

Determination of a Public Service Obligation following withdrawal of services between Ballina and Galway

Determination of Public Service
Obligation as a result of the
withdrawal of Route 52 between
Ballina and Galway



1. Introduction

In late March 2026, Expressway notified the NTA of its intention to cease operation of Route 52 (Ballina - Galway), with the service scheduled to be withdrawn from 24 May 2026.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report provides an overview of the impact along the corridor, and surrounding areas, from which the service will be withdrawn.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 52 – Service withdrawal

Following discussions with Expressway, the NTA has been formally advised that Route 52 (Ballina - Galway) will be withdrawn in its entirety.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 52 currently operates six return trips daily between Ballina and Galway. Route 52 serves the following settlements: Galway, Claregalway, Tuam, Milltown, Ballindine, Claremorris, Balla, Breaffy, Castlebar, Ballyvary, Straide, Foxford and Ballina.

Table 1 Timetable Route 52 Ballina - Galway

ROUTE 52 BALLINA to GALWAY

DAILY (including Public Holidays)

BALLINA	BUS STATION	0600	0830	1135	1430	1700	1930
FOXORD	POST OFFICE	0620	0850	1153	1448	1720	1950
STRAIDE	POST OFFICE	0630	0900	1206	1501	1730	2000
BALLYVARY	BALLA CROSS WESTBOUND	0635	0905	1210	1505	1735	2005
CASTLEBAR	STEPHEN GARVEY WAY - SOUTHBOUND	0647	0917	1223	1518	1750	2020
BREAFFY	BREAGHWY	0651	0921	1227	1522	1755	2025
BALLA	OPP COMMUNITY CENTRE	0708	0938	1248	1543	1810	2040
CLAREMORRIS	DALTON ST LEISURE CENTRE	0723	0953	1302	1557	1825	2055
BALLINDINE	MAIN STREET - SOUTHBOUND	0735	1005	1313	1608	1835	2105
MILLTOWN	OPP GLYNNS HARDWARE	0741	1011	1320	1615	1840	2110
TUAM	VICAR ST - THE GROVE CENTRE	0755	1025	1333	1628	1855	2125
CLAREGALWAY	OPP COIS CHLAIR	0815	1045	1355	1650	1915	2145
DUBLIN ROAD	OPP ATU GALWAY CITY	0836D	1106D	1411D	1706D	1925D	2155D
GALWAY	BUS STATION	0842	1112	1418	1713	1935	2205

ROUTE 52 GALWAY to BALLINA

DAILY (including Public Holidays)

GALWAY	BUS STATION	0700	1000	1300	1600	1830	2100
DUBLIN ROAD	ATU GALWAY CITY	0710P	1010P	1310P	1610P	1840P	2110P
CLAREGALWAY	COIS CHLAIR ARCHES HOTEL	0720	1020	1320	1620	1850	2120
TUAM	VICAR ST - OPP THE GROVE CENTRE	0740	1040	1340	1640	1910	2140
MILLTOWN	GLYNNS HARDWARE	0755	1055	1355	1655	1925	2155
BALLINDINE	MAIN STREET - NORTHBOUND	0800	1100	1400	1700	1930	2200
CLAREMORRIS	DALTON ST HAIR SALON	0810	1110	1410	1710	1940	2210
BALLA	COMMUNITY CENTRE	0825	1125	1425	1725	1955	2225
BREAFFY	BREAGHWY	0830	1130	1430	1730	2002	2230
CASTLEBAR	MAIN STREET - NORTHBOUND	0845	1145	1445	1745	2015	2245
BALLYVARY	BALLA CROSS EASTBOUND	0900	1200	1500	1800	2030	2300
STRAIDE	OPP POST OFFICE	0905	1205	1505	1805	2035	2305
FOXORD	POST OFFICE	0915	1215	1515	1815	2045	2315
BALLINA	BUS STATION	0935	1235	1535	1835	2105	2335

2.2 Route Map

Figure 1 illustrates the locations served by Route 52, namely Ballina, Foxford, Ballyvary, Castlebar, Balla, Claremorris, Ballindine, Milntown, Tuam, Claregalway, and Galway.

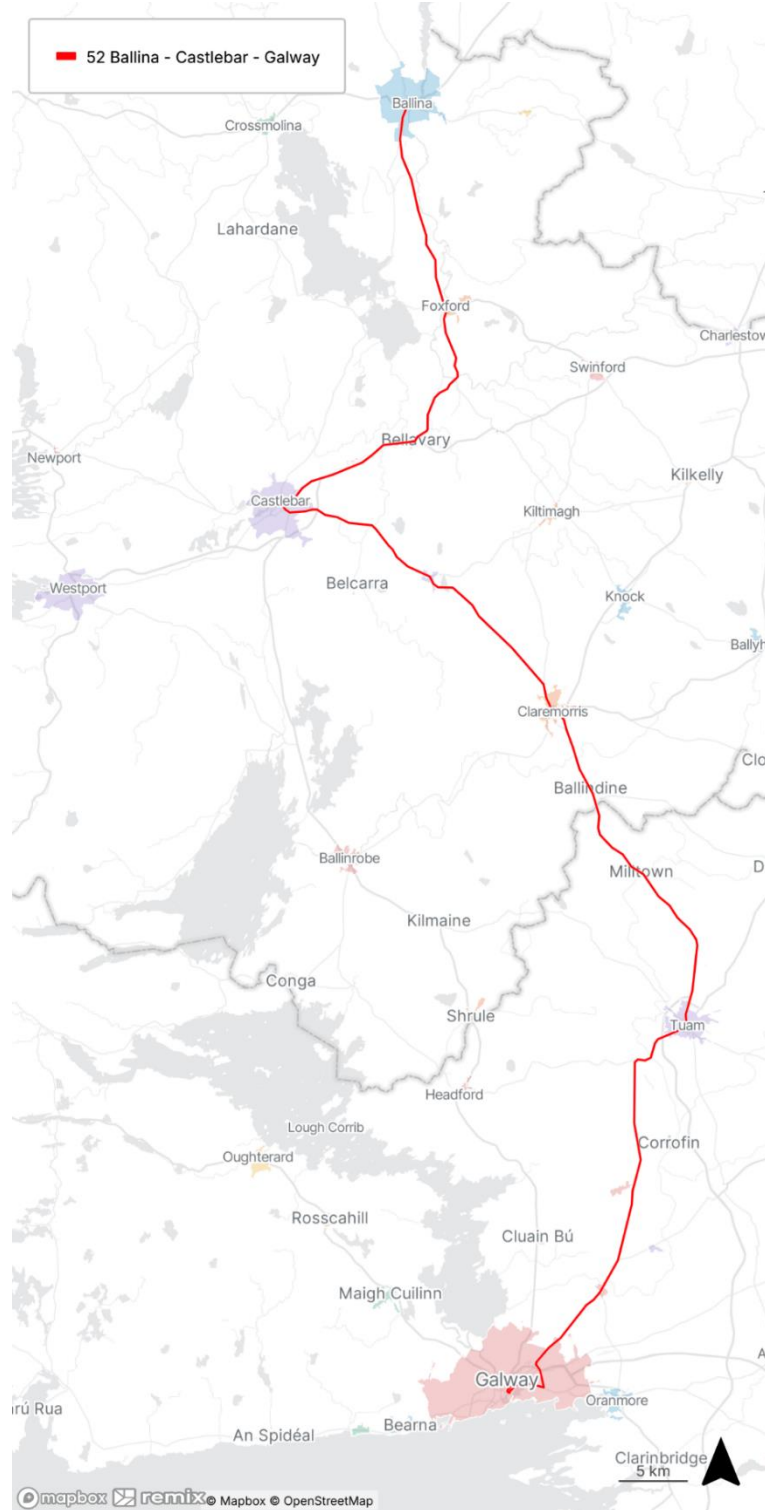


Figure 1 - Route 52 alignment

2.3 Demand Analysis

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

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

	Ballina	Foxford	Castlebar	Balla	Claremorris	Ballindine	Milltown	Tuam	Galway city and suburbs	Total
Ballina		46	240	4	9	2		9	91	401
Foxford	74		81	2	4	2		2	10	175
Castlebar	98	17		29	41	2		22	212	421
Balla	4	2	150		17	4		8	17	202
Claremorris	17	2	167	10		24	4	35	107	366
Ballindine	2	2	16		32		2	6	22	82
Milltown	2		2		2	2		27	34	69
Tuam	4	2	22		14	2	2		1,034	1,080
Galway city and suburbs	6		45	2	11	2	2	247		315
Total	207	71	723	47	130	40	10	356	1,527	3,111

2.4 Connecting Ireland Standard

As shown in Figure 2, Connecting Ireland aims to achieve a minimum service frequency of one bus every hour on the Ballina–Galway corridor, with a 30-minute frequency proposed between Tuam and Galway. The withdrawal of Route 52 would result in a reduction in the overall level of service currently available along the corridor, particularly in terms of all-stop provision serving intermediate settlements.

Proposed Public Transport Improvements in County Mayo

Proposal	Connecting		Serving*	Description
22A	Ballina	Galway	Castlebar, Milltown, Tuam, Claregalway and other places en route	This corridor is currently served by routes 52, 64, 430 and 964. We propose more frequent services and a better integration of routes along this corridor. A minimum service frequency of 1 hour is proposed between Ballina and Galway and between Sligo and Galway. In our proposal routes 22A and 22B will combine to provide a 30 minute frequency between Tuam and Galway.
22B	Sligo	Galway	Tobercurry, Ireland West Airport Knock, Ballyhaunis / Claremorris, Tuam and other places en route	

Figure 2 - Connecting Ireland Proposed service level on Ballina - Galway Corridor

2.5 Ballina – Galway Corridor Analysis

The Ballina–Galway corridor is currently served by the following public transport route operating across the full length of the alignment:

- **CityLink Route 430 (Ballina – Galway):** This route operates between Ballina and Galway City, providing five daily return trips. The service operates via Foxford, Ballyvary, Castlebar, Balla, Claremorris, Ballindine, Milltown and Tuam, with services terminating in Galway City.

There are other services operating along parts of the Ballina–Galway corridor that do not serve the full length of the route but do enhance connectivity between key settlements along the corridor. These include:

- **Bus Éireann Route 64 (Galway – Letterkenny):** This service provides limited connectivity between Galway and a number of settlements on the corridor, including Tuam, Milltown, Ballindine and Claremorris.
- **Bus Éireann Route 420 (Ballina – Pontoon – Castlebar):** This route operates between Ballina and Castlebar, providing three daily return trips (Monday to Sunday). The service overlaps with Route 52 between Ballina and Castlebar, serving Ballina, Foxford and Castlebar.
- **Burke Bros. Coaches Limited Route 427 (Dunmore – Galway):** This service provides frequent connectivity between Tuam, Claregalway and Galway City.
- **Bus Éireann Route 456 (Galway – Westport – Ballina):** This route operates between Galway and Ballina via Westport, providing five daily return trips (Monday to Sunday). The service overlaps with Route 52 serving Galway City, Tuam, Claremorris and Castlebar.
- **Bus Feda Teoranta Route 964 (Crolly – Galway):** This service provides connectivity between Claremorris and Galway City.
- **CityLink Route 721 (Dublin Airport – Tuam):** This route provides connectivity to Tuam, Claremorris and Castlebar.

Figure 3 shows the main bus services running between Ballina and Galway.

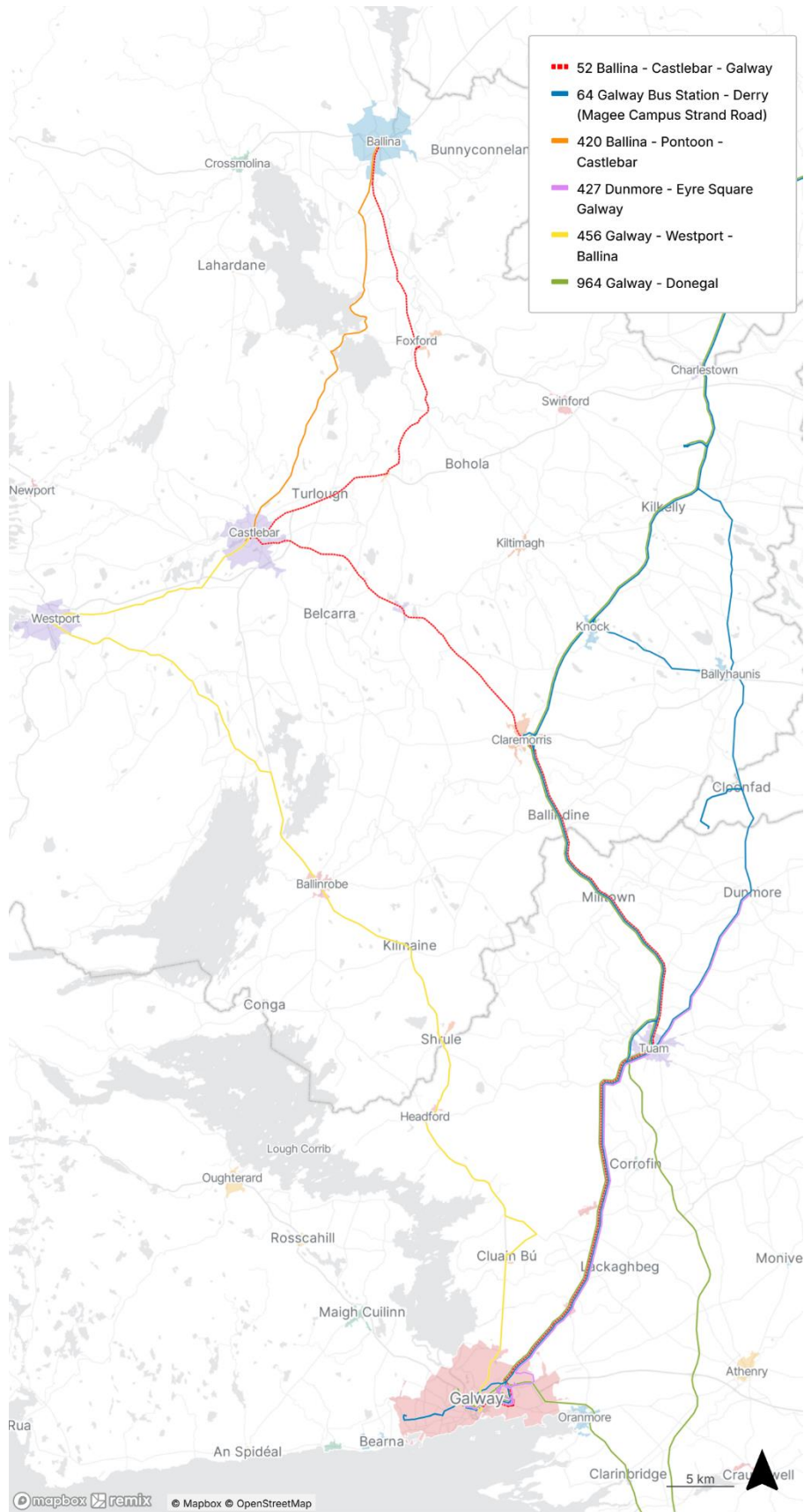


Figure 3 - Main bus services running between Ballina and Galway

While a number of bus routes operate along sections of the Ballina–Galway corridor, not all of these services provide a comparable level of coverage to Route 52. For the purposes of assessing the impact of the withdrawal of Route 52, the timetable analysis focuses on Routes 52, 420, 430 and 456, as these services provide the most direct and sustained overlap with Route 52 along significant portions of the corridor.

2.6 Timetable Analysis

Currently, Route 52 provides 12 services per day (six return trips) between Ballina and Galway. In addition to Route 52, there are other services operating along the corridor, most notably CityLink Route 430, which also provides corridor-wide connectivity.

Table 3 below shows the level of service on the Ballina–Galway corridor with and without Route 52. As shown in the table, the current level of service is 11 services per day in the inbound direction (towards Galway) and 11 services per day in the outbound direction. Following the withdrawal of Route 52, the level of service would reduce to five services per day in each direction, representing a reduction of six services.

Table 3 – Level of Service Analysis Ballina to Galway Corridor

Direction	Section	Route	Operator	Origin	Destination	via	Mon-Fri						Total Services	Total Services	Without Route 52	Reduction in service
Inbound	Ballina to Castlebar	52	Expressway	Ballina	Castlebar	Foxford	06:00	08:30	11:35	14:30	17:00	19:30	6	14	8	-6
		430	Citylink	Ballina	Castlebar	Foxford	05:10	07:15	10:10	13:10	15:55	5				
		420	Bus Éireann	Ballina	Castlebar	Pontoon	08:00	10:45	16:45	3						
	Castlebar to Galway	52	Expressway	Castlebar	Galway	Tuam	06:47	09:17	12:23	15:18	17:50	20:20	6	16	10	-6
		430	Citylink	Castlebar	Galway	Tuam	05:50	07:55	10:50	13:50	16:40	5				
		456	Bus Éireann	Castlebar	Galway	Westport	06:00	09:00	12:00	15:00	18:00	5				

Outbound	Galway to Castlebar	52	Expressway	Galway	Castlebar	Tuam	07:00	10:00	13:00	16:00	18:30	21:00	6	16	10	-6
		430	Citylink	Galway	Castlebar	Tuam	08:25	11:25	14:25	16:55	19:25	5				
		456	Bus Éireann	Galway	Castlebar	Westport	09:15	12:15	15:15	18:15	21:15	5				
	Castlebar to Ballina	52	Expressway	Castlebar	Ballina	Foxford	08:45	11:45	14:45	17:45	20:15	22:45	6	14	8	-6
		430	Citylink	Castlebar	Ballina	Foxford	10:10	13:10	16:10	18:40	21:10	5				
		420	Bus Éireann	Castlebar	Ballina	Pontoon	08:42	11:28	17:30	3						

Ballina to Galway	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 52		2	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	11
	Without Route 52		1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
	Reduction in service levels		-1	0	-1	0	0	-1	0	0	-1	0	0	-1	0	-1	0	0	-6

Galway to Ballina	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 52		0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	1	1	1	11
	Without Route 52		0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	5
	Reduction in service levels		0	-1	0	0	-1	0	0	-1	0	0	-1	0	-1	0	-1	-1	-6

2.7 Gap Analysis

With Route 52 in operation, the corridor is served by a total of 11 services per day in each direction, providing a relatively even spread of services across the day.

Following the withdrawal of Route 52, the total level of service on the corridor would reduce to five services per day in each direction, representing a reduction of six services inbound and six services outbound. This reduction would result in longer gaps between services and a less consistent level of provision, particularly for intermediate settlements along the corridor.

2.8 Addressing the Service Gap

The withdrawal of Route 52 (Ballina–Galway) will result in a reduction in service levels along the Ballina–Galway corridor, particularly in terms of all-stop services serving intermediate settlements. While other services continue to operate along parts of the corridor, the timetable analysis demonstrates that these services do not fully compensate for the loss of Route 52.

In order to maintain an appropriate level of public transport provision on the corridor, intervention will be required to address the reduction in frequency and the increased gaps between services arising from the withdrawal. Any intervention should seek to restore a consistent level of service across the corridor, with particular regard to intermediate settlements including Foxford, Ballyvary, Castlebar, Balla, Claremorris, Ballindine, Milltown and Tuam.

3. Conclusions

As demonstrated in this report, the withdrawal of Route 52 will result in a material reduction in service levels on the Ballina–Galway corridor. The analysis shows that, with Route 52 in operation, the corridor is served by 11 services per day in each direction, whereas the withdrawal of Route 52 would reduce this to five services per day in each direction.

This reduction represents a significant decrease in frequency and results in longer gaps between services, particularly during off-peak periods. The remaining services are insufficient to maintain existing levels of all-stop provision and do not meet the service standards set out under the Connecting Ireland programme for this corridor.

4. Determination

The Authority has determined that the withdrawal of Route 52 services will result in a reduction in service levels along the Ballina–Galway corridor and will move the overall level of provision further away from the service standards set out under the Connecting Ireland programme, including the objective of a minimum hourly service on the corridor and a higher frequency between Tuam and Galway.

The Authority considers that a public service obligation arises to ensure the continued provision of an appropriate level of public transport connectivity along the Ballina–Galway corridor. As a result of this determination, I recommend that the Authority should ensure that appropriate service interventions are introduced to address the identified service gap and to support the delivery of national public transport policy objectives.

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