

Submission no: 184



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16th November 2020

Re: Submission to the Clare County Development Plan 2022-2028

Dear Sir/Madam,

Local Link Limerick Clare welcomes the pre-draft stage consultation on the Clare County Development Plan 2022-2028. We submit the following observations for the Councils consideration which may inform the preparation of the Draft County Development Plan. We are also available for any further consultation if required.

Local Link Limerick Clare is the Rural Transport Programme TCU (Transport Coordination Unit) for Limerick and Clare. The Rural Transport Programme is funded by the Department of Transport administered by the National Transport Authority. In Clare all our transport services are currently Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) but our model to sub contract services to bus operators still remains. TFI Local Link is one of the Transport For Ireland suite of public transport providers.

In an ideal world, a passenger should be able to step outside their door and within a reasonable distance connect with a bus service which links them to a local town or facility. Rural transport services are an important component of daily life linking people with jobs, education, healthcare, shopping and recreation/tourist facilities. The design of a sustainable transport infrastructure has a fundamental impact on the health and wellbeing of people in the community. It helps address social isolation, improves overall accessibility and provides opportunities for active regular transport and daily physical activity.

With this in mind, Local Link Limerick Clare's strategic plan outlines how we are researching the expansion of current high quality public transport associated with Rural Transport Services. And developing new transport solutions to ensure that existing gaps in service provision are addressed.

Ongoing Research:-

- Increased connectivity with existing high frequency services
- Introduction of new high frequency services
- Seasonal Tourism Services
- Ennis Town Service
- Integrated ticketing
- Bus Infrastructure – Bus Stop Locations and branding
- Electric Bus fast charge locations
- Participation in Local Development Plan's

CONNECTIVITY

Realising Our Rural Potential – Action Plan for Rural Development 2017 published by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht identified under Pillar 5 of the Programme Improving Rural Infrastructure and Connectivity objectives included improved transport links.

Rural Transport Programme mission statement is ‘to provide a quality nationwide community based public transport system in rural Ireland which response to local needs’

Regional Policy Objective 172 – It is an objective to expand the development and expansion of the Local Link Rural Transport Programme by the NTA in the following manner, which seeks further integration with other public transport services, including HSE and school, better linkage of services between towns, villages and rural areas, ensures fully accessible vehicles operate on all services, enhances the customer experience, increases patronage among children and young people; and encourages innovation in the service.

Key questions from the Strategic Issues Paper for the County Development Plan for the period 2022-2028 include:

- How can we best promote and support a modal shift towards more sustainable modes of transport?
- In your opinion, what needs to be done to improve accessibility to rural areas?
- In your opinion, what are the key transport and mobility issues affecting residents, workers and visitors?

Local Link Limerick Clare’s goal is to promote connectivity with other public transport providers in the Limerick and Clare catchment area. Coordinate delivery of Rural Transport Programme and consolidate, sustain and expand existing rural transport services. Identify changes in rural transport environment and provide service solutions in those areas where there is an unmet demand and research innovative methods of meeting that need. Continue to provide accessible transport and support those in isolation. Improve efficiency of transport services through technology resources.

Local Link public transport services in Clare:-

135 Demand Responsive Door to Door Services (DRT) – these services can operate outside of the fixed route, they are responsive to request to services by passengers and are operated by making specific trips to pick up and drop off at passengers’ door. All buses are wheelchair accessible.

Proposed Growth

- Increase frequency of once a week services to accommodate commuter times and feed into the current public mainstream transport and train stations, providing a larger network of connectivity.
- To seek further integration with other public transport services, including HSE and school transport;
- Enhance the customer experience.
- Increase patronage among children and young people.
- Encourage innovation in the service.
- Establish Rural Regular Services within the County
- Further enhance social inclusion through the continued provision of an equitable transport network.
- Continue to provide and expand a reliable public transport service to cater for areas of deprivation.

Draft Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy 2040 (LSMATS)

In Chapter three, ‘study area and transport context’, we acknowledge mention that the LSMA is served by Local Link services.

As mentioned on page fifty-four of the strategy Local Link complements the proposed bus network and local metropolitan town services.

Objective BC6 of the strategy states that ‘It is the intention of the NTA and the local authorities to maintain and enhance Local Link services where required.’

Objective BC4 of the strategy regarding 'Shannon Bus Connectivity' is crucially important. We support efforts to improve local and regional bus connectivity to Shannon town centre, employment areas and the Airport. Local Link Limerick Clare stand ready to facilitate those improvements where necessary.

The proposed shuttle service from Sixmilebridge railway station to Shannon is highlighted in the Draft Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy and is also contained with the existing Clare County Development Plan. Local Link Limerick Clare have forged very positive relationships with bus operators in Clare and priority areas two and four of our own strategic plan align with this objective. That being, researching integration options with other public transport providers and identify gaps in service where new routes can be developed.

In terms of rail, LLLC already serve Ennis train station and serve Sixmilebridge with demand responsive pick-ups from Sixmilebridge railway station.

Ennis Transport Hub as contained in the Draft Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy 2040

The vast majority of Local Link Limerick Clare's services serve Clare's county town. We acknowledge the strong role Ennis has in transport connections to other towns and villages in County Clare. We support Objective SM2 to '*support Ennis as a mobility hub for County Clare*'. LLLC ask for consideration for inclusion in the consultation process in respect to a Local Transport Plan for Ennis.

It is our intention to grow services in Ennis for example an Ennis Town Service, contained within our strategic plan. We will support the recommendation in LSMATS to enhance services between Ennis and Shannon and Limerick, supporting its role as a mobility hub for County Clare.

Some of Local Link Limerick Clare's other proposed new services include:

- Regular Rural Service (RRS) Labasheeda - Killimer - Kilrush to Ennis including Ennis which would amount to six trips daily Monday-Saturday.
- Demand Responsive Travel (DRT) Ennis - Crusheen - Ruan - Corofin – Ennistymon which would amount to two trips bi-weekly on a Tuesday.
- RRS - Ennis, Ennistymon - Lisdoonvarna - Cliffs of Moher - Lahinch - Spanish Point - Miltown Malbay – Ennis, six trips daily Monday-Saturday.

In the area of encouraging innovation in rural transport LLLC's key actions include:

- Continue to research international rural transport for best practice.
- Research options in Clare for pilot of electric bus working with Councillors and Clare County Council.
- Evaluate if night service model is suited to launch in Clare.
- Promote transport connections to networks of walkways and cycleway facilities.
- Promote Community Car scheme as a model for hospital appointments.



ACCESSIBILITY

NTA Local Link Rural Transport Programme Strategic Plan 2018-2022

Lack of access caused by inadequate public transport is a major cause of rural social exclusion. The potential for more flexible forms of transport such as Demand Responsive services play a vital role in connecting people in rural areas to the services and amenities they rely on daily.

Local Link Limerick Clare Identifies:

- Unmet need in towns/villages that are not being serviced
- Connectivity to high employment areas or third level education
- Research integration options with other public transport providers
- Increase public transport on-going connectivity between towns/villages

It is recommended that the Development Plan acknowledges the role rural transport services can perform in providing for social and economic connectivity between small villages/rural areas and larger towns. Policies and objectives to support the role of rural transport should be included in the Plan

ACCESS FOR ALL

NTA Local Link Rural Transport Programme Strategic Plan 2018-2022

“The lack of provision of an appropriate and adequate level of public transport significantly diminishes the quality of life for people who are heavily dependent on it. This impacts on their ability to pursue education, attend training courses, work outside the home or live in the area of their choice. They cannot participate in social activities on the same basis as their non-disabled peers. This can be particularly acute in rural areas of Ireland where no public transport service is available and where there is a need for further support in the development of innovative initiatives, within rural communities, to provide local accessible transport.”

Clare Rural Development Strategy 2026

It is relevant to draw from Clare County Council’s rural development strategy. It acknowledges the importance of bus services in these areas and the important role they will play into the future.

‘Innovative rural transport initiatives, such as ‘rural uber’, ‘community car-pooling’, ‘befriending transport’ and community bus services, among other initiatives will be developed to supplement the current rural provision. These initiatives will extend the times of availability and reduce costs to the traveller.’

It also states that in the absence of public transport and modern ICT, many people are likely to be living in physical, social and psychological isolation.

Accessible travel is an on-going endeavour to ensure all operators provide safe, accessible and friendly access to all its passengers, regardless of their mobility difficulties, age or disabilities. All vehicles in service in Clare are Wheelchair Accessible, 93% low floor model.

‘Combined’ Towns and ‘Partnering’ Parishes

LLC supports the ‘Combined’ Towns and ‘Partnering’ Parishes proposal within the document. In essence it is about providing special supports for combined towns and partnering parishes so that they can achieve sufficient scale of population and resources to attract public investment and justify private investment.

‘1.4.2 Focusing on towns and villages and ensuring accessible public and private services. If our rural communities are to have a future, they need to have a growing population that is economically active and socially engaged and which can access quality public and private services.’

This means that existing communities will be supported by a special 'rural and community support unit' in working together. Combined towns and partnering parishes will aim to be large enough to justify the maintenance of public facilities and services (e.g. education, transport, leisure and recreation, health, education, welfare, security and employment) ...'

Local Link Limerick Clare aims to make towns and villages in County Clare more connected through the provision of regular and reliable services. We will identify changes in the rural transport environment and provide service solutions in those areas where there is an unmet demand and research innovative methods of meeting that need.

County Clare Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021

In this plan under the theme of quality of life, health and wellbeing, high level goal 7 point 6.2 states that a goal is to '*Research the County's Transport Infrastructure (Physical infrastructure, Routes, Vehicles, Timetable, Shelters, etc)*'

Its indicators for success include:

- No. of transport initiatives provided and people availing of these.
- No. of locations/facilities served
- No. of communities served and passenger trips generated
- No. transferring between services at connecting points
- No. and location of bus stops/shelters installed with timetable and service information

A short term goal contained within the Local Link Limerick Clare Strategic Plan 2020 states that we will plan and assist the implementation of identified Bus Stops, Bus Shelters and Bus Timetable information.

Local Link Limerick Clare's goal is very much to build recognition of Local Link as the information hub for all transport in County Clare.

Local Link Limerick Clare's priority area 2; Route Development and Expansion in its strategic plan wishes to deepen linkage with the local authority and increase public transport on-going connectivity between towns and villages. With all stakeholders working together the above goal in the County Clare Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021 can be delivered.

ENVIRONMENTAL

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy - Regional Policy Objective 140 - International Connectivity

The RSES also outlines the importance the role of our strategic road and sustainable transport networks including connectivity to the TEN-T Core and Comprehensive Network, while also seeking to support infrastructure for electric and low carbon fuel infrastructure along TEN-T Core and Comprehensive Network.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy - Regional Policy Objective 161 - Smart Mobility

It is an objective to support the transformative potential of E-Mobility, autonomous vehicles, Mobility as a Service transport solutions and other emerging innovations in the transport and mobility sector through transport planning at regional, metropolitan and local level.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy - Regional Policy Objective 171

...enhanced rural bus services including Local Link and community bus services, upgrade of bus fleet to low carbon/low emission, buses to be accessible for all and support direct inter-regional bus services between the cities and key access points such as airports.

The National Transport Authority completed the Low Emission Bus Trial in 2018-2019, to test a range of technologies and fuels under real-driving conditions on selected Dublin and Cork routes. The findings of the Low-Emission Bus Trial show that electric buses performed strongly across a range of metrics. In addition, hybrid-electric technology, where deployed in conjunction with hydro treated vegetable oil also emerged as a potentially viable alternative, as did gas buses when run on bio methane (bio-CNG). As a result of this trial the NTA commenced procurement for 600 double deck hybrid buses to be purchased over a five-year period. These are city and city link buses which align with the TEN-

