



# Strengthening the Connections in Rural Ireland

*Plans for Restructuring the Rural  
Transport Programme*

  
**Údarás  
Náisiúnta Iompair**  
National Transport Authority

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Minister of State for Public and Commuter Services

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## Ministerial Forward and Summary from Minister Alan Kelly, TD, Minister of State for Public and Commuter Services

The Rural Transport Programme (RTP) has achieved a huge amount to date in terms of improving people's quality of life, its links with the community and voluntary sector and how it helps many vulnerable people have access to wider social interaction.

However, it is not fulfilling its potential and it requires a new structure if it is ever to do this. This is not something to be feared but embraced.

Previously the RTP slowly evolved from local transport initiatives at the start of the last decade and today we have 35 separate companies across the country. Each of these are doing valuable work, but many are carrying out similar tasks without an overall strategic direction and vision to join them up sufficiently with the rest of the public service and transport system.

For example, not every area of the country is covered by an RTP company despite our best efforts. Some groups are run by the Leader companies, some are not, some own their own bus-fleets, some do not. Many are under pressure go 'grant-shopping' to various agencies of the State in order to maintain their existence and many are simply not on a solid financial basis surviving merely from month-to-month. Similarly, increases in funding for rural transport provision did not always see a proportionate increase in the number of transport journeys for passengers with costs being eaten up in administration by poor organisational structure, as underlined by the Government's Value for Money Review of the RTP. It was not that long ago that Colm McCarthy suggested scrapping the scheme in its entirety. Thankfully, we are no longer in this space.

If we want the Rural Transport Programme to not only survive, but to thrive, develop, and become a permanent, lasting part of Ireland's public transport system into the future, then change will have to happen. Such change requires leadership and engagement on the part of Government if it is to be successful.

I have made it my business to meet with the majority of rural transport groups in an effort to listen to their views and ideas and put them into action. The underlying philosophy in these

changes comes directly from many of the community groups, rural transport groups and even passengers who rely on their services, whom I have met and consulted with.

Overall, I want to empower these people to offer and facilitate greater transport provision than they are doing already. The new structure will allow for this, in many instances without an additional cost to the State through community car schemes or local area hackney licences which will be outlined here.

The details of these changes are detailed in this document. For the sake of clarity and to allay any short-term fears for the passengers who use these services, it is necessary to make a few matters distinctly clear:

- i. All current services will be maintained for the foreseeable future;
- ii. In the new structures, all decision-making regarding services will be made locally (subject to guidance from the National Transport Authority) and local groups will continue to have the flexibility to tailor services for each local area. Door-to-door and 'on demand' transport will continue;
- iii. The independent status of the rural transport companies will be retained as they are amalgamated into local 'Transport Co-Ordination Units';
- iv. The community and voluntary sector will play an even greater role in the new structures than they do currently with much stronger links to local Government.

The Rural Transport Programme will now evolve from 35 independent companies into 18 consolidated Transport Co-Ordination Units aligned with local authorities. A process facilitating the amalgamation of the companies that are geographically close to each other will be put in place by the National Transport Authority – the lead agency for the RTP.

The TCUs will now be the main point of contact for public transport provision in our rural areas and will be based where practical in a local authority.

For the first time ever, local authorities will have a role in the planning of rural transport services. Each county will have to develop a public transport plan for the county which will inform the National Transport Authority in assigning the appropriate remit to the TCU. This will create opportunities to develop greater area coverage as well as integrating rural transport services with the HSE, school and other public transport services. It will also facilitate the greater input of the community and voluntary sector into transport provision and planning.

I would also hope that TCUs will become the focal point for all local transport needs and become the main engines of the National Transport Authority for local and rural transport integration. This structure creates the opportunity to forge stronger links between health, educational and wider public transport provision at the local level.

There will be clear roles and responsibilities between managers, dispatchers and administrators who work in the TCU. Part of their remit will be to maintain databases of people in rural areas who require access to transport. Where the TCU cannot meet that transport, they will support the National Transport Authority in regulating voluntary community transport and facilitate community groups to provide their own transport. A legislative amendment to the Taxi Regulation Bill 2012 is being prepared to facilitate this.

Similarly TCUs will now have a role in assessing rural areas that have unmet transport needs. They can carry out analysis, in association with local authorities, for the National Transport Authority concerning the granting of the local area hackney licence, a proposal that is still being developed but is aimed at tackling the severe transport deficit that does exist in many rural communities. This unmet transport deficit is typically played out in the media as elderly males who cannot drive home from rural pubs that are facing closure. The rural pubs do need a lifeline, but this is about more than that. Many disabled and elderly people are left isolated in their homes due to lack of transport provision and bringing them even to the local shop facilitates the spending of money in the rural economy and allows people to have improve their quality of life with social interaction.

This new structure will also encourage greater investment by transport providers in accessible buses and services. As much as possible, longer term contracts will be granted by the National Transport Authority to private operators via tendering arrangements that will encourage and reward greater investment in the provision of services with fully accessible busses. This will prove a very welcome development in time as I acknowledge that despite significant progress in recent years there remains a deficit of accessible public transport services outside the major urban areas.

I continue to be genuinely amazed at the work many RTP groups do. Coming from a rural area, I know only too well how difficult life can be for people who cannot access transport in rural Ireland and rural isolation is a major problem in today's Ireland. Access to transport is at the heart of this. The RTP has provided people with a truly life-changing services aided wholeheartedly by community and voluntary groups and this will continue.

The result of these reforms outlined today will mean that the rural transport programme will form a permanent part of Ireland's public transport system – as critical to it as services provided by the CIE companies. A more efficient and sustainable way of operating will insulate the programme from future cuts in expenditure where it can be proven beyond doubt that it is doing its job – and doing it well. We want the RTP to be there for future generations. The National Transport Authority have embraced their role as overseers of the programme since last year and a huge volume of work has been carried out on their part and on my Department's part to re-organise the RTP. It has absorbed a huge level of energy from all stakeholders including the individual groups and the civil servants combined. However, as Minister with responsibility for Public Transport, I am confident that collectively we are leaving a legacy of a much more efficient framework for the provision of rural transport into the future that will improve people's quality of life and allow the rural transport programme to grow and develop into the future.





## 1. Introduction

The National Transport Authority assumed responsibility for the management of the Rural Transport Programme on behalf of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in April 2012.

The Authority was also tasked with the implementation of the recommendations of the Department's Value for Money Report on the Programme. This report outlines the proposed restructuring of the Rural Transport Programme.



## 2. Rural Transport Programme

The Rural Transport Programme (RTP) developed out of the Rural Transport Initiative of 2002, which was a pilot project established to address issues of unmet transport needs from a social inclusion and community-based perspective. The RTP was launched in 2007 to build on the success of the Initiative with a specific focus on responding to rural isolation and enhancing the mobility, accessibility and community participation of local people, particularly those at risk of social exclusion. The Programme was established to operate only in cases of market failure, in that services funded under the Programme should complement and not compete with the existing public transport services provided either by CIE Companies or by private transport operators. While services are open to the general public, older people and people with disabilities have to date formed the core customer base of the Programme. Pobal managed the programme on behalf of the Department of Transport from 2002.

35 Rural Transport Groups, covering 36 geographical areas nationwide, managed in the main by voluntary management committees, are currently being funded under the Programme. Each Group has identified and met demands for transport in its area, that were until then largely unaddressed, and has developed services that are relied upon by the people they serve. The staff and their voluntary boards have together devised innovative ways of obtaining scarce resources and deploying these in creative solutions to provide a much needed service. Figure 1 illustrates the current assembly of the 35 RTP Groups covering 36 geographical areas nationwide. Appendix 1 identifies the organisational structures of the Groups.

Department of Transport grant funding for the pilot Rural Transport Initiative and its successor the Rural Transport Programme increased from €3 million in 2003, to €11 million in 2010, with decreases from 2011. In 2013 the Grant is €9.133 and a further 6% cut is projected for 2014.

In 2012, the cost to the RTP Groups for the provision of the rural transport services was €16.33m, which was funded from the following income sources, RTP Grant (€8.87m), Free Travel (€1.51m), Fares (€1.75m), HSE Payments (€2.51m), CSP funding

(€0.93m) and Other Sources (€0.76m). Therefore the RTP Grant covered 54% of the costs of operating the services by the Groups in 2012. The remaining funds from the Department Grant are used for the central administration of the programme.

RTP funding allocations to individual Groups are provided through the NTA from funds provided by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport through an annual Vote. The allocations are the outcome of an appraisal process taking into account evidence of socio-economic deprivation, transport deprivation, levels of unmet transport needs, accessibility to services and the organisational capacity of local Groups to deliver transport services based on data and an allocations process dating back to 2008. Currently the individual rural transport Groups are responsible for deciding on the specific services to be provided locally and the methods of transport provision.

The level of service provided under the Programme has increased rising from 40,000 vehicle-trips in 2003, to 217,686 vehicle-trips in 2012. The types of transport services that are provided by the RTPs are:

- i. Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) – these services do not operate a fixed route, but respond to requests for services by intending passengers and operate by making specific trips to pick up and drop off passengers at the door; they can be operated by large PSVs, hackneys or community cars
- ii. Scheduled Fixed Transport –services with a regular route, stopping places and timetables
- iii. Scheduled Flexible Transport – timetabled regular departure points in either direction, but deviates from the route to pick up / set down passengers closer to their destinations.

The number of passenger journeys on the services also increased from 151,000 in 2003, to 1.73 million in 2012. The current structure for the delivery of rural transport services has resulted in a disproportionately high level of administrative costs compared to operational costs. A key objective of the restructuring is to reduce the level of overheads and thereby protect services.

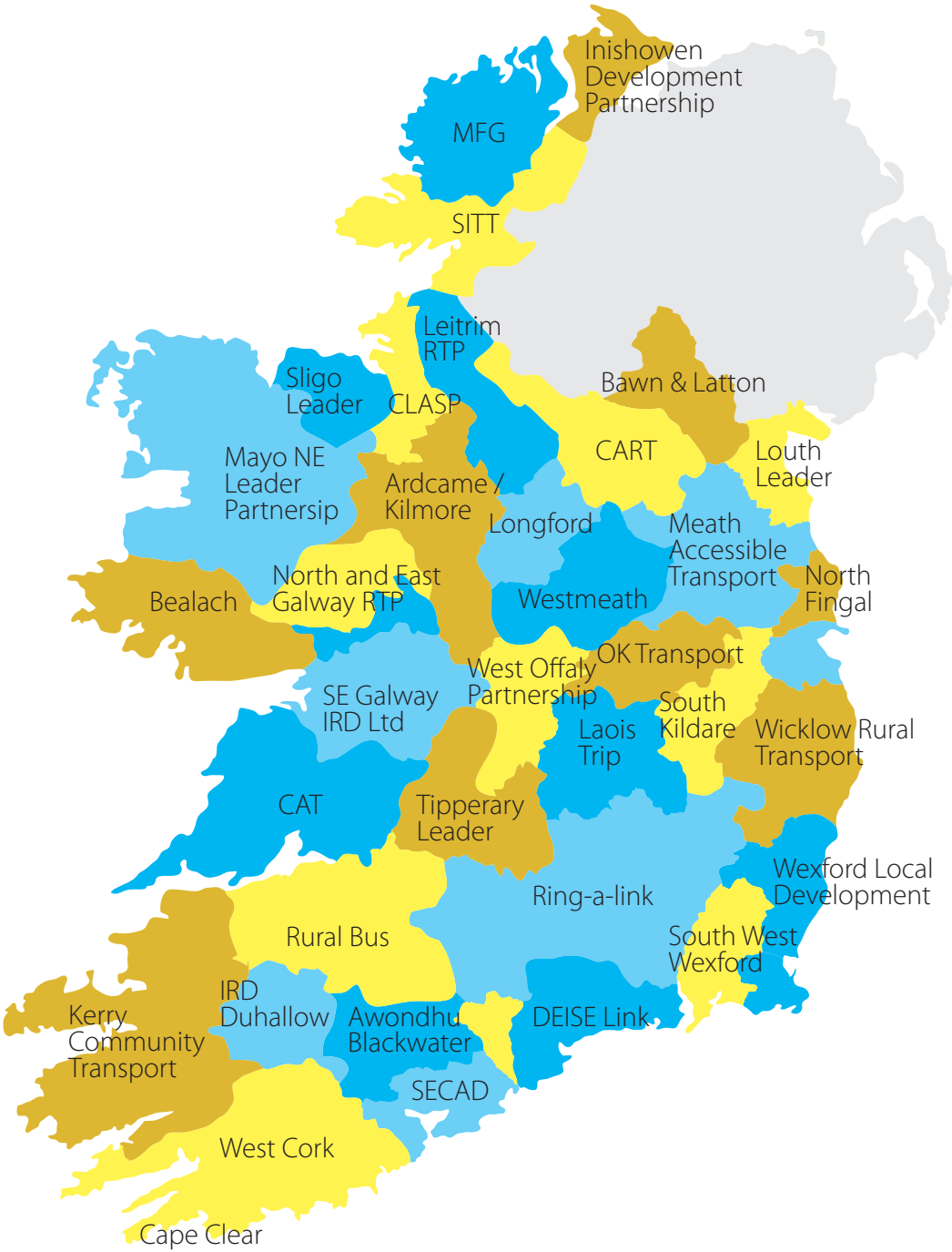


Figure 1:  
35 RTP Groups covering 36 contracts and geographical areas nationwide.

## 3. Reasons for Restructuring the Programme

### 3.1 The National Transport Authority

The National Transport Authority, established in 2009, has the statutory responsibility to procure public transport passenger services. At its inception rural transport services were not included in this remit. The placing of the responsibility for integrated local and rural transport with the NTA, including managing the RTP, has had the effect of consolidating the oversight of all State funded local and rural transport services. This new role for the NTA, coupled with its existing national remit for securing the provision of PSO public passenger transport services, enables the development of better links between local and rural transport services and scheduled bus and rail services. It also enables the NTA to identify gaps in service provision and, as funds become available, to fill those gaps gradually in the most effective way.

The Authority's vision for Rural Transport is that it will provide access to relevant, timely and safe public transport services on an equitable basis to residents of rural Ireland to enable them to participate fully in society.

To achieve that vision, the Authority will:

- ▶ clarify the role for rural transport services within the national network of public transport services,
- ▶ better integrate them with other services to maximise access by people to services, amenities, employment, education and retail; and
- ▶ Invest in and support the quality of the service to ensure the use of modern, safe, accessible vehicles on efficiently and reliably operated services, supported by modern convenient payment methods, passenger information and facilities.

### 3.2 Value for Money (VfM) and Policy Review of the RTP

The Rural Transport Programme (RTP) was selected for a VfM review in line with a commitment given at the launch of the Programme in 2007. The Review was carried out by the Department of Transport in the context of the Government evaluation of public expenditure programmes under the 'Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative'. The scope of the Review encompasses the period 2002-2009 from the Programme inception as the Pilot Rural Transport Initiative (RTI), with specific focus on the period after 2007, when the Programme was mainstreamed. It addresses the questions arising from the Programme's terms of reference regarding value for money and policy. The Report was published early 2012, following submission to Government.

The significant findings of the VfM Review include the following:

- i. The absence of firm data to measure the benefits of the Programme in term of addressing social exclusion objectives;
- ii. The value for money of the Programme in the context of the rate of increase in Programme funding without an accompanying equivalent increase in passenger numbers or services over the same period;
- iii. The existing organisational structure as a key factor in driving costs upwards resulting in the lack of cost efficiencies being achieved;
- iv. The high level of administration costs of the RTP Groups as a proportion of total Group expenditure (22% in 2009, 17% in 2013) This compares to the administration costs of the School Transport Programme at 12% of funding in 2012 ;
- v. The substantial increases in operating costs of the Programme;
- vi. The wide variance in fare levels, costs per passenger journey and cost per service across the RTP Groups; and

- vii. The annual increase over the period 2004-2009, in the number of journeys provided under discretionary free travel.

The recommendations of the VfM Review include the following:

- i. The continuation of the Programme's delivery by Pobal and the RTP Groups subject to clear evidence of Programme effectiveness based on performance indicators and the achievement of minimum efficiencies and reduction in Programme costs;
- ii. A restructuring of the Programme in order to achieve efficiencies and effective outcomes;
- iii. The establishment of a recording and monitoring framework that provides an up to date measure of transport provision and unmet transport needs in rural areas;
- iv. A Programme-wide fares policy to standardise fare levels;
- v. Greater transparency around the total financial reporting (i.e. all non RTP sources of funds) by the RTP Groups with regard to the allocation of administration and operational costs, capital costs and sources of income; and
- vi. Greater cost control mechanisms, performance targets and incentives to be developed.

The NTA has been tasked with overseeing the implementation of the recommendations of the Report and specifically with developing a detailed plan for an organisational restructuring of the RTP to address the findings of the VfM Review.

### 3.3 Local Government Reform

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government published its vision for Local Government entitled 'Putting People First – An Action Programme for Effective Local Government' on 16th October 2012, following Government approval. The policy document sets out Government policy for reforms across all the main areas of Local Government. The proposals outline the intention that Local Authorities, in the preparation of statutory development plans, should include the identification, quantification and articulation of local transport needs, arising from economic and social planning objectives for local areas within their respective jurisdictions. These local area plans will aggregate to form inputs to county level development plans.

In addition, 'Putting People First – An Action Programme for Effective Local Government' sets out, in Part 2 Chapter 4, proposals for devolution of responsibility for a range of local services and functions to Local Government. A number of functions have been identified that are potentially suitable for devolution to Local Authorities, or in which Local Authorities could play a greater role. These include "involvement in delivery of an efficient and effective integrated local and rural transport programme linking with the wider state and public transport network."

### 3.4 National Integrated Rural Transport Committee (NIRT)

In April 2012 the NTA also assumed responsibility for a new high level committee which was established by Minister Alan Kelly T.D. – the National Integrated Rural Transport (NIRT) Committee – comprising key stakeholders and chaired by the NTA, to oversee a more focussed and coherent approach to transport integration. The Committee includes representatives from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the Rural Transport Programme Groups and the County and City Managers Association (CCMA). The role of the new Committee is to oversee and manage a partnership approach to implementing integrated local and rural transport in order to achieve greater synergies, better meet identified transport needs and deliver increased value for money for the Exchequer.

The current RTP Groups act as the drivers of a multi-agency liaison which together shares information and resources, identifies needs, examines options to best serve those demands and deals with all the inevitable issues around the introduction and operation of new or enhanced transport services which serves a number of stakeholder bodies.

Some RTPs are now both co-ordinating the design of and providing services under a service level agreement for their local HSE, under contract, with some significant gains in overall transport efficiency as in Counties Sligo and Donegal, while 16 RTP Groups are providing some school and pre-school services. These efficiencies have delivered savings to the State. Some RTPs are now providing services, under contract, for other state supported bodies such as: Rehabcare, National Learning Network, IWA, Enable Ireland, Cheshire Homes and Centre for Independent Living. The successful initiatives have resulted in all passengers receiving a better level of service than would be warranted by meeting individual niche needs in isolation, and their subsequent travel has been on an integrated basis with others which improves the social networking aspect of their lives. Part of the rationale behind these restructuring plans is to facilitate much greater integration of state transport services across the state system, thereby improving the quantum of service for passengers as well as savings in costs of provision.



## 4. Restructuring Proposal

### 4.1 Scenarios for Restructuring

The NTA evaluated a number of different scenarios for delivering rural transport services. The various scenarios for an organisational restructuring were measured in the context of the following key values and aims:

- i. The continued provision of rural transport services into the future;
- ii. The long-term incorporation of the Programme within an appropriate regulatory structure, thereby mainstreaming rural transport services as a subsidised public transport service;
- iii. The creation of a formal structure to address social exclusion thus facilitating the necessary consideration, measurement and monitoring of the social inclusion aspect of the Programme in a holistic manner, through Local Authority structures;
- iv. A reduction in administrative overheads in the provision of rural transport services in line with the recommendations of the Value for Money and Policy Review of Rural Transport Programme (RTP) Report, while meanwhile creating the most appropriate and efficient model for delivery of rural transport services;
- v. The establishment of a structure to facilitate the national integration of rural transport, realising the potential for improved synergies across a range of Exchequer funded local and rural transport services.
- vi. The further development of professional management support of the strong local community participation structures;
- vii. To develop a consistency in the delivery and the quality of services; and
- viii. A structure which fits with the emerging vision for Local Government reform whereby public services and functions which are local in character are more effectively dealt with by Local Government.

### Three scenarios were examined:

1. no change to the current structures;
2. all provision of rural transport centralised in the NTA with no input from Rural Transport Groups;
3. locally undertaken transport needs assessment through county structures together with delivery of services co-ordinated through new regionally based Transport Co-ordination Units (referred to as Units) reporting to the NTA.

#### Scenario 1

Scenario 1 does not create the kind of structures necessary to achieve the desired values and aims under a Programme restructuring and does not result in any improvements in efficiency. In this scenario, the combined effect of a 20% reduction in RTP funding and a limited ability to tackle issues such as the duplication of tasks and roles that occur across a large number of RTP Groups would result in significant cuts to transport services, seriously undermining the value of continuing to support the Programme. In fact keeping the structures as they stand will put increasing financial pressure to the extent that some Groups would become unviable or have to substantially reduce the services that they can provide.

#### Scenario 2

Scenario 2 on the other hand is a fully centralised approach which proposes that the NTA has full control over almost all aspects of the process involved in the needs assessment, delivery and monitoring of the service. However, this scenario does not capitalise on any of the skills and experience that exist within RTP Groups. Furthermore, this scenario runs contrary to the vision for Local Government in Putting People First where integrated local and rural transport is identified as an area where Local Authorities could play a greater role. Finally, additional cost would be incurred by the Exchequer as the NTA would have to expand on a regional basis to deliver the RTP service nationwide.



#### Scenario 3

Scenario 3 provides a role for Local Authorities in transport needs assessment for their functional areas. Local Government with its knowledge of housing, health, economic planning, employment, education and voluntary sectors is particularly well placed to identify existing demands and to forecast future demands for transport arising from economic and development planning.

A key consideration in the assessment of this scenario is the NTA's view that the separation of "strategic demand-estimation" and "design-of-supply" sides of the rural transport equation will lead to the provision of more cost effective transport services nationally. In this scenario, a number of Transport Co-ordination Units that are aligned with county structures, while reporting to and funded by the NTA, will be established.

### 4.2 Chosen Scenario

The NTA concluded on Scenario 3 and on the establishment of 18 Transport Co-ordination Units which will provide the appropriate critical mass of population and characteristics to sustain the running costs of each Unit. The number is significantly less than the current number of RTP Groups, thereby providing long term administrative savings for the Programme, and reflecting practice in other countries where economies of scale have been achieved through specialised dispatch and resource allocation centres.

This scenario represents the most appropriate and efficient model for delivery of rural transport services. It enables a formal structure to address social exclusion thus facilitating the necessary consideration, measurement and monitoring of the social inclusion aspect of the Programme in a holistic manner, through Local Authority structures either individually or grouped.

It also offers a structure which can benefit other state agencies with significant transport needs. The Authority considers that the scenario fits with the emerging vision for Local Government reform whereby public services and functions which are local in character are more effectively dealt with if responsibility for action is locally devolved

5. Transport Co-ordination Units

A Transport Co-ordination Unit would carry out a wide range of duties. Examples of these functions include:

- ▶ Support the relevant local authority or authorities in the preparation of its statutory transport plan;
- ▶ Through the Unit's voluntary board and through its extended links into the local communities, gather information from the community it serves regarding transport needs and social exclusion as a result of transport deficits;
- ▶ Identify those local transport needs to the NTA;
- ▶ Take bookings and handle dispatch for the relevant transport services;
- ▶ Check the performance of operators on behalf of the NTA;
- ▶ Report on monies collected by the contracted operators;
- ▶ identify potential route changes to NTA in order to facilitate particular customers/groups;
- ▶ Suggest potential integrated services to NTA (e.g. dovetailing with HSE services);
- ▶ Support the voluntary car scheme;
- ▶ Advise the NTA on opportunities for Local Area Hackney licences.

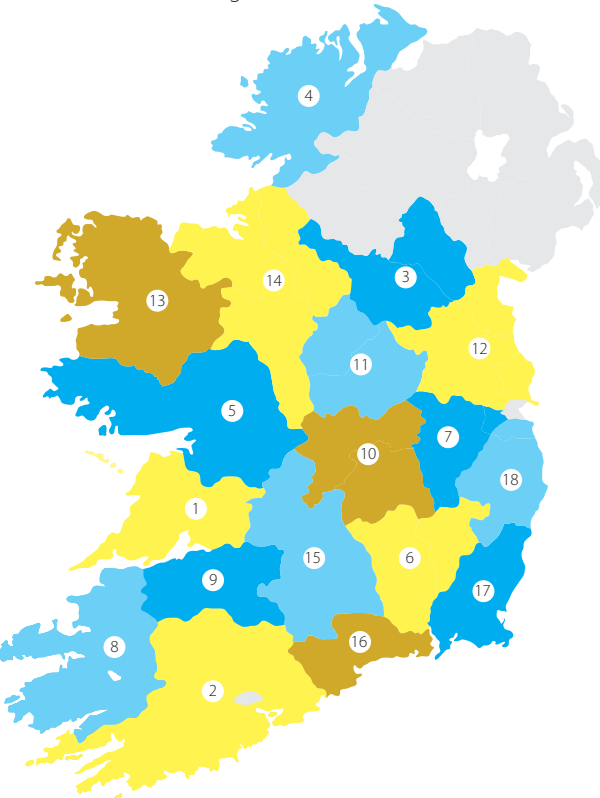
In addition to their primary role of managing rural transport provision, the Units, at no additional cost to the State, will have an important role to play in embedding integration within transport services planning, primarily by co-ordinating requirements for access to employment, health, social and education opportunities. In particular, it is anticipated that the Units will liaise on the ground with the HSE and other state organisations to establish opportunities for more efficient and cost effective transport provision. Furthermore, the co-ordination and oversight of voluntary transport services can also be embedded in the work of the Units.

5.1 Location of the Transport Co-ordination Units

Figure 2 illustrates the geographical areas covered by the proposed 18 Units under the restructuring model, while Table 1 lists the new Units and identifies the existing RTP Groups located within each of the Units.

Figure 2:

Geographical areas covered by the 18 Transport Co-ordination Units under restructuring.



1. Clare 2. Cork 3. Cavan & Monaghan 4. Donegal 5. Galway 6. Carlow & Kilkenny 7. Kildare & South Dublin 8. Kerry 9. Limerick 10. Laois & Offaly 11. Longford & Westmeath 12. Meath, Louth & Fingal 13. Mayo 14. Sligo, Leitrim & Roscommon 15. Tipperary 16. Waterford 17. Wexford 18. Wicklow / Dun Laoghaire Rathdown

Table 1. 18 Transport Co-ordination Units under restructuring and the existing RTP Groups located within each Unit.

Reference #	Transport Co-ordination Unit	Current RTPs in TCU Area
1	Clare	Clare Accessible Transport Ltd
2	Cork	Avondhu Blackwater Partnership Ltd. Bantry Rural Transport Partnership Ltd. Comharchumann Chléire Teo IRD Duhallow Ltd. South and East Cork Area Development Partnership Ltd. County Limerick and North Cork Transport Group Ltd. (part)
3	Cavan / Monaghan	Latton Social Services and Development Ltd. Kilnaleck and District Community Co-op Society Ltd.
4	Donegal	Seirbhís Iompair Tuaithe Teoranta Meitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta Teoranta Inishowen Development Partnership
5	Galway	Bealach - Páirtnéireacht Iompair Áitiúil Chonamara Teoranta Galway Rural Development Company Ltd. South East Galway Integrated Rural Development Ltd.
6	Carlow / Kilkenny	Carlow, Kilkenny and South Tipperary Rural Transport Company Ltd. (part)
7	Kildare / South Dublin	South Kildare Community Transport Ltd. Offaly and Kildare Community Transport Ltd. (part)
8	Kerry	Kerry Community Transport Ltd
9	Limerick	County Limerick and North Cork Transport Group Ltd. (part)
10	Laois / Offaly	Laois Transport for Rural Integration Programme Ltd. Offaly Integrated Local Development Company Ltd. Offaly and Kildare Community Transport Ltd. (part)
11	Longford / Westmeath	Westmeath Rural Community Transport Association Ltd. Longford Community Resources Ltd.
12	Meath / Louth / Fingal	Meath Accessible Transport Project Ltd. North Fingal Rural Transport Company Ltd. Louth Leader Partnership Ltd.
13	Mayo	Mayo North East Leader Partnership Company Teoranta
14	Sligo / Leitrim / Roscommon	County Sligo Leader Partnership Company Ltd. Rural Lift Ltd. Ardcarne Kilmore Roscommon Rural Transport Ltd. Community of Lougharrow Social Project
15	Tipperary	North Tipperary Leader Partnership Carlow Kilkenny and South Tipperary Rural Transport Company Ltd. (part)
16	Waterford	Déise Link Ltd
17	Wexford	South West Wexford Community Development Group Wexford Local Development
18	Wicklow / Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	Wicklow Rural Partnership Ltd.



## 5.2 Staffing of Transport Co-ordination Units for Service Design and Delivery

Each Unit would be funded for the provision of one Manager / Co-ordinator post, one Administrator post and one or two Dispatcher post depending on the size of the Unit and the number of services. These staff would be funded from the Rural Transport budget but directly employed by the Unit independent company housed within Local Authority offices, where possible and practical. This will involve further liaison between the NTA and the local authority. The staff of the RTPs with Direct Award Contracts will be subject to a more detailed efficiency audit by the NTA to ensure value for money in the delivery of the service.

## 5.3 Voluntary Boards of Transport Co-ordination Units

The voluntary boards of the Units will act as any company board to ensure that the company operates in accordance with its articles of association. It will seek to retain or transfer charitable status for the Unit. The board will be made up of members from key stakeholders in the community and will act as a conduit for community groups throughout the area to input into the development of transport in the area.

## 5.4 Relationships with other Statutory Bodies

Figure 3 outlines the relationship that the new Units will have with the relevant statutory bodies:

## 5.5 The NTA's Future Role

The NTA, as the EU classified "competent" public transport Authority within the State, must ensure, going forward, that the RTP operates within the relevant legislative framework while also maintaining the Programme's social and flexible service. To this end the NTA will manage the delivery of rural transport services by assigning various responsibilities, under a grant-aid agreement, to the respective Units. Further the NTA will procure the provision of rural transport services by private Operators, nationwide, and will enter into contracts with the Operators. The Operators will be managed by the Units on behalf of the Authority.

In the case of the existing fleet owning RTP Groups it is the intention of the Authority to consider applications to enter into 'Direct Award' with these Groups subject to the necessary amendments to national legislation. All eligible RTP Groups who gain 'Direct Award' status must comply with the relevant EU regulations in terms of the use of public subsidy.

The NTA has already incorporated rural transport services in its review of transport service provision across the state. Rural

transport services are also included in our National Journey Planner to promote the services that are running but also to show how the public transport customer can interchange between regional and local transport.

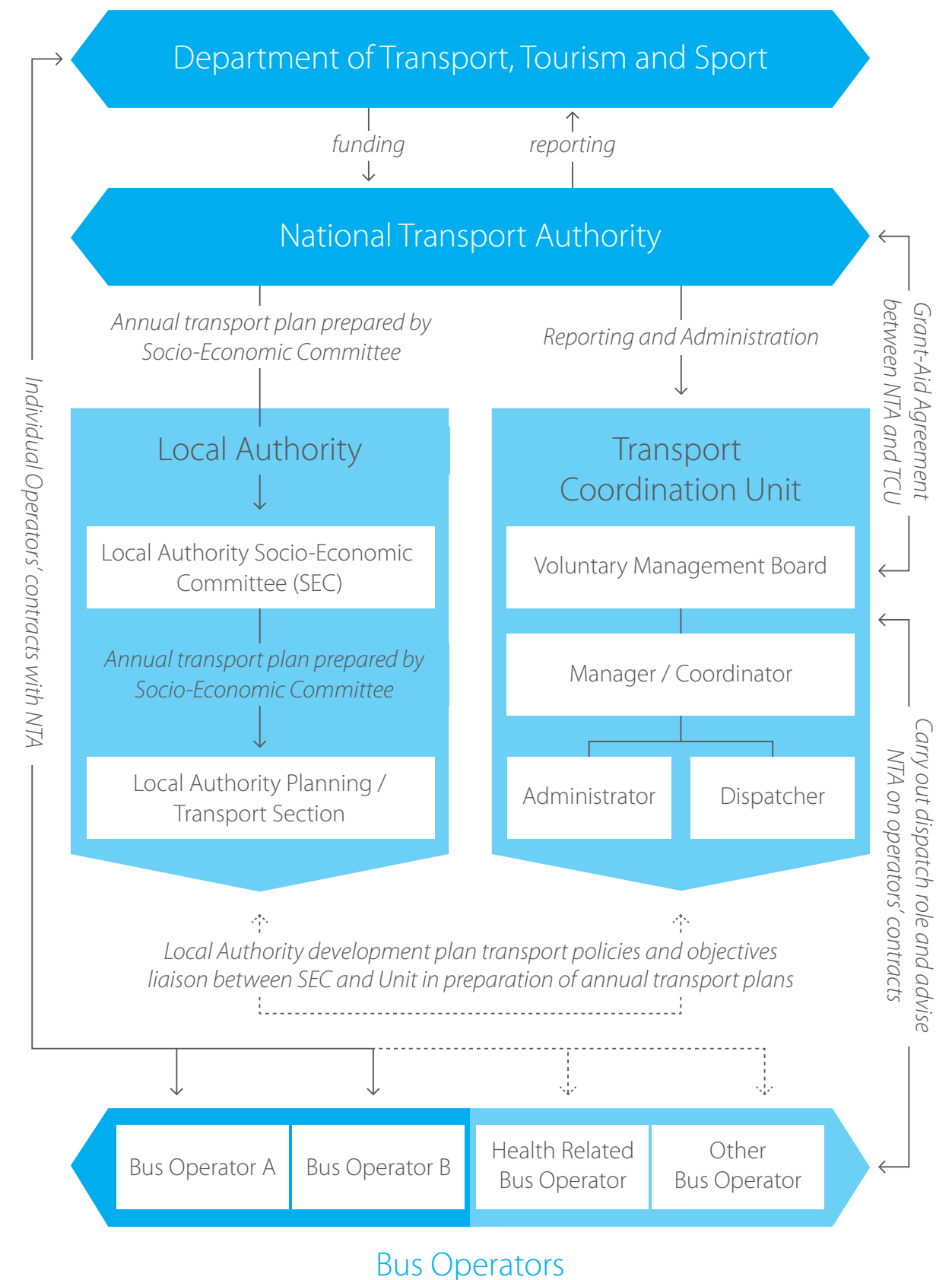
## 5.6 Future Role for Local Authorities

Central to the NTA's recommended model for the restructuring of the RTP Programme is the separation of duties and responsibility for (a) identifying and estimating demand and (b) the design and delivery of supply for rural transport.

Local Government, with its local knowledge and multi-functional involvement in local services, is particularly well placed to identify existing demands and to forecast future demands for transport. The demand/needs assessment for rural transport at county level will be carried out directly by the planning and transport section of the Local Authority. Local transport demand forecasting will be reflected in each Local Authority's development plan under its policies and objectives. These policies and objectives will be informed and underpinned by annual transport plans prepared by the Socio-Economic Committee (SEC) of each Local Authority as part of the overall community development function within the Authorities.

The Local Authorities will house the 18 new Units, where possible and practical, to oversee and manage transport supply throughout the country. This will result in a reduction in administration costs within the Programme while forging the links in local service provision. A grant-aid Agreement will exist between the NTA and each individual Local Authority to house the Units. It is envisaged that the role of Local Authorities and their relationship with the Units will strengthen further following the alignment process that is underway following the publication of "Putting People First". The NTA will continue to engage with Government Departments and the City and County Managers Association as this alignment progresses.

Figure 3: Relationships with other Statutory Bodies



## 6. Supporting the Restructuring of the Programme

### 6.1 Regulatory Structure for Rural Transport Provision

An important element in the restructuring of the Rural Transport Programme is the establishment of the appropriate regulatory framework within which state subsidised rural transport should be placed. The provision of public passenger transport services is governed by EU Regulation 1370/2007, the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008 and the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009.

The provision of open public passenger transport services under the Rural Transport Programme should be provided within a Public Services Contract with the NTA. All the scheduled, flexible and demand responsive services that are currently provided under the programme will now be incorporated into a Public Services Contract with the Authority. These contracts can take two forms:

#### 1. Direct Award Contract

This is a contract with a public transport operator which, subject to meeting both EU and national legislative requirements, can be awarded by the NTA without an open tendering procedure

#### 2. Contract following Public Procurement

If the Direct Award Contract conditions cannot be met, the public transport services must be procured in an open tender procedure and the contract for those services is with the NTA.

Closed transport services i.e. services that are not open to all members of the public but are provided for a specific group will not form part of a Public Services Contract.

A number of the existing RTP Groups own and operate their own bus fleet. Subject to a proposed change to the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, those fleet-owning Groups that meet the criterion of providing the major part of their services from their own fleet will be offered a Direct Award Contract with the NTA. The remaining service contracts will be secured through an open procurement process.

Operators will be contracted to the NTA and will be managed by the Transport Co-ordination Units on behalf of the NTA.

### 6.2 Maintaining the Voluntary Input in Rural Transport Provision

The Authority is keenly aware that a key strength of the Rural Transport Programme to date has been the level of community and voluntary input in its delivery. The services would not be operating at the level that they are currently without the huge effort of committed volunteers in Rural Transport Groups. The Authority is committed to ensuring that the community input remains as strong as ever through maintaining a voluntary board of the Transport Co-ordination Units. The continuation of volunteer drivers, passenger assistants, community car schemes and all other voluntary activity will be encouraged in the service provided by the Units.

### 6.3 Community Car Schemes

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport is developing legislative proposals for the continued provision of voluntary community car schemes. Community car schemes are where volunteers offer to use their car or a car provided by an organisation to drive individuals to a location where the individual has no means of transport themselves or access to public transport. These schemes have been developed across the State and are used to bring people to appointments or to other support facilities. They can form an important transport role in remote rural areas where the provision of bus transport is too costly.

It is envisaged that the Units will have a strong role in this initiative. Among the potential roles of a Unit would be to maintain a database of people with transport needs and if these cannot be met efficiently by the contracted public transport services in the Unit to facilitate community-based transport for such people.

Units can also play a role in identifying needs for such services,



help to identify the pool of volunteer drivers and, advise the NTA, which will be exercising the exemption from taxi/hackney regulations, on local level issues related to this initiative.

### 6.4 Local Area Hackney

The NTA proposes to introduce a "Local Area Hackney Licence" for rural locations meeting certain criteria. The objective of the Local Area Hackney Licence is to facilitate a low cost entry to the hackney market for transport provision in rural areas that, otherwise, would be unlikely to have such services. Its features would include:

- ▶ Limited area of operation – Area of pick up would be limited to a specified distance from a nominated base location and the licence holder would be prohibited from plying for hire in towns;
- ▶ The need for a "Local Area Hackney Licence" must be validated by a local community or business organisation;
- ▶ Low entry cost – low licence fee and simple vehicle standards;
- ▶ Drivers must be resident in local area and the requirement to sit the Skills Development Programme under the SPSV licence is waived; and
- ▶ Like all hackneys the driver will not be permitted to ply for trade on public roads or at taxi ranks. However, the establishment of an approved "hackney stand" in an off-street area will be permissible, where the hackney vehicle can accept customers.

The process of application and assessment is still under development. However, it can be clearly stated at this time that the Unit will play an important role in giving specialist local advice to the NTA on the suitability of areas for such a licence and may have a role in the application process.

### 6.5 Accessible Rural Transport Services

The services currently operated by the Rural Transport Groups already have a high level of accessibility. The Authority plans to improve on this level of accessibility through the specifications in the new tenders for the services. This should encourage private transport operators to invest in their fleet to satisfy the requirements for accessible services in future contracts.



## 7. Establishing the Transport Co-ordination Units

### 7.1 Appraisal Process

This section sets out the approach for the management of the application, appraisal and selection of 18 Transport Coordination Units as part of the restructuring of the Rural Transport Programme. In the interest of instilling confidence in the restructuring process, it is essential that the process for the creation of Units is viewed as transparent, equitable, consistent and robust.

The process can be summarised as follows:

- ▶ an application process will be used for existing RTP Companies
- ▶ The application and selection process will be based on detailed Programme Guidelines which will include, for example, eligibility criteria, a funding model and staffing levels for the new Programme.
- ▶ The existing RTP will be wound down by the January 2014.

### 7.2 Call for Applications

The selection of the 18 Units will be based on a closed call for applications, i.e. only those organisations that are currently funded under the RTP (35 organisations) will be eligible to apply. The application process will be designed to facilitate the natural amalgamation of certain RTP Groups. This will offer the chance to consolidate transport service provision during the period of transition. The potential for amalgamation of Groups creates opportunities to strengthen the new boards that emerge by widening the community pool. In addition boards will be encouraged to ensure that they reflect the full geographical region that the Unit covers.

In the event that no application is received for a region, the process may need to be opened up to include applications from outside of the existing RTP Groups. The same may apply in cases where no application is deemed suitable in a region.

Only one application for each of the 18 Unit regions will

be selected. On this basis, existing RTP Groups may wish to consider working together to submit one application per region. It should be noted that:

- ▶ In **11 of the 18** regions, more than one existing RTP Group will have to make their case to be appointed as the Unit for that region or apply as a single coordinated Group.
- ▶ In the remaining **7 of the 18** regions, one existing RTP could potentially be successful without any competition from another RTP but must still make a submission for appraisal.

### 7.3 Application Process and Format

#### Format

A one-stage application process is proposed, whereby Groups will submit a comprehensive 'Business Plan' covering a 2 year period for the Unit. The following information will form the basis of the Business Plan template:

- ▶ Applicant information – contact details etc.
- ▶ Background to Group(s)/Company(ies)
- ▶ Governance Information – Board Structure, Board members, skills, links to other community organisations etc.
- ▶ Experience in the area of rural transport
- ▶ Proposal for management of the Unit covering the new region. This section should form the bulk of the application and should outline the 2 year plan for how the Unit will operate. It should also include sub-sections on dispatch management, social inclusion, unmet needs, volunteerism, local community involvement, NIRT etc.
- ▶ Declaration of Chairperson(s)/Board(s)-

Supplementary documentation may also be required as part of the application, e.g. audited accounts, Tax Clearance Certificates, Memo & Articles of Association, Constitution or other legal status documentation.

### Information and Support

Groups will be provided with as much information as possible prior to commencing the application. Detailed programme guidelines will outline the new structures and the criteria for a) eligibility and b) assessment of applications.

An information session and developmental supports will be offered to Groups to ensure that all Groups are afforded the same opportunities to ask questions, seek clarifications etc. The information session will be used as the launch of the call for applications, i.e. Groups will be brought together at central location where programme guidelines, application guidelines and application templates will be distributed to all Groups simultaneously, an overview of process will be provided and a Q & A session will be facilitated for all Groups to participate in.

A realistic timeframe will be allowed for Groups to write their applications, particularly in light of the potential for collaborative applications.

### Programme Guidelines and Application Guidelines

Two sets of guidelines will be made available to RTP Groups at the announcement of the call for applications, 1) New Programme Guidelines and 2) Application Process Guidelines.

In relation to the Programme Guidelines, it is vital that Groups are very clear about the new structures including: how they will operate; significant changes from existing RTP operations; resource/staffing limits per region; roles and responsibilities; pay scales; eligible expenditure (%) and non-eligible expenditure.

In relation to the Application Guidelines, the Groups will be made aware of what criteria will be used to assess applications – including basic eligibility requirements and appraisal criteria (outlined below). The application guidelines will also state the deadline for submissions, supplementary documentation required and any supports that are available to Groups in compiling their applications, answer questions, provide clarifications etc. The guideline will outline expectations around depth of answers, e.g. word count, level of detail required for each section. This will ensure that all Groups are given the same opportunity provide an appropriate level of information against which their application can be assessed.

### 7.4 Appraisal Process

The appraisal of applications will be carried out by NTA staff, possibly supported by external experts with community/public transport expertise.

Two sets of criteria will be used for the assessment of applications:

#### 1. Basic Eligibility

Firstly appraisal staff will assess each application to ensure that the application is from an organisation(s) currently contracted to provide services under the Rural Transport Programme and that the required documentation is complete.

#### 2. Full Appraisal Criteria

The following indicative criteria will be used for the appraisal of applications (note these cannot be finalised until the Programme Guidelines are in place).

- i. Leadership and Governance – Staff and Board
- ii. Strategic capability
- iii. Value for Money
- iv. Strong Performance / Compliance Culture
- v. Proven Innovation in Service Delivery
- vi. Social Inclusion
- vii. Pro-technology
- viii. Transport Expertise
- ix. Community Networking Capability
- x. Policy Awareness

The above criteria will be refined in line with the Programme Guidelines. A scoring system will also be applied – with weighting awarded to certain criteria over others depending on Programme priorities. The appraisal criteria will be clearly linked to questions in the application or business plan template – i.e. the appropriate information will be clearly requested in order to be assessed.

If there is no eligible or successful application in a region, the application process will be opened up to a wider audience.

### 7.5 Combining Direct Award and Transport Co-ordination Unit Roles

Those RTPS that could receive Direct Award contracts are currently managing the dispatching of those services and the integration process within their area. Therefore it makes sense that those RTPS with a Direct Award Contract that covers a full Unit area could also take on the Unit functions of dispatch, integration etc.

In some Unit regions there may be a number of possible Direct Award contracts in the area. One of these Direct Award operators may also be successful in the process of selection of the Unit. If they are not selected to be the Unit for the region they would still, however, under direction from the new Unit, provide transport services with their fleet and driving staff.



7.6 Grant-aid Agreement

Grant-aid Agreements for the successful Units with the NTA will be entered into for a two year with the option for a two year extension basis. Where necessary, a set of pre and post grant-aid agreements requirements may be set for an organisation. In the case of pre-grant-aid conditions, these will be crucial requirements that must be met in a short timeframe before any contract is issued. If these requirements are not met, the grant-aid Agreement will not be issued and the Group will be considered unsuccessful.

Post grant-aid Agreement requirements will be requested from the Groups but these may have a longer timeframe for completion and the issuing of grant-aid Agreement will not be dependent on meeting these requirements.

7.7 Proposed Timeline for Selection and Appraisal Process

Phase	Deadline	Comment
Release of new Programme Guidelines and Application/Business Plan	Start September 2013	All Groups will receive this information at the same time to ensure a fair, equitable and competitive process.
Information and support period	End October 2013	Groups will be given 2 months from the date of announcement to the date of submission for applications. This period will include an information session and supports offered to all Groups.
Submission of Applications	End October 2013	All documentation must be received.
Appraisal Process – 1st phase	End of November 2013	It is intended that all applications will be appraised by end November.
Appraisal Process – sign off	Mid December 2013	It is intended that decision will be made by mid-December.
Notification to Groups	End December 2013	Notification to Groups regarding success or otherwise should go out before Christmas.
Wind down of existing RTP	End January 2014	It is envisaged that the wind down will begin in Q1 of 2014. An appropriate notice period will need to be given to Groups.
Launch of New Programme	Start February 2014	It is planned that the announcement and information provision re the new programme should begin in Q4 of 2013 and that the new programme will officially begin by Feb 2014.
Grant-aid Agreement conditions	End January 2014	Any pre grant-aid Agreement conditions must be complied with before end Jan 2014.
Grant-aid Agreements Issued	End January 2014	All grant-aid Agreements must be in place by end Jan 2014





## 8. Transition to New Structure

The restructuring will take a period of time to complete. It involves substantial changes in how rural transport services are managed. However, it is the Authority's clear objective to ensure that all rural transport services funded by the programme continue to run while the changes are being made. The demand responsive and flexible services will continue to be provided with passenger assistance where required.

All contracts with the public transport operators for the provision of the services will be with the NTA in future. This will be achieved by retendering all the transport services, commencing in 2013. This retendering should also facilitate an improvement in the already high level of accessibility in rural transport services.





## 9. Conclusion

The restructuring of the Rural Transport Programme is essential to protect and sustain rural transport services into the future.

This Plan, once implemented, will position rural transport within a national integrated public transport network, continuing to provide the people of rural Ireland with the services they deserve. This plan will ensure that the provision of rural transport services is mainstreamed as a subsidised public transport service and better integrated with other services. It will also establish a structure to facilitate the national integration of rural transport. This new structure will address social exclusion and facilitate the consideration, measurement and monitoring of the social inclusion aspect of the programme in a holistic manner, through Local Authority structures.

In summary, the implementation of this plan will set up a robust framework from which integrated public transport services can develop and grow.





# Appendix 1

## Current RTP Organisational Structures

The organisational structures can be summarised as follows: Local Development Companies (Partnerships) = 14, Independent Companies = 16, Community Development Projects =2, Other Development Associations = 2, and Cooperatives = 2. Total = 35.

Local Development Companies	Independent Company for RTP	CDP	Other Development Association	Co-operative
Avondhu Blackwater Partnership Ltd.	Ardcarne Kilmore Roscommon Rural Transport Ltd.	Community of Lougharrow Social Project (CLASP)	Latton Social Services & Development Ltd.	Comharchumann Chleire Teo (Cape Clear)
Co Sligo LEADER Partnership Company Ltd.	Bantry Rural Transport Partnership Ltd.	South West Wexford Community Development Group	South East Galway Integrated Rural Development Ltd	Kilnaleck & District Community Co-operative Society Ltd. (CART)
Co Wicklow Community Partnership Ltd.	Bealach Páirtnnéireacht Iompar Áiriúil Chonamara Teo.			
Galway Rural Development Co Ltd	Carlow, Kilkenny & South Tipperary Rural Transport Ltd.			
Inishowen Development Partnership Ltd.	Clare Accessible Transport			
IRD Duhallow Ltd.	Co Limerick & North Cork Transport Group Ltd.			
Leitrim Integrated Development Company Ltd. (Rural Lift)	Deise Link Ltd.			
Longford Community Resources Ltd.	Kerry Community Transport Ltd.			

Local Development Companies	Independent Company for RTP	CDP	Other Development Association	Co-operative
Louth Leader Partnership Ltd.	Laois Transport for Rural Integration Programme Ltd.			
North Tipperary LEADER Partnership	North Fingal Rural Transport Company Ltd.			
Offaly Integrated Local Development Ltd.	Offaly & Kildare Community Transport Company Ltd.			
South and East Cork Area Development Partnership Company Ltd.	Seirbhís Iompair Tuaithe Teoranta			
Wexford Local Development Ltd.	South Kildare Community Transport Ltd.			
Mayo North East Leader Partnership	Westmeath Rural Community Transport Association Ltd.			
	Meath Accessible Transport Ltd.			
14	15	2	2	2







