



A Manifesto for Rail Passengers

Platform 11, the National Rail Users Organisation, has devised a list of issues that need to be addressed in relation to the provision of rail transport in Ireland. As we approach the General Election, our comprehensive list is designed to promote a broad spectrum of ideas, that run from major infrastructural and planning projects to more customer focused plans that include excellent service and security provision on our rail network. All of the ideas we are promoting are in the interests of Ireland's rail users. They are important and easily achievable goals that will ultimately lead to benefits for Ireland's rail users and potential rail users.

We will circulate this list of requests to the Minister for Transport and all transport spokespersons/leaders in all other political parties. We believe that the list is forward thinking, long overdue and a demonstration in how Ireland's growing number of rail users should be facilitated.

1. Creation of a Dedicated Transport Police

Anti social behaviour is a serious issue to passengers on all forms of public transport and is without a doubt making people think twice of travelling particularly at night. Vandalism, trespass, alcohol and general hooliganism are serious issues, resulting in delays, cancellations, injuries to staff and passengers, resulting in substantial costs on transport providers and public inconvenience.

A dedicated police force suitably trained in matters of rail and tram safety procedures should be provided to restore public confidence in public transport after dark.

2. Accessibility Legislation

Currently there exists no legislation on the Irish statute, which enforces

accessibility on rail based public transport. Iarnród Éireann have given an undertaking to the Department of Transport to apply the UK Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (RVAR 1999). However since this is not enforced the vast majority of modern rail coaches are not fully accessible.

Given the possibility of private operators operating rail services in the future it important that legislation is in place that all rail passengers are provided with accessible services to the highest industry standards. The agreement Iarnród Éireann have with the Department of Transport has no legal status, Iarnród Éireann knowingly have breached the agreement on several occasions. The heavy financial penalties in place in the UK are not enforceable here without legislation.

A bill should be brought before the Houses of the Oireachtas to address these issues by enacting into law a similar piece of legislation adopting the same technical standards of the UK RVAR legislation which is seen as best practice by the European rail industry and to which all Irish trains are specified to already. Given cross border services it is preferable to ensure technical standards with respect of accessibility be the same Island wide.

3. Political Appointees

The current practice of political appointees to the boards of CIE and the RPA should be stopped and instead the positions should be filled in an open and transparent manner. Board members should be selected on the merit of their professional experience in the public transport field be it in terms of infrastructure or service provision.

4. Accountability

Currently Iarnród Éireann are self-regulating and the Department of Transport doesn't independently verify the information provided by Iarnród Éireann. The agreement in place is lax and is best described as what Iarnród Éireann want to provide in service terms not what is actually needed.

The current memorandum of agreement between the Department of Transport and Iarnród Éireann makes it explicitly clear that it has no legal or contractual status, making the agreement worthless.

A revised and strengthened agreement should be drawn up by

independent consultants and be made legally binding as to enforce agreed service levels and to penalise Iarnród Éireann for the constant failure to deliver a respectable service.

5. Passengers as board members of CIE & RPA

That there shall be at least one passenger representative on the boards of all state owned public transport operators in the interests of ensuring the service is operated for the public and not for the interests of the companies involved. Staff are already represented. It seems only fair that the primary funder and user of the service, the taxpayer be given the right to directly influence decisions.

6. Dublin Transport Authority

Irrespective of the position of the state bodies involved a independent DTA should be put in place and provided with sufficient funding to make a difference as soon as practical. Thought should be also given to the formation of regional transport authorities in Cork, Limerick and Galway.

7. Where does the profit on sale of former rail land go?

CIE property receives millions in rent on the various lands and developments they have undertaken. These funds are supposed to be invested in public transport but there is no sign of this anywhere in the CIE accounts.

All value obtained from land occupied or previously used by Iarnród Éireann should be returned to the company in the interests of funding a better service and indeed clearing its colossal debt.

8. Customer Charter

A legally binding, independently monitored customer charter written with the passenger in mind should be provided for both Iarnród Éireann, Luas and Metro.

The performance standards should be brought in line with European standards, which are much stricter than those currently used in Ireland.

9. Public Transport Users Ombudsman

The public transport operators, the CIE group in particular deal with passenger complaints in a highly variable manner. In many cases the operator won't change there ways, offer any compensation or indeed respond at all. In line with other regulated industries an ombudsman should be appointed to ensure that passengers unhappy with the response of the transport provider can seek redress and that the ombudsman can force improvements.

10. Infrastructural Investment

The projects listed in Transport 21 must be ordered such that the projects, which offer the greatest impact in terms of passenger numbers carried and congestion reduction, be given priority. This should be done in a manner not to delay any currently underway projects.

Consideration should be given to projects ignored by Transport 21 such as the reopening of the Mullingar - Athlone rail line, suburban rail services in Limerick and the extension of the DART to Kildare and Drogheda as was proposed by Iarnród Éireann but rejected by Government.

11. Tax Incentives on Annual Tickets

The current tax saver at source scheme for annual bus/rail/luas tickets discriminates against the self-employed, those on short-term contracts and those working for companies who refuse to take part in the scheme. There is no legal obligation on the employer to offer the scheme, many who wish to avail cannot.

The scheme should be altered such that employers with over 50 staff should be legally obliged to offer at source deduction over 12 months for annual tickets under the existing scheme.

Where the individual is self-employed on short-term contracts or working for a company below the 50 staff threshold, provision should be made for the employee to seek equivalent tax credit from revenue commissioners upon submission of a receipt in a format agreeable to the revenue commissioners from the transport provider.

12. Station Car Parking

Car parking and ease of access to stations is a growing issue with the ever-growing sprawl. Platform 11 believes that the current philosophy

of ever expanding car parks is unsustainable in terms of both cost and availability of land and fails to resolve the fundamental issue, people drive since they have no other way to get to the station.

A more sustainable solution is the free town bus service. Such are common in Europe, allowing residents to access the town centre and amenities as well as the train station without the need to resort to cars. This avoids the need for massive car parks and reduces local traffic.

Current stated Iarnród Éireann board policy is to apply a charge for all new or extended station car parks which goes against the entire principle of providing parking at stations, to get people out of their cars.

13. Railway Byelaws

The last revision of the byelaws concerning rail travel occurred in 1984. Since then a number of issues have arisen which have a serious negative effect on the experience of rail passengers.

In the interest of the passenger, section 6 of SI 109 1984 should be revoked. This section prevents passengers from purchasing a ticket to a station beyond their destination, which is cheaper than a ticket to their actual destination. A similar rule was revoked in the UK over 10 years ago. The current byelaw allows Iarnród Éireann to rip off its customers and restricts consumer choice.

That a new byelaw stating that consumption of alcohol be prohibited on all trains so designated. There appears to be no support in law or penalty for drinking on a train where the operator wishes to ban such.

14. Safety & Overcrowding

Currently there exists no standards or regulations concerning passengers standing on trains. Overcrowding is a serious concern on both Intercity and Suburban services. It is rare that the transport operator shows any consideration for the comfort of passengers.

The Railway Safety Commission should be instructed to devise a standard concerning standing passengers taking account of trains

designed to accommodate standees e.g. DART and those which are not
e.g. Intercity.