



The Office of the Ombudsman  
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Dear Ombudsman

As you are aware, at the request of the former Taoiseach, the Department of the Taoiseach convened a Senior Officials Group to look into issues with transport services for those with a disability with a view to identifying measures which will provide greater independence, and enhance their ability and empower them to plan and live their lives as they choose.

The group reviewed current supports and services to identify where the issues and service gaps are. Based on this work, it is considered that a tiered approach to supports and service provision is required, to include improving mainstream public transport services, targeted services based on need and individual supports based on individual circumstances. These are not quick fixes but would take time to establish and implement.

The group considered appropriate principles to guide work in this area including “*mainstream first*” as per the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Following a mainstream first approach, improvements in public transport is considered the most appropriate first step in improving transport services for those with disabilities. Of course, notwithstanding any such improvements, there will always be a cohort who cannot use mainstream public transport for different reasons. Additional supports and services will be required for those cohorts.

Work underway to improve public transport accessibility includes accessible vehicles and infrastructure; expansion of the Travel Assistance Scheme; and continuation of other travel supports such as Demand Responsive Transport (DRT); Just a Minute Card, Wayfinding Centre, “*Please Offer Me a Seat*” campaign, and Quieter Carriages. Mainstream services are being complemented by targeted pilots such as Community Car/Transport Scheme; Local Area Hackney Scheme; and a Leitrim Pilot under which services are designed to meet the needs of mainstream public transport users as well as the transport needs of passengers accessing non-emergency health care services in the county.



Further work under development includes a Smart DRT pilot (i.e. a mobile app-based platform to use DRT services - offered both on demand and pre-planned), planned for 2025; and a further area based pilot with learnings from Leitrim, potentially taking a layered approach to transport services in a selected geographical area. This would include individual or collective use services that may be door-to-door transport, other community-level services or shared vehicles/community cars pools for local use. The purpose would be to provide these non-conventional modes of transport alongside mainstream services and to assess with greater precision what cohorts remain whose needs cannot be met by the various schemes and services available. We will continue to engage with the Department of Transport on this.

Regarding vehicle adaptations, limitations with the current Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme are recognised. Work is underway to consider the replacement of the current scheme with alternative vehicular adaptation schemes which would meet adaptation needs, rather than the current limiting medical criteria. A working group is being established to progress this workstream.

Broader than transport, there are other relevant workstreams in progress which may be of interest to you. We had previously mentioned the *Green Paper on Disability Reform – A Public Consultation to Reform Disability Payments in Ireland*. The Minister for Social Protection announced on 12 April 2024 that the Green Paper proposals would not go ahead.

Conscious of the various assessment processes that exist for different supports, resource constraints, and the forthcoming *European Disability Card Directive*, a separate working group is being established: to look at assessment processes and resources across the system for services such as aids and appliances, transport supports, housing adaptations etc.; to identify options to maximise those resources e.g. consolidation of resources/shared services/common assessments; and to consider the forthcoming requirements for provision of EU Disability Cards including any domestic benefits that could be gained from these obligations.

The National Disability Strategy, currently under development, will provide an opportunity to progress transport matters in the integrated manner required to make meaningful progress. Transport that enables disabled people to travel independently, including those in rural areas, has been identified as strong point of focus and is currently intended to be a pillar in the strategy. While it is intended that the work of the senior officials group will transition to the implementation and oversight structures that will be established under the strategy, Department of Taoiseach will continue to have an active



role through the work of the Cabinet Committee on Children and Education and Disability recently established by the Taoiseach Simon Harris T.D. which will oversee the implementation of Programme for Government commitments in the area of disability, with a particular focus on the forthcoming new National Disability Strategy.

My colleagues and I remain available to engage with you on these matters.

Elizabeth Canavan

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