



National Planning Framework
Consultation Process
Bus Éireann Submission – March 2017

Summary

Bus Éireann welcomes the opportunity to contribute its ideas and suggestions in the preparation of a National Planning Framework to 2040. Bus Éireann would contend that the primary objective for prioritising investment in transport should be to support renewed economic growth, improved competitiveness and sustainable job creation and social inclusion. Bus Éireann would also contend that low cost solutions should be assessed for all communities across Ireland, and should build on the very positive progress that is being made in relation to modal shift in recent years across the country. In support of this, Bus Éireann would contend that the National Framework should continue to place a priority on the maintenance of the integrated national network of services that links all communities, urban and rural, and that fosters balanced regional economic development. This should then be supported by investment in transport infrastructure. This would require balanced investment both within Dublin and outside Dublin. In pursuing this balance, the public transport strategy that evolves should continue to place a priority on lower cost alternatives such as bus/coach transport network in a small island economy with a dispersed population. In finalising the framework, Bus Éireann would appreciate if the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government took the following into consideration:

1 - Facilitating Economic Growth and Social Inclusion – A focus on “Steady state” and growth Investment beyond “Steady State” required in the next 20 years: The “steady state funding requirement” for public transport and transport infrastructure that was previously identified in the SFILT report is being addressed, but the requirement now needs to embrace the economic growth that is being experienced, particularly in Cork, Galway, Limerick and in the Greater Dublin Areas. In the short to medium term and to ensure a safe and effective bus based PT system, steady state funding is required in Bus Éireann’s existing bus transport infrastructure as follows:

- Replacement of end of life PSO vehicles with higher capacity environmentally friendly vehicles.
- Additional investment in service frequency and fleet capacity to stay ahead of the current growth levels in PT usage across the country.
- Investment in the existing network of transport interchanges including bus shelters, bus poles, and customer facilities at bus stations.
- Maintenance and upgrade of existing RTPI and Wi-Fi systems.
- Necessary investment bus priority measures in the provincial cities and major towns across Ireland.
- Necessary investment in safety quality assurance systems and maintenance systems.

2 - Balanced Regional Development – Local and Rural communities should not be side-lined:

Bus Éireann is fully supportive of the National Planning Framework, which is required urgently to ensure a counter balance to Dublin focused level of investment that is currently occurring. Regional transport and Public Transport strategies need to be devised to facilitate competitiveness at all regional levels and not just Dublin. There is a concern that Dublin based transport projects will take precedence in the next decade. If we continue to prioritise Dublin in relation to PT projects as a nation, we will never achieve a balanced regional development strategy, and communities outside Dublin will become even more isolated in relation to social and economic inclusion, and international competitiveness.

3 - The need for a vision and direction for public transport outside Dublin:

Bus Éireann supports the UITP international initiative to double PT usage by 2025 worldwide, and is working with the National Transport Authority and the transport stakeholders to implement an expansion of the range and quality of bus based PT services and infrastructure across the country, and which is proving to be of extreme benefit in facilitating social and economic growth outside Dublin. Bus Éireann is currently focused on a 10 year development plan (2015-2025) for public transport services is required outside Dublin, that will facilitate growth in passenger numbers of over 5% per annum, supported with the appropriate capital investment, service development and integration of PT services and infrastructure planning. Bus Éireann is also working with the DOE&S, NTA and DTTAS on joined up thinking for the use of BE resources in provincial and rural Ireland over the period.

4 – PT strategy to support the NPF should be based on building efficiencies and customer focus, and ensure that PSO services are adequately funded and resourced.

Bus Éireann would be of the view that the level and extent of network and performance should be aimed at optimising value for money building cost efficiencies and developing customer focused service offering. In order that the anticipated growth in the economy is facilitated by public transport over the next decade, the National Planning Framework needs to be supported by adequately funded work programmes and initiatives that are focused on driving passenger growth and modal shift that are cost competitive and focused on high customer service quality. If these work programmes are not adequately funded it is unlikely that public transport capacity will meet the demand for socially and economically necessary PT services.

5 - Alignment with wider Social and Economic Objectives:

The National Planning Framework needs to fully acknowledge and align with policy developments that are related to PT policy, in terms of accessibility and mobility, smart ageing, environmental policy and SME development. Such alignment will need adequate investment and funding support.



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Bus Éireann welcomes the opportunity to contribute its ideas and suggestions in the preparation of the National Planning Framework by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. Bus Éireann will work with all stakeholders to implement Government priorities to ensure that transport and public transport make a significant contribution to continued economic recovery, job creation and balanced regional development. Bus Éireann's strategy is focused on providing safe, value for money and customer centred transport services to urban and rural communities in an effective and efficient manner by:

- Continuing to work in partnership with the National Transport Authority (NTA) to negotiate and deliver the best possible public transport offering for **PSO services** provided under direct award contract outside Dublin. Work programmes are focused on passenger and capacity growth on the core network as the economy recovers supported by fleet replacement, facilities and infrastructure investment.
- Continuing to develop the interregional **Expressway** brand along with network improvements for faster journey times and more competitive fares. Expressway will continue to play a vital role in connecting local transport networks to urban centres across the country without receipt of PSO subvention.
- Delivering further cost savings and efficiencies in the provision of **school transport services** on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills.

We would agree with the Minister's view in the foreword that

"If we want our country to be the best it can be, we must ensure that development and services are located where all of our people can be best served. In other words, that the right development can take place in the right places and at the right time. "

Bus based public transport can be best utilised to support the Minister's view, by providing regional and interregional connectivity for all communities in Ireland, whether in urban, commuter or rural environments. Bus Éireann would contend that the primary objective for prioritising investment in transport should be the role of transport in supporting renewed economic growth, improved competitiveness and sustainable job creation, but Bus Éireann would contend that low cost solutions should be assessed **for all communities across Ireland.**

In support of this, Bus Éireann would contend that the National Planning Framework should support the prioritisation of the maintenance of a integrated national public transport network that links all communities, urban and rural, and that fosters sustainable and balanced regional economic development. This would require balanced investment in PT services and infrastructure both within Dublin and outside Dublin. In pursuing this balance, the land based transport strategy should continue to place a priority on lower cost alternatives such as bus/coach transport network in a small island economy where increased rail coverage is unlikely in the medium to longer term. Outside Dublin this could relate to:

- **Fostering higher modal transfer to PT, cycling and walking alternatives in and around provincial cities, including the possible upgrade of the busiest corridors to BRT lite in the medium term and full BRT in the longer term.**
- **Developing sustainable and low cost transport solutions that are adequately funded and that create better linkages for towns, villages and rural communities to the wider economy, and make best use of the existing PT and road network investments.**
- **Improving PT solutions not just for work and school commuters, but for all economic and social inclusion requirements for industry, retail, tourism, healthcare and so on.**

In finalising the National Planning Framework, Bus Éireann would appreciate if the Department took the following into consideration:

- Facilitating Economic Growth and Social Inclusion - Further Investment beyond “Steady State” required in the next 20 years.
- Balanced Regional Development – Local and rural communities should not be sidelined.
- The need for a vision and direction for public transport outside Dublin.
- PT strategy to support the NPF should be based on building efficiencies and customer focus, and ensure that PSO services are adequately funded and resourced.
- Alignment with wider Social and Economic Objectives.

1 - Facilitating Economic Growth and Social Inclusion in the 20 years – “Steady State” plus growth investment required

Public Transport has to meet the evolving needs of the economy as it continues its revitalisation in the next decade. “Steady State” investment for bus based transport and infrastructure will not be enough to support this recovery. The National Planning Framework should reflect the success of the recent PT investment, and the resulting growth in PT demand across the country and the importance of public transport as an enabler in economic renewal. Bus Éireann is experiencing passenger growth rates of over 6% presently after a period of decline during the economic recession.

Latest economic indicators from the ESRI and the Department of Finance point to a reasonable acceleration in economic renewal in the short to medium term, and further investment over and above steady state funding will be required to facilitate economic growth and international competitiveness over the next decade.

In the short to medium and to ensure a safe and effective bus based PT system, steady state funding is required in Bus Éireann’s existing bus transport infrastructure as follows:

- Replacement of end of life PSO vehicles with higher capacity environmentally friendly vehicles.
- Additional investment in service frequency and fleet capacity to stay ahead of the current growth levels in PT usage across the country.
- Investment in the existing network of transport interchanges including bus shelters, bus poles, and customer facilities at bus stations.
- Maintenance and upgrade of existing RTPI and Wi-Fi systems.
- Necessary investment bus priority measures in the provincial cities and major towns across Ireland.
- Necessary investment in safety quality assurance systems and maintenance systems.

Capacity requirements to maintain “Steady state” in most cases can be met by the deployment of higher capacity vehicles, this “sweats” the existing network frequencies without adding to the PSO requirement, but this is not sustainable in the medium to longer term, and increased frequency may be required to keep up with anticipated demand. In order to cater for medium to longer term transport demands in the provincial cities, upgrades for the main corridors to BRT, or “BRT lite” should be appraised in the medium term.

2 – Balanced Regional Development – Local and Rural communities should not be side-lined

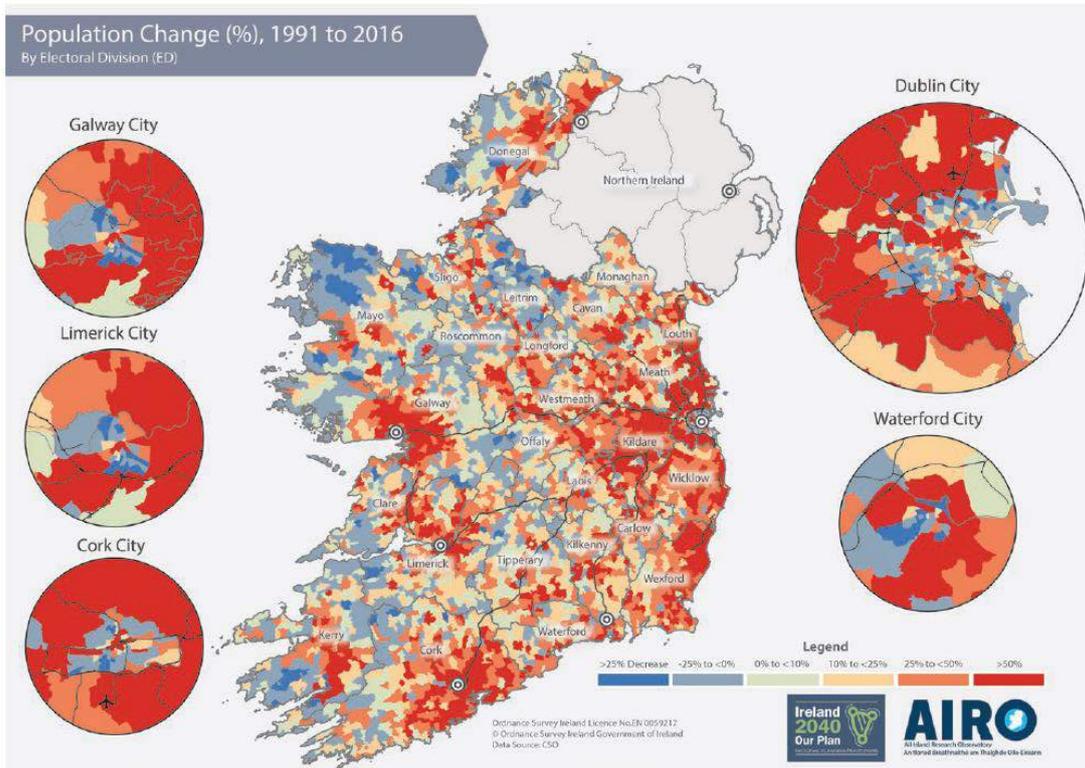
Bus Éireann would agree that a successor to the National Spatial Strategy in the form of the National Planning Framework is required urgently, and that regional transport strategies need to be devised to facilitate competitiveness at all regional levels and not just Dublin. It is widely acknowledged that PT can make a significant positive social impact, not just in relation to access to work or education, but also in relation to access to healthcare facilities, retail and leisure facilities and in facilitating tourism in urban and rural locations throughout Ireland. All of these mobility and integration needs are critical to the renewal and regeneration of local economies.

There is a concern that Dublin based transport projects will take precedence in the next few years, which will further separate urban and rural locations in the rest of the country in terms of economic well-being and attractiveness to employers. A counter balance is required. The figures cited in the SFILT consultation in relation to the spatial distribution of travel demand would support this contention:

Trip demand	% of total
Dublin	24%
Cork, Limerick, Galway	8%
Significant towns	20%
Villages/Rural	48%

Similarly in terms of population dispersal, the largest growth has not been in cities between 1991 and 2011 (up 20%), but was in towns greater than 1,000 population (up 72%). The NPF Consultation document (Executive Summary p6) reflects the dispersed nature of population growth between 1991 and 2016, in that the highest levels of population growth is not necessarily in Dublin city and County, but in pockets of growth dispersed in commuter belts, towns and villages across the country (see overleaf)

Figure 1: Population changes 1991 to 2016 (Source NPF – Issues and Choices)



If we consistently prioritise Dublin in relation to PT projects as a nation, we will never achieve a balanced regional development strategy, and communities outside Dublin will become even more isolated in relation to social and economic inclusion, and international competitiveness. It is disappointing that all major rail and BRT projects for consideration in the current and next funding period are confined mainly to Dublin, and this is not conducive to balanced regional development. Passenger growth is very strong on the core routes in provincial cities at present, and BRT Lite upgrades should be appraised in the short to medium term.

Bus Éireann would not agree with the contention in previous analyses that *“the provision of public transport to meet any significant proportion of rural travels needs is, in general, prohibitively expensive and inefficient”*. In terms of local passenger transport, Bus/coach based is a low cost PT alternative that has been applied successfully in relation to Bus Éireann’s commuter and stage carriage services and in relation to the Schools Transport Scheme. Bus Éireann provides an extensive network of rural and local stage carriage services around the country, representing only a small proportion of the total PSO spend in the country. If modal share is to be recognised as a primary PT metric, the modal share of primary and secondary students using bus in town and rural locations is one of the highest of all age cohorts in Ireland, according to the CSO Census figures. If the structures are in place and a modest level of PT infrastructure investment is put in place, then modal shift in towns, villages and rural areas is achievable.

The important role that Bus Éireann's stage carriage services play in terms of linking local and rural communities to the wider PT network, whether it relates to social inclusion or economic inclusion, should be acknowledged. These services are provided in an efficient and effective manner, and act as an important network bridge to the local services provided by Local Link. The importance of the Schools Transport Scheme in rural areas, and the importance of making best use of existing PT resources in local communities should also be acknowledged

3 - A longer term vision and direction for public transport outside Dublin is required

Bus Éireann supports the UITP international initiative to double PT usage by 2025 worldwide, and would be of the opinion that such an initiative if properly supported would be of extreme benefit in facilitating social and economic growth outside Dublin. Bus Éireann is working with the NTA and PT stakeholders to expand PSO services outside Dublin as part of a 10 year development plan (2015-2025) for public transport services is required, that will facilitate growth in passenger numbers by over 5 % per annum, but only with the appropriate capital investment, service development & integration of PT services and infrastructure planning. Bus Éireann is also working with the DOE&S, NTA and DTTAS on joined up thinking for the use of BE resources in provincial and rural Ireland over the period.

These fleet investment requirements are higher than the "steady funding" requirement, and this will need sustained investment in the medium to longer term. The development plan is based on encouraging growth in usage of PT services outside Dublin through the following:

- **Core Backbone Urban Network:** Expansion on core network of urban services supported by the necessary bus priority measures, infrastructure, technology etc. including the potential use of BRT in the provincial cities.
- **Further development** of the commuter belt networks and town services that would complement the backbone network, and would increase both integration and connectivity.
- **BE Stage Carriage - Local and rural transport connectivity to core network:** Ensure BE backbone network can cater for emerging rural , local and school transport requirements and provide connectivity to the wider national and international PT network.

4 - PT strategy to support the NPF should be based on building efficiencies and customer focus, and ensure that PSO services are adequately funded and resourced.

Bus Éireann would contend that the PT strategy that evolves to support the NPF in terms of the level and extent of network and performance levels should be aimed at optimising value for money, building cost efficiencies and developing customer focused service offerings. Recent passenger growth levels of 6% in passenger growth across Bus Éireann's PSO network, and up to 10% in provincial cities, is proof that focused investment in PT services and infrastructure outside Dublin is working.

Considerable improvements have been made in relation to the customer offering in relation to improved networks, fleet investment, RTPI, Wi-Fi, Leapcard, apps, the use of enhanced passenger counting techniques, CCTV, AVL and future roll out of multi-media including local advertising.

In order that the anticipated growth in the economy is facilitated by public transport over the next decade, the PT strategy that evolves in line with the NPF needs to be supported by adequately funded work programmes and initiatives that are focused on driving passenger growth and modal shift. If these work programmes are not adequately funded it is unlikely that public transport capacity will meet the demand for socially and economically necessary PT services.

5 - Alignment with wider Social and Economic Objectives

It is appreciated that the NPF will fully acknowledge and align with policy developments that are related to PT policy, in terms of the following:

- **Accessibility and Mobility Requirements:** Further effort may be required to develop the range of accessible services available to PT users in city, town and rural locations. Provision required would include:
 - Further investment in accessible coaches and dual purpose vehicles to complement existing fleet. At present, all of BE bus fleet is low floor accessible, and a significant proportion of our commuter coaches are lift accessible.
 - Investment in accessible transport infrastructure in the towns and villages that need to be connected to the wider PT network from a social and economic perspective.
- **Smart Ageing Policy:** The NPF should reflect the mobility needs of all age cohorts in a balanced manner. While the focus of PT policy remains with work and education

commuting, it should be noted that 15% of BE passengers are over 65, and this will increase over next two decades.

- **Environmental Policy:** Considerable improvements have taken place in relation to engine technology vis-a-vis environmental emissions. Bus Éireann will continue to improve its environmental footprint in line with National Energy Efficiency Action Plans through replacement of older fleet, improved operational practices, eco-driving and the roll out of Telematics.
- **SME Development Policy:** Public transport policy needs to support SME access to local markets. Bus will continue to work closely with the private bus and coach sector to provide PT services. At present, Bus Éireann services are supported by a comprehensive range of subcontracted services from small and medium sized suppliers (1,400 local bus operators, cleaning and maintenance, print and media, etc.).