

Opening statement: Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters UNCRPD at a local level - Transport

Iarnród Éireann's vision for rail is to be the backbone of an integrated, sustainable, and accessible public transport network for Ireland. We are committed to continuous improvements in Accessibility, with the overall, ultimate objective of universal access for our customers.

In that context, Iarnród Éireann is committed to achieving the goals of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

To that end Dr Meredith Raley from the Disability Federation of Ireland has briefed senior members of Iarnród Eireann on UNCRPD, including:

- The UN CRPD reporting process.
- Consultation on the State Report
- The DPC Network

Iarnród Éireann has a dedicated Accessibility Officer and engages regularly with disability person organisations and service providers through our Disability User Group and direct 1-1 meetings with each organisation. Our Disability User Group is independently chaired, by Tony Ward who is visually impaired. DUG's mission is to be a key contributor to the transformation of all Iarnród Eireann services to be universally accessible to, and inclusive of, everybody.

The focus of our work is to maximise the quality of service with the infrastructure and facilities we have now, and to ensure that as our investment programme – funded by the National Transport Authority - is delivered, that we are continuously delivering tangible improvements to improve accessibility.

Iarnród Éireann has a Customer Experience team who assist customers with disabilities on their journeys on all rail routes throughout Ireland. Our Customer Experience teams assist 45,000 customers with a disability on a yearly basis, and we

work to continue to enhance that assistance. Current initiatives include the development of an accessibility assistance app, JAM card for those with hidden disabilities, Irish Dementia Working Group workshops to enhance service provision for customers with Dementia, Sensory room for Heuston station and training for Customer Service Officers in Irish Sign Language, with our first group completing this training shortly.

Capital Investment Programme

A major area of focus for our capital investment programme has been to improve existing lifts, and to put in new lifts and footbridges at stations where previously there have been inaccessible platforms.

Lift Renewals

This programme, funded by the NTA, has seen over 50 lifts benefit from upgrades since 2020, ranging from complete replacement to control panel and other system renewals.

Additionally, most of our stations with lifts have the Customer Lift Call system in operation.

The system provides monitored access to lifts to prevent anti-social behaviour, a significant factor in the past in lift availability issues. To access the lift, the customer presses a help point located at each landing of the lift shaft. Our monitored centre, operational at all times when trains are running, immediately see CCTV and can ensure that access for anti-social behaviour reasons is prevented.

The results of lift investment and lift call installation continue to be very positive with a significant reduction in the lifts being out of service. Iarnród Éireann already have a direct report form for customers to provide feedback on Lifts/Escalators etc via the “Contact Us” portal on www.irishrail.ie.

Following consultation with Voice of Vision Impaired and Vision Ireland, new signage is being rolled out to all Lift Call locations.

New lift programme

This continuing programme prioritises those stations where one platform may currently be inaccessible, or where the means of access is significantly short of modern PRM standards.

The latest NTA funding was approved at the start of 2024 for the Accessibility Programme.

Recent investments completed with new lifts now open and operational include at Dalkey, Gormanston and, just last month, Little Island.

I don't intend to read through the full list, but details of ongoing works, including planning phases is below:

Banteer station – Construction works (Jons Civils) commenced 4th July 2023 proposed to complete footbridge and open to the Public in June 2024

Rathmore station – Tender issued Jan 2024 and tenders returned and evaluations complete. Construction works to commence in May 2024 and complete by March 2025.

Athy station – (new footbridge with lifts) Planning approved, Tender to be issued June 2024.

Rathdrum station – Planning approved, Tender to be issued June 2024.

Maynooth station – (new footbridge with lifts) Section 5 Application for planning exemption issued March 2024 – Detail design to commence in April 2024 and Tender to issue in July 2024.

Boyle station – Planning approved, detailed design to commence June 2024.

Claremorris station – (New footbridge with lifts) Planning approved, detailed design to commence June 2024.

Rushbrooke station – (New footbridge with lifts) - Full planning application to be lodged in April 2024.

Glounthaune station – (New footbridge with lifts) Consultant working on completion of Construction Environmental management plan & Foreshore license. Proposed that planning will be lodge in July 2024.

Wicklow Station – (Planning expected to lodge in Q4 2024, in conjunction with a larger scheme for Wicklow CC)

Arklow station – (New footbridge with lifts) Detailed design to commence Q1 2025.

Longford station - (New footbridge with lifts) Planning design complete – revised Full planning application lodged in November 2023. Longford CC have reverted looking for additional information in Feb 2024.

Preliminary design works are also underway for a further 15 stations, detailed below.

- Gorey
- Roscommon
- Enniscorthy
- Dromod
- Rosslare Strand
- Farranfore
- Mhuine Beag
- Fota
- Castlerea
- Ballyhaunis
- Carrigaloe
- Drumcondra
- Broombridge
- Kilcock
- Leixlip Louisa Bridge

New Alstom Fleet

One of the most significant improvements currently underway is the new DART+ fleet. A total of 185 carriages are on order from leading fleet manufacturer Alstom Transport. Construction is underway at their plant in Katowice, Poland, with delivery beginning later this year, and the new trains entering service from late 2025.

Ultimately, up to 750 carriages are set to be ordered over a ten-year period for the expanded DART+ network and beyond, the largest, most sustainable, and most accessible fleet to date in our public transport network.

The Disability User Group (DUG) were part of the design phase process to gather feedback for the interior and exterior design of the new fleet.

The DUG attended several workshops hosted by Behaviour & Attitudes to gather feedback as well as two visits to view mock-ups in Inchicore.

Accessibility is a key deliverable of DART+ fleet and an objective of IÉ and the NTA for the ongoing expansion of the railway as a major public transport provider. The key accessibility issue from a train interface perspective is the platform gap and platform height. Great effort went into the specification of the new DART+ trains to ensure passenger accessibility is transformed on the DART railway. The vehicle tenderers were incentivised to focus on the carriage floor height above platform, proposals to address the platform gap as well as accessibility and features for mobility impaired customers.

Station Wayfinding

Our Disability User Group were involved in design phase of Station Wayfinding project with several consultation sessions at Killester station which was used as the pilot station due to its proximity to Central Remedial Clinic and Irish Wheelchair Association.

The programme of replacement has been completed at **114 stations with a further 22 to be completed** this year.

Quieter Coach

Following consultation with our Disability User Group, the Quieter Coach was launched on the Dublin to Cork route in 2022 with positive feedback received particularly those with a disability. We are in discussions with Translink about expanding this to the Dublin to Belfast route on the existing Enterprise fleet.

Sensory Packs

Sensory packs are available for customers with additional sensory challenges. Our Disability User Group advised on contents. These packs contain ear defenders, sunglasses and a fidget spinner and are distributed to customers travelling by rail

with additional needs. These packs are free of charge and proved extremely popular with customers.

Accessibility Training

All customer-facing staff of the company are provided with accessibility training. A current procurement process is underway to provide training to all our 1500 frontline staff. Our vision is to offer best in class accessibility training to our frontline staff who interact with customers with a disability daily. UNCRPD briefing is included in training specification.

Changing Places facilities

Changing Places facilities are designed to enhance the health, safety, comfort and dignity of people who may need extra support and additional equipment during personal care tasks. They have many features and additional equipment that enhance accessibility over standard accessible toilets.

Connolly Changing Places facility opened in May 2021, the first in the Dublin 1 area, while Heuston Changing Places opened to the public in September 2022 with Colbert Station in Limerick opening imminently, with plans for further installation in Sligo and Athlone next year.

As detailed, we are committed to continuous improvement, in all aspects of what we do, and we would be happy to take any questions the Committee may have.