

➤ Sixty-five new or enhanced services resulting in over 800,000 passenger journeys in 2023

Since January 2022, Connecting Ireland has launched over 100 new or enhanced bus routes nationwide. The result of this has been rural communities have access to frequent and affordable bus services that offer freedom, travel and sustainable transport options.

In 2023, Connecting Ireland launched 24 new and 41 enhanced bus services resulting in over 800,000 passenger journeys with over a third of these passenger journeys taking place on new services. Additionally, there was a 36% patronage increase on enhanced services when compared to 2022 passenger journey figures.

The 65 services launched last year have connected 190 towns and villages, 34 colleges, 42 hospitals and provided 49 connections to rail services meaning it is easier to access education and healthcare opportunities and connect to the wider TFI Network.



Figure 1 shows fully accessible electric vehicle for TFI Local Link Galway Route 438

The NTA is continually supporting initiatives in the area of climate action including the ongoing transition of the public transport fleet to zero emissions vehicles. Connecting Ireland contributed to this by introducing three fully accessible electric vehicles in Galway (Figure 1), Cavan and Mayo last year.

The 65 bus routes introduced in 2023 added 120,000 kilometers to the Transport for Ireland (TFI) Public Transport Network giving people who live outside major towns and cities an opportunity to travel, and giving others the choice to travel more sustainably



Phase 2 Key Achievements

Since the implementation of Phase 2 in January 2023, Connecting Ireland has delivered 65 new and enhanced bus services nationwide. The introduction of these services has provided increased connectivity to educational, employment and healthcare facilities as well as improved access to the wider TFI bus and rail network. These improvements to the TFI Network provide people living outside major towns and cities a more connected, affordable and sustainable way to travel.



people now have access to the new and enhanced bus services



passenger journeys took place on the 65 new and enhanced bus services



patronage growth on the enhanced services in 2023 vs 2022



passenger journeys took place on the 24 new services



passenger journeys took place on the 41 enhanced services



new towns and villages



of the new and enhanced services provide connections with rail services



42 new connections to hospitals were created



weekly kilometres have been added to the TFI Public Transport Network



34 new higher education connections to colleges were created

➤ New Services in Action – Route 188 Athboy to Drogheda

As part of the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan, the NTA and TFI Local Link Louth Meath Fingal identified a requirement for a new bus service to improve connectivity and mobility for the communities of Kentstown, Duleek, Donore and Ráth Chairn. These areas were identified as requiring additional public transport connections to the towns of Athboy, Navan and Drogheda. The implementation of new bus services in these areas would greatly improve access to essential services and resources for residents living in these areas.

The new Route 188, launched in January 2023, operates seven daily return services Monday to Sunday, with an additional morning service offered from Monday to Saturday providing greater connectivity in Rathmore, Kentstown, Duleek, Donore and Ráth Chairn. The route provides peak-time and evening services and also offers improved connectivity to regional bus services and to Drogheda and Navan Hospitals. In February 2024, the service was split into two routes, the 188 and 163. This facilitates more direct, faster and more reliable service on the 188 bus service. The 163 provides connections from Irish Rail services in Drogheda to the key tourist's attractions, Battle of the Boyne and Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centres. The combined 163 and 188 have grown patronage significantly since their launch and now carry an average of 1,900 passengers per week.

Speaking on the success of Route 188, **TFI Local Link Louth Meath Fingal Acting Manager, Deirdre Murtagh** said *"We are delighted with the success of Connecting Ireland Route 188 that started in January 2023. The success of this service has not just been about reaching its destination, but because of the planning of the route at a local level with TFI Local Link Louth Meath Fingal and the NTA. The locations of the many stops along the way interconnect passengers for all transport needs, from work, social, tourism, and education along with the ability to get to both Navan and Drogheda Hospitals. The route provides an efficient, reliable service on two comfortable buses with sufficient capacity that is inclusive for all users."*



Minister Eamonn Ryan, Deirdre Murtagh, Biran Daly and John Burns from TFI Local Link, Kieran Kehoe from Meath County Council, John Halpenny from Halpenny Travle and Conor O'Donovan from the NTA alongside a bus operating on Route 188 at the recent Navan Interchange launch



Enhanced Services in Action – Route S2 Strandhill to Rosses Point via Sligo Town

As part of the Connecting Ireland Plan, the NTA and Bus Éireann identified the need for increased frequency and expanded operating hours on route S2. The service in its previous form operated between Strandhill and Rosses Point via Sligo Town Monday to Sunday once an hour between 7.20am and 9pm. The service now operates on a half hourly basis to provide 31 daily return services Monday to Friday, 29 daily return trips on Saturday and 26 daily return trips on Sunday with the service operating from 5.45am until midnight. The provision of the enhanced S2 service provides better connectivity to the areas and villages of Buenos Ayres Drive, Kilbrone Drive, Mannionstown, Second Sea Road, Sea Road, Connaughton Road, Clarion Road, Ballytivan Road, Ballincar and Cregg’s Corner. Subsequently, the improved service offers enhanced access to Sligo University Hospital, ATU Sligo, Sligo GAA Club and to regional bus and rail services.

Since its introduction in December 2023, Route S2 has seen an increase in customer trips of 12%, with this growth trend continuing into 2024. Customer usage has grown across all segments, particularly in the Young Adult segment which has seen very strong growth particularly among third level students travelling to ATU Sligo.

Speaking on the launch of Route S2 in December 2023, Brian Connolly, Bus Éireann, Senior Operations Manager, West said "Bus Éireann is delighted to introduce these significant enhancements to Route S2, doubling the daily services for passengers Monday to Sunday providing expanded hours of operation across the route. *Thanks to the National Transport Authority, through the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan, we have added almost 1.8 million kilometres to our network, creating over 58 new jobs. Demand for our services in the West is higher now than pre-pandemic, passenger numbers nationally are 20-30% higher than they were in 2019, this enhanced service will enable us to connect our growing number of customers with who and what matters to them.*"



➤ New or Enhanced Services implemented in 2024 so far

Route Number	Route Name/ Description	Operator	Implementation Date
292	Donegal - Ballyshannon	TFI Local Link Donegal Sligo Leitrim	04/01/2024
831	Rathdowney - Portlaoise	TFI Local Link Laois Offaly	06/01/2024
189	Enfield - Navan	TFI Local Link Louth Meath Fingal	29/01/2024
880	Naas - Carlow	TFI Local Link Kildare South Dublin	29/01/2024
192	Balbriggan - Swords	TFI Local Link Louth Meath Fingal	19/02/2024
163	Brú na Bóinne - Drogheda	TFI Local Link Louth Meath Fingal	26/02/2024
800/885	Baltinglass - Sallins	TFI Local Link Carlow Kilkenny Wicklow	11/03/2024
170	Cavan-Dundalk	Bus Éireann	24/03/2024

➤ New or Enhanced Services to be implemented in Q2 2024

Route Number	Route Name/ Description	Operator	Implementation Date
892	Dunlavin/Kilcullen-Newbridge	TFI Local Link Kildare South Dublin	Q2
359	Enniscorthy-New Ross	TFI Local Link Wexford	Q2
354	Carrick-on-Suir - Dunmore East	Bus Éireann	Q2
187	Virginia-Kells	Bus Éireann	Q2
237	Skibbereen-Cork	Bus Éireann	Q2
243	Newmarket-Cork	Bus Éireann	Q2
370	Wexford-Waterford	Bus Éireann	Q2
276	Castlemaine - Dingle	TFI Local Link Kerry	Q2