

# NATIONAL LEADER FORUM

# TRANSPORT EVENT

SEMINAR REPORT AND CONSOLIDATION OF  
WORKSHOP FEEDBACK



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## **Section I: NLF Consultation Event on Transport**

### **1.1 Introduction**

#### **1.1.1 The Center for Independent Living**

The Center for Independent Living was established in 1992 as a user-led organization and is committed to people with disabilities being recognised as equal citizens and achieving equal membership of society, to make informed decisions about our own lives in accordance with individual needs and lifestyle choices, to design and develop our own services, to achieve equality of experience through consensus, respect and value for all.

#### **1.1.2 The Leader Forum**

The purpose of the Leader Forum is to offer Leaders, CIL members, the opportunity to come together to share peer support and to advocate for equality and social justice based on the lived experience of disability. Leader Forum groups meet both on a county basis and at national level to address inequality and to promote the social inclusion of people with disabilities. The Leader Forum acts as a space to empower the voices of members and provide a unified voice for Leaders. The National Leader Forum facilitates an opportunity for Leaders to share their knowledge and experience so that the work of the Center for Independent Living is informed by real needs and the organisation may advocate based on the lived experience of members. Those not in a position to attend the National Leader Forum may feed in through their forum group at county level.

#### **1.1.3 Event Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to gather learning, experience and knowledge of members on the theme of transport and to use that intelligence to make recommendations to the various stakeholders based on the lived experience of disability. This report will be used as a tool for both Center for Independent Living as an organization and members to advocate for quality services and supports.

## 1.2 Agenda

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Opening & Update from last NLF | Gary Lee, CIL                           |
| Welcome & Introduction         | Rhona Coughlan, GDIL, Event Chairperson |

### Peer Sharing - Discussion Themes & Speakers:

- Driving with a Disability Tommy Halligan, Donegal CIL
- Transport & Travelling as a Couple Kay McShane
- A Review of Rail Services Paul Hickey
- Public Transport in a Rural Area Leigh Gath
- Public Transport with a Guide Dog Gina McNamara & Jackie McBrearty
- Improving Dart Services Michelle Gaynor
- Transport & International Travel Owen Collumb
- Cost of Disability & Transport Mary Collins
- Developing Services Don Bailey, Vantastic

### Policy Context & Consultation

- An Overview of the Policy Context Edward Crean, National Disability Authority
- Leader Consultation Session & Feedback
- Closing Remarks: Michael McCabe, Chairperson, CIL

### 1.3 Introduction

**Gary Lee (CEO, CIL)** welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. Gary explained that the last National Leader Forum (NLF) Consultation Event, which was held in June on the issue of Employment for People with Disabilities, was a success in that it fed directly into the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES). The Center for Independent Living will continue to advocate directly for the recommendations made by the report from the Employment Event and are confident that real change will happen as a result of the NLF's collective action.

The purpose of the Leader Forum project at a policy level is to raise awareness of the real issues that are impacting upon people with disabilities at a local level and for CIL, through the NLF to feed those through at a national level to impact policy. The focus of today is about bringing the attention of decision makers to what is really happening on the ground and more importantly to bring solutions to address those issues.

What the NLF needs to do as representatives of the lived experience of disability is to offer solutions to the issues its members are experiencing. The Independent Living philosophy has always been based upon the ethos of, 'Nothing About Us Without Us,' and it is vitally important that all people are consulted at every level of the decision-making process. Following consultation through the National Leader Forum and county based forum groups, the outcome will be a report that outlines both the issues and real solutions for government to consider.

### 1.4 Chairs Introduction

Rhona Coughlan chaired the event's proceedings. Rhona is an accomplished broadcaster and an advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, both in her native Cork and as part of her role with Greater Dublin Independent Living (GDIL). Rhona urged everyone to be positive and solution focused today when considering the issues raised around transport and to remember that Leaders are experts in relation to this topic. She suggested that people consider the areas that are affecting them in their own lives and also not allow themselves to be labelled.

Rhona discussed that through the Leader Forum Leaders are looking for basic human rights that non-disabled people take for granted. Rhona explained that the purpose of the event is to identify solutions and ideas that can be used to shape government policy based on the lived experience of Leaders. The forum also acts as a way to feed information in to the advocacy work of CIL and keep the organisation working based on the grassroots experience. Rhona emphasised the value of the voice of the Leaders and encouraged all present to actively engage in identifying potential solutions to issues discussed.

Speakers for the session included<sup>1</sup>:

- Tommy Halligan, Driving with a Disability
- Kay McShane, Transport & Travelling as a Couple
- Paul Hickey, A Review of Rail Services
- Leigh Gath, Public Transport in a Rural Area
- Gina McNamara & Jackie McBrearty, Public Transport with a Guide Dog
- Shelley Gaynor, Improving Dart Services
- Owen Collumb, Transport & International Travel
- Mary Collins, Cost of Disability in Relation to Transport
- Don Bailey, Developing Services

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<sup>1</sup> Please see speaker biographies at Appendix A

## Section II: Speaker Presentations

### 2.1 Tommy Halligan (Donegal Leader Forum)

#### 1. Car ownership

Tommy explained how car ownership on a fixed income is very difficult. The difference between Donegal and Dublin is like day and night. Tommy doesn't have an automatic car and his doctor is 20 miles away. This means that he has to pay €35 just to get to the doctor before he even covers his doctor fees. In Donegal there are no trains and if you want to get a bus you need to be organised two days in advance. Therefore car ownership where possible isn't a luxury for people with disabilities in Donegal, it's a necessity.

Tommy suggested supports to purchase private transport. Tommy discussed that he had accessed the Motorised Transport grant previously but that this is no longer available. As Tommys car is getting older and will need to replace, Tommy struggles to see a path to afford a new car. Without a car, Tommy will be isolated. Tommy recommended the reinstatement of the Motorised Transport Grant or a similar practice to support purchase of transport.

#### 2. Maintaining your Own Transport

Tommy outlined that once you have secured a car you incur the same expenses as able-bodied people to maintain it. A friend of Tommy's told him about a company in Cork that was providing cheap insurance. Tommy rang this company and advised the operator all of his personal details. She was happy to quote him until he disclosed that he had a disability and the type. The staff member in the insurance company told him that he was 'uninsurable' according to the system. People with disabilities who are car owners need additional assistance as it is extremely expensive to insure your vehicle – if even possible in some cases.

Tommy suggested standards and guidelines so people with disabilities cannot be discriminated against. Tommy discussed that some people had used the Mobility Allowance to maintain their cars and suggested reinstatement or the establishment of a similar support. Tommy discussed proposed changes to tax back on fuel for people with disabilities and the impact that this would have. Tommy urged that the current status in relation to tax be maintained.

#### 3. Accessible Parking

The 'blue badge' does save money parking. However disabled parking bays are simply not big enough. There should be extra lines beside the space to allow someone to open their



doors/ramp freely. All kerbs should be lowered down to allow people to access the path. You will also always find that people park in disabled bays that don't have a 'blue badge'. Tommy got stickers made up that state ***'would you take my disability as quick as you took my parking space – I wish I had your choice'***.

Tommy recommended that fines be implemented for those parking in accessible parking spaces without the relevant documentation.

Tommy recommended an increase in the number of parking spaces, particularly in areas or amenities where car parks are managed by Councils. Tommy emphasised the importance of all parking spaces being matched with the appropriate dishing to provide safe access to corresponding footpaths.

## 2.2 Kay MacShane (Dublin 15 Leader Forum)

Both Kay and her partner are wheelchair users. Kay and her partner both enjoy travel and like to travel together. However, with two wheelchairs options are limited. They own their own car but when they travel in the car they need to put the buggy/wheelchair in the boot. Ideally they would like to purchase a new car with a ramp but after the VAT refund this would still cost in excess of €30,000.

They cannot travel by bus together as normally Dublin Bus services only facilitate one wheelchair user at a time per bus. The allocated space for wheelchair is too small users prohibits travelling together. Kay and her partner have travelled together on public transport in Europe without an issue.

On public transport. Kay recommended increasing the size of the space dedicated for wheelchair users to facilitate large chairs and multiple chairs. Kay recommended basing changes on alternative models in Europe.

Kay and her partner have tried to use taxis but it is always difficult if you don't book well in advance. There are not enough taxis to meet the needs of people with disabilities. Some of the wheelchair taxis who have such a license don't operate as accessible taxis. This means that taxis as an option for transport are also limited.

Irish rail have limited accessible spaces on each train and they also require people with disabilities to notify them in advance. Kay also always makes sure that she contacts them in advance and lets them know that they are coming so they can get a ramp/porter. Kay has had issues travelling from Cork and has been told that they couldn't travel because of the lack of a porter in Dublin.

Kay recommended that trains be universally accessible and discussed solutions of a roll on roll off approach or automatic ramps. Kay recommended increased numbers of spaces for wheelchair users on trains. Ireland needs to ensure that all trains have electronic ramps and more wheelchair spaces are available on all routes.

### 2.3: Paul Hickey (Offaly Leader Forum)

As part of an access review of Tullamore by the Offaly Leader Forum in July, Paul carried out an access review on the train station and travelled by train to Heuston and back from Tullamore to Dublin with the support of his Personal Assistant Noeleen O'Rourke.

There are seven accessible parking spots in Tullamore Train Station. Paul recommended increased spaces and recommended that spaces at train stations be located as close to the entrance as possible with corresponding dished curbs. The main entrance to the train station in Tullamore was easily accessible as the doors are automatic. Paul recommends automatic doors for all stations.

The main ticket desk in Tullamore had one hatch open, the second desk appeared to have the lower level for wheelchair users that was also open at this time. Paul recommends that counter heights should be low enough to ensure they are accessible to wheelchair users.

There is a ticket machine in the station also. It doesn't take a travel pass so in the event that there is nobody on the ticket desk the ticket master advised Paul to board the train and if asked for a ticket to show their travel pass and explain that there was nobody at the ticket desk. Paul went online to see could if he could use his travel pass to book on the website but this is not possible. A wheelchair user can only reserve a wheelchair accessible space on the train which costs €5, €10 for a return journey. The staff at Tullamore Train Station also provide assistance with ramps for wheelchair users and sighted guide support. A system where people with disabilities with free travel could access tickets through the machine or through online bookings would be useful.

Paul was advised by the ticket master to watch out for the wheelchair symbol on the door because that symbol means that was the carriage for wheelchairs. Paul found communications effective between Tullamore and Heuston stations and staff were ready ramps ready when Paul arrived in Dublin. Paul found the staff very helpful.

Once on board, there are only two spots for wheelchairs on any train. There was one wheelchair on board before Paul got on so a problem may arise if another wheelchair user wanted to get on at the next stop. Paul recommends an increase in the allocation of wheelchair spaces on trains to facilitate passengers with disabilities.

Paul found this experience wonderful and it gave Paul a sense of independence. As a result he has travelled on several train journeys since throughout Ireland. Paul requires support in terms of companion to travel with him. Paul recommends that all people with disabilities should have a travel pass and that that people with disabilities using a free travel pass should automatically receive the companion pass with it.

#### **2.4: Leigh Gath (Limerick Leader Forum)**

Leigh discussed that in rural areas you are a prisoner in your own home unless you have access to your own transport. People with disabilities in rural areas do not have access to public door-to-door transportation. If you live in a rural area you could live three miles outside of the nearest village where the stop would be and often the transport itself is not accessible.

To drive a regular car in a rural transport area is fine and useful to drive to access public transport networks like the train. However, you must incur the cost of the upkeep of the car. Leigh described that on the morning of the NLF event, she was held up at the Limerick train for 15 minutes as there were no accessible parking spaces available. Three of accessible parking spaces were taken up by people who did not have a blue badge displayed. The fines are not large enough to discourage people from parking in them.

Train travel from Limerick is facilitated by the excellent staff at the station. In most cases, you don't need to let them know in advance and Leigh described that she found the process much easier than Dublin. Additional training for all train staff on disability awareness is vital.

Leigh emphasised the importance of supports to maintain ones own car, improvements in accessibility of public transport, accessible parking at train stations, consideration of the cost of transport for people with disabilities living in rural areas and an increase in accessible spaces on trains.

#### **2.5: Gina McNamara, Jackie McBrearty**

Jackie & Gina carried out a piece of research amongst guide dog users through the Irish Guide Dog Association. Members using guide dogs were asked to identify key issues that impacted them when using public transport with a guide dog. Jackie and Gina discussed the themes that were identified most by guide dog users.

Jackie spoke about the issue of litter on the buses and how dangerous this can be for guide dogs. The simple solution is to have the public transport cleaned more regularly to prevent the dogs getting sick. It is also important to have a bin available on every bus.

Audible announcements are also particularly important for people with visual impairments. With the rural or city buses you may be depending on the driver to remember you are there and to announce the stop. This is particularly problematic if the Leader is not familiar with the route. All buses need to have audible announcements similar to what exists on the Luas.

Coach buses have very small seat spaces. If the bus is full, this means the dog is extremely cramped. Generally bus drivers are very good at giving guide dog users priority seats. However, all buses should have priority seats for guide dog owners.

Disability awareness training is needed for staff working in public transport. Guide dog owners need to show people practically how difficult it is to use public transport.

## 2.6: Michelle Gaynor

Michelle discussed her experience of using the DART service in Dublin. Services are not equally accessible for all passengers. Not all stations or platforms are physically accessible, and some do not have lifts to access the platforms. Entrances to the stations with the barrier system are not accessible when the station is not staffed. Issues are exacerbated when stations are not manned. Michelle discussed that if you are not there 20 minutes early you will not be accommodated. Michelle would chose to travel 20 minutes away from her home to the next station rather than use the local station as she knows that station is better manned.

Michelle recommends that all stations must be made accessible. Staffing hours in stations need to be extended where stations are not accessible. Carriages of the dart are not accessible, ramps must be used to access the carriage with the support of staff. There is a dignity issue here. Carriages should be roll on roll off and accessible. Gaps between platforms and carriages should be addressed so passengers using wheelchairs can access the carriage independently without staff support.

There needs to be much more disability awareness training for staff working in Dart Stations. Michelle recommends a roll-on roll-off service, similar to the Luas, so that passengers with disabilities can use the service independently. Michelle emphasised that when the upgrading of the system takes place it is essential to consider access for all passengers and to disability proof the stations, trains and practices.

## 2.7: Owen Collumb

Owen discussed his experience of air travel and travelling internationally. Owen discussed that one of his first trips Owen travelled to after acquiring his disability was Spain where upon arrival he found his chair had been damaged in transit. Owen discussed the negative impact that this had on his trip. His next trip was to Croatia. On arrival he had to sit and wait for an hour for people to come and assist him off a train. Stockholm was next but unfortunately staff had disconnected his wheelchair and upon arrival he had try to put the wheelchair back together again. Next Owen went to Belgrade via Frankfurt. When he arrived the arms on his wheelchair were missing. His flight was delayed and he saw his wheelchair being dumped into a container. When he arrived back his wheelchair was badly damaged.

Owen emphasised that the wheelchair is essential to safe, comfortable and enjoyable travel for many people. Uncertainty and fears around the treatment of wheelchairs are off putting for many people with disabilities. Owen suggested that staff training should be provided around the safe management of wheelchairs by airlines and that more suitable storage of wheelchairs be provided when wheelchairs are in transit. Airline staff need to be more aware and respectful of wheelchairs. Owen recommended that this should be addressed at European level so that EU citizens with disabilities can have the same freedom to travel as passengers that do not require a wheelchair.

In addition to issues with wheelchairs, when flying, space is a huge issue for many people with disabilities. Owen discussed his experience travelling to Bangkok via London. Owen developed pressure sores because of the tight space and the lack of opportunity to move when on board. Air travel is uncomfortable for many tall people however it is worse for people who have a disability as you cannot adjust yourself as other people can. Owen recommended that a designated seating area on the flight for people with disabilities that has more leg room and adequate space should be standard on all aircrafts.

Owen discussed his experience of assistance at the airport. Owen recommends increases in efficiency for airport support for people with disabilities. The person with a disability is provided a very narrow wheelchair with no foot supports once they leave their own wheelchair to access the plane. Without the supports and straps that some people use in their chairs, it can be extremely difficult to stay upright. Owen recommended a review of this process of changing wheelchairs to access the plane. A more secure seat with supports for the feet or head and straps may be useful.

As a result of the above, Owen discussed that many people with disabilities prefer to drive for days across Europe and travel by boat as they find it much less stressful than airline travel. Owen emphasised that if people with disabilities do not call for these changes they could simply lose their opportunity to travel. Owen recommended looking at the American Airline Standards FFAACA.

### **2.8: Mary Collins (Dublin 15 Leader Forum)**

Mary emphasised that the Mobility Allowance is important to address the cost of disability in relation to transport for people with disabilities. Transport costs are often higher for people with disabilities. There is a huge amount of fear and uncertainty around the future for those in receipt of Mobility Allowance. Clarity is needed on what supports will be available to address additional costs of transport. Mary discussed that anybody who wants to apply for the Mobility Allowance over the last two years has been left in limbo. Clarity is needed around what is now happening with this allowance to give people peace of mind.

Mary discussed that she is not comfortable on public transport. Based on the size of a wheelchair buses are not always accessible, and darts can be frightening as they are not a roll on roll off service. For Mary, a door to door service is the only option. Mary explained that she uses her Mobility Allowance to fund her transport through organisations like ACTS. The travel pass should subsidise door-to-door transport or taxis to allow people to have a life and to be able to live a life outside of the house. Mary recommended extension of the travel pass to cover the types of transport that people with disabilities actually use including designated providers of accessible door to door transport.

Mary encouraged those present that there is a need for people with disabilities to unite and challenge our political representatives and demand that we be treated as equal citizens.

### 2.9: Don Bailey (Vantastic)

Vantastic grew from a CIL project many years ago. It is important that we learn from people with the lived experience and continue to do so. About 15 years ago Don was a Director in the Center for Independent Living and was given the task of reinventing Vantastic. At that stage the service was running on about 4 vans and 15 people. Since then Vantastic has expanded and grown to an organisation of over 40 vans and 40 employees. Vantastic has an operator's license from the Department of Transport which means they have standards enforced upon them and they also enforce our own standards.

Vantastic now operates a mass transport scheme operating in the Dublin area. Vantastic also have a scheme with schools and they are now entering in to self-drive services. They would like to be able to offer this service on a long-term basis across the country. It would work out at a much cheaper price than hiring/owning a car. This is a very exciting project for Vantastic and will signal a new chapter for the organisation.

Vantastic gets very little direct funding from the government so their mass transport helps them to stream the social work they do as part of their remit. What Vantastic need help with today is focusing more strongly on targeting funding to allow the organisation to progress within this sector. Members present supported the self drive service and are keen to hear more in relation to delivery of the service. Members expressed their interest in the delivery of Vantastic services on a national basis.

### 2.10 Stephen Cluskey

Stephen was not in a position to attend in person but his input was presented on his behalf by Gary Lee.

In April 2014 new regulations on the taxi industry were introduced by the National Transport Authority, many of which relate to wheelchair accessible taxis. Stephen was involved in the committee process, which decided on these new measures representing wheelchair users, and he feels very positive that these changes should firstly stop the hemorrhage of wheelchair taxi numbers in Ireland and secondly go some way to reversing this trend. They also managed to secure a €1 million grant scheme in July, which subsidises the purchase price of a wheelchair taxi to make it more affordable and attractive for drivers. As a condition of this grant drivers must undergo training, which has been long overdue and is another positive step.

Stephen is happy to report that these changes already seem to be having an impact on numbers according to the latest figures from the National Transport Authority. In 2013 there were a mere 16 new wheelchair taxis throughout the country, which is shocking. However, since the changes in regulation and the €1million grant subsidy scheme came into play, we have seen more than 220 new wheelchair taxis provisionally approved in the space

of only four months. This figure has grown month to month since July and the hope is that it will continue to do so.

The new measures are not perfect but they are the most significant changes we have seen in a very long time aiming to help wheelchair taxi drivers and their passengers. Previous regulation stated that a wheelchair accessible taxi must be able to take 'a wheelchair user plus 3 passengers' which doesn't really make sense. Why does the taxi need to be able to accommodate the wheelchair user plus these three extra passengers? The most popular wheelchair accessible taxi in the UK is the Peugeot Premier as it is reasonably priced, economical to run, can accommodate four passengers with plenty of luggage space in regular mode and when needed can take a wheelchair user plus one passenger. Our previous regulations ruled out these types of taxis as an option here meaning the cheapest new wheelchair accessible taxi a driver could purchase was upwards of €40,000. The regulation has been changed to 'a wheelchair user plus 1 passenger' opening up the Irish market to these more affordable vehicles which cost in the region of €27,500 including VAT and VRT. They are a smaller vehicle but have been very cleverly designed for the taxi industry. They feel far more comfortable for a wheelchair user in comparison to many of the 7-seaters currently out there as there is a huge amount of head height and the conversion is very similar to a home vehicle with rear entry and a cut floor. They provide taxi drivers who want to do wheelchair work with a good alternative option to what is currently out there at a far more reasonable price.

There is no maximum age limit for current operating wheelchair accessible taxis and this will not be changed. The reason behind this is because there has been such a depletion in numbers in recent years (more than 40% in the last two years alone) that if these vehicles were taken off the road they would not be readily replaced. Some of these vehicles are not fully suitable (although many are) but I think it is better to have something rather than nothing at all.

Stephen knows from experience it is not pleasant being stranded with no way home as there is no wheelchair accessible taxi and taking these vehicles off the road overnight would only make the situation for wheelchair users much worse. Again it is not perfect but a balance needed to be found.

There is talk of a possible grant scheme in the coming months and the hope is drivers would be attracted to upgrade these older vehicles because of this. New and replacement wheelchair accessible taxis will however be subject to a 14 year age limit rule in comparison to 10 years for a saloon taxi. One benefit of this is to try to persuade a driver to opt for a wheelchair taxi over a saloon.

New wheelchair taxis need to be less than 6 years old in comparison to 3 years for a saloon taxi. The main reason behind this is because of the significant initial cost price of a

wheelchair accessible taxi. If you compare a 3-year-old Skoda Octavia (common enough in the taxi industry) to a 3-year-old Peugeot Premier (the cheapest wheelchair accessible taxi now available because of the regulation change) there is still roughly €7000+ in the difference so why would a driver opt for the wheelchair taxi? This 6-year rule was introduced to try to bridge this gap making a wheelchair accessible taxi more affordable for a driver with a longer lifespan of 14 years.

Under the new regulations, drivers will now be able to swap their existing licence from a standard taxi to a wheelchair accessible taxi, which they previously could not do. They can also change back to their saloon licence if they wish and this new regulation is just common sense. It gives the driver some flexibility should they wish to pursue either route.

Stephen would prefer a driver not to be able to change back as he feels we should be moving towards a taxi industry which is inclusive to everyone in society but can understand the thinking behind this as many drivers invested significantly in their saloon licences. The 6-year rule also applies to the wheelchair accessible vehicle age for a licence swap.

These new regulations are not perfect but I believe they will go a long way to encouraging more drivers to opt for a wheelchair accessible taxi over a saloon in a time where there are only 2 wheelchair accessible taxis throughout the whole of Tipperary. Imagine living in South Tipperary and the only taxi available to you was in North Tipperary? I recently got an e-mail from someone in Donegal who couldn't get a wheelchair accessible taxi to take their mother to the funeral of her own husband. These sorts of stories are rarely heard about but happen every day and they are not acceptable in Ireland 2014! Taxis are the only real door-to-door public transport service for many people and should not exclude members of our society.

We are at crisis point with wheelchair taxi numbers even though the taxi industry as a whole is a saturated market but I see these new regulations as a good first step to going some way to addressing this issue.

### **2.11: Edward Crean (NDA)**

Edward thanked everyone for the invitation to speak at today's event and is keen to keep today's presentation simple. Edward's purpose at today's meeting is to give an overview of what is happening at present at policy level in relation to accessible transport.

Being able to easily use transport is essential to enable people to access education and training, employment, shopping, social, cultural and leisure activities and to participate in the wider society.

At the moment government departments and public bodies operate based upon a set of policy documents; Transport for All Sectoral Plan and the National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan. The Department of Transport have been the most committed to



keeping the Sectoral Plan up to date. The National Strategy sets out a list of actions that the government are committed to the end of 2015.

At EU level there are a number of regulations governing transport; Regulation (EC) no 1107/2006 concerning the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air, Regulation (EU) No 181/2011 concerning the rights of passengers in bus and coach transport, Regulation (EC) No 1371/2007 on rail passengers' rights and obligations, Regulation (EU) No 1177/2010 concerning the rights of passengers when travelling by sea and inland waterway.

This allows people to bring up issues regarding how well or otherwise they have been treated. Ireland is no different in that respect. We follow these regulations now and it is good to keep in mind that this is there to support the person with a disability as a traveller and as a passenger. Much responsibility has been delegated by the Department of Transport to the National Transport Authority.

At present, many people with disabilities are dependent on public transport that they can access and use. Many can't afford to purchase and run a private vehicle. In many cases, people with disabilities have no one available to get a lift from. Many have the Free Travel Pass, in some cases the companion pass as well, and can access and use public transport.

Some progress has been made over the last few years that must be acknowledged although there is some way to go. The Luas is an example of a positive accessible experience and a model that other services will learn from and Dublin Bus are piloting new services towards full accessibility of Dublin Bus vehicles. Bus Éireann also say that their coaches are accessible and a pilot accessible coach services is currently operated by Bus Éireann. However, not all their routes are accessible yet. Accessibility improvements have been made by Irish Rail. The introduction of a fully accessible service is an issue. There has also been the introduction of and extension of fully-accessible Luas services.

People with disabilities are valuable customers that need to be serviced in terms of transport. More than 110,000 people with a disability either have difficulty walking for 15 minutes or cannot walk for 15 minutes at all. There are over 40,000 people in Ireland who either use or have need of a wheelchair. Census 2011 showed that around 595,000 (13%) of the population stated they had a disability. Around 33% of people with disabilities live in our cities. Around 20% live in the larger towns. Another third live in rural areas while the remainder live in small towns and villages. Regardless of where a person with a disability lives, the most common method of transport for them is as a car passenger. 80% of all people with disabilities travel as car passengers. There are around 13,000 members of the Revenue Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme. The next most common forms of transport are, in order: driving oneself (38%) and taxi (35%). Across all disabilities 32% said they used urban bus services, 24% used rural bus services and 22% used inter-city bus services.

Regardless of where a person with a disability lives their most common mode of transport is the car. The next most common form is people who drive themselves and then taxis. This is a huge part of our society that needs to be as accessible as possible.

The NDA promote cooperation across all the agencies, promoting effective use of resources and ensuring that different elements of passenger journeys and the adjacent built environment, enable people with disabilities to complete seamless journeys. The NDA support the integration of sustainable transport and travel policy with other policies such as spatial planning and the co-location, co-ordination and integration of the provision of public transport in all its forms including community transport services like ACTS and Vantastic. The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets requires that the design of roads and footpaths in urban areas must consider the needs of people with disabilities and gives guidance on the design of public roads and footpaths to make them more accessible. The NTA has undertaken an audit of bus stops and bus/rail stations. This will facilitate a plan for further accessibility works.

In relation to taxis, the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles is down 42.8% from a peak of 1,600 vehicles in 2008. At the end of 2013 wheelchair accessible vehicles constituted only 4.2% (916) of the overall small public service vehicle fleet. A new €1 million grant scheme to support to wider availability of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles was launched during the summer. By the end of October 208 applications were approved of which 153 are brand new vehicles entering the taxi market. The NTA recently revised the specification of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles with the aim of making them more affordable to buy.

In relation to procurement, the Office of Government Procurement is preparing a request for tender for standard taxi services for staff of public bodies in the Dublin area. This tender will include a requirement for wheelchair accessible taxis. There is need to investigate whether this could be applied to HSE and school transport. There is a current NTA proposal to award 10% of bus contracts to private operators.

The NTA has made funding available to the fleet owning Rural Transport Programme Groups for vehicle upgrade including improved accessibility. The new Rural Transport Programme structure involves the establishment of 18 Transport Co-ordination Units in place of the existing 35 Rural Transport Programme Groups currently delivering the service.

Parking / Disability Awareness is a major issue and needs to be addressed. Work on disability awareness training across the transport scheme is in progress. Members discussed the value of the Luas with a roll on roll of service, audible announcements and accommodation of multiple wheelchair users as a model of good practice.

Members discussed that transport in rural areas is of particular importance and that Mobility Allowance needs to be addressed urgently.

**Session Closing:**

Gary concluded the conversation reminding Leaders that the NDA has the ear of government. It is a statutory body and the government should be listening to them. Government is talking about making the situation in Ireland better for people with disabilities before they can ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. However, as we heard from contributors to the event and members of the Leader Forums around the country, the situation is getting worse in many instances. Over the past 7 years there has been a dual attack on people with disabilities in relation to both income and services. There is an imperative on government to start listening to how people are experiencing the situation on the ground. Gary highlighted the role of the Leader Forum in working to inform the NDA and others of the lived experience of people with disabilities. The National Leader Forum has the potential to greatly assist Government and its Departments and agencies.

### Section III: Leader Consultation Session and Feedback

Attendees broke into four workshop groups and each group was tasked with answering a set of questions on the current transport position in Ireland for people with disabilities.

All members who did not attend the NLF Employment Event but who wished to feed into the process were invited to do so through either county based groups or by email. This feedback has been outlined below and is consolidated with feedback from the county-based leader forum groups who were not in a position to travel to the national event. The final consultation report will be forwarded both to the DSG and the Minister for Disability and Minister for Transport.

#### 3.1: Transport Costs and the Costs of Disability

**Question: Transport for people with disabilities carries additional costs (e.g. cost of someone to travel with you, cost of taxi to travel to meet accessible transport routes, etc.). How do these costs impact upon you and how do you feel the government could realistically make transport more affordable for people with mobility impairments?**

- In most cases when you leave an adapted car in for repairs, no replacement car is provided. Dealerships/garages also do not cover costs of taxis while the car is being repaired. It should be the case that if a person with a standard car is provided with a replacement that the same provision should be made available to people with disabilities. If a replacement car cannot be provided, monetary support should be provided to facilitate the repair.
- All transport for people with disabilities requires additional costs, particularly if living in a rural setting without your own transport. To access any accessible public transport you would need to first get a taxi. For many people the cost of this prevents them from travelling outside of their home except when absolutely necessary.
- Free travel passes may be useful to those living in urban areas but for those living in rural settings they are simply useless as accessible transport links do not exist for many members.

***“To travel to my doctor and back in Donegal costs €70 return. There is no accessible public transport so I have no choice but to go by car. I have to save the money that I should be spending on essentials like food to pay for the journey.”***

**Solutions:**

- Allocation of a travel allowance similar to the Mobility allowance that may be used for both public and private transport.
- The only realistic way for the government to reduce this cost is to make the town to town public transport service fully accessible and much more frequent.
- Public transport services should run past 11.30pm in Dublin to reduce the requirement of booking taxi days in advance of your night out.
- The free travel pass should be extended to cover transport costs, particularly in relation to door to door accessible transport.

**Question: How essential is Free Travel and why is it so important?**

- Free travel is a lifeline for many and is the difference between being isolated and being in a position to get out or attend events.
- Free travel is a significant asset to address the cost of disability for those in areas serviced by accessible public transport.
- The pass is essential to those with access to public transport and of much less value to those not on accessible transport routes or in rural areas.
- The free travel pass does not cover any of the essential door to door transport that members use. The travel pass needs to be much broader and must incorporate all people with mobility impairments and not just those in receipt of welfare allowances.
- As a person with a disability who has a spouse in employment you may find you are above the means threshold for the pass. However the cost of actually travelling somewhere as a person with a disability in Ireland precludes you from any travel.
- As a free travel pass holder you must produce your pass when booking your ticket. This means that you cannot purchase your ticket in advance. Due to the very limited number of wheelchair spaces on trains (e.g. two spaces on the Limerick to Dublin route) you can often find that you arrive for your journey and cannot travel, as the spaces are full.

**Solutions:**

- The means testing for the free travel pass should focus on the individuals with a disability and not their household.
- The free travel pass should be issued with a companion pass automatically to reduce the stress and administration required when applying for both separately.
- The free travel pass should cover door to door services and taxis.
- All Free Travel passes should entitle you to make bookings online and at ticket machines and must also be reviewed to include all people with mobility impairments.

**Question: Have you been effected by the cuts to Mobility Allowance/Motorised Transport Grant? What impact has it had on you?**

- The Mobility Allowance is an essential support that is the difference between being able to get out of the house and put petrol in the car or being restricted to home.

Mobility Allowance has supported inclusion within the family and community and threats to the allowance create fears of isolation. There is huge fear amongst many in receipt of the Mobility Allowance as the future of the payment is uncertain and they do not know what to expect. Many members are reliant on the allowance to cover transport costs.

- The criteria for the Mobility Allowance meant that people with a visual impairment were excluded from applying even though people with visual impairments may also incur additional transport costs.
- Not all members were aware that the Mobility Allowance existed and did not apply for it. Now, although based on the criteria they would be awarded the allowance, they cannot apply.
- Some people with disabilities have not been affected by the cuts to the Mobility Allowance if they were in receipt of the grant before the change was implemented as their situation has not changed.
- As this grant is not open to new applicants there is a significant impact on people who now acquire a disability. These people have the same costs and restrictions imposed upon them by our current public transport system and need to be treated equally.
- Members who previously were awarded the Motorised Transport Grant to purchase a vehicle are impacted by the abolition of the scheme. These members reported that having their own transport was essential but without the Motorised Transport Grant they will not be in a position to purchase a replacement car to maintain their independence when needed.

#### **Solutions:**

- People with disabilities who acquired their disability within the last two years must be entitled to the mobility allowance or a suitable alternative.
- The government must announce the findings of their mobility allowance review and their subsequent plans to replace this allowance
- People with visual impairments should be included in consideration for any transport or mobility payment
- A support similar to the Motorised Transport Grant is required for people with disabilities who wish to purchase a car.

### **3.2. Private Transport**

**Question: What supports do you think government could provide that would be useful for you to maintain your own transport? E.g. tax, cost of transport etc.**

- Supports are required to purchase, maintain and run a car. People with disabilities are at higher risk of poverty and higher risk of isolation.
- Many of the transport routes require you to use a toll both. The travel pass is not being implemented fairly. As a person who frequently uses the M50 toll plaza you are entitled to use the toll without producing your toll card. You must produce your toll card to the toll operator who will ensure that the person to whom the card is issued is present in the vehicle.

- Many people with disabilities find securing car insurance extremely difficult it is important that the law regarding quotations is enforced.

***“As a person with a disability who uses the toll both in Limerick if a family member is available to drop me to work, and avoid me paying the taxi fare, I will avail of this. However there is then a cost involved for my family member in going home as I would not be in the vehicle. If the same person was based in Dublin this would not be an issue. This may not seem significant but if this journey was carried out every day over the year it would amount to €988 euro, which I simply do not have to reimburse my family. Why should I be treated differently because I am not living in Dublin?”***

**Solutions:**

- Reinstatement of the Mobility Allowance or similar initiative.
- All tolls should implement the same rules regarding use of the free toll card.
- All insurance providers should be monitored to ensure fairness in quotations offered to people with disabilities.

**Question: If the VAT relief on petrol/diesel was removed how would it impact upon you?**

- For many, the VAT relief is essential to maintain the car. Without the VAT relief many could not afford to run a car.
- There is a lot of paper work and administration required to apply for the tax back. This makes the process inaccessible.

**Solutions:**

- Clarity is required urgently on the scheme that is due to replace the VAT on petrol.
- To reduce the administration required when submitting VAT receipts a smart card should be issued, which the person can use at the point of sale. This would automatically deduct the VAT and reduce the requirement for the end of year return.
- This review should consider the issuing of smart cards to deduct the VAT at the point of sale.

**Question: If you have learned to drive in the past or plan to in the future is it possible for you to access an adapted learning vehicle without incurring the significant expense of buying a suitable vehicle yourself?**

- Adapted vehicles for learning to drive are available through the IWA and the National Mobility Centre.
- Experience varied greatly depending on location and depending on individual circumstance. In many places you can access lessons without purchasing a car. In Cork, Sligo & Dublin members go through either the IWA or the Disabled Drivers Association.

- Members in Tullamore have access to accessible driving lessons if they can transfer in to an adapted car provided. However, for members not in a position to transfer, the same service is not available. For those accessing a car through a lift at the back and using a docking station, lessons are not unavailable unless you have your own vehicle.
- Some members used private driving schools with one person giving their positive experience of the Irish School of Motoring. The ISM have automatic vehicles with adaptations to facilitate people with disabilities to access lessons.
- In Limerick, people with disabilities are often required to buy their own car if they wish to learn to drive. In some areas, there is no option to book lessons in an adapted vehicle.
- If it transpires that the individual doesn't like driving or if the situation changes and the person is no longer in a position to maintain the car/drive they are left with an adapted vehicle that has cost considerable money, may be adapted to individual need and is very difficult to sell.
- Members who had acquired a disability discussed re-learning how to drive in a new way, the stress and expense of adapting to a new vehicle and the frustration having already been a driver. Members who drive and who have a deteriorating condition expressed similar frustration. The Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) provides a nationwide driving assessment and tuition service. The assessment determines whether the applicant should return to driving and what adaptations are needed.

***“I would love to learn to drive. At the moment I simply cannot afford to buy my own car. However I have approached numerous instructors and none of them can help. Why shouldn't I be entitled to get my license like everyone else?”***

#### **Solutions:**

- All counties must have a suitable adapted vehicle that people can utilise when learning to drive.
- Driving schools should have access to supports to accessible vehicles as the need arises
- Organisations like the IWA should be resourced to provide relevant services

**Question: As either a driver or a passenger, do you find accessible parking spaces adequate in size and number? How can accessible parking be improved?**

- In general, the number of spaces is not adequate across Ireland on street, in car parks and at facilities/amenities like hospitals, schools and other community areas.
- Parking spaces are not large enough to facilitate many cars. Vehicles with a ramp at the side have significant issues due to the proximity of the space next to the designated parking spot.
- There are also still issues for vehicles with ramps to the rear as there are health and safety concerns for people when disembarking in to oncoming traffic.
- Safe access to footpaths from accessible parking spaces is often not adequate



**Solutions:**

- There should be an obligation on all Councils and private car parks to adhere to agreed standards under the Department of the Environment.
- Disabled parking bays are not big enough. There should be extra lines beside the space to allow someone to open their doors/ramp freely.
- All kerbs should be lowered down to allow people to access a path.
- Fines for parking in accessible parking bays need to be much more significant to discourage such practices.

**3.3 Public Transport**

**Question: Is it possible for you to access an accessible taxi service and what impact has the availability of these services on your everyday life?**

- In most cases accessible taxis were available but required booking in advance
- It is possible to access a taxi service however it is extremely expensive which can prohibit frequent use.
- There is also an issue with regard to pricing as some taxi services display two prices one for wheelchair taxis and one for others.
- There is great inconsistency in what is defined as an accessible taxi and what is defined as accessible is unreliable and unpredictable. There is no agreed standard. Taxis are most accessible when there is a lift at the back. At present most have small portable ramps. Members reported nervousness and anxiety around using these small ramps. Not all drivers are accommodating or know how to properly secure the ramps. These should be replaced with a safer and more consistent alternative.

***“I contacted the taxi regulator about one taxi service, which was charging a two-tier pricing structure for disabled/non-disabled taxis. I was told that I would have to use the service and then put in a written complaint with a valid receipt. Only then would they consider if this two-tier system was fair/unfair and decide whether or not to issue me with a refund”. Why should I be charged more to use a taxi just because I have a disability?”***

**Solutions:**

- More accessible taxis are required, particularly outside of Dublin.
- All taxi companies should be required to provide a universally accessible service, all new taxis should be accessible.
- Should be a financial incentive to ensure adequate numbers of accessible taxis
- All taxi prices should be the same for both disabled and non-disabled passengers and the National Transport Authority should be challenged to carry out its role correctly.
- There should be universal markings on taxis that would be recognisable and easily identifiable for people with disabilities

- There is a need for an agreed set of standards to define what makes a taxi accessible. Best practice would be a lift to the rear of the taxi rather than manual ramps.
- Provision of training in disability awareness to ensure taxi drivers know how best to provide an accessible and appropriate service

**Question: Have you accessed any Rural Transport Scheme services and if so, did you find them accessible?**

- Members had limited experience of Rural Transport Schemes and there was a lack of information around the availability and accessibility of the schemes.
- In general these schemes limited and are often not fully accessible for people with disabilities.
- Not flexible enough to meet the needs of many Leaders
- Where they are available they are limited to very few vehicles so when one is off the road for maintenance the scheme is suspended.

**Solution:**

- Rural transport schemes need to have fully accessible vehicles and be reliable.
- The free travel pass should ideally be accepted by private service providers or entitle the user to a reduced fare.
- There is a need to develop the scheme to support flexible door to door services

**Question: How can Iarnród Eireann rail services or Dart Services be improved?**

- More wheelchair spaces are required on all routes. You need to book these spaces well in advance and cannot simply turn up on the day or you may not get a space.
- Audible announcements are vital to ensure people with visual impairments do not miss their stop. However, although these have been massively improved these are not always consistent.
- Train Stations are currently not all accessible and do not all have lifts. Members travelling from Maynooth to Sligo had to take a train in to the city centre and take a train back out to Maynooth so they could get to Sligo. This added over an hour to the train journey. This would have been easily resolved with a lift operating on the platforms. The station in Maynooth is reasonably new and is heavily used. All stations should adhere to basic accessibility guidelines so they are equally accessible for all passengers. Similarly, the train from Ennis to Limerick does not have always have access to the platform for people with disabilities. You have to give notice so they can bring the train over to the nearer platform. A new bridge was put in place to allow people to travel to the opposite platform but it is not accessible. In some cases people are being facilitated by being physically carried across the track to the required platform.
- Dart Stations are not universally accessible and all platforms within stations are not accessible. Use of the Dart is particularly problematic when stations are not manned. People with disabilities are required to ensure someone is there to let down the

ramp so you can embark/disembark. If there is no staff person available to assist you at your stop you will simply miss your stop.

- Stations are only staffed for a restricted number of hours and passengers must use automated exits. Tickets are required for these. The walk way through the automated process is too narrow and not accessible by wheelchair. The example of Sandymount station at 7pm on a weekday was discussed where a member was trapped within the station and couldn't exit. All systems must be designed to facilitate wheelchairs.
- Dart & train stations should have tactile markings to guide passengers with visual impairments.
- In most cases, staff provide great support service with positive experiences of sighted guide support and ramp support reported. However staff are not always aware of the needs of people with disabilities or informed around best practice in relation to disability awareness. There was some inconsistency reported around the quality of staff support but overall the experience of the service was overwhelmingly positive.
- For those travelling to many destinations, they are required to change trains in places like Mallow, Limerick Junction, Manulla Junction and Athlone. This can be off putting for wheelchair users and other people with disabilities that are not in a position to change trains independently due to access issues. Members reported waiting for alternative trains to avoid reliance on staff to ensure that they changed trains in time.

***“In one instance we were on the way home from Dublin to Limerick when there was an incident on the line. All passengers had to disembark and were to be transferred to Limerick by bus. Obviously we couldn't be accommodated on the bus that was called as it wasn't accessible. We then had to wait for hours on the side of a track in the middle of nowhere with no toilet facilities or refreshments while an accessible taxi was found to take us home”.***

#### **Solutions:**

- Roll on roll off services are much more accessible and many wheelchair users would be able to access them more independently without staff support
- All stations and all platforms should be accessible with tactile markings to guide passengers with visual impairments.
- Lifts in stations should all be in operation
- Stations should be manned to ensure safe exit and entry of stations
- Staff should be provided with disability awareness and sighted guide training
- A contingency plan must be put in place for people with disabilities to get to their destination when bus transfers are required.
- All Dart and Inter-City routes should have electronic ramps to allow people with disabilities to freely use these services.
- More wheelchair spaces are required on the inter-city routes.
- Automatic ticket barriers should be designed to be accessible to all.
- All station upgrades must ensure the accessibility of people with disabilities.

**Question: How can mainstream public bus services like Bus Éireann/Dublin Bus be improved?**

- In most cases, Bus Éireann services are not accessible. On some routes, there is a limited accessible service. The Letterkenny to Dublin route is sometimes accessible but there is no guarantee.
- Members reported a somewhat more positive experience of accessibility of Dublin Bus although there are many issues impacting access on Dublin Bus.
- There is inadequate provision on bus services for people with disabilities. One member discussed how she and a friend take the bus to the Blanchardstown Centre to the cinema and although they are neighbours they cannot travel together due to inadequate space on the standard bus on the 39 route. Only one wheelchair user may be on board at any one time.
- The spaces on buses are not always large enough to facilitate some of the bigger motorised wheelchairs. Members reported that they could not use Dublin Bus services as they could not fit their chair safely in the designated space without damaging the control panel on their wheelchair.
- Health and safety needs to be considered on buses. For instance even when you follow the guideline if the driver brakes suddenly there is a high probability that your chair will overturn.
- Although there is a notice posted on the buses to indicate wheelchair users get priority in the particular spot allocated to accommodate them in the buses, in practice this is not always implemented. Members reported a number of instances where drivers were reluctant to enforce the rule when a buggy occupies the space. This can lead to conflict and arguments between the wheelchair user and the person using a buggy for a child.
- There are frequent breakdowns of ramps on the buses, which create difficulties for wheelchair users. It would be helpful for Dublin Bus to regularly check if ramps are working or not.
- Timetables for accessible rural transport services must be designed with the users needs in mind. In both Sligo & Donegal there are buses that travel a route once a day – in the morning. They arrive in town and return immediately. This renders them useless for people relying on public transport. The current option is that people do the return journey by taxi. This can be expensive. It is recommended that a second run be done later in the day to facilitate people doing business/socialising in town.
- Nearly all bus drivers make a reference about the wheelchair itself rather than the user. This is more than semantics because persons with disabilities prefer to be addressed to in appropriate terms. It is vital to keep service providers informed about the proper use of language with regards to disability.

**Solutions:**

- All buses, Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus services, must be accessible for everyone. This includes all buses passing through small rural villages.
- All bus stops must be accessible and well lit and there must be enough space to facilitate the turning of a large power wheelchair. Members discussed bus stops in Clonsilla in Dublin where they cannot alight as there is not enough space between the bus and a

ditch to exit safely. Stops at Blanchardstown Hospital have been changed based on campaigning by the D15 Leader Forum so members should continue to advocate.

- Bus stops should correspond with appropriate dishing for safe access to pathways/crossings
- Accessible spaces on buses must be larger at present the spaces on Dublin bus do not accommodate larger power chairs. The bar on the bus does not facilitate all power chairs and causes damage to the control mechanism and should be adapted to facilitate a broader diversity of chair.
- Space to accommodate wheelchair users and pushchair users should be kept separate.
- Antisocial behavior should not be tolerated and drivers must implement the guidelines around asking people to move from the space allocated to wheelchair users.
- Passengers who refuse to move to facilitate a wheelchair user should be fined
- Drivers should be trained to act when a person using a wheelchair is receiving verbal abuse.
- Audible announcements are required on all public transport services.
- Bus ramps must be checked frequently to ensure they are working correctly.
- Disability awareness training for all bus staff is urgently required.
- Priority spaces should be made available on all buses for guide dog owners and use of these spaces, and the bus driver must enforce the spaces dedicated to wheelchair users.
- Buses should facilitate more than one wheelchair.

### 3.4 Specialised Services

**Question: Do you use any of the community based specialised transport services available for people with disabilities for door to door transport e.g. CIL, Vantastic, Lucan Disability Action Group. If so, how can these services be improved?**

- Many members depend on these services in city and urban areas. There is currently a high demand where these services are available, particularly in Dublin & Cork. Services need to be booked well in advance and are costly if members use them to travel to work
- Community transport at fixed times for groups is not adequate to facilitate the diversity of need. Door to door transport support is essential.
- There are no such service in most rural areas. Any community transport services that do exist are not accessible.
- These services should be supported where possible to expand as when they are accessible they are in extremely high demand.
- There are 18 private service providers offering these transport solutions in county Clare. A survey was carried out to examine the feasibility of these service providers offering a centralized number for a user to ring. This would allow all 18 to see who was available and to send the best placed person for the job. If this were rolled out it would reduce the tremendous isolation experienced by people in county Clare and unleash the potential for similar schemes in other areas.

**Solutions:**

- The Travel Pass should be expanded to cover these services.
- It is recommended that increased funding is allocated to dedicated accessible door to door services.
- Increased co-operation and communication between service providers
- Key to the successful services is that drivers are well trained. Any expanded service should make provision for disability equality training of staff.
- If services like these were available it would solve many of the taxi issues.

## Section IV: Next Steps

### 4.1 Chairperson's Remarks

Michael McCabe (Chairperson, Center for Independent Living)

The majority of these issues have been raised several times before. Michael emphasised the need for something to be done about the Mobility Allowance and this is a very bad situation for people to be in as they don't have any support. Michael needs a van and it is a lot more expensive to purchase and run than a car. What Don was saying earlier in relation to self-drive services may be a good way to combat this. The only way to change things is to be out there and there is a lot of inconvenience in travel and we need to highlight this. People with disabilities are entitled to travel and go away on holidays just like other people.

The Center for Independent Living will use the information gathered to advocate for improvements in transport services and supports and will link with key stakeholders to push for positive change and equality of access to services.

Michael would like to thank all the people who spoke here today and also everyone for their contributions to the workshops. Michael would also like to thank the staff of CIL for their work here today. Thanks also to Rhona Coughlan for chairing today's meeting.

### 4.2 Recommendations

#### 4.2.1 Cost of Disability in relation to Transport

- Allocation of a travel allowance similar to the Mobility allowance that may be used for both public and private transport.
- The government must announce the findings of their mobility allowance review and their subsequent plans to replace this allowance
- People with visual impairments should be included in consideration for any transport or mobility payment
- People with disabilities who acquired their disability within the last two years must be entitled to the Mobility Allowance or a suitable alternative.
- A support similar to the Motorised Transport Grant is required for people with disabilities who wish to purchase a car.
- Town to town public transport service should be fully accessible and more frequent.
- Public transport services should run past 11.30pm in Dublin to reduce the requirement of booking taxi days in advance of your night out.

- The free travel pass should be extended to cover transport costs, particularly in relation to door to door accessible transport. This should include costs incurred for a travel companion as required.

#### 4.2.2 Private Ownership of an Accessible Car/Van

- Reinstatement of the Mobility Allowance or similar initiative
- Reinstatement of the Motorised Transport Grant or a similar practice to support purchase of transport.
- That the current status in relation to tax back on fuel for people with disabilities be maintained
- All tolls should implement the same rules regarding use of the free toll card.
- Clarity is required urgently on the scheme that is due to replace the VAT on petrol.
- To reduce the administration required when submitting VAT receipts a smart card should be issued, which the person can use at the point of sale. This would automatically deduct the VAT and reduce the requirement for the end of year return.
- The issuing of smart cards to deduct the VAT at the point of sale.
- Insurance standards and guidelines be developed so people with disabilities cannot be discriminated against or exploited.
- All insurance providers should be monitored to ensure fairness in quotations offered to people with disabilities.
- All counties must have a suitable adapted vehicle that people can utilise when learning to drive.
- Driving schools should have access to supports to accessible vehicles as the need arises with organisations and service providers resourced to provide services.

#### 4.2.3 Parking

- There should be an obligation on all Councils and private car parks to adhere to agreed standards under the Department of the Environment.
- Disabled parking bays should be increased. There should be extra lines beside the space to allow someone to open their doors/ramp freely.
- Accessible Parking spaces must be matched with the appropriate dishing to provide safe access to corresponding footpaths and all kerbs should be lowered down to allow people to access all path.
- Fines for parking in accessible parking spaces without the relevant documentation need to be much larger to discourage such practices.
- Parking spaces at train stations be located as close to the entrance as possible with corresponding dished curbs.



#### 4.2.4 Public Transport

##### *Bus Services: Dublin Bus & Bus Éireann:*

- All buses, Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus services, must be accessible for everyone. This includes all buses passing through small rural villages.
- All bus stops must be accessible and well lit – there must be enough space to facilitate the turning of a large power wheelchair.
- Bus stops should correspond with appropriate dishing for safe access to pathways/crossings
- Accessible spaces on buses must be larger at present the spaces on Dublin bus do not accommodate larger power chairs.
- The size of the space dedicated for wheelchair users should be increased to facilitate large chairs and multiple chairs. Alternative models in Europe may provide a template.
- Space to accommodate wheelchair users and pushchair users should be kept separate.
- Antisocial behavior should not be tolerated and drivers must implement the guidelines around asking people to move.
- Audible announcements are required on all public transport services. All buses need to have audible announcements similar to those on the Luas.
- Bus ramps must be checked frequently to ensure they are working correctly.
- Disability awareness training for all bus staff is required.
- Priority spaces should be made available on all buses for guide dog owners and use of these spaces, and the bus driver must enforce the spaces dedicated to wheelchair users.
- Implementation of fines for passengers who refuse to move to facilitate a wheelchair user
- Drivers should be trained to take action when a person using a wheelchair is receiving verbal abuse
- Buses should facilitate more than one wheelchair.
- Counter heights at stations should be low enough to ensure they are accessible to wheelchair users.
- An increase in bins and buses should be cleaned more regularly to prevent guide dogs getting sick.
- Priority seats for guide dog owners giving guide dog users priority seats and additional space
- A system where people with disabilities with free travel could access tickets through the machine or through online bookings would be useful.

##### *DART & Rail Services – Iarnród Éireann:*

- A roll on roll off service on the DART would be more reliable than the current ramp system Carriages should be roll on roll off and accessible. Gaps between platforms and carriages should be addressed so passengers using wheelchairs can access the carriage without staff support.

- All stations and all platforms should be accessible
- Lifts in stations should all be in operation
- Stations should be manned to ensure safe exit and entry of stations
- Staff should be provided with disability awareness and sighted guide training
- A contingency plan must be put in place for people with disabilities to get to their destination when bus transfers are required.
- All Dart and Inter-City routes should have electronic ramps to allow people with disabilities to freely use these services.
- More wheelchair spaces are required on the inter-city routes.
- All station upgrades must ensure the accessibility of people with disabilities.
- Trains should be universally accessible and operate based on a roll on roll off approach or automatic electronic ramps.
- Increase in the allocation of wheelchair spaces on trains to facilitate passengers with disabilities.
- Automatic doors for all stations.
- Audible announcements are vital to ensure people with visual impairments do not miss their stop.
- All systems must be designed to facilitate wheelchairs.
- Dart & train stations should have tactile markings to guide passengers with visual impairments.
- Staffing hours in Dart stations need to be extended where stations are not accessible.
- There needs to be much more disability awareness training for staff working in Dart Stations.
- Any upgrading of the systems should entail consideration of access for all passengers.

#### Rural Transport Scheme:

- Rural transport schemes need to have fully accessible vehicles and be reliable.
- The free travel pass should ideally be accepted by private service providers, or at the very least entitle the user to a reduced fare.
- There is a need to develop the scheme to support flexible door to door services for those who need it.

#### 4.2.6 Specialised Door to Door Services

- The Travel Pass should be expanded to cover these services.
- It is recommended that increased funding is allocated to dedicated accessible door to door services.
- Key to the successful services is that drivers are well trained. Any expanded service should make provision for disability equality training of staff.
- If services like these were available it would solve many of the taxi issues.

#### 4.2.7 Taxis

- More accessible taxis are required, particularly outside of Dublin.
- All taxi companies should be required to provide a universally accessible service, all new taxis should be accessible.
- Should be a financial incentive to ensure adequate numbers of accessible taxis
- All taxi prices should be the same for both disabled and non-disabled passengers and the National Transport Authority should be challenged to carry out its role correctly.
- There should be universal markings on taxis that would be recognisable and easily identifiable for people with disabilities
- There is a need for an agreed set of standards to define what makes a taxi accessible. Best practice would be a lift to the rear of the taxi rather than manual ramps.
- Provision of training in disability awareness to ensure taxi drivers know how best to provide an accessible and appropriate service

#### 4.2.8 Free Travel

- The means testing for the free travel pass should focus on the individuals with a disability and not their household.
- All people with disabilities should have a travel pass
- The free travel pass should be issued with a companion pass to reduce the stress and administration required when applying for both separately.
- The free travel pass should cover door to door services and taxis.
- All Free Travel passes should entitle you to make bookings online and at ticket machines and must also be reviewed to include all people with mobility impairments.
- Clarity is needed on what supports will be available to address additional costs of transport.
- There is a need for people with disabilities to unite and challenge our political representatives and demand that we be treated as equal citizens.

#### 4.2.9 Airline Travel

- Staff training should be provided around the safe management of wheelchairs by airlines. Airline staff need to be more aware and respectful of wheelchairs.
- More suitable storage of wheelchairs should be provided.
- This should be addressed at European level so that EU citizens with disabilities can have the same freedom to travel as passengers that do not require a wheelchair.
- A designated seating area on the flight for people with disabilities that has more leg room and adequate space should be standard on all aircrafts.
- A review of this process of changing wheelchairs to access the plane. A more secure seat with supports for the feet or head and straps may be useful.

- A comparative review of the American Airline Standards FFAACA and Irish practice.

## Conclusion

Access to transport is essential to inclusion and equality when it comes to disability. The progress made in the area of public transport has been significant. However, in relation to private transport and people with disabilities owning their own cars, the same improvements have not been made.

Members expressed varied experiences in relation to transport depending on where in the country they are based. The government must ensure that adequate transport services and supports are available throughout the country to facilitate the independence of people with disabilities. It is essential that the diversity of locale is considered when devising strategies around transport for people with disabilities. Rural people with disabilities are extremely isolated, which gives rise to a number of other problems. At present lack of accessible transport is one of the leading contributors to that isolation.

The cost of transport for people with disabilities is huge and it is recommended that based on this report an allowance or payment be made to people with disabilities on an ongoing basis to support people to meet these additional costs. This payment should be flexible so that it can be used by a person living in a remote rural area or busy urban areas with lots of transport, that it can be used to supplement private ownership and maintenance of a car or access to public transport. It is crucial that planning of all services and supports take in to account the needs of people with disabilities as outlined above.

## Appendices

### A – Speaker Biographies

**Don Bailey:** studied business in Dundalk and has been working in the Department of Agriculture for many years. Don is involved in the Civil Service Credit Union and recently completed an award in Corporate Governance. Don has been involved with Vantastic for over 10 years. Don will speak about the role of door to door transport services targeted at people with disabilities and the expansion of Vantastic in to self drive services.

**Mary Collins:** is an accomplished artist and her work is regularly exhibited. Mary is a long time proponent of independent living in Ireland. Mary is a member of the Dublin 15 Leader Forum. Mary is passionate about the cost of transport and the cost of disability.

**Owen Collumb:** is a native of Longford. Owen completed a Degree in Sociology & Politics in Trinity College, Dublin and has been involved with The Center for Independent Living since 2004. Owen is the Facilities Co-ordinator with Muscular Dystrophy Ireland (MDI) and the Chairperson of Greater Dublin Independent Living (GDIL). Owen has also served on the boards of Cheshire Ireland and Lucan Disability Action Group (LDAG). Owen is one of the Leaders involved in the Direct Payments pilot, Áiseanna Tacaíochta. Owen has travelled extensively internationally to events in Bangkok, Belgrade, Bosnia & Stockholm.

**Edward Crean:** works in the Policy and Research section of the National Disability Authority. The National Disability Authority is the independent state body providing expert advice on disability policy and practice to the Minister, and promoting Universal Design in Ireland. Edward currently covers the issues of transport, communications, arts and attitudes. Edward has worked in the National Disability Authority for seven years.

**Leigh Gath:** has been an activist and advocate from the age of 17. Leigh has worked in the disability sector in the US and Ireland. Leigh is involved in the West Limerick Leader Forum and is engaged with in CIL to develop a new Leader Forum in Limerick City.

**Michelle Gaynor:** is a well-known campaigner for equality on disability issues and is currently involved in the campaigns on the water charges. Michelle recently completed a course in Assistive Technology and is an active member of GDIL.

**Tommy Halligan:** is a member of the Donegal Leader Forum. Tommy has organised a hugely successful community fundraiser in 2013 for Donegal CIL and a number of music events. Tommy is known to his peers for thinking outside the box and being creative and has played an important role in relation to access in Donegal.

**Paul Hickey:** is an active member of the Offaly Leader Forum and takes on the role of media and PR for the group. Paul also played key roles in the Offaly LF including organising and modelling in a fashion show and carrying out an access review in Tullamore. Paul carried out a review of rail services this summer. Paul is the PRO for Rhode GAA and is responsible for updating their website and twitter. Paul is currently doing an internship in education.

**Jackie McBrearty:** is originally from Donegal and has been living in Sligo since the age of 18. Jackie is a lead member of the Sligo Leader Forum and has made a huge contribution to independent living in Sligo. Jackie has a degree in Social Studies. Jackie currently provides Technology Support to members of the NCBI and in particular guides members learning to use iPhones and iPad.

**Gina McNamara:** has a Degree in Social Care from Athlone IT and a Masters in Public Advocacy and Activism from NUI Galway. Gina has been visually impaired all her life with only partial sight in one eye. Gina started out using the symbol cane, then the long cane and now has a Guide Dog Cherie. Gina is a member of the Galway Leader Forum since it was founded in 2011 and is a Disability Advocate on many levels focusing on the rights of all people with disabilities in the community.

**Kay McShane:** is originally from Cobh and living in Dublin for 28 years. Kay worked for 26 years as a civil servant and retired 2 years ago. Kay has since been involved in Blanchardstown CIL and is a member of the Dublin 15 Leader Forum. Kay is a medal winning Paralympic athlete, with 2 medals for marathons and 1 for track. Kay is here with husband Michael White to discuss experiences of transport as a couple both using wheelchairs.

## B. Consultation Questions

### 1. Transport Costs & the Cost of Disability:

i) Transport for people with disabilities carries additional costs? (e.g. cost of someone to travel with you, cost of taxi to travel to meet accessible transport routes, etc). How do these costs impact upon you and how do you feel the government could realistically make transport more affordable for people with mobility impairments?

ii) How essential is Free Travel and why is it so important?

iii) Have you been effected by the cuts to Mobility Allowance/Motorised Transport Grant? What impact has it had?

### 2. Private Transport

i) What supports do you think government could provide that would be useful for you to maintain your own transport? Eg tax, cost of transport etc

ii) If the VAT relief on petrol/diesel was removed how would it impact upon you?

iii) If you have learned to drive in the past or plan to in the future is it possible for you to access an adapted learning vehicle without incurring the significant expense of buying a suitable vehicle yourself?

iv) As either a driver or a passenger, do you find accessible parking spaces adequate in size and number? How can accessible parking be improved?

### 3. Public Transport

i) Do you have access to a public transport service?

ii) Is it possible for you to access an accessible taxi service and what impact has the availability of these services on your everyday life?

iii) Have you accessed any Rural Transport Scheme services and if so, did you find them accessible?

iv) How can Iarnród Eireann rail services or Dart Services be improved?

v) How can mainstream public bus services like Bus Eireann/Dublin Bus be improved?

vi) How can Luas services be made more accessible?

### 4. Specialised Services

i) Do you use any of the community based specialised transport services available for people with disabilities for door to door transport eg CIL, Vantastic, Lucan Disability Action Group. If so, how can these services be improved.

ii) Would you use a self-drive service (low cost accessible van hire) if it was available in your area?

## **5. Conclusion**

Are there any further changes that you would recommend government make to develop improved sectoral plans and services for accessible transport.



### C. Abbreviations

- CIL: Center for Independent Living
- NLF: National Leader Forum
- LF: Leader Forum
- CES: Comprehensive Employment Strategy
- DSG: Disability Stakeholders Group
- DFI: Disability Federation of Ireland
- UNCRPD: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- EU: European Union
- IL: Independent Living
- WSS: Wage Subsidy Scheme
- WEAG: Workplace Equipment/Adaptation Grant
- JIIGS: Job Interview Interpreter Grant
- PRGS: Personal Reader Grant Scheme
- ERGS: Employee Retention Grant Scheme
- DA: Disability Allowance
- CE: Community Employment
- TRACS: Training and Consultancy Services
- NDA: National Disability Authority
- NDISG: National Disability Strategy Implementation Group
- PAS: Personal Assistance Services
- PA: Personal Assistant



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**“Nothing About Us Without Us”**