



**Consultation on potential changes to the licence  
conditions for public bus passenger services with  
regard to accessibility**

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## Introduction

The requirements for accessibility regarding transport are set out in national<sup>1</sup> and European legislation<sup>2</sup> as well as Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>3</sup>. Considerable progress has been made in some segments of Ireland’s public transport sector; improvements are evident in the state funded Public Service Obligation (PSO) services. This includes Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann regional city fleets which are now 100% wheelchair accessible to the required EU standard and a low floor access system is in place on all Luas services. It is acknowledged that currently not all powered wheelchairs can get easy access to some single-deck city buses, but this is being addressed by the NTA. Similarly, there have been continuous improvements in accessibility to heavy rail services.

In contrast to PSO services, ‘commercial’ bus operators providing licensed public transport services receive no subsidies from the Authority. The market is variable and diverse in scale, frequency and type of service provided, with the majority of operators providing services with a small number of vehicles.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) is the statutory body responsible for regulating the licensed commercial bus services sector under the Public Transport Regulation Act, 2009. This Act empowers the Authority to establish licence categories and to attach minimum accessibility standards as a condition of the licence. There are five types of licence categories defined in the NTA’s Guidelines for the Licensing of Public Bus Passenger Services (“the Guidelines”)<sup>4</sup>. The proposed new licence condition(s) would only be applied to the regular licence category. This category provides for the regular carriage of passengers on a predetermined route with predetermined pick up/set down points. Services in this category include: *Interurban Services* – linking major towns and cities; *Commuter Services* - to centres of employment or education (not school services), provided to match the travel patterns of commuters; *Rural Services* - linking two or more small towns or rural areas.

The Authority is committed to improving accessibility to transport, in particular, for people with reduced mobility. This commitment is reflected in the Authority’s Statement of Strategy 2018-2022, in which it undertakes to “Develop an efficient, effective and safe transport system so that most people, including those with a disability or mobility impairment, are within easy reach of a reliable public transport service.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2009/act/37/enacted/en/html>

<sup>2</sup> [The Council of the European Union and the European Parliament, “Regulation \(EU\) No 181/2011 of the European Parliament and of the council of 16 February 2011”; The European Parliament and Council, “Directive 2001/85/EC”](#)

<sup>3</sup> [United Nations, “Article 9 - Accessibility”](#)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.nationaltransport.ie/downloads/guidelines\\_for\\_licensing\\_public\\_buses.pdf](https://www.nationaltransport.ie/downloads/guidelines_for_licensing_public_buses.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/NTA\\_Statement\\_of\\_Strategy\\_2018-2022\\_ENGLISH.pdf](https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/NTA_Statement_of_Strategy_2018-2022_ENGLISH.pdf)

In 2014, the NTA carried out a public consultation to assess stakeholder and operator attitudes on transitioning to a wheelchair-accessible licensed bus sector. There were a number of recurring themes across the responses received including maximising the use of low-floor buses on regular urban, suburban, commuter and rural licensed services, as well as a phased approach to accessibility. Low floor vehicles also accommodate those with a mobility impairment that have difficulty with the steps up to a vehicle.

Following on from this, the NTA conducted a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) investigating different options for the phased implementation of accessibility and the potential impacts associated with these different options on the stakeholders involved. With this in mind, NTA is now conducting a public consultation seeking feedback from stakeholders and operators on a phased approach to improving accessibility to licensed public transport services and the cost involved in the options set out in the RIA.

In order for wheelchair users to access a public transport vehicle, they require as a minimum a hard standing to access a ramp to a low floor vehicle or a wheelchair lift on a high floor coach. The space required on a footpath to facilitate a ramp from the bus is approximately 1.8m x 1.8m, while for a wheelchair lift it is 3.0m x 4.0m. Accordingly, the vehicle with a ramp can be accommodated at the majority of bus stops where there is a hard standing across the State. However, there are very few locations where the wheelchair lift space can be provided without changing the bus stop location usually away from town centres or purchasing land to accommodate such a step.

## NTA proposed approach:

The Authority licences several categories of public bus passenger service licence, as defined in the *Guidelines for the Licensing of Public Bus Passenger Services*. These proposals would only be applied to the Regular licence category.

There are two main sub-classes in this category. The Authority will determine the applicable sub-class for each licence.

### 1. Rural/ Urban services, including town services

#### Objective:

- All vehicles used to provide rural/ urban regular public bus passenger services would be low-floor, wheelchair accessible by end 2023.

#### Implementation

- Phased approach for all new/ renewed licences from 2020:

	<b>End Year 1 2020</b>	<b>End Year 2 2021</b>	<b>End Year 3 2022</b>	<b>End year 1 2023</b>
Percentage of vehicles used on licensed service	25%	50%	75%	100%

- If the service has not reached a verifiable 75% accessibility standard by the end of year 3, the licence will not be renewed.

### 2. Interurban services

#### Objective:

- All vehicles used to provide Interurban regular public bus passenger services would be low-floor, wheelchair accessible by 2023 or 2026.

#### Implementation:

- i. Phased approach for all new/ renewed licences from 2020:

	<b>End Year 1 2020</b>	<b>End Year 2 2021</b>	<b>End Year 3 2022</b>	<b>End year 1 2023</b>
Percentage of vehicles used on licensed service	25%	50%	75%	100%

- ii. Alternative:

<b>End Year 1</b>	<b>End Year 2</b>	<b>End Year 3</b>	<b>Licence renewal dependent upon reaching required accessibility percentage</b>	<b>End year 1</b>	<b>End year 2</b>	<b>End year 3</b>	<b>End Year 1</b>
<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>		<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2026</b>
10%	20%	25%		50%	75%	85%	100%

### 3. Additional proposals related to information for passengers

#### Objective:

- All vehicles used to provide urban, rural and interurban regular public bus passenger services would have visual and aural next stop announcements by end 2023.

#### Implementation

- Phased approach for all new/ renewed licences from 2019:

	<b>End Year 1 2020</b>	<b>End Year 2 2021</b>	<b>End Year 3 2022</b>	<b>End Year 1 2023</b>
Percentage of vehicles used on licensed service	25%	50%	75%	100%

- If the service has not reached a verifiable 75% accessibility standard by the end of year 3, the licence will not be renewed.

## Accessibility Questionnaire

The following questionnaire refers to **vehicle accessibility only** and is divided into sections. You may answer the questions in each section if you wish, however, Section 6 is designed for bus operators only.

Please provide as much detail as possible when answering the following questions.

## Making a Submission

The Authority invites written submissions or observations on the above proposals for the potential changes to the licence conditions for public bus passenger services with regard to accessibility.

Written submissions and observations may be made by email to:

[accessiblelicensedbus@nationaltransport.ie](mailto:accessiblelicensedbus@nationaltransport.ie)

or by post to:

Accessible Bus Consultation,  
National Transport Authority,  
Dún Scéine,  
Iveagh Court,  
Harcourt Lane,  
Dublin D02 WT20.

All submissions must include the full name and address of the person making the submission and where relevant the name of the body or organisation represented.

All submissions and observations received within the timeframe set out will be taken into consideration. These submissions may be published.

The closing date for all submissions is **5:00pm Friday 25 October 2019**.



## Section 1: Wheelchair Accessibility

**Q 1.1** In your experience, how adequate is the current level of wheelchair accessibility in the licensed bus and coach sector? Please explain.

**Q 1.2** If applicable, could you describe your experience of using wheelchair-accessible:

- A. Low-floor buses (e.g. low-floor urban buses), and
- B. Wheelchair-lift on high floor coaches (e.g. wheelchair lift on inter-urban coaches)?

**Q 1.3** In your opinion, what are the obstacles in transitioning to a fully wheelchair accessible licensed commercial bus and coach sector?

**Q 1.4** Please describe any positive developments in the wheelchair accessibility of services operated by the commercial bus and coach sector.

**Q 1.5** With limited resources, please rank what services should be prioritised for wheelchair accessibility (with 1 being the most important priority):

- a. City & town services to be wheelchair accessible at all times
- b. City and town services to be wheelchair accessible at 24 hours' notice or 36 hours' notice
- c. Commuter services to be wheelchair accessible at all times.
- d. Commuter services to be wheelchair accessible at 24 hours' notice or 36 hours' notice
- e. Rural services only to be wheelchair accessible at all times
- f. Rural services to be wheelchair accessible at 24 hours' notice or 36 hours' notice
- g. Intercity services to be wheelchair accessible at all times

**Q 1.6** Can you describe any foreseeable developments in wheelchair or powered mobility equipment or use which are likely to impact on accessibility standards for buses or coaches?

**Q 1.7** What other changes, if any, could be made to the current policy and regulations to increase wheelchair accessibility?

## **Section 2: Visual/ Audio Accessibility**

**Q 2.1** In your experience, how adequate is the current level of visual/ audio announcements in the licensed bus and coach sector? Please explain.

**Q 2.2** What visual/ audio enhancements do you think would be required to ensure vehicles are accessible?

**Q 2.3** If applicable, please could you explain the current procedure for visually impaired passengers with/out an assistance dog?

**Q 2.4** If applicable, please could you explain the current procedure for hearing impaired/ deaf passengers?

## **Section 3: Accessibility Options – based on NTA Approach**

For explanatory information on this section, please see the accompanying Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA).

**Q 3.1** Do you agree that accessibility conditions should only be applied to the regular licence category? Please provide reasons for your answer.

**Q 3.2** Do you agree that the Authority's phased approach to accessibility, with minimum requirements increasing over time until all vehicles meet the required standard, is the most feasible approach? Please provide reasons for your answer.

**Q 3.3** Given the differences in the existing infrastructure at stop locations across the country, should all regular services be held to the same accessibility standards?

**Q 3.4** Considering the potential cost (indicative as set out in the Regulatory Impact Assessment), which option do you believe is most feasible for operators:

- Option 1 - Total Accessibility by 2023;
- Option 2 - Total Accessibility by 2029; and
- Option 3 - Total Accessibility by 2032.

Please provide reasons for your answer.

**Q 3.5** If you do not agree with options set out above, please explain what licence conditions you think could the Authority place on commercial bus operators to improve accessibility of their services, while not placing an unreasonable burden on them?

## Section 4: Compliance

**Q 4.1** Commercial bus operators are not subsidised by the state and must carry the cost of increased accessibility. What licence conditions could the Authority place on commercial bus operators to improve accessibility of their services while not placing an unreasonable burden on them?

**Q 4.2** Do you think that refusal to renew a licence is a proportionate response to an operator's non-compliance with accessibility standards in the first instance? If not, please state what you deem to be proportionate?

**Q 4.3** Please indicate how you think NTA can best monitor improvements in accessibility in the commercial public bus passenger services and ensure compliance with licence conditions in accessibility?

## Section 5: Disability Awareness Training

**Q 5.1** EU law states that drivers and staff should receive disability awareness training and, for journeys above 250km, disability assistance training.

Please outline your views on what training should be required in the commercial bus sector to improve accessibility of public transport services.

Please note that disability-awareness training is defined as:

“Training of staff that deal directly with the travelling public includes: — awareness of and appropriate responses to passengers with physical, sensory (hearing and visual), hidden or learning disabilities, including how to distinguish between the different abilities of persons whose mobility, orientation, or communication may be reduced, — barriers faced by disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility, including attitudinal, environmental/physical and organisational barriers, — recognised assistance dogs, including the role and the needs of an assistance dog, — dealing with unexpected occurrences, — interpersonal skills and methods of communication with deaf people and people with hearing impairments, people with visual impairments, people with speech impairments, and people with a learning disability, — how to handle wheelchairs and other mobility aids carefully so as to avoid damage (if any, for all staff who are responsible for luggage handling);”

## Section 6: Industry Questions

**Q 6.1** How many buses in your fleet are currently used to provide licensed services? How many are wheelchair accessible? Please indicate whether low floor ramp access or lift access.

**Q 6.2** As a bus operator, please could you describe the advantages and disadvantages of operating:

- a. A low floor wheelchair accessible bus
- b. A high floor coach with a wheelchair lift

**Q 6.3** What information do you currently make available to customers on accessible services you provide? What format is this information available in e.g. hard copy, PDF, HTML, braille, easy to read, screen reader etc.

**Q 6.4** What procedure do you currently have in place for visually impaired passengers with/out assistance dog?

**Q 6.5** What steps could you take to make your bus more noticeable for visually impaired passengers?

**Q 6.6** What procedure do you currently have in place for hearing impaired/ deaf passengers? Audio announcements/ visual with journey progress etc.

**Q 6.7** What steps could you take to make your services more accessible for deaf/ hearing impaired?

**Q 6.8** Do you agree that the Authority's phased approach to accessibility, with minimum requirements increasing over time until all vehicles meet the required standard, is the most feasible approach? Please provide reasons for answer.

**Q 6.9** Please set out what the cost implications for you, as operator, would be in order to comply with the following options:

- Option 1 - Total Accessibility by 2023;
- Option 2 - Total Accessibility by 2029; and
- Option 3 - Total Accessibility by 2032.

**Q 6.10** in relation to the above, which option would be most feasible for you? Please state the reason for your answer.

**Q 6.11** if you do not think that any of the options set out are acceptable, please set out in detail how you could achieve accessibility and within what timeframe?