



**Determination of Child Fares on Public Transport in the  
Dublin Area and Regional Cities**

**Determination No. 4 – 2014**

**June 2014**

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## 1. Executive Summary

The Authority has examined ways to simplify and streamline the current confusing fares structures for children and teens, as each operator currently applies different age categories, different fare-types and different rules.

This paper sets out the current situation in relation to child / schoolchild /scholar fares for children and school going children in secondary education up to 18 years of age. Currently there is great confusion amongst parents in relation to child / schoolchild /scholar fares with 16 different cash fares and a similar number of Leap card/smartcard fares operated by three public transport operators in the Dublin region – Dublin Bus, Irish Rail and Luas. Bus Éireann has child fares on its stage carriage, commuter and regional city services and schoolchild fares on its regional city services.

Child fares are available for children up to 15 years old on all State operators but at widely varying discounts.

Over the past decade or more the number of children remaining in full time secondary education has grown and currently over 90% of children who enter secondary school remain in school until they complete their Leaving Certificate exams. As the majority of secondary school children also do transition year they spend 6 years in secondary school and are at least 18 years old when completing their secondary education.

Schoolchild fares (i.e. heavily discounted single fare and on Iarnród Éireann return fare during school term time) for local journeys are available on 3 of the 4 State Operators – Luas being the exception. However Luas child fares are similar to current schoolchild fares offered by the other public transport operators.

Currently both Dublin Bus and Irish Rail offer scholar product fares to schoolchildren aged between 16 and 18 inclusive while Luas and Bus Éireann do not offer scholar fares. School going children aged 16 to 18 can purchase student fares on Luas or Bus Éireann but student fares are 30% to 40% dearer than child fares and are not available for single or return journeys.

As the technology supporting the Irish Rail scholar product is being discontinued this year and as it is also necessary to address the confusion regarding child / schoolchild /scholar product fares, change is needed and should be introduced for the new school year in late August 2014.

Following an analysis of the current situation and a number of possible options to simplify the current situation the Authority determined that the current upper age limit for child fares should be increased from 15 years of age up to 18 years of age inclusive for those using child Leap cards before the new school year in August. Initially children aged 16 to 18 years old can avail of the child fares on Dublin Bus, Luas, on Iarnród Éireann in the Dublin short hop zone and on Bus Éireann services in the Greater Dublin Area and the Greater Cork Area. As Leap is rolled out to Galway city in late 2014 and Limerick city and Waterford city in 2015 the revised child ages will become available to the older children.

The Authority has also determined that children 3 years of age and under should travel free on public transport thereby increasing the free travel age by 1 year.

## **2. Introduction**

The National Transport Authority (the Authority) entered into a Public Service Contract with Dublin Bus, Iarnród Éireann and Bus Éireann in December 2009 for the provision of passenger and ancillary services. The services the three companies provide under this contract are not commercial and attract a public service obligation payment in line with EU regulation 1370/07. The three companies are 100% owned by Córas Iompair Éireann (CIÉ) and CIÉ is a statutory body with ownership vested in the Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport.

The Authority also has the statutory obligation to secure the provision of light railway passenger services in the Greater Dublin Area. The Authority has currently assigned these functions to the Railway Procurement Authority (RPA). Transdev Ireland operates Luas, Dublin's light rail tram system, under contract with the RPA.

Fare alterations on Dublin Bus, Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann and Luas require the prior approval of the Authority.

## **3. Current situation**

Children and school children aged 15 years and younger can avail of discounted fares on each of the four main public transport State operators, namely, Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus, Irish Rail and Luas. In general they can avail of fares offering a discount on adult fares of between 40% and 70% depending on the operator used, the time of travel and the distance travelled.

Schoolchild fares offered by the three CIÉ operators are a flat fare regardless of distance travelled.

Once a child reaches the age of 16 they can no longer avail of child or schoolchild fares due to the age limits. All four operators offer student fares to full time secondary and third level students aged 16 years and over on production of a valid student ID. However in general student fares are about twice the schoolchild fare so for example a child who was paying 90 cent on the Luas per single trip would spend €18 for a student 7-day flexi ticket or the equivalent of €1.80 per single trip based on 10 trips to school per week once they turn 16. For the regular user of public transport to get to school the Leap daily and weekly caps for students are twice or more the child caps.

However both Dublin Bus and Irish Rail offer scholar fares via ticket products for pupils in secondary school aged 16 to 18 years where the prices are dearer than schoolchild (50% dearer on Dublin Bus and up to 100% dearer on the longer Irish Rail journeys) but cheaper than student products in most cases. However pupils travelling by Luas or Bus Éireann do not have this option and must avail of the more expensive student fares.

The schoolchild and scholar fares are only available during school term but depending on the operator the product fare may be only usable up to 17:00 or up to 19:00 during the school week. Two of the operators offer the school fares on a Saturday morning up to 13:30 while the third does not offer a school fare anytime on a Saturday.

Child and schoolchild fares are available by paying cash or by simple validation with the Leap card and Leap pricing is cheaper than cash pricing. However the scholar fare is only available as a smart 10 journey ticket on Dublin Bus and on the Irish Rail interim smartcard. The technology behind the Irish Rail interim smartcard is due to be withdrawn over the summer months this year.

Currently for child / schoolchild /scholar travel there are 28 different fares, 11 cash, 11 Leap, 4 Irish Rail interim smartcard and 2 smart tickets covering the various child / schoolchild /scholar fares for the three public transport operators operating in Dublin. This along with the various conditions applying to some of the fares understandably leads to great confusion and, furthermore, creates the impression of a complicated and opaque public transport system with attendant long – term negative resonances for children and young adults.

As the technology currently used for the Iarnród Éireann scholar fares is being withdrawn this summer the immediate question arises as to how to cater for the secondary school pupils 16 years and older. When the current fare structure was set up a large proportion of children did not attend school at and beyond 16 years old. As more 16 year old children remained in full time education the scholar fares were introduced by some operators to cater for the 16 to 18 year old schoolchild. Over 90% of 16 to 18 year olds are in full time education according to the CSO and some others in this age group may be in part-time training or education.

Over the past decade or more children are staying longer in secondary school and now over 90% of the children who start secondary school go on to complete their Leaving Certificate exam. A recent Department of Education and Skills report citing 2011 OECD statistics stated *“Ireland, starting from a position of a relatively low level of completion of education in the population as a whole in the mid-20th century, has been catching up with other economically developed countries. There has been a steady increase over recent decades with a particularly fast catching-up by groups who completed their initial education in the 1970s and later. In 2011, 52% of persons aged between 55 and 64 had completed upper-secondary or higher (Leaving Certificate or equivalent or higher). The corresponding figure was 64% on average across the OECD. However, 85% of 25-34 year olds here had completed upper-secondary education compared to 82% across the OECD.”*

Also with the introduction of transition year quite a number of pupils are remaining in secondary school until they are almost 19 and the old schoolchild and scholar fares do not fully meet their needs.

This paper examines how to simplify the child / schoolchild /scholar fares offering and sets out a determination on new fares.

#### **4. Principles to keep in mind**

When looking at any changes to the fare structure it is important to be clear what is required and what principles we should be guided by, which are the following.

- Any revised fare structure should be simple and easily understood by the potential users.
- It should be relatively easy for the operators to introduce and operate.
- Personalised Leap cards enable operators to police the age limit and reduce the opportunities for possible ‘fare-dodging’.

- The loss in revenue should be minimised.
- It should be used as an opportunity to further reduce cash handling, particularly on buses where dwell times at stops are a critical factor in the quality of service.
- Public transport use needs to be encouraged and children/young adults need to be retained as future users when they become adults.
- Dublin and the regional cities should have similar child fare structures.

## 5. International comparisons

In London children 0 to 4 have free travel, children 5 to 10 have free travel with an adult or with a 5-10 Zip Oyster card while children 11 to 15 can travel free on London buses and get a child rate on the Tube with an 11-15 Oyster card. Children 16 to 18 in full time education can get free travel on buses and trams and reduced rates on other services.

In Singapore there is concessionary travel for all schoolchildren up to 21. Students automatically receive their first school smartcard from their respective school. It is also one of the few places where they have a height stipulation in relation to free travel. If you are under 0.9 metres or under 7 years you can travel free with an adult.

While traditionally child fares internationally were up to 15 years old, and this is still the case with a number of transport providers, in a number of countries on their various transport services the age for child fares has been extended to 18 years old. Operators or cities to offer child fares up to 19 are Norwegian Railways Oslo, Helsinki Region Transport, London, Leeds, Auckland Transport, New Zealand Bus Wellington and Metrolink Trams Manchester (although they only offer the child fare during school term time while the others appear to offer the child fares at all times). Most of the operators who offer child fares to children over 15 offer the child fare for those in full time education. The 15 years age limit still applies in a number of countries such as Deutsche Bahn in Germany, National Express West Midlands and Centro West Midlands in the UK and Metlink Victoria in Australia. In Paris child fares are only up to 10 but that appears to be an exception.

In general in Europe child fares trend at about half the adult fare while in Australia and New Zealand the child fare is slightly dearer at about 60% of the adult fare.

For very young children, in many countries children under 5 have free travel but in Paris, Metlink Victoria Australia and in New South Wales Australia the age for free travel is under 4. Helsinki Region Transport have free travel for children up to 6 and Deutsche Bahn Germany offer free travel up to 6 years old with no need for a ticket and up to 15 years old when stated on an adult ticket.

Currently the transport operators in Ireland offer free travel for children less than 3 years which is low compared with other countries while Irish Rail intercity trains offer free travel to those under five. This will be standardised at under 4 years of age (Irish Rail can retain, if they wish for marketing purposes, the under 5 option on intercity).

## **6. Options**

Four options were which would simplify the fares for 16 to 18 year olds were identified:

### **Options A: Introduce Scholar fares for all operators**

Luas and Bus Éireann do not have scholar fares. A scholar fare could be introduced on their services and retained on the Dublin Bus and Iarnród Éireann services by introducing a scholar Leap card.

However over the past number of years the Authority has worked towards reducing the number and type of fares available, so as to simplify the fare structure making it simpler for the travelling public to understand. Therefore it would be very regressive to introduce a scholar fare for operators who do not already have one and to introduce short-period personalised scholar Leap cards to support that offering; that would result in child, scholar, student and adult leap cards.

This option was discounted and not considered further.

### **Option B: Dispense with Scholar fares and reduce Student fares to current Scholar levels**

Currently schoolchildren over 15 travelling on Luas and Bus Éireann have to pay an adult fare or a student fare (if they have a personalised student Leap card).

Student fares are available to all full time students, both those in second level and third level education and 16 to 18 year old schoolchildren could avail of them. As indicated earlier student fares are about double the cost of schoolchild fares and are more expensive than scholar fares.



To address the cost of fares for those between 16 and 18 in secondary education student fares could be reduced in price so that an increase in price from a schoolchild to a student fare would not be too great for the 16 year old child.

Reducing the cost of student fares to bring them closer to schoolchild fares would have a large financial impact on the operators as the numbers of students who avail of public transport are more than 1.5 times larger than the numbers of schoolchildren and student fares are in general substantially higher than child and scholar fares.

This option was discounted and not considered further.

**Option C: Dispense with Scholar fares, increase Child age to 18 and retain Schoolchild variant**

Another option would be to increase the age for the schoolchild/child fare on all operators to 18 years of age. This would allow for the removal of the scholar fare and would simplify the treatment of children from 4 to 18. It would result in child, student and adult fare categories supported by respective Leap card types with two of them personalised (child (6 to 18) and student).

Three operators (Luas being the exception) offer very heavily discounted flat fares for schoolchildren. Currently schoolchild fares are available when children are going to and from school while child fares are available at all times. Schoolchild fares are flat fares regardless of distance travelled while child fares are tiered based on distance travelled. These are paid either by cash or by the child Leap card (the Leap system is programmed for both day and time of day to deduct school pricing from Child Leap card).

This option is considered in more detail below.

**Option D: Dispense with Scholar fares, increase Child age to 18 and dispense with Schoolchild variant**

This option is a development of option C and is a greater simplification of fares through the merging of schoolchild and child fares.

Schoolchild fares are heavily discounted flat fares, therefore, depending on the mechanism chosen to achieve this merging of fares the results could be either significant dis-benefits to children or to operators.

This option was considered in detail. While it simplified the current offering it also removed the current schoolchild flat fare. This would result in very significant fare increases especially for those children who had a longer distance to travel to school with some increases in excess of 30%. The Authority would not impose fare increases of this magnitude and so this option was not considered further.

### **Options on Validity of Child fares**

As indicated earlier in the report, all operators operate different validity periods for schoolchild fares from Monday to Friday and some offered a schoolchild fare on Saturday. The options considered for application across all operators were:

1. Monday to Friday up to 17:00hrs only
2. Monday to Friday up to 19:00hrs only
3. Monday to Friday up to 17:00hrs and Saturday up to 13:30
4. Monday to Friday up to 19:00hrs and Saturday up to 13:30
5. Monday to Friday all day to 24:00hrs
6. Monday to Friday all day to 24:00hrs and Saturday up to 13:30

In order to achieve alignment of validity periods and to ensure that no customer would have a reduced offer the chosen option is that schoolchild fares will be available, except for school holidays, on Monday to Friday up to 19:00 and on Saturday up to 13:30.

## **7. Determination by the Authority**

The Authority having considered the four options as outlined above in some detail has determined that option C ***Dispense with Scholar fares, increase Child age to 18 and retain Schoolchild variant*** is to be the fares determination. The Authority has further determined that the Schoolchild fare will be available during school terms on Monday to Friday up to 19:00 and on Saturday up to 13:30.

### **Implications of this option are:**

#### **Dublin Bus**

- Scrap scholar fares
- Increase Leap child age from 15 to 18

This option will benefit:

- All children 16 to 18 on scholar cards and
- All children 16 to 18 all year round for all journeys

### **Bus Éireann (Regional cities)**

- Increase Leap child age from 15 to 18.

This option will benefit:

- All children 16 to 18 on scholar cards

### **Irish Rail**

- Scrap scholar fares
- Increase Leap child age from 15 to 18

This option will benefit:

- All children 16 to 18 on scholar cards and
- All children 16 to 18 all year round for all journeys

### **Luas**

- Increase Leap child age from 15 to 18
- Currently Luas child fares are similar to or cheaper than the schoolchild fares offered by the other operators. At this stage there is no need to introduce another fare category but this can be reviewed in the future if necessary.

This option will benefit:

- All children 16 to 18 all year round for all journeys

### **Benefits of this option are:**

- It allows for the removal of the scholar fare and scholar smart cards;
- It extends the availability of child fares to those between 16 and 18 years of age, 90% of whom are in full-time secondary education.
- Accessing the extended child fares will only be through a personalised Leap card which will control 'fare dodging'. At present the operators are aware of significant 'fare dodging' but current arrangements are very hard to enforce.
- It simplifies the fares offering for children all the way to 18 years of age.
- It reduces the cost of public transport for children between 16 and 18 years.

The revised age for child fares will only be available on a personalized Child Leap card. Initially the 16 to 18 year old children can avail of the child fares on Dublin Bus, Luas, on Iarnród Éireann in the Dublin short hop zone and on Bus Éireann services in the Greater Dublin Area and the Greater Cork

Area. As Leap is rolled out to Galway city in late 2014 and Limerick city and Waterford city in 2015 the revised child ages will become available to the older children.

As a large portion of child travel is to and from school the current Department of Education and Skills school transport scheme will cater for most school going children in areas outside the cities.

Allied with the above changes, the Authority has determined that children 3 years of age and under should travel free on public transport if accompanied by and in the charge of a fare paying passenger, provided that the child does not occupy a seat to the exclusion of another passenger.

The Authority has determined that Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann, Iarnród Éireann and Luas will implement the revised age for child travel from the 25th August 2014, at the latest, unless there are technical reasons as agreed with the Authority why this cannot be done.

## **8. Conclusion**

The extension of the child age from 15 to 18 is a positive development for many families especially those with children travelling by public transport to school. For the 16 to 18 year old they will realise savings of up to 65% with a child personalised Leap card compared with paying an adult cash fare.

It will also simplify the current fare system reducing the current four age categories to three namely child, student and adult. Finally it avails of the functionality in the Leap card to provide the appropriate best value fares without the individual having to hold multiple product types.