

AN EXAMINATION OF ENFORCEMENT OF ROAD TRAFFIC OFFENCES – ANDREA KEANE, ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF DUBLIN BUS

Introduction

Chairman, thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee today. I welcome the opportunity to set out the company's views on the enforcement of road traffic offences. Given the nature of our operations, this submission will only focus on bus lane enforcement, and potential deterrents and solutions to this issue.

Dublin Bus is the largest public transport provider in the state. Our services reflect the full spectrum of public transport connectivity in the capital ranging from orbital and radial routes to 24/7 and nitelink services. This gives Dublin Bus a keen insight into the needs of the city, its businesses and the wider community.

Sustainable high quality bus services are the backbone of urban mobility. We envisage a low-cost, frequent and zero emission service which is fully integrated with a suite of flexible transport solutions that make door-to-door journeys for all our customers easy and enjoyable. We believe this can make a significant contribution towards making Dublin one of Europe's most sustainable cities and one of the best both to live in and to visit.

At the heart of this is the BusConnects project. It is a key part of the GDA Transport Strategy to improve public transport and address climate change in Dublin and other cities across Ireland.

Dublin Bus is assisting the NTA with the implementation of the BusConnects Dublin Area Network Redesign. We have successfully implemented Phases 1,2 and 3 of the Network Redesign, and we look forward to assisting the NTA with Phase 4 in the near future. The successful delivery of BusConnects is vital to the future of the city. It is unthinkable that such a critically important project would be undermined by bus lane violations. Today, that is a very real risk.

Chairman and members of the committee, my opening statement will focus on:

- The importance of bus lanes in maintaining frequency, reliability and consistency of journey times
- The importance of bus lanes to the overall customer experience
- How bus lanes have helped, and continue to, make bus a more attractive option than private

Whilst also highlighting:

- Technological solutions to aid enforcement and cities which have utilised same
- Practical solutions which could be implemented almost immediately
- How Dublin Bus can facilitate implementation

Of the many causes of delays to bus services, few seem more unjust than drivers who illegally park or drive in a dedicated bus lane, triggering a slowdown for the dozens of customers stuck behind it. While improved bus lane enforcement is just one piece of the puzzle, it is

nonetheless an important one. Dublin Bus is a solutions provider, and it is in this spirit that we put forward these options.

1. The importance of bus lane enforcement

I know the committee is very familiar with the importance of bus lanes. They have revolutionised the customer experience over the last 40 years. Millions of commuters, students, parents, and older people rely on our services every day to get to where they need to be. With transport being so vital to the city's economy and the lives of Dubliners, it is essential that we have a safe, modern, affordable and accessible public transport system operating in a congestion free city. Bus is the primary mode of public transport in the capital and will remain so.

Buses help reduce traffic congestion and air pollution because they provide a more efficient way of moving people from one point to another. However, private vehicles travelling and parking in bus lanes reduces the efficiency of buses and creates unnecessary congestion.

Pre-covid our network speed at peak times was in the region of 14kmph, with substantial variations on all transport corridors. While some gains have been made due to priority and changes to traffic patterns (during and post pandemic), private transport remains extremely competitive in terms of journey times to the city, and in many cases is faster than the bus. A customer centric public transport system must have, after safety, three basic fundamentals in place.

They are:

- frequency of service
- reliability of service provision and
- competitive and consistent journey speeds.

Bus lane violations threaten the delivery of these fundamentals. At a minimum our public transport network speed at peak times must increase from approximately 14kmph to at least 18kmph. Of crucial importance to this is the ability to travel freely along dedicated bus lanes. This will provide for a more efficient bus service that is a more attractive option than private car.

2. Automatic Number Plate Recognition

Over many years we have seen the benefits of embracing technology in our lives and in business. At its purest form technology makes things easier to use and by design, better. We have seen the benefits of technology in the transport industry over many years leading to greater accessibility of our buses (access ramps, induction loops, audio announcements, colour contrasting interiors), zero tailpipe emissions on order, traffic light priority for buses and timely information for customers.

We are now at a time where the technology and transport industries are significantly integrating. This presents us all with opportunities, especially in the area of bus lane enforcement.

We note that Dublin City Council trialled fixed AI pole cameras in 2020 and 2021. It is our understanding that this trial was not for enforcement purposes.

We believe that a simpler solution should be examined and trialled.

ANPR stands for Automatic Number Plate Recognition. It's a technology that reads vehicle registration plates to create location data. This information is captured by scanners or cameras then cross-referenced for a range of traffic and law enforcement purposes.

Cities such as Belfast use automatic number-plate recognition to fine drivers caught in bus lanes, using on-street cameras, and a car with a camera that drives around to capture drivers illegally using bus lanes. ANPR technology is already used in Dublin, albeit not for bus lane enforcement. Gardaí already use automatic number plate recognition for speeding. All Dublin Bus vehicles are fitted with up to 14 cameras. The external cameras could capture the registration details and instantly forward them to the relevant enforcement agency.

Dublin Bus has always played a vital role in unlocking the innovative capacity of public transport in the capital. Today we stand ready to work with all partners to deliver the first ever ANPR trial in Dublin. This trial could take place on a designated spine (to ensure alignment with and support towards BusConnects) for a period of 12 months. This would provide a good proof of concept test whilst also providing operators, authority and law enforcement would good learnings.

3. 24/7 Bus Lane designation

It is over 40 years since the introduction of bus lanes transformed bus services across the capital. Today they need to be protected and improved. When it comes to bus lane enhancement, we believe it would be appropriate to move away from time specific (7am-10am etc) bus lanes and towards 24-hour designation for all bus lanes on all days of the week.

This process could, and should, begin immediately. This simple step would remove areas of uncertainty and make enforcement easier.

It would also facilitate the introduction of additional 24/7 bus services in the capital. This would allow operators and customers to build on the success of 24/7 Routes 15, 39a, 41, C1 & C2, plus C5 and C6 (which are the night-time service of the daytime routes C3 & C4).

4. Fixed Charge Notice

It is important to note that the Fixed Charge Notice and penalty points system has operated extremely well since its introduction in 2002 and has enjoyed wide public support. During the last pre-Covid year of 2019, the Garda Roads Policing Unit issued 4,734 fines to people driving in bus lanes and 935 fines to motorists who illegally parked there.

Last February, Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan doubled the fixed-charge penalty for parking on footpaths, cycle lanes or bus lanes from €40 to €80. The fine for driving in a bus lane is currently €60.

Given the strategic importance of bus lanes to the smooth operation of services, Dublin Bus feels that it would be appropriate to look again at the fixed charged penalty with a view to increasing the fines for illegally parking or driving in a bus lane.

Conclusion

Members of the committee, I have today set out technological and practical solutions to the challenge of bus lane enforcement. Dublin Bus stands ready to work with all partners on this important issue. We have a strong working relationship with An Garda Síochána and I want take this opportunity to thank them for their work in supporting our services.



Bus lanes exist for a reason and that's to allow for smoother, faster movement of high-capacity buses. Without them, the advantage of using a bus would be lost in urban areas, making them less efficient and probably forcing more cars onto the road.

That is not something we want to see happen.

While the challenges being faced are clear, so too are the risks of not rising to meet them, and with continued work from all partners, I believe we can deliver the necessary solutions.