

Determination of a Public Service Obligation following withdrawal of services between Waterford and Dublin

Determination of Public Service
Obligation as a result of the
withdrawal of Route 4 Waterford –
Dublin.



1. Introduction

In late March 2026, Expressway notified the NTA of its decision to cease operation of Route 4 (Waterford – Dublin, via Carlow), with the service scheduled to be withdrawn from 24 May 2026.

This report provides an overview of the impact along the corridor, and surrounding areas, from which the service will be withdrawn. Also, the report evaluates whether the withdrawal of the service creates a requirement for new or revised Public Service Obligation (PSO) route to maintain essential public transport provision.

The NTA is responsible for securing the provision of subsidised public passenger transport services nationally. The services in question are currently being delivered on a commercial basis by Expressway. In circumstances where a commercial operator ceases or curtails services, the NTA will examine whether, in the absence of any commercial services, a public service obligation (PSO) exists to provide socially necessary but commercially unviable public transport services. Such examination will include an assessment of the demand for public transport services and options to either re-configure existing PSO services including Local Link services, or to competitively tender for the provision of services. In either event, the NTA's ability to provide such services is subject to the availability of funding

NTA has a strong record of carrying out such assessments when market conditions change and in particular when commercial operators decide to withdraw wholly, or in part from providing services in any given location or along a corridor.

2. Route 4 – Service withdrawal

Following discussions with Expressway, the NTA has been formally advised that Route 4 (Waterford–Dublin) will be withdrawn in its entirety. Expressway has confirmed that the cessation of service will apply across the full length of the Route, with no partial retention of any section.

2.1 Existing Timetable

As shown in Table 1, Route 4 currently operates eight return trips daily between Dublin and Waterford (Monday to Sunday), including two late evening services from Dublin. Route 4 serves the following settlements: Dublin, Carlow, Leighlinbridge, Paulstown, Gowran, Thomastown, Ballyhale, Mullinavat and Waterford.

Table 1 Timetable Route 4 Dublin Airport - Waterford

ROUTE 4 WATERFORD to DUBLIN AIRPORT

DAILY (including Public Holidays)

WATERFORD	BUS STATION	0500	0645	0900	1045	1245	1445	1800	2000
MULLINAVAT	MAIN STREET		0700	0914	1100	1259	1459	1810	2010
BALLYHALE	MAIN STREET		0710	0925	1111	1309	1509	1820	2020
THOMASTOWN	MARKET STREET		0725	0933	1120	1318	1520	1830	2030
GOWRAN	MAIN STREET		0733	0947	1131	1331	1532	1840	2040
ROYAL OAK	SLIP ROAD		0745	0956	1142	1342	1542	1850	2050
LEIGHLINBRIDGE CROSS	SLIP ROAD		0750	1000	1146	1346	1546	1855	2055
CARLOW SETU	OPP MAIN ENTRANCE		0805	1013	1156	1356	1600	1905	2105
CARLOW	COACH PARK	0600	0815	1018	1201	1401	1607	1910	2110
DUBLIN	HEUSTON STATION		0925D	1129D	1320D	1520D	1720D	2025D	2225D
DUBLIN	EDEN QUAY		0928D	1138D	1331D	1531D	1731D	2038D	2228D
DUBLIN	CUSTOM HOUSE QUAY	0725D	0930D	1140D	1333D	1533D	1733D	2040D	2230D
DUBLIN AIRPORT	TERMINAL 2 - DEPARTURES ROAD	0745	0945	1200	1353	1553	1753	2100	-

ROUTE 4 DUBLIN AIRPORT to WATERFORD

DAILY (including Public Holidays)

DUBLIN AIRPORT	ATRIUM RD ZONE 13 STOP 10	0900	1050	1305	1505	1730	1915	2215	-
DUBLIN	BUSÁRAS	0930P	1120P	1335P	1535P	1800P	1945P	2235P	2345P
DUBLIN	OPP HEUSTON STATION	0950P	1140P	1350P	1555P	1820P	2000P	2250P	2350P
CARLOW	COACH PARK	1050	1255	1500	1705	1930	2105	0000	0100
CARLOW SETU	MAIN ENTRANCE	1100	1300	1510	1715	1935	2110	0005	0105
LEIGHLINBRIDGE CROSS	SESKIN ROAD	1107	1309	1520	1724	1941	2120	0015	0115
ROYAL OAK	SLIP ROAD	1110	1313	1524	1729	1950	2124	0019	0119
GOWRAN	MAIN STREET	1118	1318	1531	1738	1958	2133	0026	0126
THOMASTOWN	LOW STREET	1130	1330	1542	1750	2010	2145	0035	0135
BALLYHALE	MAIN STREET	1138	1338	1550	1758	2015	2155	0045	0145
MULLINAVAT	MAIN STREET	1147	1345	1600	1808	2020	2205	0055	0155
WATERFORD	BUS STATION	1200	1400	1615	1815	2030	2215	0110	0210

2.2 Route Map

Figure 1 illustrates the locations served by Route 4, namely Waterford, Mullinavat, Ballyhale, Thomastown, Gowran, Muine Bheag, Leighlinbridge, Carlow, Dublin and Dublin Airport.

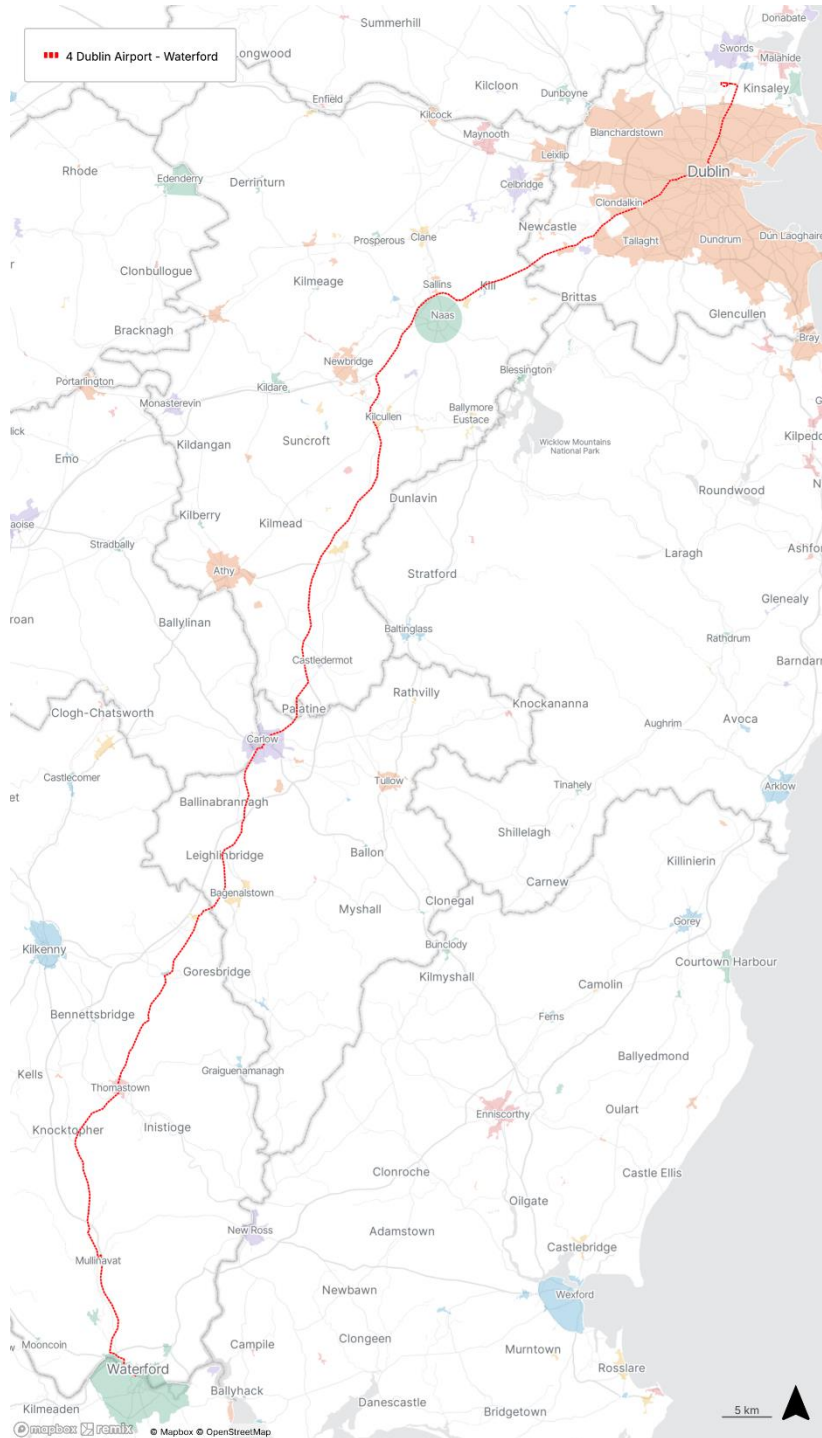


Figure 1 - Route 4 alignment

2.3 Demand Analysis

Table 2 below shows the travel demand between Dublin and Waterford, across all modes for work and school purposes.

Table 2 - OD Matrix (2022 census data: all modes, school and work purposes)

	Dublin city and suburbs	Carlow	Leighlinbridge	Paulstown	Gowran	Thomastown	Ballyhale	Mullinavat	Waterford city and suburbs
Dublin city and suburbs		227			2	8	2	4	274
Carlow	905		33	2	4	4	2		84
Leighlinbridge	19	78		7	2	2			2
Paulstown	25	31	7		2	2			12
Gowran	18	8	2	2		8			12
Thomastown	37	16	2		6		2	2	39
Ballyhale	6	2				2		2	12
Mullinavat	2						2		23
Waterford city and suburbs	464	71	2		2	4	4	19	

2.4 Connecting Ireland Standard

As shown in Figure 2, Connecting Ireland aims to achieve a minimum service frequency of one bus every two hours on the Waterford–Dublin corridor. The withdrawal of Route 4 would result in a reduction in the overall level of service currently available along this corridor, particularly in terms of all-stop provision serving intermediate settlements.

Proposed Public Transport Improvements in County Carlow

Proposal	Connecting		Serving*	Description
13	Dublin	Waterford	Carlow, Muine Bheag, Thomastown and other places en route	This corridor is currently served by routes 4, X4, 600 and 736 a mix of express and all-stop services. We propose more frequent all-stop services on this corridor and better integration of the existing services. A minimum service frequency of 2 hours on all-stop services is proposed.

Figure 2 - Connecting Ireland Proposed service level on Dublin - Waterford Corridor

2.5 Waterford – Dublin Corridor Analysis

The Dublin – Waterford corridor is currently served by the following public transport routes:

- **Dublin Coach Route 600 (Cork – Dublin):** 8 return trips daily (Mon–Sun), 6 of which operate between 07:00 and 20:00.

- **JJ Kavanagh & Sons Route 736 (Waterford – Dublin Airport):** 13 return trips daily (Mon–Sun), 10 of which operate between 06:00 and 21:00.
- **Rail Services (Dublin Heuston – Waterford):** 10 trains daily (Mon–Fri), 8 on Saturdays, and 5 on Sundays.

There are other service along this alignment that don't operate over the entirety of the corridor but do enhance the level of service for local connections along the corridor. These are:

- **JJ Kavanagh & Sons Route 717 (Clonmel – Dublin Airport):** 10 return trips daily (Mon–Sun), 8 of which run between 08:00 and 21:00.
- **TFI Local Link Route 880 (Naas – Carlow):** 7 services per day (Mon–Thurs), 8 per day (Fri–Sat), and 5 per day on Sundays.
- **Bus Éireann Route 73 (Waterford – Athlone):** 2 return trips per day (Mon–Sat), 1 return trip on Sundays and public holidays.

Figure 3 shows the main bus services running between Dublin and Waterford.

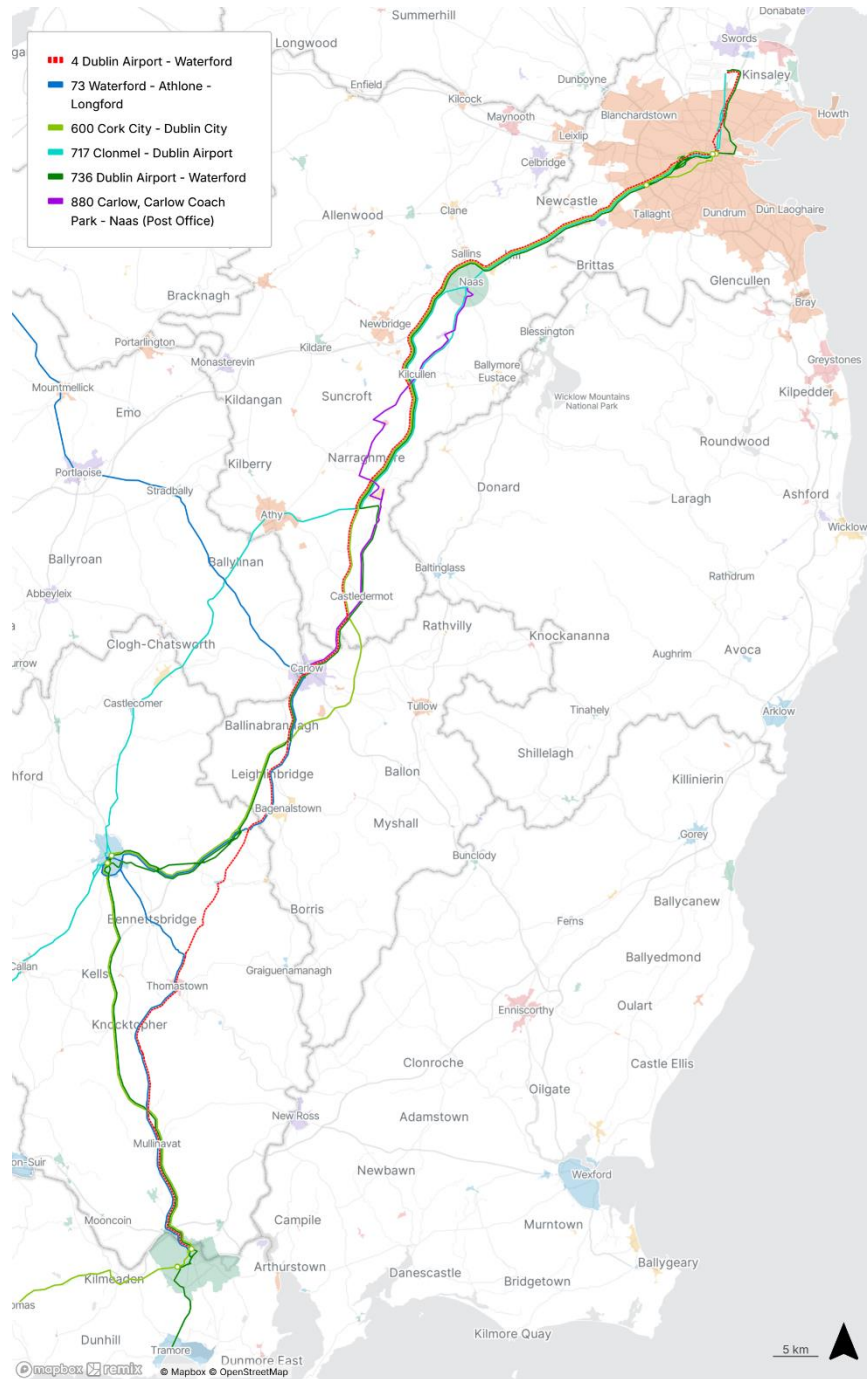


Figure 3 - Main bus services running between Waterford and Dublin

2.6 Timetable Analysis

Currently, Route 4 provides 8 services a day between Dublin and Waterford in both directions. In addition to Route 4, there are similar services provided on this corridor by JJ Kavanah on route 736 and Dublin Coach Route 600.

Table 3 below shows the level of service on this corridor with and without Route 4. As can be seen from the table the current level of service is 32 service a day in the inbound direction (towards Dublin)

and 31 in the outbound direction. The withdrawal of Route 4 would reduce the service levels to 24 inbound and 23 in the outbound direction.

It should also be noted that Irish Rail operate 8 service a day in both direction Monday to Friday on the Waterford to Dublin corridor. Combining Bus and Rail excluding Route 4 there would be a level of service of 32 inbound services and 31 outbound services once Route 4 will cease to operate.

Table 3 – Level of Service Analysis Waterford to Dublin Corridor

Inbound	Route	Operator	Origin	Destination	Mon-Sun															
	4	Expressway	Waterford	Dublin	05:00	06:45	09:00	10:45	12:45	14:45	18:00	20:00								
736	JJ Kavanagh	Waterford	Dublin	01:15	02:10	04:25	05:00	06:15	06:20	08:10	09:30	10:25	12:20	13:30	15:30	17:15	18:35			
600	Dublin Coach	Cork / Waterford	Dublin	03:45	06:45	08:45	10:45	12:45	14:45	16:45	18:45	20:45	22:45							
Service level analysis				<06:59	07:00	08:00	09:00	10:00	11:00	12:00	13:00	14:00	15:00	16:00	17:00	18:00	19:00	>19:00	Total	
With Route 4				10	0	2	2	3	0	3	1	2	1	1	1	3	0	3	32	
Without Route 4				8	0	2	1	2	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	0	2	24	
Reduction in service levels				-2	0	0	-1	-1	0	-1	0	-1	0	0	0	-1	0	-1	-8	

Outbound	Route	Operator	Origin	Destination	Mon-Sun															
	4	BE Expressway	Dublin	Waterford	12:00	14:00	16:15	18:15	20:30	22:15	01:10	02:10								
736	JJ Kavanagh	Dublin	Waterford	02:00	05:30	06:30	09:00	11:00	12:30	13:30	14:30	15:30	16:30	17:15	19:00	20:30	23:45			
600	Dublin Coach	Dublin	Cork / Waterford	06:00	08:00	10:00	12:00	14:00	16:00	18:00	20:00	22:00								
Service level analysis				<06:59	07:00	08:00	09:00	10:00	11:00	12:00	13:00	14:00	15:00	16:00	17:00	18:00	19:00	>19:00	Total	
With Route 4				6	0	1	1	1	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	2	1	6	31	
Without Route 4				4	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	4	23	
Reduction in service levels				-2	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	-1	0	-1	0	-1	0	-2	-8	

2.7 Gap Analysis

Despite the range of services, coverage along the full corridor is not consistent along the entire corridor. In particular:

- **Waterford to Thomastown** is currently only served by rail, Route 4 and Route 73
- **Thomastown to Carlow (via Muine Bheag)** is currently only served by Route 4. With the withdrawal of Route 4, this section of the corridor, won't be served.
- **Carlow to Dublin** is currently served by Routes 4, 600, 736, and 880. The combined frequency of these routes exceeds the Connecting Ireland target of one bus every two hours.

As shown in Figure 4, the withdrawal of Route 4 would leave Gowran unserved.

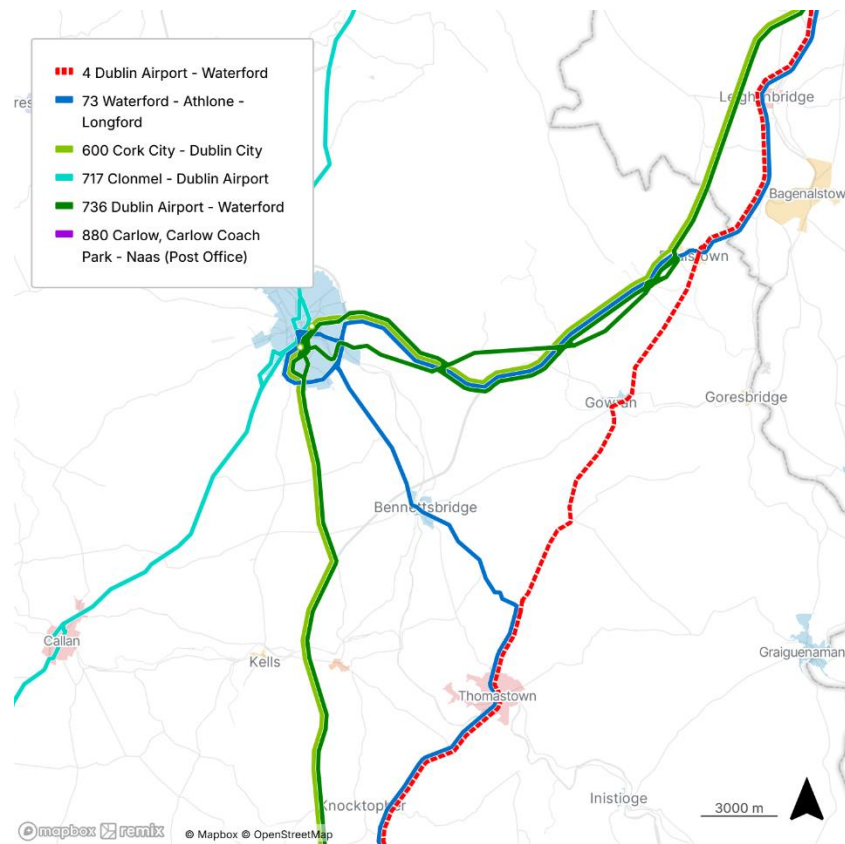


Figure 4 - Bus services between Thomastown and Carlow

Although the rail service between Waterford and Dublin guarantees a two-hour frequency, this does not reduce the need for the bus services specified by *Connecting Ireland*.

2.8 Addressing the Service Gap

The withdrawal of Route 4 (Waterford–Dublin) will result in a gap in service provision along the Waterford–Carlow section of the corridor, particularly along the R448 alignment. This section serves a number of intermediate settlements, including Mullinavat, Ballyhale, Thomastown, Gowran and Leighlinbridge.

While other services continue to operate on parts of the wider corridor, the analysis demonstrates that these services do not fully compensate for the loss of Route 4 in terms of frequency, stopping pattern and direct connectivity for the settlements affected. As a result, the withdrawal of Route 4 leads to a failure to meet the service standards set out under the Connecting Ireland programme for this corridor.

In order to restore an appropriate level of public transport provision, action will be required by the Authority to investigate options to address the identified service gap and to ensure that connectivity for the affected settlements is maintained in line with national transport policy objectives.

3. Conclusions

As demonstrated in this report, the withdrawal of Route 4 will result in a significant reduction in service levels and the creation of a service gap along the Waterford–Dublin corridor. The removal of Route 4 eliminates a key all-stop service on the Waterford–Carlow section of the Route and reduces accessibility for intermediate settlements along the R448 alignment.

The remaining services operating on the corridor are insufficient to maintain existing levels of provision and do not meet the service standards set out under the Connecting Ireland programme. On this basis, the withdrawal of Route 4 gives rise to a requirement for action by the National Transport Authority to examine and implement measures to address the identified service gap and to restore appropriate levels of connectivity along the corridor.

4. Determination

The Authority has determined that the cessation of Route 4 services will result in a reduction in service levels along the Waterford–Dublin corridor. The analysis demonstrates that the withdrawal of Route 4 will create gaps in service provision and will move the overall level of service further away from the service standards set out under the Connecting Ireland programme for this corridor.

The Authority considers that a public service obligation is needed on the Carlow-Waterford section to ensure the continued provision of an appropriate level of public transport connectivity along the corridor. As a result of this determination, I recommend that the Authority should now take the necessary steps to put in place appropriate service interventions to address the identified service gaps and to support the delivery of national public transport policy objectives.

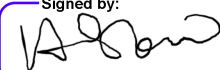
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Dominic Hannigan

Head of Public Transport Regulation

Approved:

Signed by:

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Anne Shaw

Chief Executive Officer