



Submission on the restructuring of the Rural Transport Programme

The Rural Transport Network

February 2013

Key Messages to Government, DTTAS and NTA

- (1) Confirm NTA role as eventual sole fund-holder for all local and rural transport subvention, including local PSO, rural and community transport services.
- (2) NTA to develop regulatory and funding framework
- (3) Establish Local Transport Units in counties as successors to RTP Companies. These Units will act as agents of the National Transport Authority and be aligned to local authorities with responsibility for the co-ordination and integration of transport at county level.
- (4) Core funding of Units is essential to the future sustainability of integrated rural transport
- (5) Mandate state resourced agencies to use the LTUs expertise to create and maximise efficiencies in the integration of public transport services. The LTUs become the 'Go To' hub for all areas of transport within each county.

Introduction

In August 2011, the Rural Transport Network (RTN) made a Submission to Government and other stakeholders regarding the future of rural transport in Ireland.¹ This set out a series of important changes which the Network members felt necessary in order to put rural and other local passenger transport on a more efficient, effective, value-for-money and sustainable basis into the future.

We welcome the fact that many of the proposals made are reflected in subsequent policy developments and statements including the Central Expenditure Evaluation Unit (CEEU) report on publicly-funded local transport schemes, and the decision to transfer responsibility for the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) to the National Transport Authority (NTA).

Further significant developments in rural transport policy, and its immediate context, have taken place since we made our Submission, including publication of the CEEU report, publication of the VFM report on rural transport, establishment and progress of the National Integrated Rural Transport Committee (NIRTC) under NTA Chairmanship, and the outcome of the Comprehensive Expenditure Review from a rural transport perspective, launch of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government alignment proposals, and the interim reports of the NIRTC. A common thread through all this recent and ongoing activity is the recognised potential for a “win win” of both better services and better value-for-money through greater integration of local transport service provision and funding – an aim to which we fully subscribe.

Against this background, the Network decided to make a further Submission to government in response to the recent Re-structuring Proposal Discussion Document, as this is the only document that has come to the attention of the Rural Transport Network.

The purpose of this Submission is to:

- set out our thinking on some of the topics currently under debate;
- positively influence the decisions of the Minister, Department, and NTA on the future role and structure of the Rural Transport Programme and of our Network.

We think this is a critical juncture in the evaluation of local transport planning in Ireland and that it is ultimately in all parties’ interest to try to move towards a more integrated and expanded network of local easy access services for all.

¹ Rural Transport Network, *Towards Integrated Rural Transport: Achieving More for Less*, A Submission to Government from the Rural Transport Network, 9 August 2011

2. Our Proposals

The Rural Transport Network is eager to engage in determining the future structures of rural transport provision in Ireland. We welcome Minister Kelly and the NTAs commitment to the strengthening of services on the ground and to the retention of community and voluntary input. We welcome the acknowledgement that the NTA plan to engage in a process of direct award with fleet owning groups pending legislation changes. As implementers of the recommendations of the VFM review, this is a real opportunity to support greater clarity and direction for an enhanced Rural Transport Programme. Whilst the recommendations of the VFM review have clear targets, it is imperative that the core principles of the future programme are clear and that the strengths of the current programme are maintained. To progress greater integration it is clear that the current RTP programme will be refined in light of these recommendations. We believe that the proposals outlined in this document incorporate all of the elements that will underpin the success of Rural Integrated Transport in Ireland into the future. We would welcome the opportunity for meaningful engagement on re-defining and re-structuring the current Rural Transport Programme into the future. In light of our current contractual situation we are ready to engage in this process immediately, with a deadline of Jan 1st 2014 for the commencement of new structures.

We advocate for:

1. The establishment of 25 County Integrated Transport Units operating to county boundaries (and across county boundaries by necessity to maximise efficiencies)
2. Each of Unit will act as agents of the NTA
3. Each Unit will have allocated core funding (a guaranteed, sustained consistent level of funding allocated for the administration of the LTU).
4. Each Unit will be aligned to the local authority according to one of two alignment models outlined below:
 - A. Operated by and housed within the Local Authority, managed by a advisory working group that consists of County Manager appointees, community volunteers and relevant statutory agencies. The resources allocated to County Integrated Transport Unit to be ring-fenced for sole use by the unit.
 - B. Operated by an Independent Ltd Company, managed by a board of directors that includes the county manager or a nominee of same, the community/voluntary sector and relevant agencies.

The Key Functions of County Integrated Transport Units are;

- a) Continue the day to day operations of rural transport provision.
- b) To work with the NTA to re-define the parameters of community transport provision.
- c) Engage in the development and implementation of County Transport Plans.
- d) Operation and implementation of our health and safety system.
- e) Ongoing identification of demand and needs.
- f) Promotion of behavioural change within each county.
- g) Developing and supporting a brand locally and nationwide.
- h) Embedding integration in transport service planning. Become a one-stop shop for all things transport.
- i) Supporting NTA in the operation of subvention via PSO to commercial or other independent transport operators for rural and other local transport services. (The precise mechanism by which this happens is open to discussion, e.g. the role could be local support, or the County Integrated Transport Unit could actually be the delegated local fund holder for aspects of this)
- j) To become the 'go to' unit for all agencies, communities etc. who have transport as an operational part of their daily function.
- k) Facilitate the development of integration transport into the future.
- l) Create and support a network of transport contacts within each county.
- m) Monitor the quality and adequacy of local transport service provision, particularly of publicly-funded local/rural transport providers;

This strategy presents to the Government a blueprint to maximise the return on investment made in the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) by building on the work to date by providing greater connectivity and integration. It sets out a clear plan for a more sustainable model of transport in rural areas.

The CITU will have the potential to take on a catalyst role in this model of integrated transport in the rural context, bringing together, coordinating and maximizing resources from HSE, Bus Eireann, VEC, disability organisations, local authorities and their respective parent bodies.

The design of the future programme should involve meaningful consultation with the RTN NTA DTTAS to achieve the following sustainable transport objectives which include the following principles

- Develop people and community centred services
- Integrate local transport systems to include education, health, and social services
- Provide efficient and effective national management and support mechanisms
- Minimise the negative impact of transport on the environment

Public transport will always need subsidy from the State for the delivery of services, particularly nonconventional services which address specific needs. This type of subsidy is evident in most developed

countries. The cost of providing this subsidy needs to be viewed against the cost of not providing it, which has long term social, economic, cultural and environmental implications.

This county based nationally aligned structure presents a prime opportunity to Government to maximise its return on investment to the Rural Transport Programme, as well as key mainstream Exchequer allocations to health, transport, and education by presenting clearly the necessary components and steps required in achieving a more structured integration in the delivery of rural transport.

