

**Transport, Energy, Aviation & Construction
Division**

TRANSPORT SECTOR

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07/07/2020

Ms Aileen Fallon,
Clerk of the Committee,
Special Committee on Covid19 Response
Leinster House
Dublin 2

Dear Ms. Fallon,

Please find attached SIPTU's submission to the "Special Committee on Covid 19 Response" regarding Public Transport.

We thank you and the committee for seeking our input and we would welcome an opportunity to discuss this matter directly with the committee in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

John Murphy



SIPTU submission to the Oireachtas Covid 19 committee on the impact of Covid 19 on Public Transport Services.

July 07th 2020

INTRODUCTION

Chairman, members of the Committee, SIPTU is the largest Trade Union in Ireland and the largest Trade Union within the Public Transport Services Sector. We organise and represent over 5000 employees within Public Transport and these members are spread across all grades and categories of workers and our members work within all current operators who hold public transport contracts with the National Transport Authority (NTA).

While this submission will comment on issues such as passenger levels, impact on operators revenue, investment in rail and road infrastructure and public transport capacity, SIPTU does not have access to factual data produced either by the NTA or the individual operators so we will not go into detail on such matters. We do, however, intend to focus our submission on the actions taken to deal with Covid 19, the impact on staffing and other actions that should have

and still need to be taken to protect public transport services, the workers that deliver these services and the passengers dependant on such services.

SUBMISSION

As previously stated SIPTU represents workers across all the current public transport service providers and we have liaised closely with each of the providers since the onset of the Covid crisis. Through information received from them, and through information contained within media reports, SIPTU would estimate that passenger numbers fell by between 80 – 90% at the commencement of the Covid lockdown and the ban on all non-essential travel.

This sudden dramatic reduction had an undoubted financial impact on all providers, this impact may have been greater on some due to the differing natures of their contracts with the NTA. SIPTU wrote to the National Transport Authority and the Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport on the 16th March last raising concerns and among these concerns was the financial impact on the providers under the current contracts and seeking the necessary assurances that public transport, as a vital essential service, would be supported by government.

While we are aware that ongoing discussions have taken place between the NTA and the operators, SIPTU would urge the NTA and the present government to formally and publicly assure all stakeholders that public transport now and post Covid 19 will receive the necessary funding to continue to provide a safe, reliable and efficient service to all citizens regardless of their geographical location.

Assurances must also be given that capital investment will be provided in all areas of public transport be they road, rail, or light rail. While we can understand

that the full impact of the covid crisis on our economy will not be known presently, the present government must ensure that capital investment is provided for public transport. Over the recent months we have all seen the importance of our public transport services and the part it has played in ensuring other essential workers in our economy were able to travel safely to and from work.

The Covid crisis has impacted every citizen over the recent months and we have all had to change the way we live our daily lives. Even as we progress through the opening of our society and the further lifting of restrictions, we do not yet know whether passenger numbers will ever return to pre-covid levels. Despite this, SIPTU believes we must plan to increase public transport capacity going forward. Plans such as Bus Connects, Metro Link and proposed new Luas Lines should still be actively pursued and progressed. The benefits of these plans on issues such as congestion, our environment and our economy still apply today and going forward.

As previously stated, SIPTU organises and represents over 5000 workers directly employed by public transport service providers. Since the onset of the Covid crisis SIPTU has been dealing directly with each provider to ensure every precaution and safety measure needed was been taken and that their workers and the passengers were protected. We accept that the Covid crisis was unprecedented and everyone, including the employers, had to learn and adapt quickly but there were and still are a number of actions that government and the NTA should take to assist all within and dependent on the Industry.

SIPTU had cause to write to the NTA and the Minister on several occasions (between 16th March and 25th May) to seek Industrywide resolutions to Covid issues. Issues such as the following were raised.

- Ensuring Social Distancing Guidelines were adhered to within Public Transport vehicles.
- Ensuring all buses are fitted with driver screens which provides a physical barrier between driver and passenger.
- Mandatory wearing of face coverings/face masks on public transport.
- Designate each operator with “Emergency Service Status” which would greatly assist operators in sourcing and securing sanitizing and cleaning products.
- Testing of Frontline Transport workers.

Unfortunately, our correspondence went unanswered until a reply was received from the Minister on the 11th June. As yet the NTA has not formally responded to SIPTU on any of the above issues. The lack of or delays in formal replies would be unacceptable in normal times, but in these unprecedented times this shows a complete disregard for workers within the Industry.

SIPTU has long held the view, and indeed we have made representation to various administrations and offices, that there must be a forum to deal with and progress issues within public transport. Public transport is not a for profit industry, it is a social obligation that government must provide to all citizens even where financially unviable.

Under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, which established the forerunner to the present National Transport Authority, section 17 of the Act commits to the establishment of an “Advisory Council” whose functions is to advise and make recommendations on public transport. This council, despite SIPTU’s efforts, has never been established by successive administrations and Ministers. SIPTU holds the view that this council must be established immediately so as it can assist the NTA and the Industry in dealing with the present crisis, any possible second wave or indeed any future similar matters.

CONCLUSION

SIPTU wishes to thank the committee for seeking our input into this matter. The above submission is just a short overview of public transport issues arising from and developing because of the Covid crisis. SIPTU would welcome an opportunity to discuss the above in more detail with the committee where necessary.

Finally, we would urge the committee to ensure the Advisory Council, as committed to in the 2008 Act, is established immediately. Such a Council, with representatives of all stakeholders, is the appropriate mechanism to assist with dealing with all public transport matters going forward, which includes Covid related issues.

