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Ms Aileen Fallon  
 Clerk to the Committee (Work Programme)  
 Special Committee on Covid-19 Response  
 Leinster House  
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7<sup>th</sup> July 2020

**Ref: SCC19R-I-0372**

**Re: The impact of Covid-19 on public transport.**

Dear Ms Fallon,

I refer to your recent request of 26<sup>th</sup> June.

Please find attached Iarnród Eireann's submission as requested.



Jim Meade  
**Chief Executive**



## **IARNRÓD ÉIREANN SUBMISSION to SPECIAL COMMITTEE on COVID-19 RESPONSE**

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### **Introduction**

Iarnród Éireann (IÉ) is pleased to make a submission to the Special Committee on COVID-19 Response on the topic "Impact of COVID-19 on Public Transport Services".

In advance of the first cases of COVID-19 in Ireland, IÉ initiated its business continuity plan and formed a dedicated COVID-19 response team to support operational continuity.

The measures implemented have allowed IÉ to respond to Government/NTA requirements to maintain essential services on a sustained basis and to ensure HSE guidelines were implemented to limit the risks of COVID-19 and protect our employees and customers.

We would like to place on record for the benefit of the Committee our appreciation for the efforts of our team of 4,000 employees who ensured our essential services were maintained throughout; to our representative trade unions with whom we have worked to protect employee and customer health; to the National Transport Authority, and other public transport operators – both our sister companies in the CIÉ Group, Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann, and Luas operator Transdev and GoAhead – for the collaborative effort which has ensured knowledge, expertise and information available to one was available to all.

### **Impact of COVID-19 – IÉ employees and our response**

Of over 4,000 Iarnród Éireann colleagues, there have been 4 cases of COVID-19, and we are pleased to report that all have fully recovered and returned to work. This speaks to the professionalism of our colleagues, who ensured they acted quickly and appropriately both in isolating arising from possible symptoms, and adhered to all public health advice.

The total number of staff who have been self-isolating for any reason arising from COVID-19 in Ireland is 285 cases with 275 having returned to work. The current status as at 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 is:

Staff members who have been out of work due to COVID-19, including self-isolating?	How many staff are out of work currently?	What was the highest recorded absence due to COVID-19?	How many staff are you aware of that have tested positive for COVID-19?	What is the total number of employees?
285	10	169	4	4047

Colleagues have demonstrated flexibility and adaptability in all functions and locations, and have cooperated with measures to ensure service continuity and customer and employee safety. Furthermore, many measures implemented were a direct result of employee feedback and insight.

The proportion of staff working remotely is circa 20% of the workforce (737 colleagues). The COVID-19 Response Team have created a 'Return to Work' plan which details the policies and practices required by the Government to reduce the risk of COVID-19 occurring in the workplace. The plan gives an overview of the key controls and mitigations to ensure compliance and to minimise any risk to colleagues, contractors or customers. The plan has been developed through a collaborative working group of all IÉ departments and our Trade Unions.

We continue to provide a supply of personal use hand sanitiser/sanitised wipes and reusable face masks for our employees. We have distributed in excess of 8,000 re-usable face masks to front line colleagues. The team has ensured delivery of PPE for the CIÉ Group's Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Department in order to recommence face to face employee medicals.

We have placed high priority on strong and consistent internal communications relating to services, policies and practices during COVID-19. Regular updated internal communication is being distributed via all user emails, our intranet IÉ Connect, weekly circular and dedicated COVID-19 newsletter. Work has also advanced on the development and implementation of a new employee engagement app supplied by Irish company, Workvivo.

### **Impact of COVID-19 – IÉ service delivery and our response**

While IÉ has maintained services on the network throughout this pandemic for essential travel requirements, there has been a significant and substantial decrease in demand for services, and passenger numbers reduced in the early weeks when the most severe restrictions were imposed to circa -96% of normal pre-COVID passenger loadings. This indicates extremely high compliance with the restrictions amongst the public, for which we are grateful.

Revised and reduced schedules were implemented from 30<sup>th</sup> March at c. 50% of normal frequency.

The Government roadmap introduced phased reopening of the economy and an easing of restrictions in some sectors while public transport remained for essential travel. In the early phases, passenger volumes increased from a reduction of circa -90% to an average

of -84% each day with social distancing measures of 2m in place, including seat covers, floor markings and platform and station concourse markings.

During phase 2, and in consultation with the NTA, we had taken measures to increase frequency and capacity, in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) on DART/Commuter and on some InterCity routes. While we were observing additional passenger numbers in phase 2, our services were coping and there are no significant issues as we managed loadings within HSE Guidelines for social distancing. We continued to monitor passenger demand versus fleet capacity daily and responded quickly when and if changes were necessary.

The Government roadmap has now moved to phase 3 since 29<sup>th</sup> June 2020, we have adapted our fleet and services to align with the additional capacity allowed, up to 50%, and the requirements for mandatory wearing of face coverings.

The easing of the requirements for social distancing on public transport has provided for an increase in capacity from circa 12% with social distancing to 50% with mandatory face coverings, and is a welcome development. We have provided additional frequency where required to meet demand, including the full weekday DART Timetable and increased frequency on commuter routes. Full weekend DART services, and enhanced weekend Commuter services will commence from Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> July.

We expect the current capacity to adequately meet demand for the period up to the end of August 2020. However, we will continue to monitor passenger loadings daily and respond quickly to increased demand.

<b>Current demand vs 2019</b>	<b>InterCity</b>	<b>DART &amp; Commuter</b>	<b>Total</b>
30 <sup>th</sup> June 2020	-72%	-79%	-78%

We are providing consistent messaging via media, website and updated customer information across all channels, while reviewing social media feedback to highlight customer areas of concern for review and action.

### **Impact of COVID-19 – IE financial position and our response**

Passenger revenue year to date is significantly down on prior year revenue, which represents a (41.5%) drop year on year. Budgeted Public Service Obligation (PSO) funding for 2020 will be exhausted in June 2020. The NTA have furnished IE with a PSO schedule which compensates for forecasted revenue shortfall for the remainder of 2020.

IÉ has taken a number of measures to control costs across the business in response to COVID-19, including payroll reductions, fuel and electricity costs.

However, some additional costs have arisen as a result of ensuring PPE for employees, and facilitating remote working.

<b>COVID-19</b>	<b>Costs</b>
Sanitiser products delivered	€ 237,000
Face Masks delivered	€ 148,000
Incremental Security	€ 151,000
Laptops 184 Issued	€ 221,000
<b>Current Total</b>	<b>€ 757,000</b>

#### **Impact of COVID-19 – IÉ public health measures and our response**

Iarnród Éireann has taken a lead role in the provision of PPE requirements across the CIÉ Group and LUAS. In addition, IÉ is undertaking a number of pilot projects and trials for advanced surface protection in fleet and buildings and the provision of hand sanitiser and face coverings for public use at selected interchange stations on behalf of NTA and Public Transport providers.

#### **Impact of COVID-19 – IÉ rail infrastructure projects and our response**

The appetite for a more sustainable future for our society and economy, and the repeated pattern of rapid recovery from economic shocks demonstrates the importance of continuing with investment in public transport – including these major heavy rail projects – to facilitate a more sustainable pattern of travel, development and economic activity to meet the Climate Action goals at national and international level.

Specifically, work on ten (10) Capital Investment projects stopped for a varying periods up to 3 months. There was a delay in awarding 3 contracts (2 construction and 1 consultancy). All suspended contracts have recommenced and all contracts have been awarded. The remote working arrangements have been established and work efficiently. The infrastructure arrangements for remote working will not be dismantled until the risk of a second wave have significantly reduced.

This means that Iarnród Éireann remains in a position to deliver crucial enhancements for customers, within the NDP programme, including:

- DART Expansion, including major fleet orders, electrification, and network enhancement
- National Train Control Centre
- Development of proposals to enhance the role of rail in regional cities
- Conversion of existing Intercity fleet to hybrid operation

### **Impact of COVID-19 – IÉ future focus**

Public transport is playing a critical role in transporting essential workers during the COVID-19 crisis and will serve as a key enabler for the revival of the economy and facilitator of the movement of citizens, with the reopening of business and society.

Research undertaken by Iarnród Éireann on customers attitudes to using rail as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted indicates 90% of all customers intend to return to rail once restrictions are lifted with 60% of that group stating they will return within one month. 21% will travel with us less frequently which may reflect an increase in remote working.

This does indicate that as schools resume in September, the revised 50% capacity may come under pressure, even with full schedules operating. We will continue to liaise with international public transport partners in assisting the NTA, public health and Government authorities in consideration of any further increase in capacity to ensure we continue to both protect public health, and support the recovery of the economy.

### **Review of measures taken, and focus for potential second waves**

We have been greatly supported in our efforts by the support and information from state agencies, not least our public health authorities. While a full review is appropriate, we would draw the contrast between the tragic incidence of loss of life amongst public transport workers in other jurisdictions, and the extremely low level of incidence of COVID-19 amongst our own workforce.

Resilience of supply of resources such as PPE, and sanitising equipment has been established, and assured for any future waves, and stocking of such resources either at transport level or national level for essential services could aid rapid response for any future pandemic events.

**END**