

# Cessation of Route 706

Public Service Obligation  
Determination



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Cessation of Route 706

On 8<sup>th</sup> April 2024 Aircoach ceased to operate route 706. This route provided connections from Galway to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport. The route also served intermediate stops on route including Ballinasloe, Athlone, and Maynooth.

## 1.2 The Purpose of this Paper

The withdrawal of route 706 has reduced the level of public transport connectivity to the settlements it served. The purpose of this paper is to assess the impact of this cessation of services and whether or not there is Public Service Obligation (PSO) requirement for the National Transport Authority (NTA) to procure replacement services, subject to funding.

## 1.3 Structure of this Paper

The paper will be structured as follows:

- Section 2 will describe the service previously provided by route 706 prior to its withdrawal;
- Section 3 will explain the relevant proposals included in Connecting Ireland for the settlements served by route 706;
- Section 4 describes the wider network of services that operate along the corridor previously served by route 706;
- Section 5 will assess the impact of the cessation of route 706 by analysing the different types of connections it provided and whether the remaining service provision is adequate to address the demand for public transport; and
- Section 6 concludes the report with the PSO determination as to whether a replacement is required or not.

# 2. Service Provided by Route 706

Route 706 provided ten departures Monday to Sunday, in both directions, between Galway and Dublin Airport. The timetable for route 706 is provided in Figure 1 below. All departures from Galway Coach Station terminated in Dublin Airport however there were a variety of service patterns across the day:

- Athlone was served on all departures with eight of the ten routing via Dublin City Centre to Dublin Airport and all returns from Dublin Airport to Athlone routing via Dublin City Centre;
- The remaining two services, from Galway in the early morning, did not route via Dublin City Centre; and
- Ballinasloe and Maynooth were served by four departures in both directions, all of which route via Dublin City Centre to and from Dublin Airport.

Route 706 served a number of functions including:

- Connections to Dublin Airport;
- Intercity connections between Galway and Dublin;
- Regional connections from Galway to Athlone and Athlone to Dublin; and

- Local connections from Ballinasloe to Galway/Athlone, Athlone to Maynooth, and Maynooth to Dublin.

In order to assess the impact of the withdrawal of route 706 each of these functions will be examined to determine if an intervention is required to mitigate any issues arising.

Stop Name	Restrictions	706X	706X	706	706	706X	706	706X	706	706X	706X
Galway Coach Station	<b>PUO; PVO</b>	01:30	03:30	06:30	08:15	10:30	12:30	14:15	15:00	16:30	18:30
GMIT/ATU	<b>PUO; GCC</b>	01:36	03:36	06:36	08:21	10:36	12:36	14:21	15:06	16:36	18:36
Ballinasloe, Portiuncula Hospital	<b>P/S; GC</b>	---	---	07:16	09:01	---	13:16	---	15:46	---	---
Athlone, Arcadia Retail Park	<b>P/S; WHC</b>	02:30	04:30	07:38	09:23	11:30	13:38	15:15	16:08	17:30	19:30
Athlone, Old Dublin Road, Smyths Toys	<b>P/S; WHC</b>	02:35	04:35	07:45	09:30	11:35	13:45	15:20	16:15	17:35	19:35
Maynooth, Straffan Road	<b>P/S; KE</b>	---	---	08:45	10:30	---	14:45	---	17:15	---	---
Dublin City, Bachelors Walk	<b>SDO; DCC</b>	---	---	09:30	11:15	13:00	15:30	16:45	18:00	19:00	21:00
Terminal 2, Departures Road, Zone 11	<b>SDO; DAA</b>	04:00	06:00	10:00	11:45	13:30	16:00	17:15	18:30	19:30	21:30

Stop Name	Restrictions	706X	706X	706	706X	706	706X	706	706	706X	706X
Dublin Airport, Zone 11	<b>PUO; DAA</b>	06:30	08:00	10:00	10:30	12:30	14:00	16:00	18:30	21:00	23:15
Dublin City, Aston Quay	<b>PUO; DCC</b>	07:00	08:30	10:30	11:00	13:00	14:30	16:30	19:00	21:30	23:45
Maynooth, Straffan Rd	<b>P/S; KE</b>	---	---	11:00	---	13:30	---	17:00	19:30	---	---
Athlone, Old Dublin Road, Smyths Toys	<b>P/S; WHC</b>	08:20	09:50	12:00	12:20	14:30	15:50	18:00	20:30	22:50	01:05
Athlone, Arcadia Retail Park	<b>P/S; WHC</b>	08:26	09:56	12:05	12:26	14:35	15:56	18:05	20:35	22:56	01:11
Ballinasloe, Portiuncula Hospital	<b>P/S; GC</b>	---	---	12:30	---	15:00	---	18:30	21:00	---	---
GMIT/ATU	<b>SDO; GCC</b>	09:24	10:54	13:10	13:24	15:40	16:54	19:10	21:40	23:54	02:10
Galway Coach Station	<b>SDO; PVO</b>	09:30	11:00	13:15	13:30	15:45	17:00	19:15	21:45	00:00	02:15

Figure 1: Route 706 Timetable, Monday to Sunday prior to cessation

### 3. The Wider Network

There are a number of other routes in operation along the corridor previously served by route 706. These are described below.

Irish Rail provides services between Galway and Dublin, which serve Ballinasloe and Athlone en route to Dublin. These services are eight departures in each direction Monday to Friday, with eight operating on Saturday and six on Sunday. The services also includes a small number of additional departures from Galway to Athlone and *vice versa*.

In addition to Irish Rail services, there are several routes operated on a commercial basis under licence provided by the NTA.

Route 720 provides direct services from Galway to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport. The route operates two different timetables, depending on the time of year, with a minimum service level of 17 daily departures to Dublin Airport, 14 of which route via Dublin City Centre.

Route 763 provides eight departures, seven days a week from Galway to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport. These services also call at Athlone and Ballinasloe.

Route 660, 760 and 761 all operate under the same licence. These routes combine to provide 29 daily connections to Dublin Airport, with 17 of these serving Dublin City Centre en route and a further service terminating in Dublin City Centre.

### 4. Connecting Ireland

In November 2021, the NTA published its Rural Mobility Plan, Connecting Ireland. Connecting Ireland is the NTA's Plan over five years (2022 – 2026 inclusive) to invest in the provision of new and improved public transport services to rural areas and between villages and towns across Ireland.

Connecting Ireland identifies a number of regional corridors that require improvement. Relevant to this PSO Determination is Regional Corridor 23<sup>1</sup>, which is described as 'Galway to Dublin via Oranmore, Loughrea, Ballinasloe, Athlone and other places en route' in the Plan. Connecting Ireland proposes more frequent services and a better integration of routes along this corridor, with a minimum service frequency of two hours on all-stop services.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationaltransport.ie/connecting-ireland/document-library/>

## 5. Impact of Withdrawal and Remaining Service Provision

### 5.1 Connections to Dublin Airport

Route 706 provided ten departures daily, in both directions, between Galway and Dublin Airport. Service frequency to the Dublin Airport from other operators varies depending on the time of the year. The least frequent period, which is between 1<sup>st</sup> November and 31<sup>st</sup> March, there are a minimum of 49<sup>2</sup> daily departures to Dublin Airport from Galway. This is a high level of service and there is no requirement for a replacement service to address the withdrawal of route 706. Table 2 below itemises the service provision from Galway to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport.

Ballinasloe and Athlone will have fewer departures to the Dublin Airport however both will still have direct Dublin Airport connections with route 763 travelling to Dublin Airport eight times a day. Connections to Dublin Airport are also possible via interchange from intercity bus and rail services to airport connector services in Dublin City Centre. Therefore it is not considered necessary to introduce a replacement service to augment the level of service that will remain when route 706 ceases to operate.

Like Ballinasloe and Athlone, Maynooth will also have a reduced number of departures to Dublin Airport. However, Maynooth will still be served by route 767, which provides an hourly service to Dublin Airport, seven days a week between 04:00 and 21:00. Maynooth is also part of the Dublin Area Bus Network, with route C3 providing connections to Dublin City Centre every 30 minutes, seven days a week. From there customers can interchange with airport connector services.

### 5.2 Intercity Connections between Galway and Dublin City

Route 706 provided eight daily departures to Dublin City Centre from Galway and ten departures in the other direction. While the withdrawal of route 706 will reduce the existing level of service, there remains a good level of connectivity between Galway and Dublin City. Irish Rail provides nine departures to Dublin Monday to Friday, eight on Saturday and six on Sunday. In addition to this interurban bus services provide 36 daily departures to Dublin. This is considered to be a good level of service between Galway and Dublin City. Table 2 below itemises the service provision from Galway to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport.

### 5.3 Regional connections from Galway to Athlone and Athlone to Dublin City

Public transport trips from Galway to Athlone and Athlone to Dublin will continue to be served by rail and bus. Route 763 provides eight return trips daily and Irish Rail provides nine departures on weekdays, eight on Saturdays and six on Sundays in both directions between Galway and Athlone.

Athlone is included within Corridor 23 in the Connecting Ireland Plan, which specifies a minimum service frequency of two hours on all stop services between Galway and Dublin. Following the withdrawal of route 706 the remaining service provision exceeds the minimum service frequency identified by Connecting Ireland. There is no requirement to provide a new service to replace the connectivity previously provided by route 706.

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<sup>2</sup> Tables 1 and 2 itemise the level of service provided for trips from Galway to Dublin and Dublin Airport and vice versa

## 5.4 Local connections

### Ballinasloe to Galway/Athlone

Ballinasloe has a population of 6,597 (CSO, 2022) and is identified as a Key Town in the Galway County Development Plan. Ballinasloe is the location of Portiuncula Hospital, which has a wide catchment due to the range of services it provides. These include 24/7 acute surgery, acute medicine and critical care along with Emergency Department and maternity services to adults and children in the areas of East Galway, Westmeath, North Tipperary, Roscommon, and Offaly.

Ballinasloe is located approximately 20km from Athlone and 55km from Galway. Both Athlone and Galway are the largest commuter destinations from Ballinasloe with 218 and 211 trips respectively (CSO, 2016).

With the withdrawal of route 706, public transport connections to/from Galway will be reduced to route 763 and Irish rail services. However, the remaining service level provided to Ballinasloe exceeds the minimum service standard identified by Connecting Ireland. Table 1 below itemises the connections from Ballinasloe to and from Galway.

<b>To Galway</b>	<b>Monday to Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Sunday</b>
Irish Rail	10	10	6
Route 763	10	10	8
<b>From Galway</b>	<b>Monday to Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Sunday</b>
Irish Rail	11	9	7
Route 763	8	8	8

*Table 1: Service Provision to/from Ballinasloe and Galway*

In addition to direct rail and bus services to Galway, Ballinasloe is also served by Local Link route 546 which operates three return services, seven days a week between Castlerea and Ballinasloe. This route also provides Ballinasloe with a feeder service to the Ballinasloe rail station. The timetable of route 546 is designed to integrate with Irish Rail services to and from Galway. It connects with rail for trips to/from Galway on five of the six departures Monday to Saturday.

Given the remaining level of connections meet Connecting Ireland minimum service standards, there is no requirement for a replacement service to be introduced for Ballinasloe as a result of the withdrawal of route 706.

### Athlone to Maynooth

Route 706 provided the only direct bus connection between Maynooth and Athlone. Without this, any public transport trip between the two settlements will require interchange. While the loss of direct public transport links is not optimal, the low travel demand between the two settlements (34 trips, CSO 2016) and distance over 100km does not necessitate the introduction of a PSO replacement service.

### Maynooth to Dublin

As Maynooth is within the Dublin Area Bus Network and is served with frequent buses to Dublin City Centre it is not considered necessary to introduce replacement services.



Table 2 Remaining Service Provision from Galway to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport

Mode	Monday to Friday departures	Saturday departures	Sunday departures
Irish Rail	<b>9</b> to Dublin Heuston	<b>8</b> to Dublin Heuston	<b>6</b> to Dublin Heuston
Route 720	<p><b>(01 Apr – 31 Oct)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>16</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> <li>• An additional <b>10</b> direct to Dublin Airport</li> </ul> <p><b>(01 Nov – 31 Mar)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>13</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> <li>• An additional <b>4</b> direct to Dublin Airport</li> </ul>	<p><b>(01 Apr – 31 Oct)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>16</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> <li>• An additional <b>10</b> direct to Dublin Airport</li> </ul> <p><b>(01 Nov – 31 Mar)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>13</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> <li>• An additional <b>4</b> direct to Dublin Airport</li> </ul>	<p><b>(01 Apr – 31 Oct)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>16</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> <li>• An additional <b>10</b> direct to Dublin Airport</li> </ul> <p><b>(01 Nov – 31 Mar)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>13</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> <li>• An additional <b>4</b> direct to Dublin Airport</li> </ul>
Route 763	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>8</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>8</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>8</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> </ul>
Route 660, 760/761	<p><b>(01 Apr – 31 Oct)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>13</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> <li>• <b>2</b> to Dublin City Centre only</li> <li>• An additional <b>14</b> direct to Dublin Airport only</li> </ul> <p><b>(01 Nov – 31 Mar)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>13</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> <li>• <b>2</b> to Dublin City Centre only</li> <li>• An additional <b>11</b> direct to Dublin Airport only</li> </ul>	<p><b>(01 Apr – 31 Oct)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>16</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> <li>• <b>2</b> to Dublin City Centre only</li> <li>• An additional <b>14</b> direct to Dublin Airport</li> </ul> <p><b>(01 Nov – 31 Mar)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>14</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> <li>• <b>2</b> to Dublin City Centre only</li> <li>• An additional <b>11</b> direct to Dublin Airport only</li> </ul>	<p><b>(01 Apr – 31 Oct)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>17</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> <li>• <b>2</b> to Dublin City Centre only</li> <li>• An additional <b>14</b> direct to Dublin Airport</li> </ul> <p><b>(01 Nov – 31 Mar)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>14</b> to Dublin City Centre and Dublin Airport</li> <li>• <b>2</b> to Dublin City Centre only</li> <li>• An additional <b>11</b> direct to Dublin Airport only</li> </ul>

Table 3 Remaining Service Provision from Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre to Galway

Mode	Monday to Friday departures	Saturday departures	Sunday departures
Irish Rail	<b>9*</b> (8 on Fridays) to Dublin Heuston	<b>9</b> to Dublin Heuston	<b>6</b> to Dublin Heuston
Route 720	<p><b>(01 Apr – 31 Oct)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>17</b> to Galway via Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> <li>• An additional <b>7</b> to Galway direct from Dublin Airport</li> </ul> <p><b>(01 Nov – 31 Mar)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>14</b> to Galway via Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> <li>• An additional <b>1</b> to Galway direct from Dublin Airport</li> </ul>	<p><b>(01 Apr – 31 Oct)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>17</b> to Galway via Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> <li>• An additional <b>7</b> to Galway direct from Dublin Airport</li> </ul> <p><b>(01 Nov – 31 Mar)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>14</b> to Galway via Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> <li>• An additional <b>1</b> to Galway direct from Dublin Airport</li> </ul>	<p><b>(01 Apr – 31 Oct)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>17</b> to Galway via Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> <li>• An additional <b>7</b> to Galway direct from Dublin Airport</li> </ul> <p><b>(01 Nov – 31 Mar)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>14</b> to Galway via Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> <li>• An additional <b>1</b> to Galway direct from Dublin Airport</li> </ul>
Route 763	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>8</b> from Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>8</b> from Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>8</b> from Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> </ul>
Route 660, 760/761	<p><b>01 Apr – 31 Oct)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>17</b> to Galway via Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> <li>• <b>1</b> to Galway from Dublin City Centre Only</li> <li>• An additional <b>12</b> from Dublin Airport Only</li> </ul> <p><b>(01 Nov – 31 Mar)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>17</b> to Galway via Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> <li>• <b>1</b> to Galway from Dublin City Centre Only</li> <li>• An additional <b>12</b> from Dublin Airport Only</li> </ul>	<p><b>01 Apr – 31 Oct)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>17</b> to Galway via Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> <li>• <b>1</b> to Galway from Dublin City Centre Only</li> <li>• An additional <b>13</b> from Dublin Airport Only</li> </ul> <p><b>(01 Nov – 31 Mar)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>17</b> to Galway via Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> <li>• <b>1</b> to Galway from Dublin City Centre Only</li> <li>• An additional <b>13</b> from Dublin Airport Only</li> </ul>	<p><b>01 Apr – 31 Oct)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>17</b> to Galway via Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> <li>• <b>1</b> to Galway from Dublin City Centre Only</li> <li>• An additional <b>13</b> from Dublin Airport Only</li> </ul> <p><b>(01 Nov – 31 Mar)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>17</b> to Galway via Dublin Airport and Dublin City Centre</li> <li>• <b>1</b> to Galway from Dublin City Centre Only</li> <li>• An additional <b>13</b> from Dublin Airport Only</li> </ul>

## 6. PSO Determination

The NTA has determined that there is not a Public Service Obligation to introduce new services to replace route 706. The services that will remain in operation along the Galway to Dublin corridor via Ballinasloe, Athlone, and Maynooth meet the minimum service standard outlined in Connecting Ireland and no immediate action is required to address the withdrawal of route 706. The NTA will continue to monitor local demands for travel along this corridor to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

*Dominic Hannigan*

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**Dominic Hannigan**  
**Head of Public Transport Regulation**

Approved:

*Anne Graham*

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**Anne Graham**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

Dated: 12<sup>th</sup> April 2024