



Commercial Bus Services

in Ireland (Overview of 2020)

Bulletin Topics:

- Overview of Commercial Bus Services in 2020
- Total Number of Passenger Journeys
- Scheduled Vehicle Kilometres
- Commercial Bus Services Revenue and Ticketing
- Commercial Operator Fleet Size



Introduction

Introduction to the Statistical Bulletin on Commercial Bus Services in Ireland in 2020

This statistical bulletin is a publication of the National Transport Authority of Ireland (the “Authority”). It focuses on bus statistics for licensed public bus passenger services operating to a regular schedule in Ireland. The Authority was established under the Dublin Transport Authority Act, 2008 (as amended) and the Public Transport Regulation Act, 2009 (as amended) and is required¹ to “collect, compile, analyse and prepare information, data or statistics” regarding public transport services in Ireland.

Abridged Bulletin for 2020

Due to the devastating impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the public transport market this bulletin is an abridged version of the usual annual bulletin, with emphasis on the differences between 2019 and 2020. Comparisons are also drawn between 2013, the first year data was collected across the entire State, and 2020.

Regular Public Bus Passenger Services covered in this Statistical Bulletin

Licensed public bus passenger services are often called “commercial” bus services because they are usually operated without any public subsidy from the Authority. This was changed and funding was made available to regular commercial bus service operators in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19. These commercial bus services are individually licensed by the Authority. Some commercial bus services receive payments from the Department of Social Protection’s Free Travel Scheme in compensation for the revenue foregone from carrying those passengers entitled to free travel.

The commercial bus services covered by this bulletin include any licensed regular bus service with an origin, intermediate point, or a destination within the Republic of Ireland. Bus services which were subject to an international authorisation under EU law and were travelling to, from or through Northern Ireland and then into this State are also included in the bulletin. References to commercial bus services therefore include services operating wholly within the State and bus services which cross the border into Northern Ireland.

The two principal contracted State funded bus operators, Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus, also provide commercial bus services. These include the Bus Éireann Expressway

services and the Dublin Bus Airlink services. The figures for these services are included in this bulletin.

Licence Categories not included in the Bulletin

Certain commercial public bus passenger service licence categories are not included in this bulletin. These are Event and Venue licences, which cover public bus passenger services for concerts and other events; Specific Targeted licences, which cover public bus passenger services such as tours; and Demand Responsive licences. Complete details of each category of public bus passenger service licence can be found in the ‘Guidelines for the Licensing of Public Bus Passenger Services’ available to download from www.nationaltransport.ie/bus-licensing/

References to GDA and Non-GDA services and Operators

‘GDA services’ refers to any commercial bus service travelling to, from or through any of the GDA counties of Dublin, Meath, Wicklow or Kildare. This includes commercial bus services that travel wholly within the GDA and services which include stops both inside and outside of the GDA. GDA services for the purposes of this bulletin include both licensed and authorised services.

The bus services travelling wholly outside of the GDA counties are referred to as ‘Non-GDA services’ and ‘Nationally’ refers to the combined figures for all the bus services running to, from or through the State. These are the meanings assigned throughout the document, unless otherwise stated. Again, these services include licensed and authorised services.

Some operators have a mix of GDA and Non-GDA services. References to GDA and Non-GDA Operators do not include operators with a mix of services and are simply operators that have either solely GDA or Non-GDA services.

Level of Data Collected

All of the Authority’s Bulletins can be viewed and downloaded here: <https://www.nationaltransport.ie/publications/>

Fifteen operators did not supply returns for commercial bus services provided in 2020. The combined figures for these licences accounted for less than 0.5% of

¹ Section 73 (Information, data and statistics) of the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, as amended

previous years' overall totals for passenger journeys or scheduled kilometres. Due to the rounding used in this bulletin the figures have no statistical impact on percentages however, the actual figures would be higher than recorded.

Authority Obligations in Relation to Commercially Sensitive Information

In publishing this data the Authority has been fully aware of its obligations regarding commercially sensitive information and has therefore ensured that patronage and revenue data have been presented in a consolidated and anonymised fashion.

Statistical Qualification

It is important to know that the figures used in this bulletin are provided by the operators and are not independently verified by the Authority.

Some figures have been estimated by operators. The figures are intended to illustrate general features and broad trends for commercial bus services in Ireland. They are not meant to be read as precise calculations. Rounding has been used which could affect overall percentages. Please also be aware that some figures from previous years may have been subsequently revised by the operators. The data expressed in this bulletin utilises the most up to date information provided by the operators and updates all previous bulletins.

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Acknowledgement

The National Transport Authority would like to extend its appreciation to the licensed and authorised commercial bus operators for their co-operation and assistance in contributing to this bulletin.

Overview of Commercial Bus Services in 2020

There is a large variability and diversity in the scale, frequency, and type of commercial bus services provided by operators. Commercial bus services cover large scale inter-city and interurban bus services which provide connections to and from the country's main towns, cities, and airports; commuter services that bring passengers to employment and education; urban and suburban services; as well as rural services that generally link small towns and villages in rural areas.

A single licence may provide numerous services per hour or per day, using several vehicles with large passenger capacities. An operator can also hold several licences, each of which may have a small number of services per week or per month and provide all of these services using one vehicle with a lower passenger capacity.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on licensed regular bus services was devastating. Figures A to C and Table A in this bulletin illustrate this impact.

The combination of the restriction of passenger travel to essential journeys along with the two-metre social distancing requirement meant that both demand and capacity were severely curtailed. Passenger numbers plummeted to less than 10% of previous patronage levels after the nationwide lockdown was implemented in March 2020. As a result, many licensed bus operators ceased to provide services or reduced their service levels due to the financial losses that would be incurred by continuing to operate in full. The gradual easing of the lockdown restrictions increased capacity to a recommended 50% maximum. However, this constraint still rendered many services commercially unviable to operate.

There are many areas where licensed bus operators provide most, and in some locations all, regular public bus services. Therefore, it was essential for both social and economic reasons that bus services recommenced. In June 2020, the Government announced temporary funding supports would be introduced for the licensed regular bus sector, in accordance with EU and national legislation. Due to this financial support, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the licensed regular bus sector was mitigated and many commercial services resumed in full or in part in July/ August 2020.

The capacity restrictions placed on public transport varied throughout the year, but at no time was 100% capacity allowed after March 2020. To ensure that restrictions were adhered to and that passengers were able to board services, additional vehicles had to be deployed by operators. Therefore, some individual services were operated by two or three vehicles. As a result, while there was a large reduction in the total passenger journeys, there was not a corresponding consistent reduction in kilometres operated or vehicles utilised. For this reason operators were asked to provide the actual operated vehicle kilometres for each licence. The operated vehicle kilometres figure incorporates the additional kilometres provided when more than one vehicle was deployed. All previous bulletins reported on the scheduled vehicle kilometres for the licence.

Figure A: Overview of Figures for Commercial Bus Services in 2020 compared to 2019

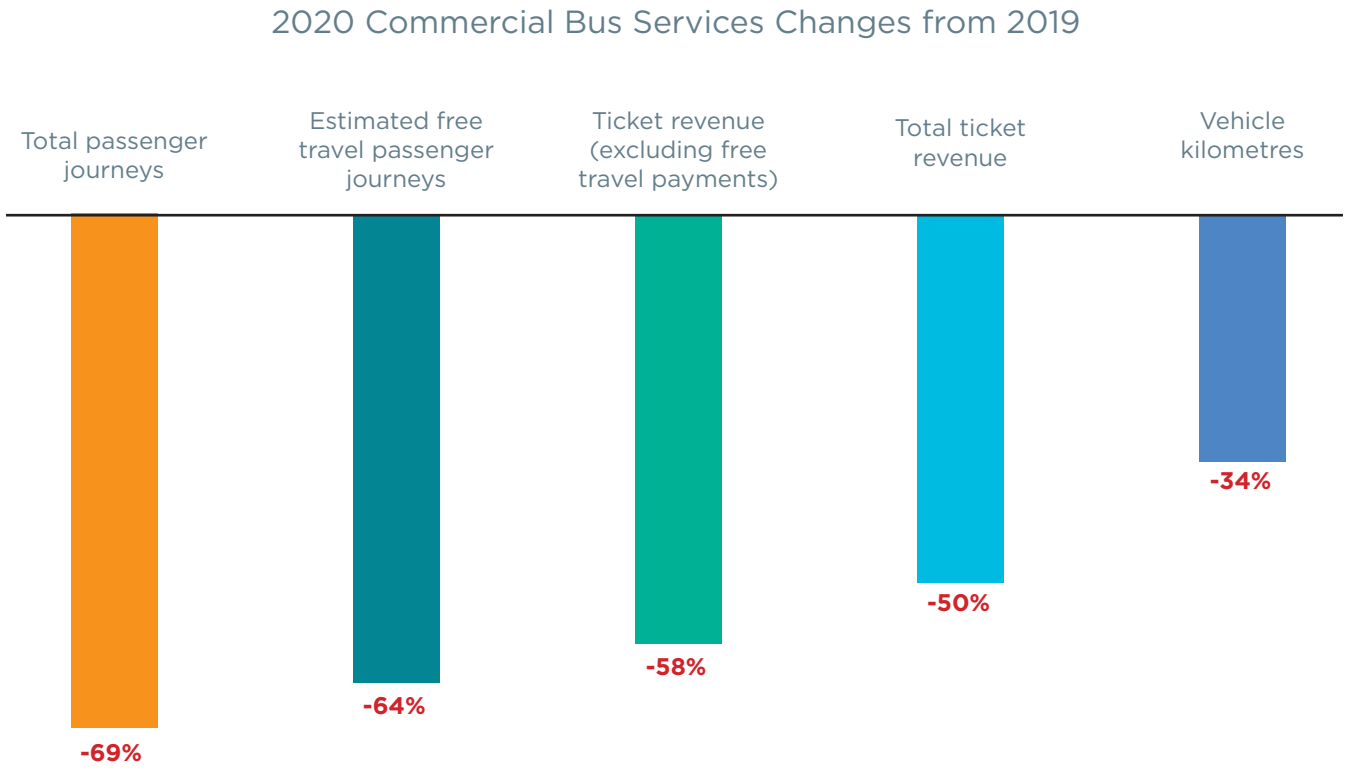


Figure B: Overview of Passenger Figures for Commercial Bus Services in 2020 compared to 2019

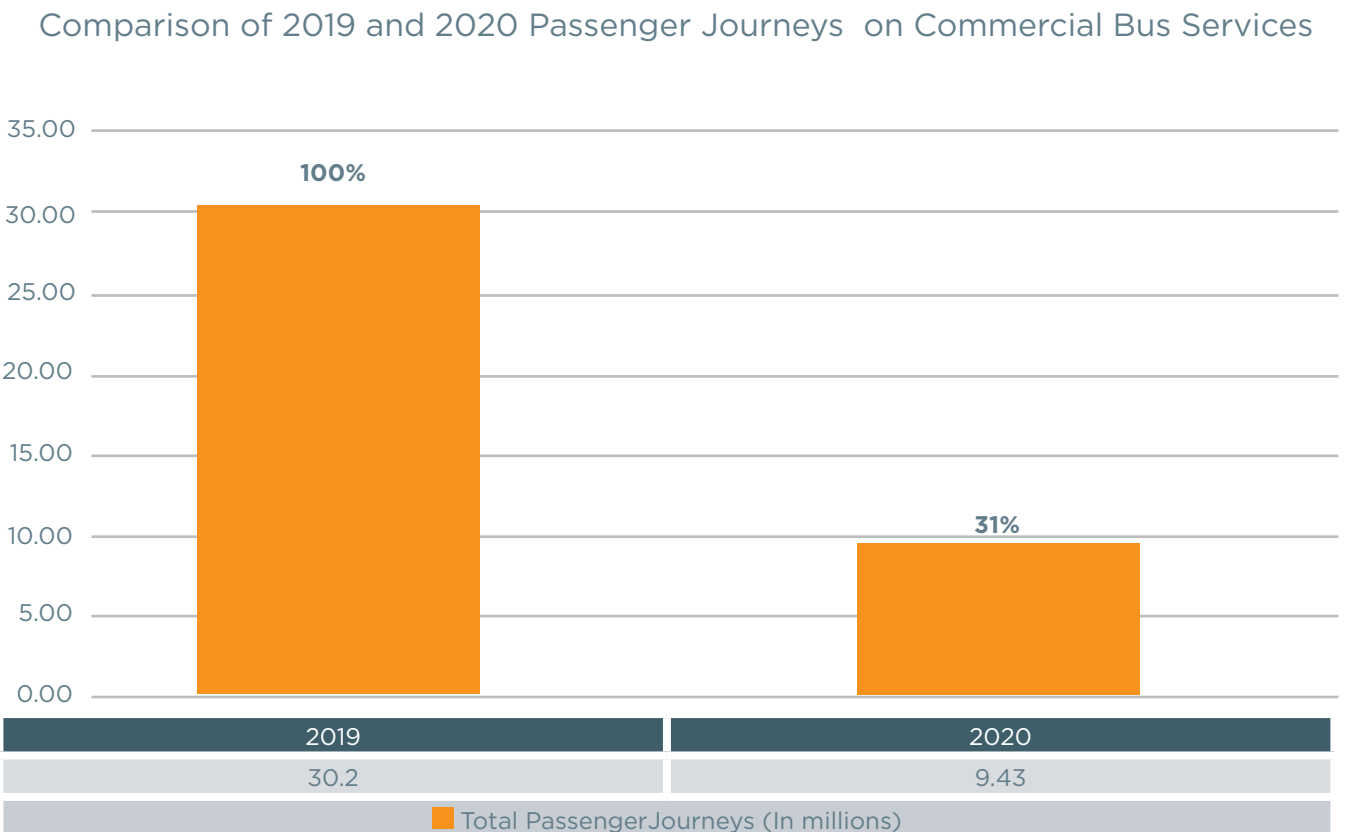


Figure C: Overview Vehicle Kilometres Figures for Commercial Bus Services in 2020 compared to 2019

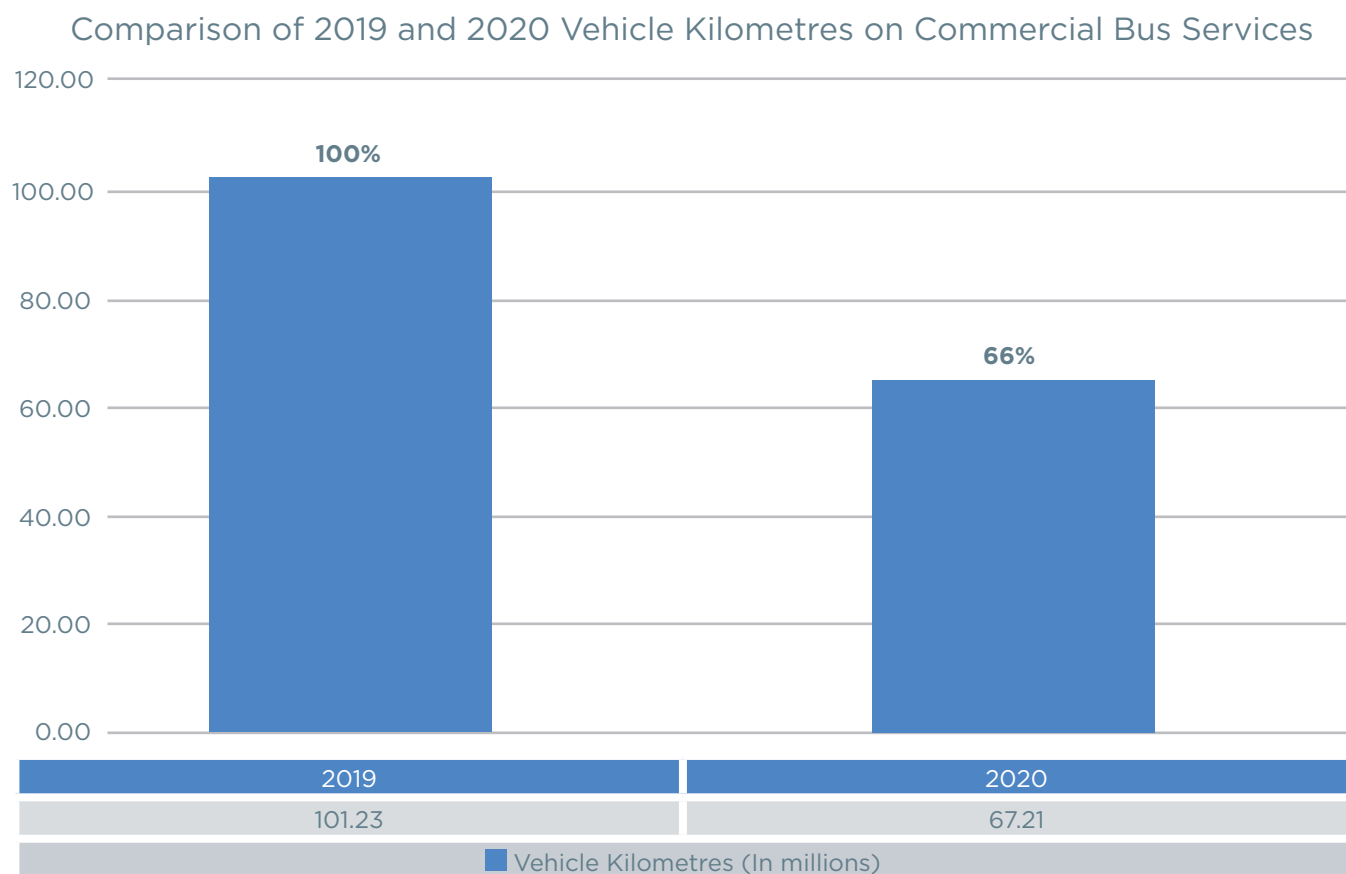


Table A: Comparison of 2020 Total Annual Passenger Journeys and Scheduled² Vehicle Kilometres (in millions)

Year	Total Passenger Journeys	Scheduled Vehicle KM
2013	20.1	80.1
2019	30.5	101.2
2020	9.43	67.21
Change: 2013-2019	52%	26%
Change: 2019-2020	-69%	-34%
Change: 2013-2020	-53.1%	-16.1%

² For 2020 operators provided the actual number of vehicle kilometres operated.

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Total Number of Passenger Journeys

Demand for public transport services is strongly related to economic activity. Economic growth increases employment, disposable income, and consumer spend, all of which lead to greater demand for travel. Economic decline produces the opposite effect.

2013 was the first year for which data was collected on a national level for commercial bus services. Figures 1.1 and 1.2 show the total change in passenger journeys since 2013. The passenger figures for 2020 are then compared in Figure 1.3 to a baseline figure of 100% in 2013.

Figure 1.1: Commercial Bus Services Total Passenger Journeys by Year 2013-2020 (in millions)

Total Annual Passenger Journeys on Licensed Services 2013-2020 (in millions)

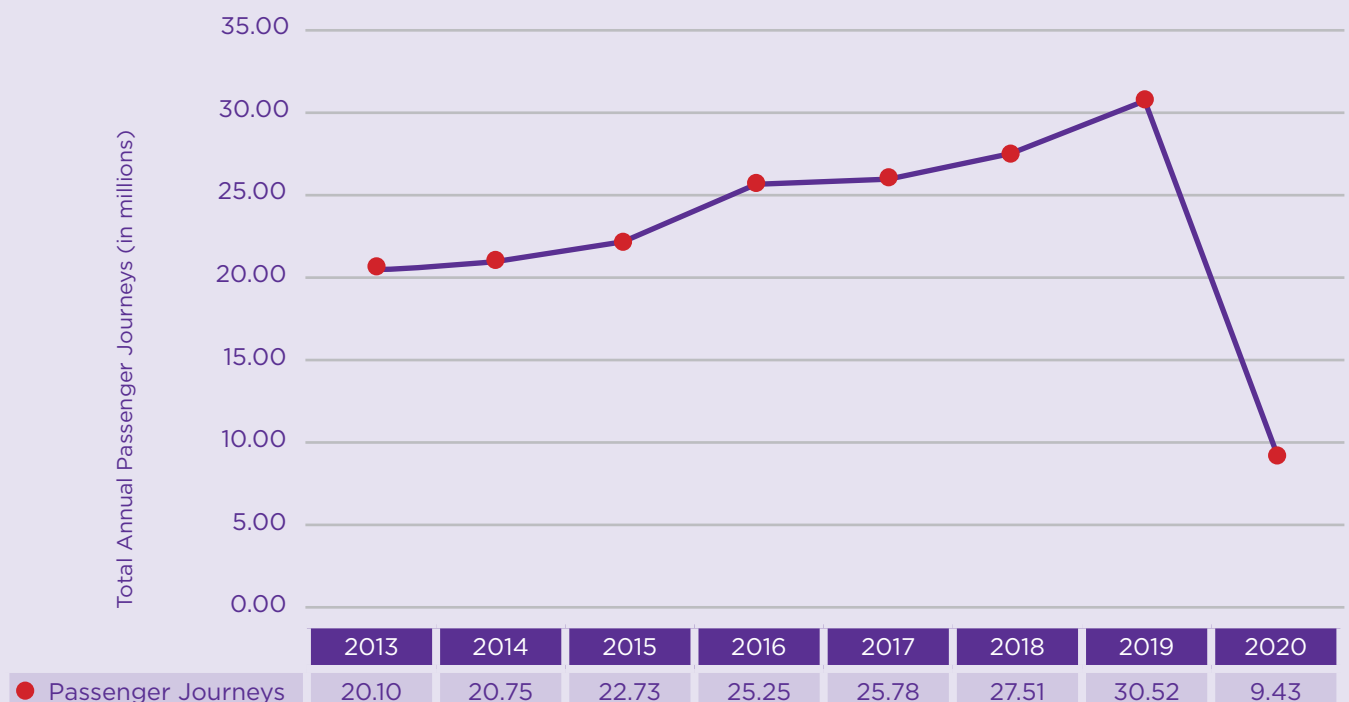
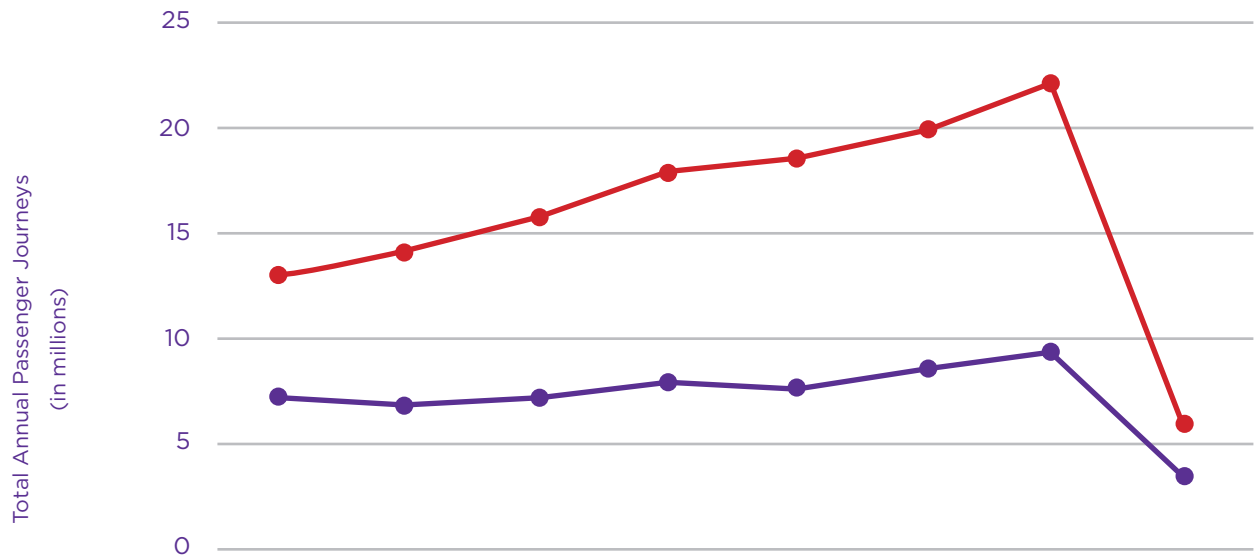


Figure 1.2: Breakdown by Area of Total Annual Commercial Bus Services Passenger Journeys (in millions)

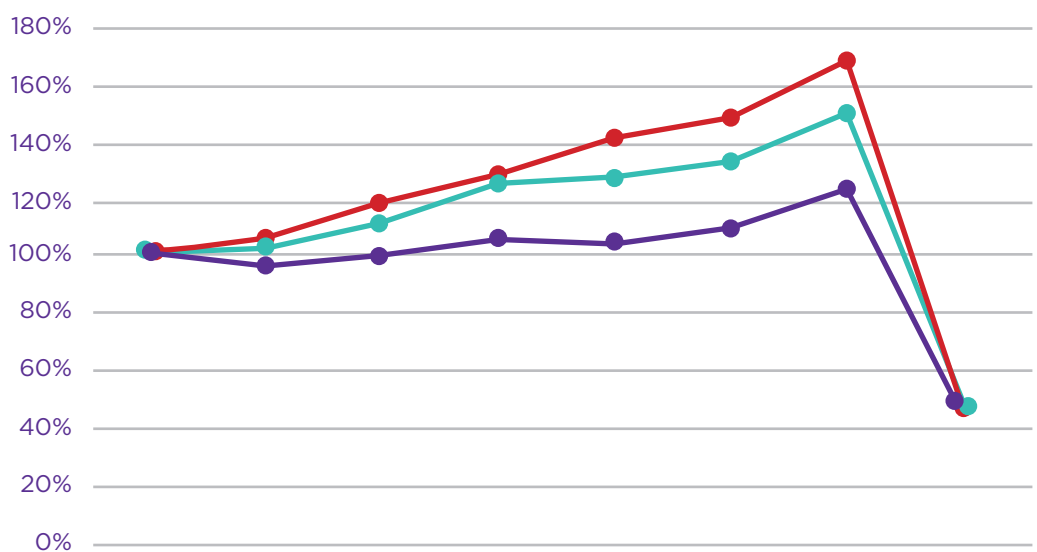
Breakdown of Total Annual Passenger Journeys on Licensed Services 2013-2020 (in millions)



	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
● Non-GDA Services	7.06	6.74	7.06	7.64	7.41	7.90	8.84	3.59
● GDA Services	13.02	14.01	15.67	17.61	18.37	19.62	21.68	5.84

Figure 1.3: Comparison of 2020 Commercial Bus Services Total Passenger Journeys (in millions) to baseline year of 2013

Commercial Bus Passenger Journeys 2013 - 2020 with 2013 as 100%



	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
● Non-GDA Services	100%	95%	100%	108%	105%	112%	125%	51%
● GDA Services	100%	108%	120%	135%	141%	151%	167%	45%
● All Commercial Bus Services	100%	103%	113%	126%	128%	137%	152%	47%

Free Travel Passenger Journeys

The Department of Social Protection’s Free Travel Scheme is available to all persons aged 66 and over living permanently in the State. Some people under 66 may also qualify, such as carers in receipt of a Carer’s Allowance and certain other persons in receipt of a Disability Allowance or an Invalidity Pension.

Since 1995, Northern Ireland Senior Citizens aged 65+ have been eligible for restricted cross border free travel from any point in Northern Ireland to any destination within the Republic of Ireland. This provision was further expanded in 2007, to allow eligible Northern Ireland 65+ Senior Smart Pass holders, to travel for free not only to a destination across the border but also on internal public transport services within the Republic of Ireland.

Free travel is available on State funded bus and rail transport including Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann, Iarnród Éireann, and Luas services. Free travel is also available on a number of commercial bus services. Operators that are part of the scheme receive payments for the fare forgone for carrying passengers entitled to free travel.

As part of the Annual Bus Operator Returns, operators estimate the number of free travel passenger journeys as a percentage of all journeys for each licence and authorisation.

Figures 1.4 to 1.6 show the trend and breakdown in estimated free travel passenger journeys.

Figure 1.4: Comparison of Free Travel Journeys and Total Passenger Journeys (in millions) 2013-2020

Comparison of Free Travel Journeys and Total Passenger Journeys (in millions) 2013-2020

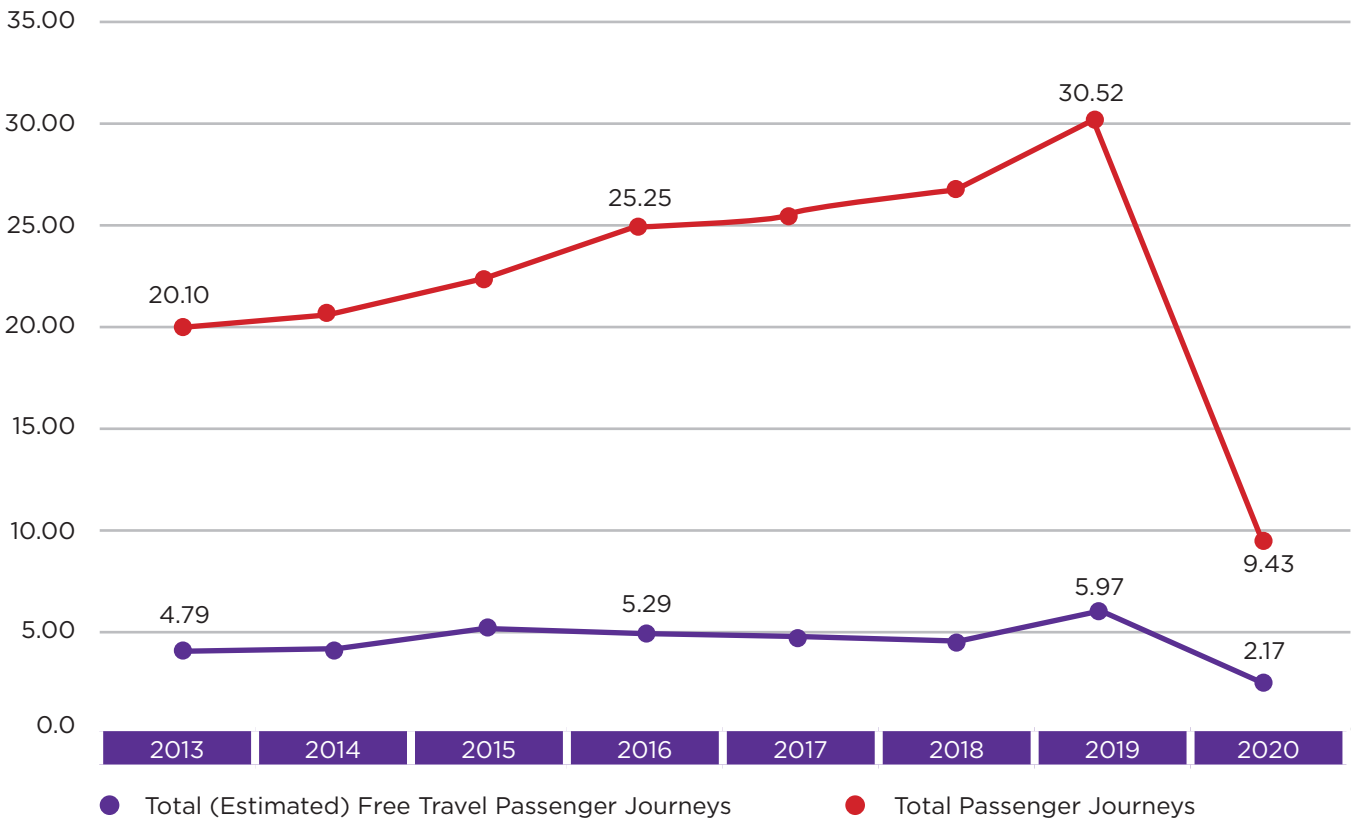


Figure 1.5: Breakdown of Free Travel Journeys and Total Passenger Journeys (in millions) 2013-2020

Breakdown by Service Type of Total Free Travel Passenger Journeys (in millions) 2013-2020

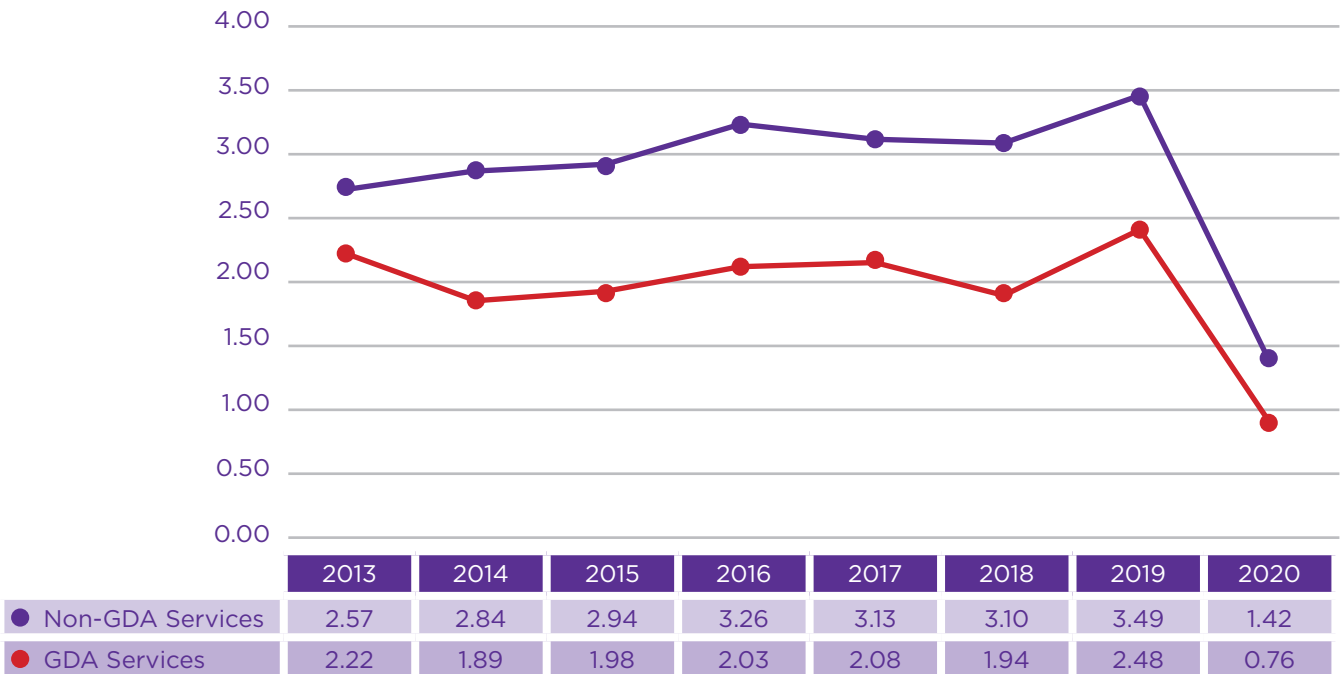
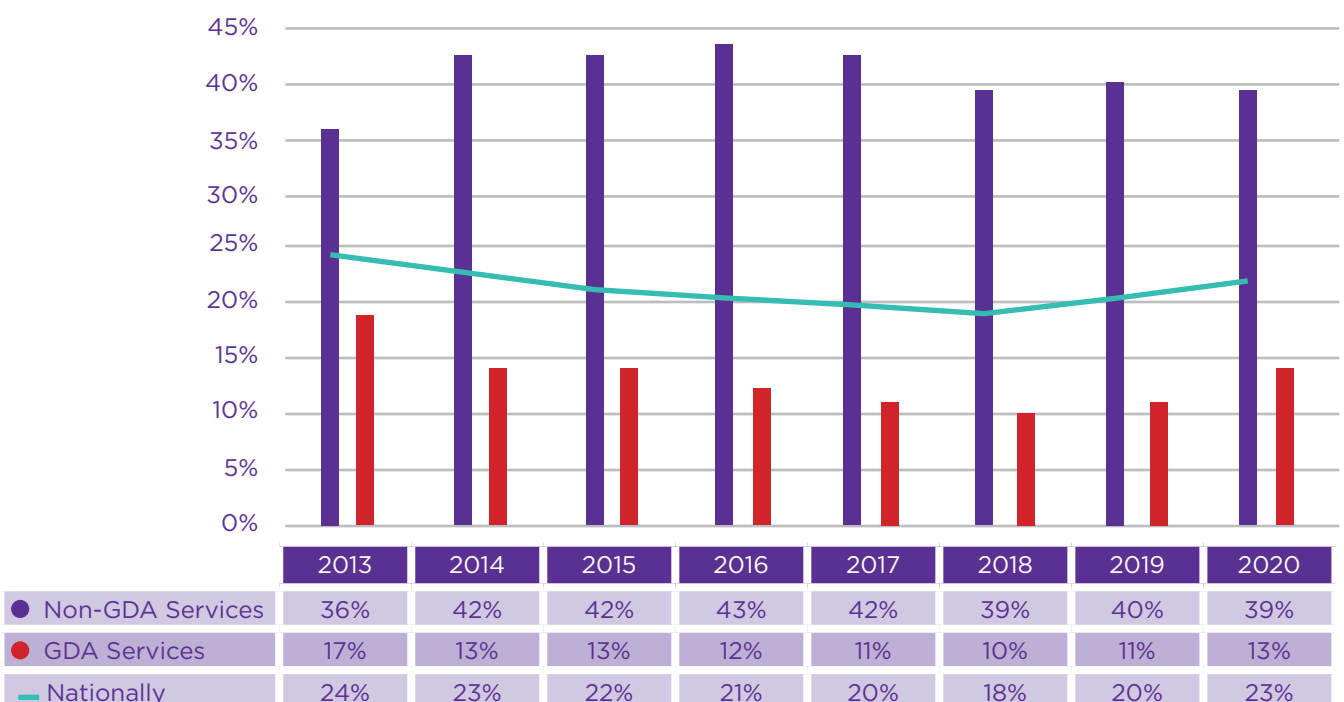


Figure 1.6: Free Travel Journeys as a Percentage of Total Passenger Journeys 2013-2020

Free Travel Passenger Journeys as a Percentage of Total Passenger Journeys 2013-2020



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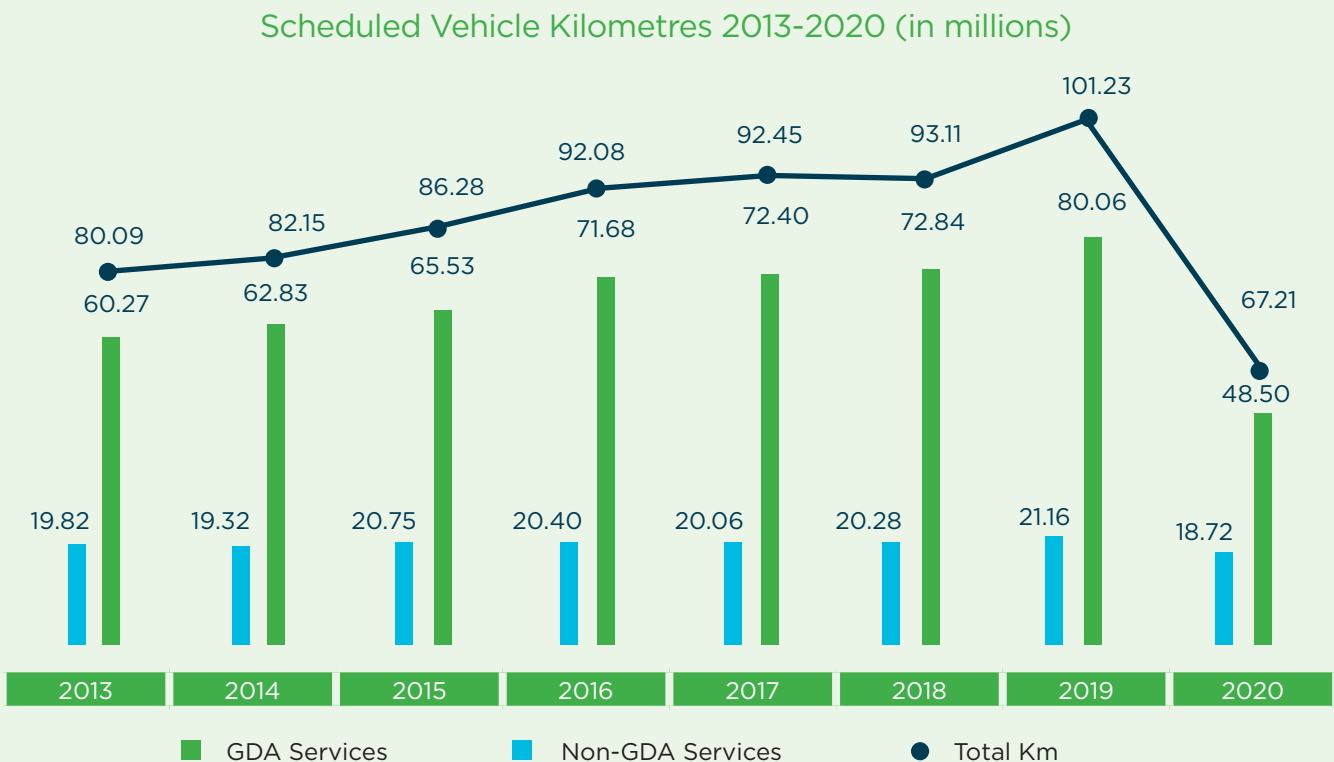


Scheduled Vehicle Kilometres

‘Scheduled vehicle kilometres’ indicate the total number of vehicle kilometres intended to be operated based on the licensed timetables. For 2020, operators were asked to provide the actual number of vehicle kilometres operated.

This was due to some services being partly or completely suspended, as well as to account for additional vehicles used due to the restrictions on public transport capacity throughout the year.

Figure 2.1: Comparison of Scheduled Vehicle Kilometres for GDA and Non GDA services by Year 2013-2020 (in millions)



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Commercial Bus Services Revenue and Ticketing

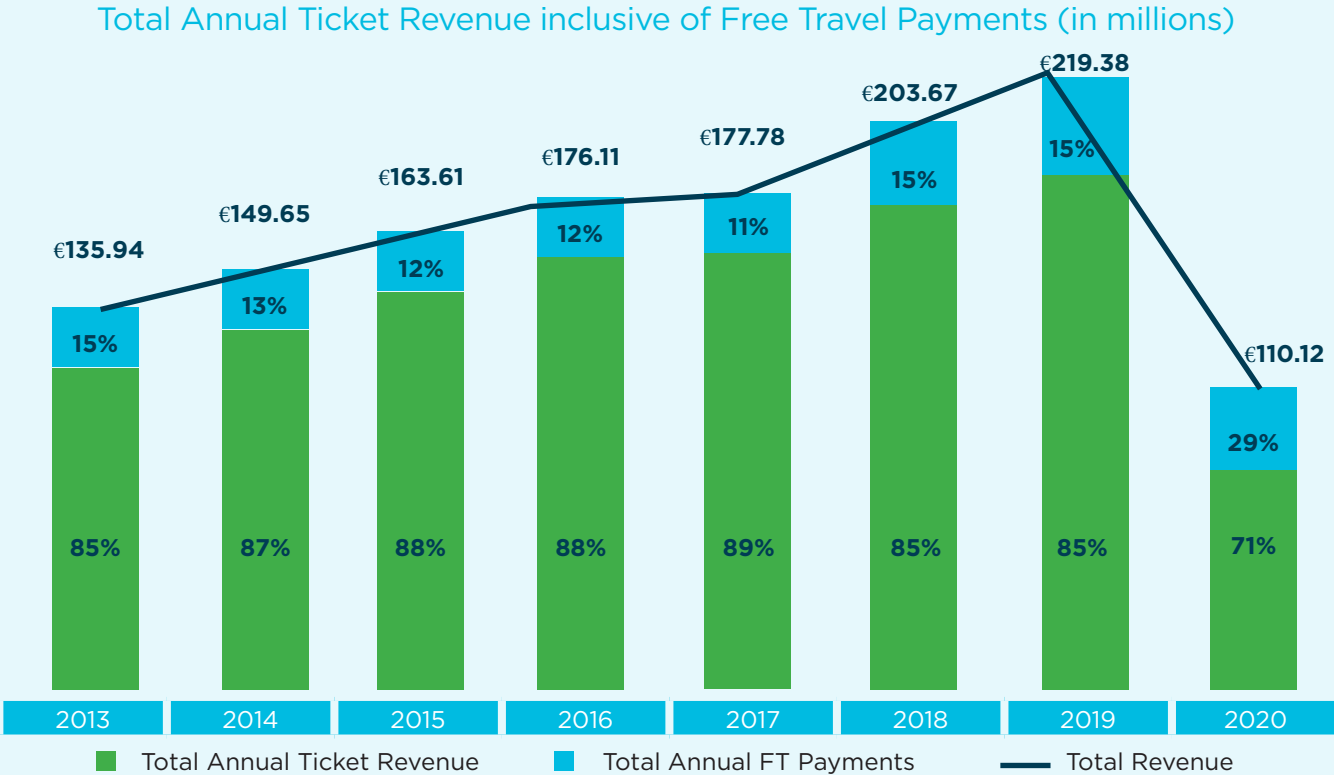
Commercial bus service revenue consists of all revenue from ticket sales, including cash, TaxSaver, Leap card, online, and prepaid tickets, as well as payments to operators participating in the Department of Social Protection’s Free Travel Scheme.

Free Travel Revenue

Operators that are part of the Department of Social Protection’s Free Travel Scheme receive payments for the fare forgone for carrying passengers entitled to free travel.

Overall Free Travel Scheme payments to commercial operators are set out below. These include payments for free travel within the State for both Irish and Northern Irish passengers, as well as payments for cross border free travel.

Figure 3.1: Commercial Bus Services Comparison of Revenue Types by Year 2013-2020 (in millions)



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Commercial Operator Fleet Size

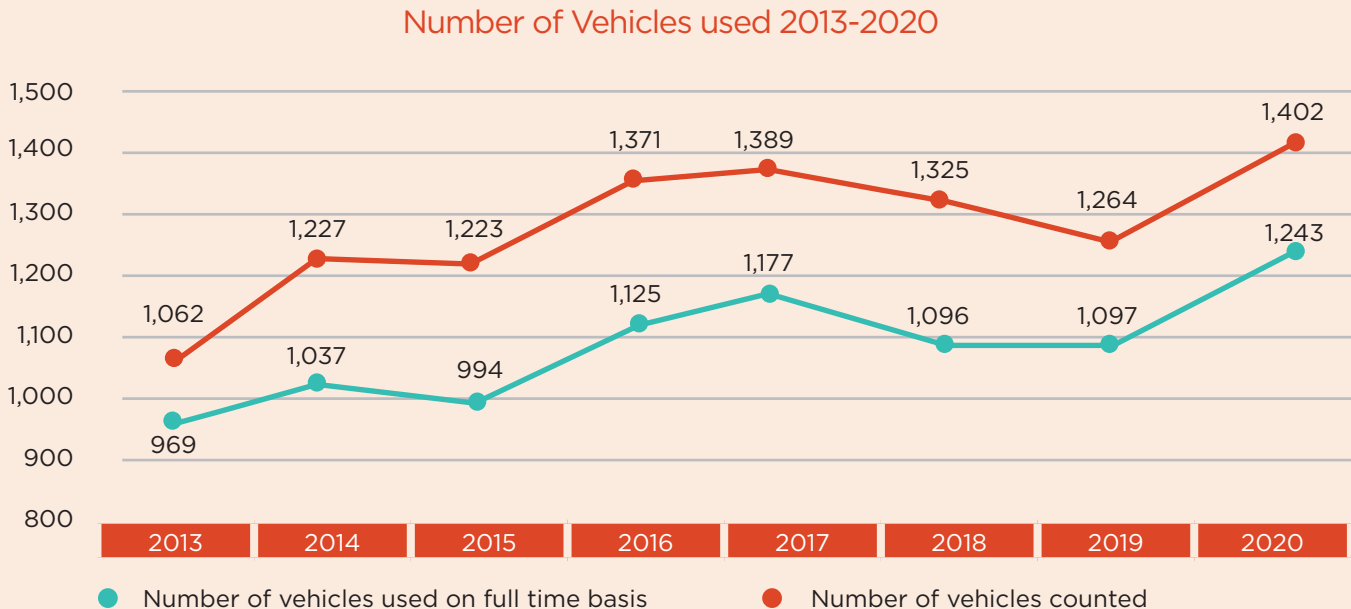
This is set out in terms of the total number of vehicles used and the number of vehicles used on a full-time basis to provide the licensed regular services. These figures were obtained by asking commercial operators whether their vehicles were also used for other activities, to show not only how many vehicles operators used to provide their commercial bus services, but also how much these vehicles were used for operating these services.

As an example, if an operator had one vehicle and this vehicle was used 70% of the time for commercial bus services and 30% of the time for school transport services, then the operator would report that as 0.7 of a vehicle.

The vehicles referred to include a broad variety of vehicles, such as inter-city coaches, low-floor urban double and single decker buses, and midi and mini buses. These vehicles have a wide range of passenger seat capacities.

As above, additional vehicles may have been deployed to provide individual services from March 2020 onward due to the restrictions on public transport capacity.

Figure 4.1: Comparison of Operators Total Number of Vehicles used by Year 2013-2020





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