and in applying these, where feasible, at the earliest stages of design.

Members of the group comprise of representatives from the National Council for the Blind of Ireland, Voice of Vision Impairment, Irish Guide Dogs Association, Chime, the Irish Wheelchair Association, Enable Ireland and other social inclusion groups. Transdev, the Luas Operator, also participate in this consultation process, which often includes targeted site visits and thematic presentations of relevance to the group. Recent engagement with members of the Coalition of Disabled Persons Organisations

(DPOs) has expanded TII's engagement with the disability community, in line with a social model of disability, as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by Ireland in 2018.

At the early stages of the Metrolink project, TII made a renewed call-out to disability groups and representatives with a view to reaching as many people as possible. Following the first round of non-statutory public consultation, submissions were received from the National Disability Authority and the National Council for the Blind of Ireland. A dedicated User Group presentation on Metrolink was held on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2019 and more recently on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021. A further User Group meeting is scheduled for July 2021 and will be followed by a series of thematic workshops – on the construction, infrastructural and operational phases of Metrolink - to ensure that accessibility is fully incorporated into the Project Requirements, as appropriate.

TII also sit on the Department of Transport Accessibility Consultative Committee (ACC), which reports directly to the Minister on matters relating to disability and public transport, including key issues arising from the User Group meetings and actions pertaining to the National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan (NDSIP).

As a Public Body, TII has developed corporate structures to support best practice in sustainable and accessible design. As well as the requisite Access and Inquiry Officer roles, TII has established an internal Accessibility Committee to promote a cross-divisional approach to accessibility and to encourage the highest standards of service for all users of the transport network throughout the country. The Committee comprises of individuals from across all the directorates of TII and has developed protocols to address, inter alia: The Irish Sign Language Act 2017, the European Union (Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Bodies) Regulations 2020 and the Employment Equality Act 2015.

TII's commitment to accessibility also extends to the National Roads Network. In February 2020, TII launched its Disability Toll Exemption Scheme. This National Scheme replaced the cards that were previously issued by individual Toll Plazas and not only simplifies the process for applicants but also expands the scheme to enable qualified able-bodied drivers of disabled passengers to - for the first time - avail of an exemption. Around 8,000 vehicles have registered under the scheme to date.

TII is a key stakeholder in the development of the Department of Transport's Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS). In addition to this, TII has a role in setting standards and guidance for national roads. See [www.tiipublications.ie](http://www.tiipublications.ie) TII's Traffic Calming and Transition Zones guidance sets out design guidance for walkers,

cyclists and other vulnerable users in our villages and towns. This aims to ensure that all users along our national roads are considered in streetscape works, for both new schemes and upgrade works to existing streets.

In addition, TII carried out an Accessibility Review in 2019 of all TII-controlled, as-constructed, Motorway Service Areas (MSAs) to establish compatibility with guidance in BS 8300, Building for Everyone and Changing Places Ireland. This entailed both a review by a specialist architectural consultant and input from stakeholders from the disability community. Recommendations arising from this review – relating to changing facilities, aisle widths, disability awareness training and so forth – are currently being rolled out.

No system is perfect and of course constraints and barriers remain. Where these arise, TII is committed to understanding concerns and to seeking solutions.

Thank you to the Oireachtas Committee for allowing TII the time to make this statement.