



NBRU Disability Committee



Joint Oireachtas Report
ON
Accessibility of Public Transport
FOR
People with Disabilities

Members are advised that the NBRU was invited to partake in the deliberations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee with regard to the above subject.

We were subsequently invited to submit to the Committee on the 13th June last year in relation to our view on this most important of subjects, after all, **any Society worth its salt can only but be judged on how it treats its most vulnerable.**

- The NBRU is extremely proud of the fact that we have a fully functioning Disability Committee.
- We were both honoured and privileged to be asked, as the largest Frontline representative Trade Union on the Island of Ireland to submit to this vital and hopefully life changing report into ensuring that those with Disabilities will, in a relatively short period of time, have Equal Accessibility to Public Transport.
- The NBRU intends to extensively engage (we have already commenced the process) with all of the Disability Groups that are representative of the circa 650,000 people amongst us that are designated as having a disability.
- We are proud to work with Senator John Dolan, his assistant Mr Ciaran Delaney and all those at the Disability Federation of Ireland.
- Mr Delaney was the first recipient of the NBRU 'Jennifer Forde Award' for Services to People with Disabilities (December '18). This award was named after a very courageous young Lady who battled serious illness for practically all of her life, before succumbing to her illness and leaving us in May of last year.
- We have campaigned incessantly over that last year for the introduction of the Jam Card (just a minute) initiative in our Transport Companies in the Republic (it already operates in the North of Ireland), we have written to the NTA as far back as November '18 for the resources to be made available so that frontline staff can be trained to assist with this wonderful initiative.
- The wonderful Now Group in Belfast, represented by the formidable Ms Dianne Hill and Ms Maeve Monaghan are pioneering the Jam Card which allows people with a learning difficulty autism or Asperger's tell others they need 'Just a Minute' discreetly and easily.

National Bus & Rail Union



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Ms Anne Graham
Chief Executive Officer
National Transport Authority
Hardcourt Lane
Dun Sceine
Dublin 2

12th November 2018

Re: 'Jam Card' Initiative for people with Intellectual Disabilities

Dear Ms Graham,

I refer to the above initiative which is being promoted by the NOW Group in support of people with a learning difficulty, autism or communication barrier.

I am aware that Ms Maeve Monaghan, Ms Diane Hill and colleagues from the Now Group, supported by Senator John Dolan from the Disability Federation of Ireland, have been engaging with a range of Stakeholders, including Transport providers, Politicians, the Department of Transport and your Office, with a view to having this invaluable service available in this jurisdiction.

The NBRU, the largest frontline Transport representative Trade Union on the Island of Ireland has been engaging with the Now Group and Senator Dolan for a number of months on this issue, our members interact on a daily basis with people from across the disability family, they assist those most vulnerable in our Community as they undertake their daily commute.

They, as in the frontline staff, would see the Jam Card initiative as a significant addition towards the delivery of ensuring, that those with intellectual difficulties and/or communication barriers, will enjoy a smooth and trouble-free journey.

I am aware that the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport is scheduled to present its report on the 14th November. The NBRU, having submitted to the Committee on the 13th June this year, on the matter of 'Accessibility of Public Transport for people with Disabilities' look forward to the launch of this Report.

This report should act as the catalyst for the delivery of a commitment from all Stakeholders as to when, not if the Jam Card will become a feature across our Public Transport services.

I am, on behalf of the membership of the NBRU urging you to commit to the NTA providing the necessary resources, through infrastructure and training supports to the State-owned Transport providers to deliver this wonderful initiative.

I would also respectfully request that you would look at including a mandatory requirement that: all applicants for a Commercial Bus Operators Licence would facilitate (inclusive of training) the use of the Jam Card across their Services.

I look forward to an early reply to this correspondence.

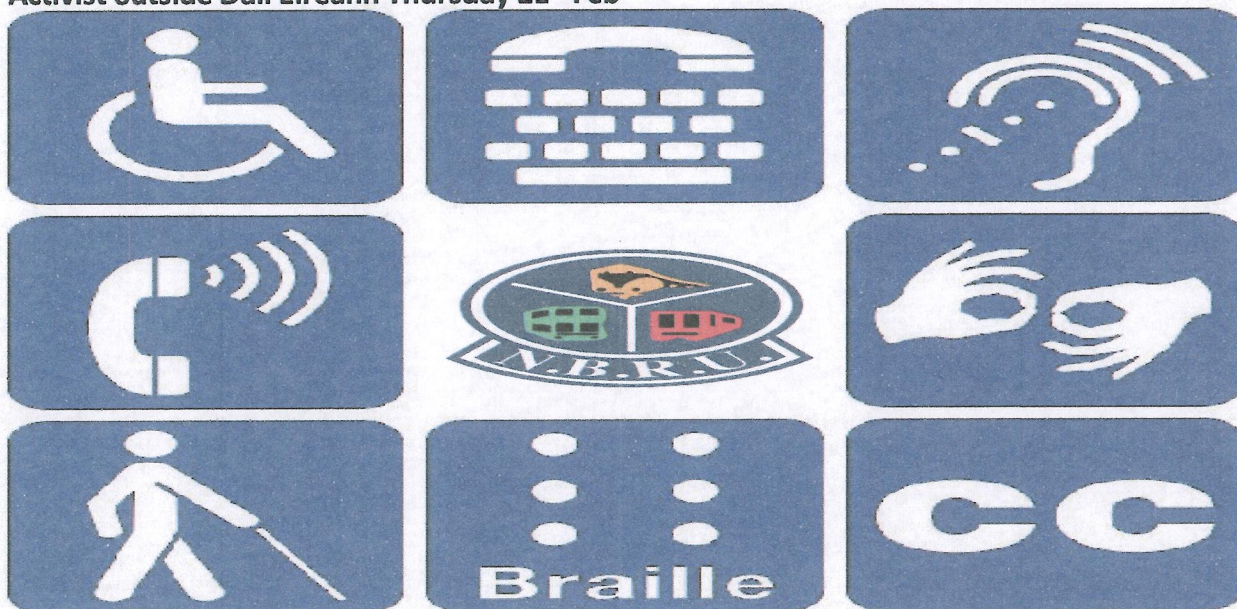
Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dermot O'Leary', written over a horizontal line.

Dermot O'Leary
General Secretary



Members of NBRU Disability Committee (Noel Fagan, Tony O'Brien) with General Secretary Dermot O'Leary, Ms Delores Henchin, Accessibility Officer Dublin Bus, Ms Dianne Hill, Head of Business Development Now Group, Mr Gary Kearney, Disability Activist outside Dail Eireann Thursday 21st Feb



- The Joint Oireachtas Report outlines sixteen recommendations that it is seeking the Government to achieve (the report is available from your NBRU reps).
- Let's dwell for a moment on the original Bus Connects (58 pg.) document, not one mention of disabilities from page 1 to page 58. Of course, behind the description of people with 'Disabilities' are some of those 'Beautiful People' referenced earlier, a significant amount of our fellow citizens are not alone totally reliant on their Bus, but they actually take part in familiarisation and training on their actual Bus route number, Bus Stop placement and colour coding, without which they would not be able to use public transport.
- The NBRU intends on ensuring that all aspects of the report as it relates to issues and areas within our ability to advocate upon, i.e. Planning and Policy, Bus Design, Accessibility to all Bus and Rail Services, Familiarisation, campaign for all Bus Services, inclusive of Private Commercial Bus Services to provide accessibility for people with disabilities, **the foregoing is an indicative list.**
- We will proactively monitor all Transport services (private & public), particularly Buses, to ensure that those with the Free Travel Pass are facilitated to travel.

The NBRU does have a fundamental issue with the title and description of this so-called 'Pass' we said as much at the Joint Oireachtas Committee, the final Report documented our concerns:

For Mr. O'Leary, General Secretary of the NBRU, the characterisation of the Free Travel Scheme as providing recipients with a "free pass" is problematic:

"We should have long ago changed the emphasis and perhaps the title of such travel into something which supports the entitlement of our most vulnerable. Perhaps the committee might lend its support to changing it to something more appropriate and potentially less stigmatising such as the Social Mobility Card." (Mr Dermot O'Leary, 13 June 2018)

Frontline Staff/Company Relations

Those of you that will take the time to read this pamphlet will see that we have written to Iarnród Éireann with regard to current industrial relation discussions

and the potential conflict they may have with the recommendations in the Joint Oireachtas Report. We did indicate to the Committee that those we represent would not present any obstacle to those with Disabilities having Accessibility of Public Transport for People with Disabilities:

In the course of his engagement with the Committee, Mr. O’Leary, General Secretary of the NBRU, took the opportunity to emphasise that its members are fully supportive of implementing accessibility initiatives:

“It has been a source of great disappointment to all of us at the NBRU that some commentary on the accessibility issue has sought to lay the blame at the door of front-line bus and rail workers. Nothing could be further from the truth. I want to make it abundantly clear to the committee that there are absolutely no industrial relation impediments to accessibility for any of our fellow citizens across the bus and train services run by CIÉ. Our members will fully co-operate with any initiative which will assist towards making all locations 100% accessible.” (Mr Dermot O’Leary, 13 June 2018)

Stakeholders

Our work in this area will involve the NBRU working with and alongside many organisations, including those that are sometimes on opposite sides during industrial relations, policy and funding disputes, e.g. Departments of Transport, Finance/Public Enterprise, Social Protection, the NTA, Dublin Bus, Bus Eireann, Iarnród Eireann, politicians from all parties and none.

It is worth noting that the NBRU Disability Committee was invited to the Dail on Thursday last (21st February) to hear first-hand, the debate on the Joint Oireachtas Report on Accessibility of Public Transport for People with Disabilities.

In fact, we took this opportunity to directly communicate our commitment with regard to working across all organisations, working with the relevant Departments, with politicians, including the current Minister for Transport Mr Shane Ross. One can say many things in relation to this particular Minister (our Union has, and we will again!), but, when it comes to the issue at hand, the daily difficulties that people with Disabilities face (witnessed by many of us on the frontline) on our Public Transport system, we defy anyone to take cheap shots or politicise what for all Stakeholders, inclusive of this Minister, is a fundamental issue, **one of those generational defining issues in fact.**





Mr Jim Meade
Chief Executive Officer
Iarnrod Eireann
Connolly Station
Dublin 1

22nd February 2019

Re: Joint Oireachtas Report on Accessibility of Public Transport
for
People with Disabilities

Dear Sir,

I refer to the above and my concern with regard to ongoing initiatives (de-manning/staff reductions) being undertaken by Iarnrod Eireann which appear to conflict with what it is that the above report recommends.

I am particularly concerned that the de-manning of stations may lead to further negative impacts for accessibility to rail services for people with disabilities.

You will most likely be aware of a recent survey commissioned by the Irish Wheelchair Association and some of the findings therein as they apply to Iarnrod Eireann:

Dart

- 64% of respondents said they have to give 24 hours-notice when making a journey.
- In the last 6 months 48% of respondents said they had been unable to gain access to the service
- In general, 66% of respondents were very dissatisfied with DART.
- 5% stated that the lifts are always broken, 12% said the lifts are broken most of the time and 14% replied that the lifts were broken half of the time.

Intercity & Commuter trains

- 55% of respondents said they have to give 24 hours-notice when making a journey on Intercity & Commuter trains.
- In the last 6 months 69% of respondents said they had been unable to gain access to the service.
- 205 stated the lifts are always broken, 10% said the lifts are broken most of the time and 14% replied that the lifts were broken half of the time.
- In general, 54% of respondents were very dissatisfied with Intercity and Commuter trains.

Furthermore, some of the contributions from the Disability Community to the Joint Oireachtas were at best critical, and at worst, were damning:

“People with disabilities have to give 24 hours-notice of travel, thus preventing them from making travel plans spontaneously or in emergencies ... The notice time for the DART has been reduced from 24 hours to four for people with disabilities who are supposed to be grateful for this change. However, it does not make the experience any different for them.” (Ms Joan Carthy, 13 December 2017)

Such testimony (there were others) is neither easy on the eye nor frankly acceptable in the Ireland of the 21st Century.

What is ironic for those of us that travel through Connolly Station on a regular basis is the fact that the ‘Proclamation of the Republic’ hangs proudly on the wall, a document which contains the following principle:

‘a guarantee of religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens’

Sadly, it would appear the egalitarian aspiration in the proclamation does not even stretch as far as some of the Rail Stations situated not too far from where the document hangs!

The testimony by Ms Joan Carthy (above) in relation to the four-hour notice is an indictment on the very best efforts of both Iarnród Éireann and the Trade

Unions (including the NBRU) to legislate for wheelchair users at the unmanned stations across the Dart/Suburban Network.

Of course, I am acutely aware that the de-manning of stations in the lead-up to the 'hubs' agreement was driven by a cost-cutting programme which was pursued with excessive zeal by the previous incumbent of your office.

It should of course be noted that the NBRU was asked to submit to the Joint Oireachtas on the issue of Accessibility of Public Transport for People with Disabilities, we were honoured to be asked, one of our contributions made its way into the Final Report:

"It has been a source of great disappointment to all of us at the NBRU that some commentary on the accessibility issue has sought to lay the blame at the door of front-line bus and rail workers. Nothing could be further from the truth. I want to make it abundantly clear to the committee that there are absolutely no industrial relation impediments to accessibility for any of our fellow citizens across the bus and train services run by CIÉ. Our members will fully co-operate with any initiative which will assist towards making all locations 100% accessible." (Mr Dermot O'Leary, 13 June 2018)

Iarnrod Eireann, as represented by your good self was also referenced many times in the report, far too many to quote here, but here is the pick of such references:

"we want to work towards a future where any notice is ultimately eliminated".

The NBRU would like to work with Iarnrod Eireann in ultimately eliminating the notice period (4-hours).

However, there is perhaps one barrier which may prevent both parties from achieving such a scenario within a relatively short timeframe, namely, Labour Court Recommendation NO. 21605.

You will be aware that the Company and the Trade Unions are currently engaged in a process at the WRC which may present some difficulties towards achieving

the ultimate goal of eliminating 'notice periods' for Wheelchair Accessibility on all Iarnrod Eireann services:

- **Review of Station Staff Levels (on the WRC list) is an obvious impediment.**
- **The new Customer Service Role perversely, is also a prospective impediment, given that there is an over emphasis (by the Company) on 'encouraging' grades that are currently located at Stations to, as it were, jump ship and take on this new role.**
- **There is also the not insignificant matter of a potential Voluntary Severance programme (staff reductions) being rolled out over the coming months.**

In the context of the foregoing I am now to request that you will arrange for a moratorium to be placed on discussions at the WRC, to include those items highlighted above, in order for an initial engagement, preferably at your level, to take place to discuss the Joint Oireachtas Report on Accessibility of Public Transport for People with Disabilities and the recommendations therein as they apply to Iarnrod Eireann.

The NBRU has also written to Ms Anne Graham of the NTA (Nov '18) requesting that appropriate funding and resources should be put in place across all Public Transport providers to facilitate the introduction of the Jam Card for those with a learning difficulty, Asperger's, Autism or communication barrier, our members stand ready to be trained in the user of this wonderful initiative, whilst we await a reply from the NTA, we would appreciate any assistance we can receive from your good offices to give those in Harcourt Lane a little 'nudge'!

There are many, many brilliant organisations out there doing wonderful work on behalf of those with Disabilities, Irish Deaf Society (IDS), National Council of the Blind (NCBI) to name but two, they all deserve our full cooperation and no little effort to make their commute as seamless and less onerous than is humanly possible.

We at the NBRU will play our part, however, we are but one of the many moving parts that is required to come together to make life less stressful for those circa 650,000 of our Citizens that are designated as having a Disability.

Yours Sincerely

Dermot O'Leary
General Secretary

Copy/Mr Shane Ross, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport
"Mr Fergus O'Dowd, Chairman, Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport
"Senator John Dolan, Disability Federation of Ireland
"Ms Anne Graham, Chief Executive Officer NTA
"Mr Frank Allen, Chairman Iarnrod Eireann



Chathaoirleach, Members of the Committee,

I thank you for your invitation to attend this mornings hearing on access to Public Transport for people with disabilities.

Any decent society, particularly a first world Country such as ours, should be measured on how we treat the most vulnerable among us, both those with visible ailments that are easily recognisable and those that outwardly at least, look full bodied and able minded, but are carrying some burden that afflicts their everyday lives.

Accessibility

As General Secretary of the NBRU, the foremost frontline transport Trade Union in Ireland, I am committed to ensuring that nobody is treated in a manner less favourable to any fellow Citizen.

However, our national infrastructure and the provisions made for people with disabilities falls far short of what is required and casts those with responsibility for such facilities in an extremely bad light.

While Dublin Bus are 100% wheelchair accessible, Bus Eireann PSO fleet 100% and almost all its Commercial fleet similarly so, the ability of delivering people with disabilities to their location/stop of choice is severely restricted by the shameful condition of some of footpaths and hardstands across the Country.

The responsibility for this lies with both National and Local authorities, the NTA have previously stated that the local councils have jurisdiction over the providing the infrastructure to facilitate the provision of disabled accessibility and embarkation onto our Bus Transport system.

This is a copout and the so-called Authority which is master of all they survey in terms of transport provision should not be allowed to get away with such mealy-mouthed responses, this crowd now have so much of a stranglehold over funding and revenue streams that they can even charge for advertising on Bus Shelters across the Bus Network.

Ironical surely, given that those same shelters are located adjacent to the very locations that do not have adequate infrastructural facilities for disability access?

Surely it is not much of a stretch to suggest that some of this income stream could be directed towards providing wheelchair accessibility across the Country?

Stripping much needed subvention over recent years from the three CIE Companies has also had a direct impact on accessibility.

There have been reports in the media for example, in relation to people being stranded on trains. This is not a reflection on the hardworking frontline staff, rather it is reflective of the attitude of successive Governments that have cut funding for public transport.

What is not mentioned of course is the fact that over 3000 jobs have been shed in Irish Rail over the last 15 years, quite a number of those were shed to enable the Company to 'cut its cloth' in terms of State subvention, leading directly to the recent problems at that Company in relation to disability access, e.g. the number of unmanned stations has mushroomed over recent years.

It has been a source of great disappointment to all of us at the NBRU that some commentary around the accessibility issue has sought to lay the blame at the door of frontline Bus and Rail workers, nothing, but nothing could be further from the truth.

I want to take this opportunity to make it abundantly clear to the committee that there is absolutely no Industrial Relations impediments to accessibility for any of our fellow Citizens across the CIE Companies Bus and Train services.

Our members will fully cooperate with any initiative which will assist towards making all locations 100% accessible.

Free Travel Scheme

The NBRU has also, over the last number of years, been campaigning for sufficient funding for the three CIE Companies for the so-called Free Travel Scheme.

There has been quite an amount of discourse across many media platforms on this issue, particularly during the unfortunate Bus Eireann dispute last year, a

lot of it unfortunately centred on the notion that it is a 'Free Pass', this is for us at the NBRU is fundamentally wrong on a number of levels.

It is long since passed time that we changed the emphasis and perhaps the title of such travel into something which supports the entitlement of our most vulnerable, perhaps the Committee might lend its support to changing it to something more appropriate and potentially less stigmatising, such as the 'Social Mobility Card'?

Conclusion:

- The entire bus and rail fleet, both private and state-owned, PSO and commercial, should be compulsorily required to be mobility friendly.
- Engineering infrastructural solutions need to be advanced to provide persons with difficulties to have access to all Buses and trains.
- Frontline staff should be fully trained to assist those with disabilities.

All the above of course requires funding. The onus is on the Government to commit to such funding, no excuses should be offered or tolerated.

*Issued by the National Bus & Rail Union Disabilities
Committee, Tom Darby House.*

Tony O'Brien

John Forde

Noel Fagan