

# Connecting Ireland Insights

Issue 1 | Quarter 4



## ➤ Introduction from Tim Gaston, Programme Director, NTA

"I am delighted to see this informative update on the huge progress being made on the NTA's Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan. This plan will continue to make a difference in the day to day lives of more and more people as new and enhanced services are introduced right across rural Ireland. My thanks to all involved in designing, securing and implementing and operating these services. We are on a journey to bring about a sea-change in the opportunities available to the 50% of people living outside our larger towns and cities. I commend this bulletin to all who have an interest in rural Ireland and in public transport in particular."

### What is Connecting Ireland?

Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan (the Plan) is a major public transport initiative developed by the National Transport Authority (NTA) with the aim of increasing connectivity for people living outside our major cities and towns. The Plan aims to improve mobility in rural areas, and it will do this by providing better connections between villages and towns to facilitate access to local services as well as providing connectivity to an enhanced regional network connecting cities and regional centres nationwide. The NTA consulted both stakeholders and the public on the Plan.



### Connecting Ireland Timeline

In 2022 the NTA analysed feedback received from the public consultation and, where appropriate, integrated amendments / alternative suggestions into the Plan.

Throughout 2022, Phase 1 of the Plan has delivered a number of new and enhanced bus services. The revisions were implemented on routes and services serving areas in counties Cavan, Monaghan, Donegal, Clare, Sligo, Kildare, Offaly, Mayo and Wexford.

Throughout the remainder of 2022, the NTA aims to continue to implement further services across the State, and start the procurement for proposals due to enter service in 2023. This rate of improvement of bus services has and will continue to be achieved in a sector facing severe challenges due to increases in the cost of fuel, lack of both vehicle and trained drivers, both of which have been brought about by the recent pandemic and geopolitical events across the world.

The rollout of new and improved services is continuing on a phased basis from 2023 to 2026. Please check back here and on social media to keep up to date with the latest progress in delivering the Plan, and to see how it has helped the transport sector to contribute to wider sustainability and climate change mitigation objectives.





## Implemented Services

To the end of October 2022, the NTA has implemented a mix of 25 new and enhanced services improvements. These are:

Route Number	Route Name	Operational Since
176	Cavan - Monaghan	11/04/2022
195	Ashbourne - Balbriggan	23/05/2022
331	Ballyvaughan – Ennis	27/05/2022
840	Banagher - Tullamore	01/06/2022
978	Belmullet – Castlebar	13/06/2022
339	Loophead - Kilrush	01/09/2022
264	Ballyshannon - Letterkenny	12/09/2022
953	Greencastle – Letterkenny	12/09/2022
977	Ballaghderreen - Sligo	12/09/2022
572	Sligo - Cavan	12/09/2022
880	Naas - Carlow timetable changes	19/09/2022
368	Eniscorthy - New Ross (via Clonroch)	24/09/2022
369	Tullow - Bunclody - Enniscorthy	24/09/2022
431	Carraroe - Costelloe - Ballinrobe - Claremorris	03/10/2022
595	Tarbert - Croom	03/10/2022
821	Newbridge - Naas via Allenwood	17/10/2022
823	Birr - Portlaoise	20/10/2022
320	Charleville - Limerick	23/10/2022
466	Athlone - Longford - Cavan	23/10/2022
190	Athlone - Drogheda Extension	23/10/2022
167	Mullingar - Kells - Ardee - Dundalk	23/10/2022
314	Limerick - Ballybunion via Foynes	23/10/2022
328	Limerick - Mitchelstown	23/10/2022
332	Limerick - Cashel	23/10/2022
345	Scariff - Limerick	23/10/2022



### TFI Local Link Service Launches

Between April and October 2022, TFI Local Link in conjunction with the NTA delivered 17 new and enhanced services. Of these the following 6 were brand new services:

- 331 & 595 TFI Local Link Limerick Clare
- 264 TFI Local Link Donegal Sligo Leitrim
- 431 TFI Local Link Galway
- 821 TFI Local Link Kildare South Dublin
- 823 TFI Local Link Laois Offaly

For further details on all the new and enhanced service launches visit the [TFI website](#)

### Bus Éireann Service Launches

In October 2022, Bus Éireann in conjunction with NTA delivered 8 new and enhanced services. Five services within the Limerick area and 3 in the north east. Of these the following 3 were brand new services:

- 466 Athlone - Longford - Cavan
- 190 Athlone - Drogheda Extension
- 167 Mullingar - Kells - Ardee - Dundalk

For further details on all these new and enhanced service launches visit [Bus Éireann's website](#)



## Service improvements in action: Enhanced 978 Bus Service from Belmullet to Castlebar

Route 978 Belmullet to Castlebar originally provided 2 return services between Belmullet and Castlebar Monday to Saturday, with 24 trips per week. In its current form, the bus route did not provide a mid-day return service from Castlebar to Belmullet or operate a service on Sunday. As part of the Connecting Ireland programme, the route was analysed and areas for improvement were identified by the NTA’s Service Planning team.

Since the 13th June, the enhanced 978 service now provides greater connectivity and flexibility than ever before for the communities in Belmullet, Glencastle, Bangor Erris, Mulranny, Newport and Castlebar with a 75% increase in service levels going from 24 trips per week Monday to Saturday to 42 trips per week Monday to Sunday. The enhanced service now operates three times a day, seven days a week with a new regular Sunday and Bank Holiday service, new mid-day service from Castlebar to Belmullet and peak-time service for commuters to Castlebar offering improved connectivity to regional bus and rail services.

**TFI Local Link Mayo Manager, Sarah Togher said:** “The timetable for the revised 978 service has increased passenger connectivity options substantially accommodating travel between Erris and Achill to both Castlebar and Westport through a service interchange at Mulranny. The 978 Belmullet to Castlebar service now connects with the Bus Éireann 450 Achill to Westport twice daily at Mulranny. This vital service that provides greater options for rural dwellers on the route to access training, education, employment as well as access to health care services including Mayo University Hospital.”

### What passengers have said:

“If it wasn't for TFI Local Link and Route 978 I wouldn't be able to get to college. I would have no other way to travel.”

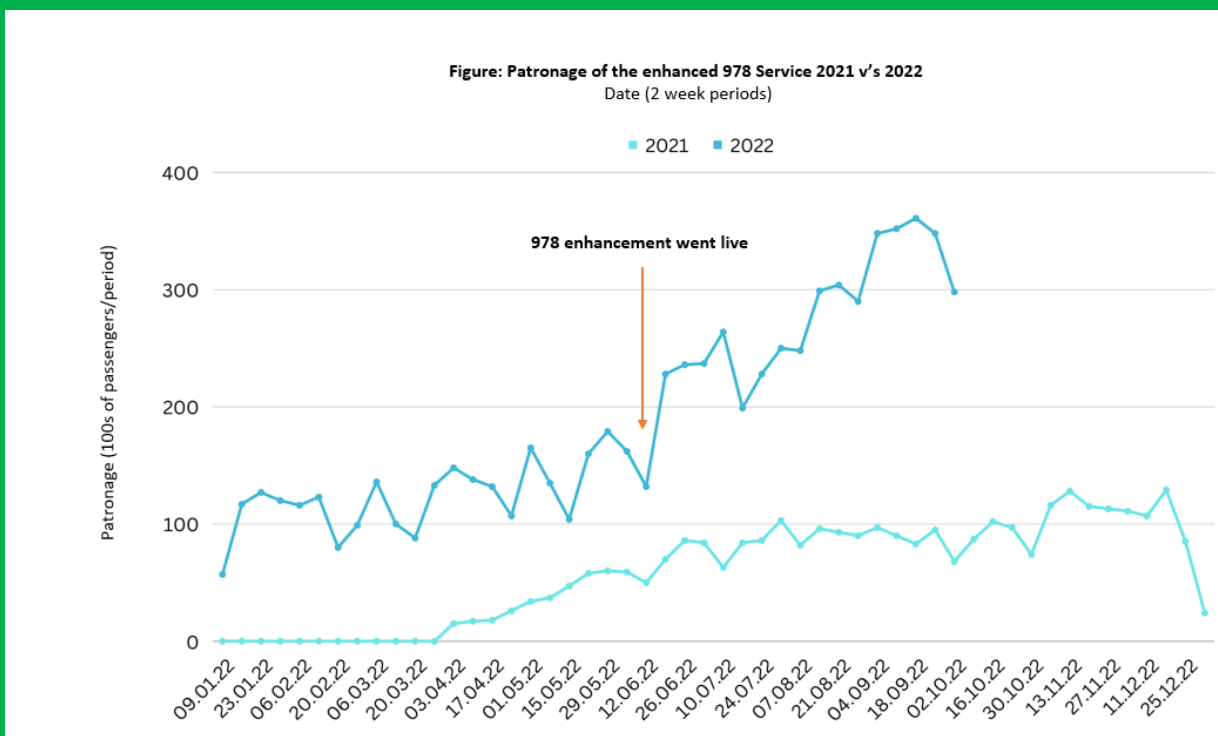
“This service means a lot because I don't drive. It allows me to get away for a few hours and get my shopping.”

“Apart from connectivity, it's a way to meet people. Social isolation is at an all-time high and this service allows us to get out and meet people.”

“We're travelling around all around Ireland by bus and train - this service is the best connection to Ballycroy. It's also an environmental decision - the bus is much better than using a car as its going anyways.”



Year to date, there has been a 310% increase in patronage on Route 978 (Jan 21– Oct 21 – 1719 vs Jan 22 – Oct 22 7348). Impacts of the improvements can be seen in the below graphic:



## COMING SOON...

The planned list of remaining implementations for 2022 is presented below:

Route Number	Route Name	Operational Since	Estimated Operational Timescales
358	Tramore - Dunmore East - Passage East - Waterford	TFI Local Link Waterford	Q4
354	Portlaw - Dunmore East	Bus Éireann	Q4
546	Ballinasloe - Castlereagh via Moylough	TFI Local Link Galway	Q4
432	Clifden - Roundstone - Carraroe	TFI Local Link Galway	Q4
981	Sligo - Coolaney	TFI Local Link Donegal Sligo Leitrim	Q4
384	Enniscorthy - Wexford	TFI Local Link Wexford	Q4
183	Arklow - Sallins	TFI Local Link Carlow Kilkenny Wicklow	Q4
M3	Emyvale - Glaslough - Tyholland	TFI Local Link Cavan Monaghan	Q4
283	Currans - Tralee	TFI Local Link Kerry	Q4
M1	Knockatallon – Monaghan Institute	TFI Local Link Cavan Monaghan	Q4
M2	Ballybay – Monaghan Institute	TFI Local Link Cavan Monaghan	Q4
257	Kinsale – Killarney (part Macroom - Killarney via Mill Street)	Bus Éireann	Q4
270	Skibbereen - Killarney	Bus Éireann	Q4
522	Charleville - Mallow	TFI Local Link Cork	Q4
523	Mitchelstown - Mallow	TFI Local Link Cork	Q4
884	Wexford - Gorey via Oulart	Commercial Bus Operator	Q4

The estimated implementation dates are indicative and may change for a number of reasons:

- The duration of the planning and design process, involving liaison with Local Authorities, TFI Local Link Offices, representatives, lobby groups, passengers and transport service providers to provide enhanced levels of service in response to growth and changes in demand for transport;
- Discussions with operators where licensed services and proposed PSO services co-exist on the same corridor; and
- Availability of service providers and drivers in particular following the impacts of Covid19 and macro-economic factors brought about by the conflict in Ukraine on the industry.

Given the rapidly changing environment, it is important that the Connecting Ireland team is able to be agile and flexible in its management of the programme, so that where progress is impacted, other plans can be advanced instead. This Bulletin reflects the Authority's intention as of today, but is likely to change to respond to changing circumstances.