

Opening Statement: Joint Committee on Transport and Communications

Good afternoon. My name is Dervla McKay, and I am the Managing Director of Go-Ahead Ireland. I am joined by my colleague Niamh Swords, who is Director of Operations. We want to thank the Committee for the invitation to today's session, to discuss bus services in the Greater Dublin Area, Wicklow, Meath, and Kildare.

Go-Ahead Ireland has been contracted by the National Transport Authority since 2018 to operate a total of 33 routes: encompassing the Outer Dublin Metropolitan Area and W routes from our Ballymount depot, and 5 Dublin commuter routes operating from our Naas depot. We are a team of more than 750 people employed across Dublin and Leinster, and we are proud partners of local charitable and community organisations such as Down Syndrome Ireland and Familibase.

Since our last presentation to the Committee in July of this year, we have rolled out enhancements to our Dublin Commuter services, adding an additional 178 trips per week between our 120 and 126 route services. Most recently, in conjunction with the National Transport Authority, we launched phase 5B of the Bus Connects Programme. Like other phases, 5B offers new journey opportunities with more direct and more frequent services between the main travel destinations and interchanges across West and South Dublin, enhancing connectivity for local communities.

We have seen significant progress over the past five months and a growth in passenger numbers throughout 2023. Fuelling this growth are enhancements to the public transport network under BusConnects alongside tangible government policy such as the introduction of the Young Adult Card. However, the services we provide would not be possible without our team of dedicated colleagues who work tirelessly to deliver for the communities we serve. At Go-Ahead Ireland, we are proud to be a diverse and inclusive employer and want to attract and retain the best talent in our industry. Using our colleague survey and engaging with our people to incorporate their feedback into our People Plans for 2024 will further help further cement our position as a great place to work.

Previously we spoke with the Committee around issues including driver recruitment, and I am happy to report that Go-Ahead Ireland remains in a good position in terms of recruiting new employees, with 578 drivers out on routes and 99 drivers in training in our driving school, an increase of 12% since July, and we are confident that this trend will continue.

Since our last discussion with the Committee, we have continued to work collaboratively with the RSA on the licensing process, and as such there has been a reduction in the timings associated with the block booking for tests from 5 to 3 weeks, and the volume of testing per week has increased. This has had a positive impact, with an increasing number of drivers flowing through the training process to be rostered for services. As per our previous Committee presentation, the CPC requirement on individual drivers, whereby they require a physical card before being able to drive, can still be a challenge, and inconsistencies in the process remain. This results in some colleagues having to wait weeks longer than others for their card, but it should be noted that we are seeing more standardised return rates.

Go-Ahead Ireland continues to enjoy a positive relationship with the RSA. Their understanding and commitment to working with us to mitigate the issues we have faced not only benefits our work but most importantly, public service users, and we are continuing to explore additional guidance and improvements to address existing challenges.

As we move towards 2024, we are ambitious in terms of the level and breadth of services we will provide to our passengers, and confident in our ability to deliver accessible and reliable public transport services. We are grateful for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon about the current issues impacting public transport, and how future policy might be informed to meet the needs of public transport operators and the communities we are all proud to serve.

ENDS

*Dervla McKay
Managing Director
Go-Ahead Ireland*