

NATIONAL TRANSPORT AUTHORITY DECISION TRANSFERS THE CO-ORDINATION OF COUNTY CLARE'S RURAL TRANSPORT SERVICES TO LIMERICK

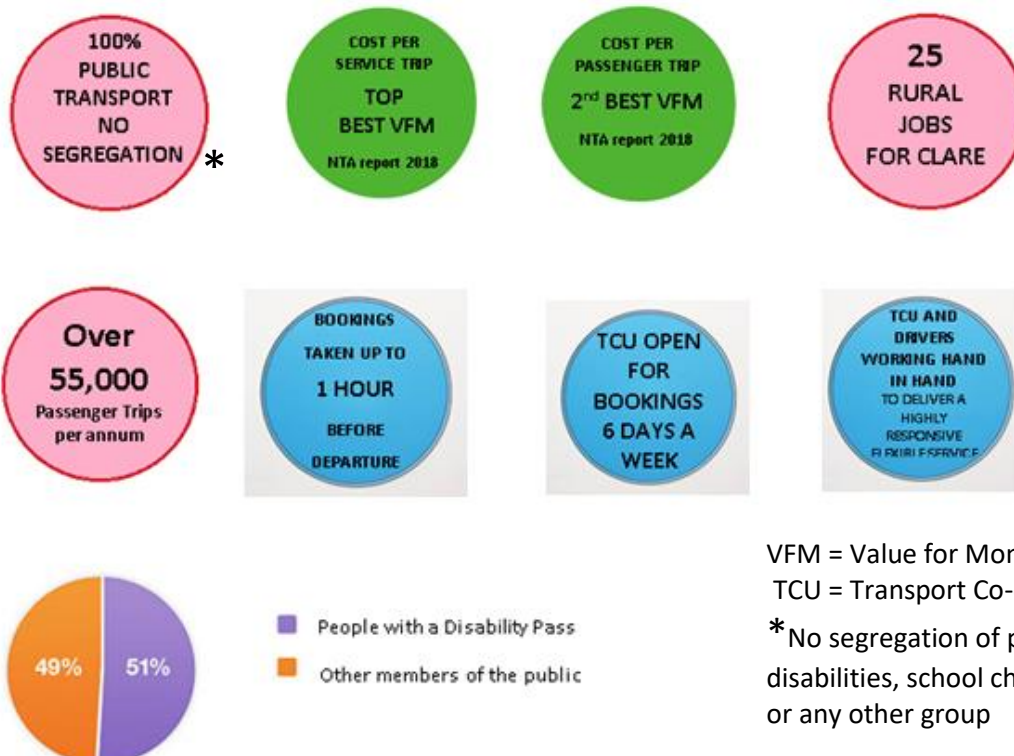
Following a recent tender process Clare Accessible Transport (CAT) has lost the contract for the county's Rural Transport Co-ordination Unit (TCU). The National Transport Authority (NTA) has decided to transfer the co-ordination of transport services to Limerick Local Link which is based in West Limerick. The result breaks up a very successful model demonstrated as one of the most efficient services in the country according to the NTA's own report issued in 2018.

CAT appealed the NTA decision. The NTA notified us that the only recourse to appeal is through the High Court. This effectively means the NTA tender process denies CAT the right to appeal within our means. As a community based company this put us in an extremely vulnerable position. We ask for your support and give details at the end of this document.

How does the NTA's decision impact Clare?

- It would mean 7 part time jobs lost in Clare - 25 rural jobs may be in danger because of this.
- Control of the County's transport co-ordination and planning would go to an agent outside the county severing 16 years' experience of working closely with the Community, Clare County Council, HSE and other state agencies.
- The decision undermines the ethos and effectiveness of the unique community based bus service established in Co. Clare, a service that has become a life line for so many.

CLARE ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT ACHIEVEMENTS



VFM = Value for Money.

TCU = Transport Co-ordination Unit

*No segregation of people with disabilities, school children or any other group

What is Clare Accessible Transport?

Clare Accessible Transport (CAT) is a registered charity and Not for Profit Company. It has delivered community based accessible transport since 2003.

CAT is a locally based transport provider with a local voluntary Board of Management and a staff of 25 from the locality. Services are operated throughout County Clare and parts of South Galway under the trade name of Local Link Clare Bus. Local Link is the new name for Rural Transport.

Clare Accessible Transport has a strong local identity and is a significant local employer.

The company has established a high quality, sustainable public transport service with flexible routing and 100% accessibility facilitating over 55,000 passenger trips in 2018. This has been achieved by working in cooperation with the Community, Local Authority and government agencies at the point of service design, the bus service stands as one of the most cost effective services in the country.

Despite capital funding being unavailable under the Local Link programme, CAT has independently raised almost €1 million capital over the last 16 years to invest in a fleet of 11 low floor easy access buses to ensure equality of access for all.

What is Clare Transport Co-ordination Unit (TCU)?

Will I miss it if it's gone??

When you need to book Clare Bus you contact 'the TCU', this is where the local dispatchers who know all our regular passengers are based. They make sure the drivers have accurate schedules and any additional information they need as the day progresses.

The Dispatchers within Clare TCU are the life force that direct the bus service, look after drivers and above all look after the passengers.

It is where the vision for the Clare service model developed and the planning for future services will come from.

Just as the heart is something you cannot see – the TCU is the hidden enabler of Clare Bus.

If the TCU is taken from our community the Clare Bus service will be a shadow of its former self.

Local knowledge will be lost; drivers will be severed from Dispatchers reducing their level of support and information. Passengers will not have the responsive service that has worked so well for them, particularly safe independent travel for people with learning disabilities.

Taking Dispatchers and local control of service provision and development out of the county potentially puts 25 Clare jobs at risk.

How does CAT provide such a responsive service while achieving one of the highest cost effective results in the country?

A key element of this achievement is the integrated structure between the TCU and the Clare Bus service.

We are very concerned that by separating the dispatchers from the drivers, the people of Clare and South Galway will not receive the same service level or quality of service if the Co-ordination of Clare's services are taken out of the county.

We question if West Limerick have fully considered how they are going to support the current level of flexibility, availability of booking and real time information. All Limericks bus services are outsourced to private operators.

The NTA's own 2018 report shows Clare Bus as one of the best value for money services in the country.

This NTA report shows that the passenger trips for Limerick cost twice as much and their bus services cost

three times as much as Clare Bus. On the basis of this report, comparison costs between Clare and Limerick shows CAT's structure reduces the costs to the Exchequer by in excess of €250,000 per annum.

This comparison demonstrates that the approach of combining the TCU and the bus service in one integrated unit is extremely effective in terms of cost as well as increasing its ability to reach the most isolated people.

Here are 5 key factors that make us such good value:

- The integrated structure of TCU Dispatchers, Drivers and buses enables a highly responsive service ensuring every opportunity is utilised throughout the day with minimum wastage.
- Increased availability – the booking office is open for an additional 6th day with the ability to book up to an hour before departure.
- Resources are maximised by creating a network of responsive services rather than the current A to B structure more commonly used by private operators.
- Flexibly routed services managed by Clare TCU means the bus gets to where the passengers are without unnecessary mileage incurred by fixed routing.
- As a community owned not for profit bus operator we ensure all resources go into the service rather than creating profit.

What are the achievements that make Clare TCU stand out?

- Cost effective services – The NTA’s own 2018 report shows Clare Bus as one of the best value for money services in the country.
- Local dispatchers and highly trained drivers work closely together throughout the day. Two-way feedback supported by a cloud based communication system increases the capacity to respond and to reduce unnecessary time and mileage.
- Implementing a real time system gives us the capacity to take bookings up to one hour before departure making it easier for people to travel when they need to.
- Prioritising people who need our service the most while responding to tourists and anyone else who wish to hop on the bus. Everyone enters the bus by the same entrance whatever their mobility needs.
- Our office is open for bookings 6 days a week instead of only 5 days in other counties.
- Working closely to meet the needs of agencies like the HSE, ETB and Youth Services through a 100% public transport model – no segregation.
- Developing close relationships with Clare County Council and Community Groups on the identification of needs, implementation of new services and promotion of our services.
- Not just A to B service routes but a network offering hop on hop off journeys along the route. Great connections within our own network and national bus and rail services facilitating daily journeys to work, education and training.
- Independently raised almost €1 million capital over the last 16 years to invest in a fleet of 11 low floor easy access buses to ensure access for all at all times. Bringing the accessible features of public transport in our towns to a rural area.

When these features come together, services become useful and a real alternative to the private car. All this makes public transport attractive.



Despite outstanding achievements the NTA have suppressed service development in Clare for the last 2 years. Why?

The Clare TCU has established a progressive working relationship with the Local Authority and other significant agencies like the HSE and Education Boards since 2003. Every opportunity has been maximised by designing and scheduling public services around the requirements of agencies providing essential services.

The Clare approach coordinates different agencies and their service users at the point of design within one public system. This ensures the service works for the people who need it most while offering the most cost effective solution to the State. Examples of co-ordination include Youth Reach, Back to Education, HSE Mental Health, Disability and Older Peoples services.

The Clare model shows that if a strong enough network of high frequency services are established in an area the need for individual transport contracts with each agency is no longer required.

Specific service contracts with private operators are the preferred approach of the NTA. They have rejected the Clare model and have instructed the company not to increase the footprint of Clare Bus. As an isolated bus service it makes Clare Bus more vulnerable to future cuts.

Despite the challenging environment CAT submitted applications for new bus services in the knowledge that these services would be automatically put out to tender under the NTA's model of outsourcing. The NTA have not responded to our applications denying us the opportunity to explore this area.

CLARE ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT APPLIED FOR VITAL NEW BUS SERVICES FOR THE COUNTY INCLUDING HIGH FREQUENCY 7 DAY PER WEEK SERVICES FOR NORTH AND WEST CLARE. THE NTA HAVE FAILED TO RESPOND TO THESE APPLICATIONS FOR UP TO 2 YEARS. EVERY DAYS WAIT IS A LOST OPPORTUNITY FOR OUR COMMUNITY.

CAT TCU is committed to progressing environmental and sustainable development

Clare Accessible Transport has a history of taking a lead in piloting sustainable fuel sources and promoting the shift from the private car to public transport. The TCU has made a number of proposals to pilot electric busses in rural and Ennis based settings with no success to date.

Operating in an unequal environment

As our bus services are not for profit the NTA fund them in a similar way to Bus Éireann under a budget called Direct Award (DA). However the NTA have never issued a contract to CAT for the service or fully disclosed the funding criteria for Direct Award.

Local Link companies funded under Direct Award are not permitted to include depreciation and vehicle replacement in their costs to the NTA, this restriction does not apply to private operators. CAT is the only Local Link Company who operates all bus services with their own fleet. The company purchased low floor buses from the outset purely to ensure equality of access for all as the private sector was unable to invest at this level.

The absence of a contract or guidelines from the NTA on how to allocate costs between the TCU and the bus service put CAT at a serious disadvantage when applying for the tender. The tender process severed the essential element of the TCU placing it isolation from the whole Clare operation. The NTA has refused to acknowledge that the overall costs of the TCU and Bus service are substantially less than in other counties.

NTA Policy change threatens the way the Rural Bus Service is delivered in Clare

Since the NTA took over the control of the Rural Transport Programme (now called Local Link) they have made a significant policy shift to outsource rural transport services to the private sector while systematically undermining not for profit community based transport providers. The result of this policy appears to have increased operational costs while reducing the potential to develop a progressive, sustainable public transport model.

The NTA recently stated that bus services funded under Direct Award such as Clare Bus will not be developed any further, and that these existing services will be subject to tender over the next 4 years.

We have a few days to make the NTA reconsider.

PLEASE VOICE YOUR SUPPORT!

Contact your local representatives;

Ask them to fight to keep County Clare's service safe!

For more information email:

Chris Kidney
ckidney@clarebus.ie

Laura Ward
lward@clarebus.ie

To show your support - sign our on line petition @ www.clarebus.ie also on our FB page

Email: travel@clarebus.ie

CALL 061 924 375

or text only to 086 818 8182