

Opening Statement – Billy Hann, CEO of Dublin Bus.

Introduction

Good afternoon,

I want to thank you, Chairman, and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to address you.

This is my third time to appear before the Transport Committee and I look forward to today's engagement.

I am joined by Mr Gareth Quinn, Central Operations Planning Manager and Mr Philip Donohue, Head of HR and Development at Dublin Bus.

We are here today representing the 4,000 people in Dublin Bus who work at the front line of public transport in Dublin.

I am proud of our employees, the work they do, and the services they deliver on a daily basis for customers across the city and Greater Dublin Area.

We exist, of course, because of our customers. We do our best for them every single day.

Do we always get it right?

No, of course not.

But in our 36 years, we've shown a strong record of delivery and that we are capable of big things.

We've embraced change and innovation while staying true to our roots, and we've grown and expanded without forgetting our purpose.

We're a people-led, customer focused semi-state public transport provider dedicated to providing the people of the Greater Dublin Area with safe, frequent and reliable bus services.

There are three themes I want to address in my opening statement:

- Service performance
- Traffic congestion and;
- Recruitment.

In doing so I will touch on some of the hurdles cleared over the last 12 months and set out some remaining challenges and threats to this progress.

Public Order

But before beginning I will briefly touch on the shocking events of last week.

We have had to suspend services before. Mostly because of severe weather.

But we have never been forced off the streets by a thuggish mob.

Our buses were burnt out. A driver was forcibly removed from his cab and intimidated.

We made the only decision we could make. Which was to protect the safety of customers and employees.

I want to publicly thank An Garda Síochána and Dublin Fire Brigade for their assistance and work to restore order.

Service Performance

Chairman,

When I first appeared before this committee 12 months ago, the story I had to tell was not a pleasant one.

Our Lost KMs were 94%.

Our Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) reliability was unsatisfactory.

This could not continue. I established a Service Improvement Group whose sole focus was to drive service improvement.

Today, Lost KMs are 98%.

RTPI reliability is 98%, ahead of the NTA contract target of 95%

So, the committee will see the scale of improvement and that the majority of our services now operate on time and on schedule.

This is down to the hard work and dedication of all employees in Dublin Bus.

And on the back of this - people are voting with their feet.

2023 will see, with over 144 million customer journeys, our highest customer numbers in over 20 years.

Our focus is now on driving performance even higher and I am confident that improvements seen in recent months can be maintained as we build towards 2024.

Challenges and Congestion

I have (hopefully) just painted a positive picture of recent developments in Dublin Bus. However, this positivity is very much framed against the backdrop of some gathering storm clouds which have the potential to throw us off course.

Congestion poses a massive challenge to all public transport operators and it would be wrong to ignore that reality.

Dublin is our capital city and Dublin simply will not work with buses stuck in traffic gridlock.

But what can we do?

There are too many cars on our roads, particularly in the city centre.

Car ownership doubled between 1995 and 2015 and there are now more than 2.2 million cars on our roads.

Dublin needs to go on a car diet. We need to move from a city of brakes lights to a city of buses, bikes and boulevards, just like some of our European peers such as Amsterdam and Paris.

We need to create more priority for public transport.

There are not enough priority bus corridors, although this should be addressed through BusConnects. Of the existing bus lanes, too many are not designated 24/7 and are often used by private vehicles. This is an easy fix and could be implemented very quickly. This would help simplify bus lane enforcement and improve journey times.

There are currently too many modes competing for the limited road space available. Our network speed at peak times is in the region of 14kmph, with substantial variations on all transport corridors. This means private transport remains extremely competitive in terms of journey times to the city, and in many cases is faster than the bus.

All of this means we welcome the aspiration set out in the Dublin City Council (DCC) and NTA Draft Transport Plan. I believe it will help make public transport a more attractive option for people.

We must, however, be certain that some of the measures proposed do not have unintended consequences and ensure our public transport system can accommodate any displaced demand. This will require careful planning and engagement between the NTA, DCC and all operators.

Having a public transport system that is a better option than owning a car is a vision that is achievable and will enable our city to fulfil its potential in many diverse areas.

These include enhanced urban living opportunities, reduced congestion, improved air quality and reduced noise pollution. It will enable the economy to prosper and provide a platform for a vibrant social and cultural city scene.

Recruitment

Chairman, I am sure the committee is aware of our high-profile recruitment campaigns.

Bus drivers, mechanics and other skilled workers are key to meeting the increased demand for our bus services.

Since January 2022 we have recruited and trained 711 drivers.

To put this into context – the number of drivers recruited is bigger than most medium sized enterprises (as defined by the CSO) and represents an increase of more than

500 drivers when compared to 2018 driver numbers. This has helped us keep pace with BusConnects and other network expansion.

We are immensely proud of the work done so far but recognise and acknowledge there is more hard work ahead of us.

While we are close to reaching our current targets, the full implementation of future phases of the BusConnects Network Redesign project will require continued recruitment and training.

We are already putting measures in place to relieve future pressures, including our Longer Working Policy, which was introduced in March of this year. This policy allows employees to work until their seventieth birthday.

This recruitment campaign, the largest in our history, is ongoing and is now particularly focused on tackling the extreme shortage of mechanics. This is an industry wide challenge facing all transport operators.

We are leaving no stone unturned because a shortage of these skilled workers seriously threatens the effective and efficient delivery of bus services to our customers.

I know all of us here today share an ambition to make public transport the very best it can be. But if we are optimising for this goal, then we must tackle some of these fundamental barriers to success whether they be congestion or a skill shortage.

Conclusion

Business is often about the 'right now', solving the problems of today. But I believe leadership in business must also be about what happens next, imagining, investing in, and creating the world of tomorrow.

And in doing this we will always be guided by the needs of the people and communities we serve.

That's why I was so pleased to recently join Minister Ryan and Anne in launching the charging infrastructure at our Summerhill Depot which is powering the new electric buses currently on the streets of Dublin.

This was a very positive day for Dublin Bus and demonstrates what we can achieve when we work together.

This 'can do' attitude has turned around a very challenging situation and is creating the public transport world of tomorrow.

Chairman,

In conclusion I am pleased to report to the committee that:

- We have a laser like focus on our customers priorities'
- Our service performance has improved.
- Our RTPI reliability has improved.
- Customer numbers are at a record high.

We have shown that we will never shirk the tough decisions to secure our company's future and improve performance for our customers.

Yes, like all companies, we face challenges but we are evolving for tomorrow by staying true to our purpose.

Thank you for giving me the time to address you and I look forward to your thoughts and questions.