

## **Introductory Statement by Mr Peter Strachan, Chairperson, National Transport Authority**

6<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Chairperson, members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to attend. I would like to begin by giving some brief details on my background and career.

I am a geography graduate from Durham University and a Member of the Chartered Institution of Railway Operators.

I have over 40 years' experience in transport in the UK and Australia and have run a number of train operating companies, bus, tram and rail operations in Melbourne. I was the inaugural CEO of TransLink, the public transport authority in Brisbane and South East Queensland. I was also Director-General for major projects and London with the UK Department for Transport and led on transport delivery for the London 2012 Olympic Games.

I currently serve on the Boards of Merseyrail and Caledonian Sleeper for Serco plc, the Board of the UK Rail Delivery Group and I am a non-executive Board member for Transport for Wales Rail.

I serve as Chair of the North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust and Chair of UKROEd, the National Driver Offender Retraining scheme.

### **Background to NTA**

At this point I would like to briefly recall the background to the NTA's establishment and its role.

The principal rationale for the Authority was the need for a new approach to the planning and implementation of public transport services and infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area to be delivered through a single authority, with powers to ensure joined-up thinking and delivery across all the transport modes. This was then extended so that the Authority is the national body for public transport and taxi regulation.

While the legislation establishing the NTA is complex and lengthy, section 10 of the 2008 Dublin Transport Authority Act sets down the high level objectives that the Authority is required to achieve in very succinct terms. I think they are neatly captured by the first objective in particular, which is “the development of an integrated transport system which contributes to environmental sustainability and social cohesion and promotes economic progress”.

We are a non-commercial state agency of the Department of Transport and are tasked with delivering on the objectives of the Department under its Sustainable Mobility Plan and the Government’s Climate Action Plan.

The NTA has an extensive list of functions. While the full list is too long to repeat here, I think it is worth highlighting the main functions in order to give a sense of the breath of our activities. They include

- Procuring public transport services by means of contracts;
- Providing integrated ticketing, fares and public transport information;
- Developing the public transport networks through capital investment;
- Licensing commercial bus services;
- Managing and expanding the Rural Transport Programme;
- Providing bus infrastructure and fleet and cycling facilities and schemes;
- Developing and implementing a single public transport brand;
- Regulating the operation of taxis, hackneys and limousines and their drivers;
- Regulating the operation of Vehicle Clamping.

The Authority now receives approximately €1.6bn in Government grants. Almost €1bn is allocated to capital investment in sustainable transport infrastructure across all modes ranging from major schemes such as BusConnects, DART+ and Metrolink to small Active Travel schemes. The remaining funding is allocated to the operation of subsidised bus and rail services by the CIÉ companies and other providers, as well as funding the administrative costs

of the Authority. The Authority collects about €450m in fare revenue which is allocated to the operation of public transport services.

## **Some Key Aspects of our Work**

I would now like to move on now to outline some key aspects of the Authority's work.

### **Strategic Transport Plans**

In 2023, the Authority finalised a major plan for the Greater Dublin Area, which accounts for about 40% of the State's population and economic activity. The *Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2022-2042*, which has been approved by the Minister for Transport, provides a comprehensive outline of what is required to meet the transport demand for the sustainable economic development of the Greater Dublin Area taking into account the carbon emission reductions required in the transport sector.

On a non-statutory basis and in partnership with the relevant local authorities, the NTA has developed transport strategies for the Metropolitan Areas of Galway, Cork, Limerick/Shannon and Waterford. The Galway Strategy was completed in 2016 and is now in the process of being reviewed with a public consultation planned in the first quarter of 2024.

The NTA recognises that a key government strategy that supports our transport strategies is the National Planning Framework which supports balanced regional development, compact growth and transit-oriented development.

### **Sustainable Transport Infrastructure**

The NTA acknowledges that the funding made available to the Authority to invest in new and enhanced public transport infrastructure has grown very substantially over recent years. These funds support the Authority and its partners in the delivery of light rail and heavy rail fleet and infrastructure, bus fleet and infrastructure including low and zero emission fleet, numerous active travel projects and the supporting technologies such as ticketing and information.

As a Committee you are aware of the ambitions that the Authority has to deliver the infrastructure to give the people of Ireland a choice of sustainable travel; BusConnects in our cities, Metrolink in Dublin and lighter rail in Dublin and Cork, DART+ in the Dublin region and other significant commuter rail projects in Cork, Limerick and Galway. Over €300m is now invested by government across the state in walking and cycling projects from an average of €10-15m annually only a few years ago.

The Active Travel Programme has grown substantially again thanks to the large increase in funding which has enabled all local authorities to establish the appropriate expertise in their authority to bring forward a number of schemes through the design and planning process. Many exciting projects are being delivered on the ground in our cities and towns which will transform how people travel in those locations. A key priority is joining up and integrating schemes to ensure a network of safe walking and cycling infrastructure.

The Authority has worked tirelessly as have our delivery partners, following significant levels of public engagement, to bring BusConnects Dublin Core Bus Corridors, Metrolink and the first phases of DART+ infrastructure through the planning process. We would hope that some of these major projects will come through the planning system shortly so that we get to the delivery phase of these important projects. A third round of public engagement is underway in Cork at the moment which I hope will enable final proposals for Sustainable Transport Corridors in Cork to be developed for planning.

Project governance is of huge importance to the Authority and we follow the Dept of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform's Public Spending Code to ensure correct controls are in place to estimate the cost of the different projects and to ensure that each delivery agency has the correct controls to manage the projects through delivery in line with the committed budget as well as the appropriate resources to deliver these projects.

### **Public Transport Services**

The Authority has now taken on the role of designing the network of public transport services to be delivered across the state with the assistance of external expertise. This has resulted in the publication of BusConnects networks for Dublin and Cork with the final networks for Limerick and Galway to be published next month, and Waterford in 2024. The Connecting

Ireland programme is the network of services that the Authority wants to deliver in rural Ireland allowing people make vital connections to education, services and to their wider community. The Authority also has plans to provide new and improved town services and delivered a new town service in Carlow earlier this year.

The Authority delivers public transport services through its contracts with Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann, Iarnród Éireann, Go-Ahead Ireland and with a number of other operators across the state. The Luas services are delivered by Transdev who are contracted to the NTA and Transport Infrastructure Ireland as joint clients. Each operator has a number of contracted performance indicators that must be met and these are closely monitored by the Authority.

The Authority is also responsible for the regulation of public bus services operated on a commercial basis; services such as Expressway, Aircoach and Citylink.

### **Rural Transport**

The Authority has re-structured the delivery of the Rural Transport Programme throughout Ireland which is now branded as *Locallink*. We support 15 Local Link offices who manage the delivery of services locally. The Connecting Ireland Programme is an ambitious programme of new and enhanced services to be delivered over 5 years across the country. Up to date we have delivered about 150 such services and they are really making a difference to peoples' lives in rural Ireland. We have seen a remarkable response from the public with passenger numbers growing by 300% compared to 2019 on new Connecting Ireland services.

### **Integration**

The Authority continues to prioritise the development of initiatives which are critical to the achievement of an integrated public transport system and to attracting new customers onto public transport services as well as promoting walking and cycling. These include Leap card, real-time passenger information, the National Journey Planner and making that information available digitally on websites and Apps. A number of innovative Apps have been provided to make the journey as seamless as possible. But we want to do more and so we will be appointing a supplier in Q1 next year to build the Next Generation Ticketing platform which will deliver account based ticketing across our services, facilitating the use of mobile phones, contactless bank cards and other digital forms of payment.

## **Taxis**

The taxi industry has been dealt a number of blows in the last number of years including the impacts of the Covid pandemic. Alongside the normal regulatory work of the Authority, we put in many measures to support the industry through those shocks and encourage its recovery. As of now the number of licensed drivers across the industry has recovered to 96% of pre-Covid figures and we continue to see an increasing number of new applicants to the industry. We continue to grant-aid the industry to increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles in the taxi fleet and the Authority is on target to have 20% of the fleet being wheelchair accessible by 2025.

## **Sustainability**

Sustainability is at the heart of the work of the National Transport Authority. We all know the challenges that we face to reduce the carbon emissions in the transport sector. The Avoid – Shift – Improve principle is key in all our work. Under Avoid principle, we encourage compact development and transit-orientated development through our transport strategies and in our interactions with development proposals. In the Shift principle we are improving public transport networks and infrastructure to allow people choose to use more sustainable travel. We are then improving the fleet by switching to low and zero emission vehicles across bus, train and tram. We have introduced a fully zero-emission bus service in Athlone town and are now rolling out the new electric double-deck fleet across Dublin which will be followed by Limerick next year.

## **Conclusion**

I would like to conclude by recognising that the Authority comprises the Board, the Chief Executive and the staff. The overall effectiveness of the Authority is dependent on each of these playing their relevant parts.

We are supported in our work by the Taxi Advisory Committee and a newly established Transport Users Advisory Group who advise us as we develop policies and plans. We also have

a number of external members that support the work of our Board Sub-Committees whose expertise and guidance we value.

I believe the Board of the Authority has been very conscious of the important public service role we undertake. Its members have given the time and commitment necessary to the effective performance of our duties in order to ensure that the Authority can successfully meet its statutory objectives.

The Authority is acutely aware of its accountability to Government and to the Oireachtas. The Authority's Executive is always available to the Oireachtas Committees to explain the work of the Authority and to answer questions about the decisions that the Authority makes in the course of undertaking its statutory functions. We will continue to engage at the request of the Oireachtas members.

Chairperson and Committee members, the Authority has a very ambitious programme of work to deliver over the next five years and I am delighted to be appointed in this position by the Minister for Transport to guide its work. That concludes my statement.