

# National Bus & Rail Union



Tom Darby House  
54 Parnell Square,  
Dublin 1.  
Telephone: 01 873 0411  
Fax: 01 873 0137  
E-mail: [nbru@eircom.net](mailto:nbru@eircom.net)  
Web: [www.nbru.ie](http://www.nbru.ie)  
Twitter@nbru\_dublin

*Branches: Cork, Limerick, Galway, Sligo, Ballina, Donegal, Cavan, Waterford, Tralee, Drogheda, Dundalk, Kilkenny, Rosslare*

An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar TD  
Department of the Taoiseach  
Merrion Street Upper  
Dublin 2  
D02 R583BB

Mr. Michéal Martin TD  
Leader Fianna Fail  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

Ms. Mary Lou McDonald TD  
Leader Sinn Féin  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

Mr. Eamon Ryan TD  
Leader Green Party  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

Mr. Alan Kelly TD  
Leader Labour Party  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

Ms. Catherine Murphy/Ms. Roisin Shortall TD  
Co/ Leaders, Social Democrats  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

5<sup>th</sup> May 2020

## *Re: Safety of Essential Workers post Coronavirus restrictions & the shape of Irish Public Transport into the future*

Dear Taoiseach, Party Leaders & TD's,

My office has, over recent days, been fielding numerous questions from our many members in Dublin Bus, Irish Rail, Bus Éireann and Go-Ahead Ireland in relation to the safe operation of Public Transport once restrictions begin to ease. The Roadmap to ending the lockdown has exacerbated those concerns with the reality that 'social distancing' and current public transport 'norms' are not compatible.

Recent media reports suggest that one of the first measures to be undertaken when emerging from lockdown is the restoration of full bus and rail schedules (return to pre Covid-19). Similar speculation in the UK have led to expressions of grave concerns from Trade Unions in that jurisdiction. Given the scale of suffering that this terrible virus has caused, and the unprecedented tragic loss of life, a similar approach here, without recourse to the relevant Health and Safety concerns would be improvident.

Whilst one can only speculate as to what levels of economic activity will return, our Public Transport system requires significant changes, especially at peak times, to accommodate even a reduced level of morning and evening commuters, compared to what it was pre Covid-19.

The fear among our members and frontline colleagues is, that a return to pre-virus practices will result in buses and trains becoming incubators for this virus, or other such viruses that may follow. It is a matter of undisputed fact that there is a vulnerability on our buses, trains and trams unless strict enforceable measures are applied from the commencement of the first phase of any 'lockdown' easement.

In the long term, through consultation with all stakeholders, the design of our buses and trains will have to change to accommodate a new reality around physical/ social distancing. Our behaviour and ways of social interactions will have to be reinvented.

The NBRU, along with representative colleagues across all transport operators, are prepared to fully engage in such a process to ensure a safe and viable transport system for workers and commuters alike, allowing Public Transport to play a central role in driving the economic recovery post Coronavirus.

Of course, recognising that new and reconfigured rolling stock will require investment and no little time, innovative thinking will have to be our stepping-stone in the interim.

We simply cannot return to a scenario in which capacity was overstretched. Kick starting the economy will require lateral thinking and the introduction of measures and actions that will both alleviate the pressure on transport and obviate the requirement for large sections of the workforce to use public transport in the short to medium term. Some of the measures outlined below may assist.

- **Staggering the starting times of schools and colleges in a controlled and structured manner to reduce the demand for Public Transport at traditional times. This approach is common practice in the United States. Starting primary schools at the traditional times, secondary schools an hour later and third level institutions an hour after that, would assist in reducing the impact these groups have on the morning peak commute.**

The probability that School will not return to any form of normality until at least September will allow for more time to assess how best to accommodate school/college usage on public transport in the medium to long term.

- **Staggering the starting times of workplaces in a controlled and structured manner to reduce the demand for Public Transport at traditional times. Manufacturing, retail and office-based workplaces could have staggered opening and closing times.**
- **Incentives for working from home to be introduced (where practicable). The current Tax-free payment of €3.20 per day for example, could be increased along with a work from home tax credit. An increase in this type of investment in society could, in the short-term, assist in alleviating the pressure on the Exchequer regarding the quantum of Capex into Public Transport, i.e. less people travelling to work in the short to medium term would mean that the current rolling stock operating over an extended morning and evening peak could potentially move commuters in a safe manner.**
- **Introduction of Park and Ride facilities in proximity to major urban centres in order to reduce, if not eliminate congestion. This pandemic has demonstrated that buses can operate more frequently if our streets are not clogged with unnecessary traffic.**

The pandemic has clearly demonstrated what a future can look like, both for this generation and those coming behind when it comes to Climate change and the enablement of meeting our current emissions targets, and significantly beyond those goals. For example, China's **carbon emissions dropped by 25%** in the month of March alone. The main reason for this **air quality improvement** is the decreased use of vehicles, specifically **private cars**. We look at our own Cities and large urban centres and can discern what a future without clogged up streets might look like.

Our children and grandchildren will not thank us if we fail to grasp the opportunity that this crisis has presented when it comes to planning a future around sustainable public transport, a future that can see significantly less air pollution and breathable streets.

**Planning for future transport needs should be based on what is achievable, not on what is desired**, for far too long we as a society, led in the main by successive Governments, have almost slavish like, been obsessed with light rail projects. How many times have we seen the promise of super-duper light rail (Luas/Metro style) projects been offered to our Citizenry, only to see them binned or placed on the back burner because of the onset of the latest economic downturn or recession?

It is surely time to take stock, to look at how we can, as a Country, use our resources to the betterment of many transport projects, rather than place all our money, roulette style on 'Red' and hope the wheel will stop at our choice; we should look at ways of ensuring that sustainable transport can be provided across the Country.

How many iterations of Metro have we had? Metro, Metro North, Metrolink to name but a few, have been on the go now for well over a decade, the most recent cost associated with this project alone is circa €4/5bn. This type of investment (if still attainable) should perhaps be looked at through the prism of what 'bang' we can get for our buck if we look at:

*(a) Building a Dart spur from Clongriffin to Dublin Airport, with Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) being provided to serve Glasnevin, Finglas, Ballymun, & Swords.*

*(b) The provision of BRT in Cork, Limerick and Galway.*

*(c) Providing street space for cycling and walking in our Cities and Urban centres.*

*(d) Commence building the Navan rail corridor (closed in 1947).*

*(e) Completion of the Western Rail Corridor.*

*(f) Start the development of a Liffey Tunnel linking Heuston and Connolly stations.*

*(g) Accelerated trial of Hydrogen and Electric Bus, Rail and BRT technologies.*

*(h) Establish multiannual, multi-Governmental funding envelope to ensure delivery of transport projects.*

This crisis has demonstrated that we need not spend hundreds of millions (Budgeted at €2bn) on BusConnects, with its bulldozing of roads and gardens, reduced traffic levels will allow us to run more buses, more frequently. BusConnects did propose new orbital routes which can be provided to compliment a BRT system.

Bus Rapid Transit, with Park and Ride, offers the opportunity to solve severe congestion issues in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway at a fraction of the price of one unintegrated Metro line.



Bus rapid transit (BRT), also called a busway or transitway, is a bus-based public transport system designed to improve capacity and reliability relative to a conventional bus system. Typically, a BRT system includes roadways that are dedicated to buses and gives priority to buses at junctions where buses may interact with other traffic; alongside design features to reduce delays caused by passengers boarding or leaving buses or purchasing fares, BRT can combine the capacity and speed of a Metro with the flexibility, lower cost and simplicity of a bus system.

There are circa 166 cities in six continents with BRT systems, accounting for 4,906 km of BRT lanes and about 32.2 million passengers every day.

Interestingly, the concept of BRT in Dublin would not be a new phenomenon, the NTA have already spent millions of euros on BRT, a matter of dusting down the iterations of the previous plan and applying it to today's needs.

Many of the projects listed above could (finance permitting) be achieved within one singular Government term!

Like other organisations and representative bodies, inclusive of Politicians, the NBRU is not in possession of the panacea to cure all the ills of our transport systems, we do of course have a view. Whilst it may not be to everyone's liking, it does have a legitimacy borne from many, many generations of exclusively working and operating at the Coalface of public transport

Public transport workers and State-owned operators continue to put their collective shoulder to the wheel in a time of National crisis, significantly, Bus Éireann continues to provide vital Bus services into communities at a time when virtually all other operators went into Hibernation. Many of these services are deemed to be Commercial, however those of us in the industry know full well that the vast majority of these Routes (not least be cause of their links into many towns and villages) are effectively PSO, a discussion on the future operations of Bus Éireann and its relationship with rural Ireland will be urgently required as we move through the different phases of 'lockdown' easement. Our members and frontline colleagues are of course also prepared to play their part in the recovery, but they cannot do so on the basis of being seen as, or treated as second class Citizens, these workers are themselves vital, if not the most vital of Stakeholders in the Transport Sector.

We did, along with fellow representative colleagues, make representations to the NTA (NBRU corresponded on 13<sup>th</sup> March) to request that workers be directly represented in the decision-making process around transport provision during the covid-19 crisis. Unfortunately, our request was not accepted at that time.

I have also written (again) to the CEO of the NTA on Friday last, ironically on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, aka International Workers Day, to again request that we, along with other representative bodies, would have a direct Stakeholder role in mapping out the post Covid-19 transport landscape.

I did mention the UK earlier in this correspondence, it is noteworthy that the Trade Unions in London have direct access to Transport for London (TFL), with the Union Unite being quoted as to **'working closely with TFL and the operators to ensure the safety of drivers and others in the industry who are performing a heroic job in getting NHS and care workers to their places of work'**

The establishment of a Public Transport Advisory Council (or similar) as envisioned in Section 17 of the 2008 Dublin Transport Authority Act, as amended by the 2009 Public Transport Regulations Act would be an appropriate forum to discuss and debate many of the issues (including those above) which will impact on the continued provision of public transport.

Such a Forum could also assist in ensuring that the future direction and policy of Public Transport in Ireland would have an input from all Stakeholders, enabling the establishment of a more grounded approach in developing vital and strategic transport infrastructure. Such an approach might also assist in reducing the overreliance on expensive consultants and ensure that the costly transport mistakes of yesteryear are not repeated.

Yours sincerely,



Dermot O'Leary

General Secretary

Copy/ Mr. Peadar Tóibín TD, Aontú

Mr. Richard Boyd Barrett TD, Solidarity/People Before Profit

Mr. Paul Murphy, RISE

Regional Independent TD's Group

Independent TD's Group

Rural Independents TD's Group