



Opening Statement: Stephen Kent, Chief Executive Officer, Bus Éireann

Joint Committee on Transport & Communications

Wednesday, 29 November 2023, 1.30pm

A Chathaoirleach, Deputies and Senators,

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you all. I am joined by my colleague Allen Parker, Bus Éireann's Chief Customer Officer and we are both pleased to be here today and look forward to our discussions and assisting you with any questions you might have.

Bus Éireann is Ireland's national State-owned bus company.

We operate services in the cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford; town services in Athlone, Balbriggan, Drogheda Dundalk, Navan, Sligo, and this summer we also launched Carlow's first bus town service. We also operate regional and rural PSO routes throughout the country and all of these services, across almost 230 routes, are delivered under contract with the NTA.

Our Athlone town service launched in January as Ireland's first electric town service and this month will see the completion of the installation of electric charging points at our Limerick depot where we look forward to launching the first fully electric regional city service early next year.

Our commercial inter-regional coach business, Expressway, is the largest coach operator in the country providing important connectivity across the country. It operates as a fully commercial operation and is not State subvented.

Bus Éireann also operates Europe's largest school transport scheme on behalf of the Department of Education, transporting over 160,000 students this school year, an increase of 7% from 2022/23. This scheme provides a vital public service to children and families throughout Ireland, as well as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and traffic congestion.

This year, Bus Éireann is well on course to deliver over 99 million passenger journeys across the country through our own services, and services we contract to deliver School Transport.

None of this could be delivered without the support of our customers, our key stakeholders and of course our dedicated and hard working staff.

Bus Éireann employs over 3,000 people across the country. Four in five of our employees are customer-facing and we currently have almost 2,100 drivers at 17 bases throughout Ireland.



We are delighted to report that we are seeing tremendous growth in our services and passenger numbers which is led and supported by ambitious public transport plans set out by Government.

However, managing this growth does not come without its challenges, and like other operators in the industry, we are facing significant short-term challenges for the recruitment of both drivers and mechanics.

Bus Éireann acknowledges and regrets that we did experience some service delivery issues in the Eastern Region for a number of weeks from September into early October. Our service level was impacted primarily by the non-availability of our fleet due to insufficient mechanics available in our Dublin (Broadstone) Garage. We sincerely apologise to any customers who may have been caused any inconvenience during this period.

Bus Éireann provides over 5,100 services from Meath, Wicklow and Kildare to and from Dublin across 19 routes, carrying over 162,000 passenger journeys *per week*.

Our fleet is primarily maintained by our maintenance departments and supplemented with support from external contractors where required. Due to recruitment challenges for mechanics across this industry, we experienced temporary shortfalls of fleet availability resulting in our delivery dropping to 95% of the scheduled network of services. To address this, we have implemented a number of measures including the redeployment of mechanics from other regions and engaging external resources to support service delivery with a view to minimising disruption to our customers.

Since implementing these measures on 16 October, when we exclude services suspended for Storm Debi, our service delivery has now improved to 99%. We are confident that the steps we are taking will continue to improve the situation. However, recruitment of mechanics remains an industry wide challenge and will take time. Our extensive mechanic recruitment campaigns remain ongoing and meeting our required mechanic headcount is the key action to resolve this issue in the long term.

On a positive note, I am pleased to report that Bus Éireann is seeing unprecedented levels of growth across the region and wider country. The introduction of lower fares and an ever-expanding number of routes and corridors has seen passenger growth in excess of 20%. We know that growth also brings a greater level of customer expectation, but it is a challenge which Bus Éireann is proud to embrace. While we acknowledge there have been short-term delivery issues, we are not standing still. As I appear before you today, I am extremely confident we are in a strong position to continue to deliver an excellent public transport service across the country.

I hope this sets the context for you and look forward to our discussion. Thank you again for the opportunity to engage on this important matter.