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Department of Transport

'A forward-looking rural vision implemented through a whole-of-government strategy and rural proofing'

Clare O'Connell
Public Transport Corporate and
Services Division

Rural proofing challenges for public transport in Ireland

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A third of Irish people are living outside the cities and main towns.

Not all rural communities have the same needs; widely differing population density, geography and access to services.

The challenge is to design and implement an effective whole of government process for the delivery of rural proofing, more meaningful in terms of outcomes for differing rural communities, and practical for officials to implement.

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Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan

Key features

- A **5-year programme** of public transport network improvements outside of the metropolitan areas and large towns.
- Creating a more integrated, and sustainable public transport network for rural Ireland
- Connecting smaller settlements to their nearby larger urban centres
- Complemented by pilots on n**on-conventional** transport improvements
- Core Objectives: Quantity, Quality, Utility, Plan-led



Implementation timeline

2019 - 2021

1

Analysis of Existing Network & Stakeholder Engagement

2021

2

Public Consultation

2022

3

Phase 1 implementation

(accelerated due to demands arising from Ukrainian Crisis)

2023

4

Phase 2 implementation

2024 - 2026

5

Phase 3 – 5 implementation

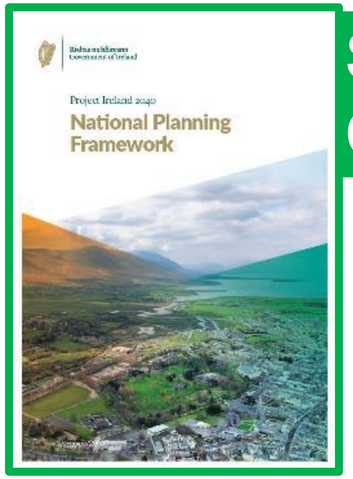
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Connecting Ireland
Rural Mobility Plan

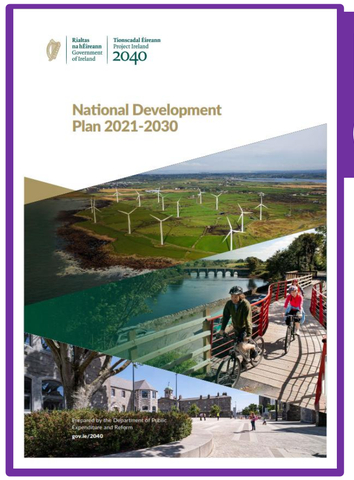
Key connections to;

- 41 higher education facilities,
- 61 healthcare facilities
- 71 connections to rail services allowing passengers to connect to the wider TFI network.
- Over 240 towns and villages have been connected to the public transport network.
- more than 8 million passenger journeys recorded across Connecting Ireland services in 2025.
- 188 new or enhanced routes since 2022

Policy Framework



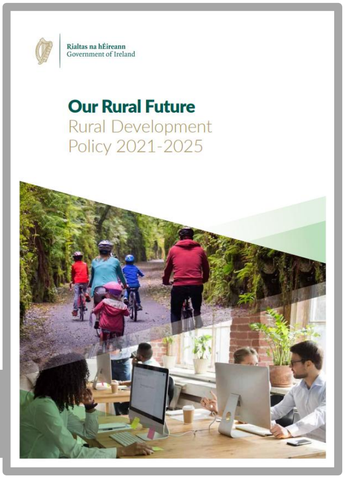
Strategic Outcomes: “Sustainable Mobility, Enhanced Regional Connectivity, Strengthened Rural Economies”



Major Investment: “Better public transport through the Connecting Ireland bus programme”



2030: 500,000 additional trips by Sustainable Modes



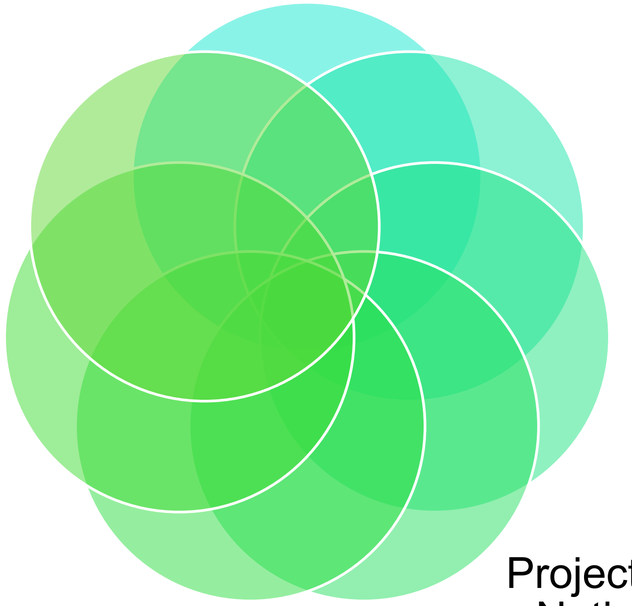
Our Rural Future

Policy alignment

United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

National Sustainable Mobility Policy 2022 - 2030

European Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy



National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland

Climate Action Plan

Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021 – 2025 & 2026-2031

Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework & National Development Plan 2021 – 2030

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TFI local link

- TFI Local Link is here to serve rural communities across Ireland with safe, reliable, and inclusive transport
- Rapid rise in passenger numbers: by 47% year-on-year to 6.97 million in 2025.
- RTP saves €33m worth of carbon in present terms over the next 20 years.
- More than 100,000 weekly rural trips.

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Smart Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services

- With funding under the Climate Action Fund, the NTA have implemented a pilot hree areas in 2025 as part of the Connecting Ireland Plan.

- The TFI Anseo app is a new smart demand responsive transport service providing both local trips and integrated ‘first and last mile’ connections to fixed route bus and rail services.

- This Anseo app is now operating in Achill, Killarney and Northeast of Limerick City.

Future Integrations?

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Smart Demand Responsive Transport services

Any future expansion will be subject to a full review of the pilots, during Q1 of 2027, and subject to funding and resource availability.

School Transport/Public Transport integration

The Department of Transport, the Department of Education, the NTA, and Bus Éireann ST/PT Steering Group will conduct a full review of the pilot which will inform any future pilot plans.

Health Services Transport /Public Transport Integration

From 2021 to 2024 a three-year pilot between the NTA, TFI Local Link Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim and the HSE was implemented. It was designed to meet the needs of mainstream ‘open’ public transport users as well as the transport needs of passengers with disabilities and those accessing non-emergency health care services in Leitrim, previously carried on the HSE’s ‘closed’ transport services.

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