

## Opening Remarks – 7<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Minister for Transport, Eamon Ryan T.D.

### Select Committee on Revised Estimates 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to present the 2024 Estimates for the Department of Transport.

Transport is a vital enabler in our economy and society. My ambition is to support a transport system will keep pace with our growing economy and population to provide sustainable, accessible, safe and secure transport options across all modes of travel.

The budget is set out in six programmes, *Programme A “Sustainable Mobility – Active Travel and Greenways”*, *Programme B “Sustainable Mobility - Public Transport”*, *Programme C “Road Safety and Road Networks”*, *Programme D “Civil Aviation”*, *Programme E “Maritime Safety and Transport”*, and *Programme F “Information Technology, Engagement and Research Delivery”*.

The set of Transport Estimates before you provide an overall gross allocation to the Department of Transport of **€3.574 billion**, which constitutes **€894.322 million** in current expenditure and **€2.679 billion** in capital investment. The allocation will support our ambitions in delivering on the transport related objectives in the National Development and the Climate Action Plan, delivering safe, sustainable and accessible transport options in urban and rural areas. It will support our ambitions in

maintaining and enhancing road, aviation, and maritime, safety, security and connectivity.

The Advance Brief before you highlights many of the achievements of 2023; the growth in public transport passenger numbers and the retention of the 20 percent average reduction on fares, to name but two. However, it also highlights many of the challenges that we face going into 2024, from the immediate; the concerning rise in road fatalities; to the long term, the challenge of rapidly reducing carbon emissions in the transport sector; and the increasingly expected, but unpredictable, damage caused by extreme rainfall events.

The budget continues to focus on the Department's strategic priorities, and we are seeing the ambitions of this government start to bear fruit on the ground, in different transport sectors. 2024 will see, for example: a steadily increasing number of the new electric double decker buses now on the streets of Dublin; the new inter-city railcars enter service; the large pipeline and high quality of the Active Travel and Greenway networks continue under construction; an increasing density of public electric vehicle charging infrastructure; more progress on the Cork Commuter Rail project; more major public transport projects exit the planning system; and the continued progression of the roads programme agreed under the NDP, with contracts signed in 2023 for Ballaghderreen to Scramogue and funding support for the Cork to Ringaskiddy road and Adare bypass in place.

Turning first to **Programme A, "Sustainable Mobility, Active Travel and Greenways"**. **€358.668 million** is allocated under this Programme. My Department continues to deliver on the Programme for Government

commitment of providing €360 million per annum to invest in active travel. Strategic programmes, for example, the Safe Routes to School programme, will support the design of integrated networks that will greatly enhance safety and accessibility and make active travel an attractive alternative to the private car. The pipeline of Active Travel and Greenways projects under construction will proceed apace. As the out-turn for 2023 demonstrates, the demand for the investment is there and we will continue to deliver.

**€1.636 billion** has been allocated to **Programme B “Sustainable Mobility, Public Transport”** for public transport infrastructure investment and services. This funding will continue to protect existing networks, modernise our transport networks and fleets and provide new connections. It will provide for the existing range of transport services and facilitate the ongoing delivery of BusConnects, Connecting Ireland and New Town service plans, providing better connected, more frequent services and building that real alternative to the private car.

**€613.463** million is allocated in PSO funding. The 20% discount on public transport fares is retained for 2024. The funding provides for the extension of the upper age limit of the Young Adult Card from 2023 to 2025. The NTA will continue to roll out new services in line with the BusConnects, Connecting Ireland and New Town Services plans, so we can build on the achievements of 2023 in growing passenger numbers on our networks. I am delighted to see the steady growth in passenger numbers, which demonstrates the success of our investment to date.

**€971.056 million** is allocated to public transport investment. Plans for 2024 include: ongoing protection and renewal of the rail network;

progression of Cork Commuter Rail; expansion of bus fleets with the addition of 70 electric buses for Dublin and 60 zero emission buses for deployment in regional fleets; and continued progression of public transport projects. Now that these projects are starting to exit the planning system, 2024 and onwards should see real progress on these projects.

**€1.365 billion** is allocated to **Programme C “Road Networks and Road Safety”**, including EV grants and infrastructure. This funding will: maintain and renew the national, regional and local road surfaces; undertake safety works and bridge maintenance and rehabilitation; meet our contractual obligations under public private partnerships that delivered parts of our motorway network; fund the construction of new national and regional and local roads; fund vital safety related services and progress the electrification of our transport networks.

**€158.000 million** has been allocated to the construction of new national roads and **€70 million** for regional and local road improvement schemes. Construction is continuing a number of major roads including completion of the Dunkettle Interchange and the Listowel bypass. Projects with planning approval that will continue to progress towards construction phase include the re-tendered Ballaghdereen to Scramogue road, Cork to Ringaskiddy road and the Adare bypass.

**€286.750 million** has been allocated to protection and renewal of national roads, **€553.667 million** for protection and renewal of regional and local roads and an additional **€97 million** in PPP operational payments.

**€115.800 million** is allocated to EV grants and infrastructure. 2024 will see progress towards finalising and implementing a national En-Route

Electric Vehicle Charging strategy, which will facilitate the installation of banks of electric vehicle fast chargers at key points on the motorway network, in the first instance.

In relation to road safety, **€7.47 million** has been provided to the Medical Bureau of Road Safety to support their vital work in detecting drug and alcohol misuse by drivers. My Department will continue to work closely with the Road Safety Authority on all matters related to road safety.

Turning now, to **Programme D, Civil Aviation. €35.614 million** is allocated to Aviation. The Regional Airports programme provides targeted supports to Regional Airports that handle fewer than one million passengers per annum. The funding facilitates operational grants and PSO funding as well as investment in a wide variety of safety, security, and sustainability related capital projects. For the first time since 2020, emergency Covid supports are not required for the Aviation Sector and this funding has now ceased. **€11.171 million** is allocated to fund services such as air accident insurance and membership of key international organisations.

**€128.533 million** is allocated to **Programme E, Maritime Transport and Safety**. Most of that funding is directed to the Irish Coast Guard. This includes delivery of the Helicopter contract incorporating Search and Rescue and Air Ambulance support to the HSE and the Island communities. 2024 will see the transition from CHC as the Search and Rescue Service provider to Bristow. The funding also includes investment in the Commissioner of Irish Lights and marine casualty investigations.

**€49.528 million** is allocated to a new **Programme F, “Information Technology, Engagement and Research Delivery”**. Given the central importance of IT infrastructure to how the Department conducts its operations and delivers front line services, such as licensing services and motor tax collection, a new ‘Digital Hub’ has been created, bringing these services and the funding of these services under one structure for the first time.

The Department has also introduced two additional subheads, F.4 Climate Engagement and F.5 Research Programmes. This will support information campaigns such as *“Your Journey Counts”*, which highlights how individual choices can make transport more sustainable; and also vital research into areas such as sustainable fuels.

I am pleased to see how the strategic direction of the Department has developed over the past few years: with real progress on investment in regional cities, not just Dublin; investment in rural areas, not just urban; in all transport modes, not just the ones we traditionally use; in modernisation and electrification to build the transport networks of the future, not just in settling for what we already have; and always with an ambition to improving connectivity across all modes. This year promises to be an exciting year for new public transport infrastructure as BusConnects exits the planning system and DART Plus and Metrolink get closer to decisions; with the oral hearing for Metrolink commencing this month. I look forward to the pace ramping up for 2024 and I will be seeking to ensure that we maintain the real momentum that we have built up in delivering safe, secure and accessible transport networks that serve all our citizens’ needs.

I am now happy to take any questions that the Committee may have.

**ENDS**