

Public Consultation Report; Carriage of Pets on Transport for Ireland Services



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1. Introduction

This report provides a summary of the overall sentiment expressed in public submissions relating to the Carriage of Pets on Transport for Ireland (TFI) services. A total of 2,567 submissions were received through the online portal and are publicly available at <https://consult.nationaltransport.ie/en/consultation/carriage-pets-transport-ireland-services>. The submission period ran from 23 February 2026 to 20 March 2026.

This report outlines the key reasons people support or oppose the proposal, as well as the conditions most frequently requested by respondents. The review is qualitative rather than statistical. It identifies recurring patterns, repeated arguments, and common operational themes within the written submissions.

2. The proposed policy

To support public consultation, NTA proposed the following policy wording for consistent application across the TFI network:

“Small dogs, cats, or other small animals

Small dogs, cats, or other small animals that do not threaten the safety of other passengers may travel on TFI bus, rail and Luas services under the following conditions:

- The animal must be carried in a suitable box, basket or other container while on board.
- Animals are not allowed on seats and must remain on the customer’s lap or on the ground in a way that does not obstruct other passengers or passageways.
- Animals must be kept away from other travelling animals to ensure the safety and comfort of other customers and pets.

Larger dogs

Larger dogs may be carried provided they are on a lead and have a muzzle. Larger dogs may be refused entry if the service is reaching capacity.

Guide dogs and Assistance dogs

Guide dogs and Assistance dogs are permitted on all TFI services without restriction.

Guide or Assistance dogs must wear an official coat, medallion and lead to distinguish it as a working dog, which has the relevant training, and not a pet. A parent or guardian who is accompanying a child with an assistance dog should be carrying an identity card for the dog.

Only one Guide dog or Assistance dog is permitted per passenger.”

3. Summary of sentiment

Overall sentiment in the submissions is strongly supportive of allowing pets on TFI services, subject to clear and practical safeguards. Supportive submissions substantially outnumber opposing submissions.

- The main supportive themes are improved access for people without cars, easier travel to veterinary appointments and social destinations, better alignment with climate and modal shift objectives, and the view that Ireland is behind peer European systems on this issue. Submissions show a clear pattern that most respondents favour permitting pets on public transport in some form. Support is often framed as a practical quality of life issue rather than a niche or discretionary request.
- The main conditional supportive themes relate to the detail of the draft policy rather than opposition to the principle itself. Many supportive respondents argue that the current draft is too restrictive for small dogs and that they shouldn't need to be carried in a box, too broad in its muzzle requirement for larger dogs, and too uncertain where boarding depends on service capacity or individual discretion.
- The main opposing themes are allergies, fear of dogs, hygiene, safety in enclosed spaces, crowding, and concern that existing rules would be difficult to enforce consistently in real operating conditions. A small minority opposes the proposal outright or supports only the continued carriage of guide and assistance dogs. These respondents tend to focus on risk, enforcement, hygiene, allergy exposure, and the rights of passengers who do not wish to travel near animals.

Why people support the proposal	Conditions most often requested	Main concerns raised by respondents
Better access for people without cars	More flexibility for small dogs and carriers	Allergies, phobias and passenger comfort
Easier travel to vets, parks and family visits	Muzzles only where legally required or risk based	Safety and hygiene in enclosed spaces
Supports climate and modal shift goals	Clearer definitions and consistent rules	Crowding, noise and animal behaviour
Brings Ireland closer to European practice	Predictable approach to busy services	Difficulty enforcing rules consistently
Improves inclusion for older and non-driving users	Strong owner responsibility and staff guidance	Requests for pet free or dedicated areas

4. Main reasons for support

- **Improved access and fairness:** many respondents state that pet owners without access to a private car are currently disadvantaged. Repeated examples include travel to veterinary appointments, parks, beaches, family visits, and day trips.
- **Sustainability and reduced car dependency:** supportive submissions commonly link the proposal with the wider goal of reducing private car use. Respondents repeatedly state that they currently drive because they cannot reliably travel with a pet on public transport.

- **Social inclusion and wellbeing:** submissions often describe pets as part of the household and associate the ability to travel with pets with inclusion and wellbeing. This is particularly noted for older people, non-drivers, people living alone, and people who rely on pets for companionship or emotional support.
- **Consistency and modernisation:** many respondents strongly favour a clear national policy because current practice is viewed as inconsistent across modes and too dependent on staff discretion. Comparisons with other European countries are frequent and are often used to argue that safe pet carriages are both normal and manageable elsewhere.

5. Main qualifications and requested changes

- **Flexibility for small dogs:** one of the most repeated issues is the requirement for small animals to remain in a carrier, crate, basket, or similar container. Many supportive respondents say this is impractical for day trips, older passengers, or longer journeys. A common request is to allow small dogs to sit on the owner's lap or remain at the owner's feet on a short lead, while keeping cats and similar animals in secure carriers.
- **Muzzle requirement for larger dogs:** many respondents support stronger controls for larger dogs but question whether all larger dogs should be muzzled. A common suggestion is to apply muzzling only where required by law, where a dog is on a restricted breed list, or where an individual animal presents a behavioural risk.
- **Capacity and discretion:** repeated concern is expressed about the phrase allowing refusal when a service is busy or reaching capacity. Respondents argue that vague wording creates uncertainty and risks leaving passengers stranded on the return leg of a journey. Many therefore ask for clear definitions, predictable rules, and visible public guidance.
- **Operational clarity:** many respondents want clearer definitions of small dog, large dog, suitable carrier, owner responsibilities, and the consequences of non-compliance. There are also repeated requests for staff guidance, stronger and more consistent enforcement, and simple public information that is easy to understand.

6. Main concerns

- **Passenger comfort and health:** the most common concerns are allergies, phobias, asthma, hygiene, smell, noise, and anxiety in enclosed spaces. Some respondents state plainly that they would avoid public transport if pets were broadly permitted.
- **Safety and behaviour:** objectors often refer to the unpredictability of animals, the presence of children, the possibility of bites or aggressive behaviour, and the lack of staff capacity to intervene effectively if problems arise.
- **Enforcement risk:** several submissions raise concerns that existing rules relating to dogs in public spaces are already inconsistently enforced, and that introducing a broader pet policy without clear and effective enforcement mechanisms could undermine public confidence. This theme appears in both wholly opposing submissions and cautious submissions that otherwise support the principle.
- **Requests for designated areas:** both supporters and objectors raise the idea of pet free carriages, designated pet areas, or mode specific rules to balance inclusion with comfort for other passengers.

7. Recommendation for policy refinement

Overall, the submissions indicate that public sentiment is clearly more supportive than opposed in relation to allowing pets on TFI services. The clearest message from the submissions is that the principle of pet access is broadly welcomed, and the proposed policy is seen to be as practical, proportionate, and enforceable with some suggestions added. Respondents commonly view the proposal as overdue, practical, and aligned with a more sustainable and inclusive transport system.

Following the consultation, it is proposed to introduce a general reminder that owners remain responsible for their animals and to remove the requirement for small dogs to travel in a box. So, the proposed revised policy is as follows:

“Owners Responsibilities

Owners are responsible for the behaviour of their animal on TFI services and any resulting hygiene issues from bringing their animal on board. The designated wheelchair space, buggy space and priority seats must be kept clear for the people who need them.

Small dogs, cats, or other small animals

Small dogs, cats, or other small animals, that do not threaten the safety of other passengers, may travel on TFI bus, rail and Luas services under the following conditions:

- Animals are not allowed on seats and must remain on the customer’s lap or, or in a small box/cage, or on a lead on the ground in a way that does not obstruct other passengers or passageways.
- Animals must be kept away from other travelling animals to ensure the safety and comfort of other customers and pets.

Larger dogs

Larger dogs, that do not threaten the safety of other passengers, may be carried provided they are on a lead and have a muzzle. Larger dogs may be refused entry if the service is reaching capacity.

Guide dogs and Assistance dogs

Guide dogs and assistance dogs are permitted on all TFI services without restriction.

Guide or assistance dogs must wear an official coat, medallion and lead to distinguishing it as a working dog, that has the relevant training, and not a pet. A parent or guardian who is accompanying a child with an assistance dog should be carrying an identity card for the dog.

Only one guide dog or assistance dog is permitted per passenger.”

8. Next steps

The NTA will draft revisions to its own bye-laws and work with operators (in particular Dublin Bus, Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann and Luas) to implement necessary changes to their own bye-laws and conditions of carriage to accommodate the above policy in relation to carriage of pets.

The policy will apply to TFI services only (public transport services contracted and funded by the NTA). Operators will not be expected to implement the policy on non-TFI services (such as Bus Éireann Expressway or Dublin Bus tours).

Appendix 1: Summary of sentiment from organisations

A variety of organisations responded to the consultation including Foyle Coaches Northwest Busways Limited, the Labour Party), Rail Users Ireland, The Irish Blue Cross, Peata Pet Therapy, Asthma Society of Ireland, Coach Tourism and Transport Council (CTTC), National Bus and Rail Union (NBRU), Bus Éireann, CUC Medical Limited, Easy Treesie, University of Liverpool (Professor of Law, Co-Director Health Law & Regulation Unit), Big Bark News and Media, Dogs Trust and the Irish HelpCare Foundation.

Consultation responses showed broad support for introducing a consistent national policy that permits pets on public transport, provided clear rules, safeguards, and enforcement measures are in place. Supporters noted that allowing pets would improve accessibility for pet owners, particularly those without access to a car, facilitate travel to veterinary appointments, reduce reliance on private vehicles, and align Ireland with common practice across many European countries. There was strong support for the proposed network-wide approach, with respondents highlighting the benefits of consistent rules across bus, rail, DART and Luas services. Stakeholders noted that a unified policy would reduce confusion for passengers and staff and encourage greater use of public transport.

A key area of debate concerned the treatment of larger dogs, particularly the proposal to require muzzling. While some respondents viewed muzzles as necessary for passenger safety and reassurance, animal welfare organisations and veterinary stakeholders raised concerns about stress, overheating, improper fit, and the practicality of introducing a blanket requirement. Several submissions suggested a more flexible approach based on the dog's behaviour, temperament and owner responsibility rather than size alone.

Many submissions highlighted the need to balance pet access with the needs of other passengers. Concerns were raised regarding allergies, asthma, phobias and passenger comfort, particularly in enclosed or crowded environments. Suggestions included enhanced cleaning protocols, strict containment requirements for small animals, and consideration of designated pet-free areas where feasible.

Transport operators, staff representatives and some community organisations expressed concerns regarding operational and enforcement challenges. Common issues raised included responsibility for enforcing the policy, managing non-compliant pet owners, dealing with conflicts between passengers, additional cleaning requirements, and potential liability in the event of incidents. Staff representatives stressed that frontline employees should not be expected to take on extensive enforcement responsibilities.

Several respondents recommended restrictions on non-service animals during peak periods, citing capacity constraints, passenger comfort and animal welfare concerns. Alignment with existing bicycle restrictions was suggested by some stakeholders.

There was universal support for maintaining unrestricted access for Guide Dogs and Assistance Dogs. Some disability organisations also highlighted the need to ensure that any identification or verification requirements for assistance dogs do not create barriers or discrimination for handlers.

Animal welfare organisations broadly supported the policy but emphasised that successful implementation would require public education, staff training, clear guidance for pet owners, and robust animal welfare protections. Many also recommended granting transport staff discretion to refuse access where an animal appears distressed, aggressive or uncontrolled.

While a minority of submissions opposed the proposal outright, primarily citing safety, health, operational and cost concerns, the overall consultation response indicates support for allowing pets on public transport under a controlled, clearly defined framework that protects passenger safety, accessibility, operational requirements and animal welfare.

Appendix 2: Summary of disability user groups sentiment

The three organisations below have submitted responses to the public consultation:

- Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind directly submitted a response via letter
- Voice of Vision Impairment (VVI) directly submitted a response via letter and
- National Council for the Blind of Ireland directly submitted a response via letter.

Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind

Overall sentiment: Qualified support.

Submission summary: The submission argues strongly for access for accredited dogs, says the organisation generally welcomes the idea of domestic pets on public transport, and asks for strict control because an uncontrolled dog could undermine a guide dog partnership.

Interpretation: The organisation is positive about expanded access in principle, especially for accredited dogs, but cautious about general pet access unless rules are tightly enforced.

Voice of Vision Impairment (VVI)

Overall sentiment: Cautious but broadly supportive of inclusive rights for assistance dog users beyond narrow provider-based recognition.

Submission summary: Their submission notes the need for bespoke or home training for dogs in some cases, the risk of discrimination, and states that no private organisation has the right to impede the rights of people who are not associated with the organisations that provide accredited training for Guide or Assistance dogs.

Interpretation: The submission suggests a rights-focused position. It appears supportive of access for properly trained dogs who provide assistance to their owners while resisting overly narrow or potentially discriminatory recognition rules.

National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI)

Overall sentiment: opposed to extending access to household pets and strongly supportive only of registered assistance dogs trained by recognised bodies.

Submission summary: The submission says its position is clear, that only registered assistance dogs should be permitted, and that it does not support extending access to household pets or other non-accredited animals. It lists concerns about safety, accessibility, equality, public health, hygiene, noise, and conflict between animals.

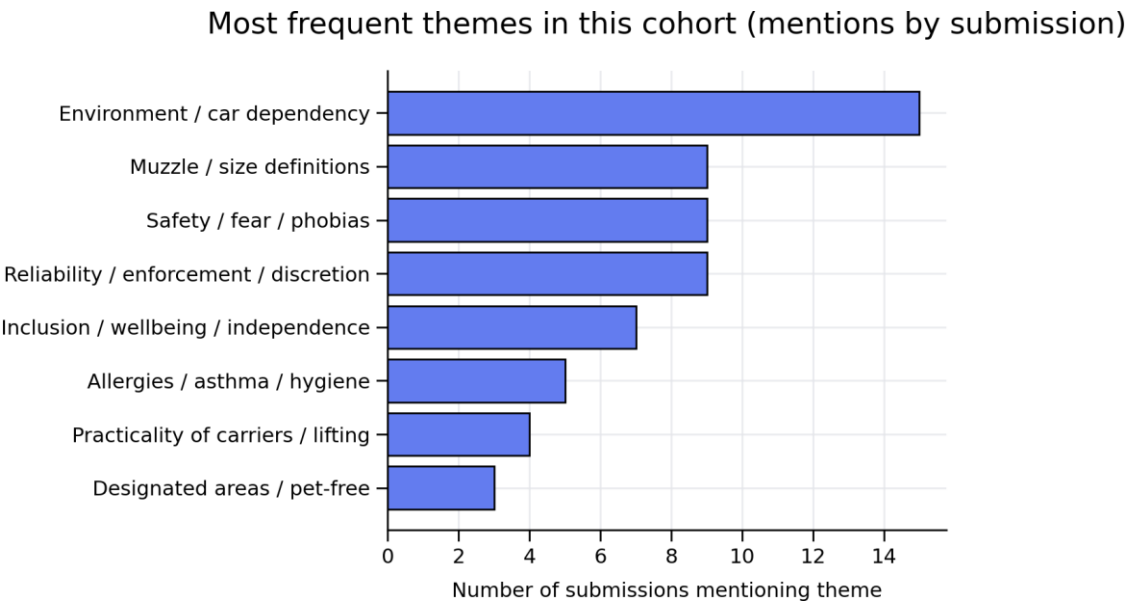
Interpretation: This is the clearest negative stance of the three on general pet access. The organisation supports protected access for accredited assistance dogs but opposes broader pet access.

Appendix 3: Summary of sentiment from those with self-declared accessibility issues

This analysis identified 24 relevant submissions where respondents explicitly self-identified as disabled, living with a long-term illness/condition, or as being elderly.

- **Context:** submissions were included where the respondent self-identified within the text (e.g., ‘As a person with a disability...’, ‘I can’t drive due to my epilepsy’, ‘As a pensioner...’).
- **Sentiment:** responses were categorised as Supportive, Conditional/Mixed, Opposed, or Unclear using policy-specific language cues (e.g., ‘support’, ‘welcome’, ‘do not agree’, ‘guide dogs only’), with ‘Conditional/Mixed’ used where respondents supported the principle but raised requirements or caveats. Overall sentiment towards permitting pets on TFI-branded services is predominantly supportive, with many respondents emphasising improved independence, social participation and practical access to essential trips (e.g., veterinary visits). Support is frequently conditional on safeguards for allergies, hygiene, passenger comfort and predictable enforcement.
- **Key findings:**
 - Cohort size: 24 submissions
 - Sentiment distribution: Supportive 6, Conditional/Mixed 11, Opposed 1, Unclear 6
 - Self-identification breakdown (not mutually exclusive): Disabled Persons 3, Older Persons 19, People with Long-term illness 2

Figure 1. Most frequent themes raised by the target cohort. Note: This cohort is based on explicit self-identification within free-text responses; some relevant respondents may not be captured in cases where the respondent didn’t state their status within the submission copy.



Sentiment and what's driving it

Across 24 self-identified submissions, the balance of opinion is: Supportive (6), Conditional/Mixed (11), and Opposed (1); Unclear (6).

What supportive respondents emphasise:

Supportive respondents frame pet carriage as an accessibility and inclusion issue. Common rationales include:

- Greater independence for people who rely on public transport and do not drive.
- Reduced isolation and improved wellbeing where pets are described as key companions or support.
- More feasible access to essential journeys (notably veterinary appointments) without reliance on taxis or private cars.
- A view that a uniform, national policy would reduce uncertainty compared with discretionary/variable practices.

Conditional support: safeguards and practical implementation

A substantial share of respondents support the principle of allowing pets but highlight implementation details that could unintentionally create barriers—particularly for older people and those with disabilities or long-term conditions. The most common conditions requested are:

- Avoid rigid carrier requirements where lifting/carrying a container is difficult; allow small dogs on lap or at feet under control.
- Limit blanket muzzling requirements; align muzzling with existing restricted-breed or risk-based approaches.
- Introduce predictable rules on capacity/peak times to reduce the risk of passengers being stranded on return journeys.
- Ensure staff have clear authority and guidance to manage non-compliance, hygiene incidents and passenger disputes consistently.

What opposed respondents emphasise:

Opposition within this cohort concentrates on managing competing accessibility needs (e.g., allergies/asthma, phobias, sensory sensitivities) and concerns about hygiene and enforceability in crowded vehicles. Key objections include:

- Risk of allergic reactions or respiratory impacts in enclosed spaces.
- Fear of dogs and perceived safety risks, especially during peak crowding.
- Hygiene concerns (odour, shedding, soiling) and doubts about cleaning and compliance.
- Scepticism that rules would be consistently enforced given existing behavioural issues on services.

Implications for policy design

Across supportive and conditional submissions, respondents frequently signal that the policy will be judged not only on whether pets are permitted, but on whether it is workable and predictable for people with mobility limitations or health conditions. Based on the issues raised, the following design elements appear most likely to address inclusion while protecting other vulnerable passengers:

- A clear, nationally consistent ruleset with plain-language definitions (e.g., how ‘small’ and ‘large’ dogs are defined).
- Flexible accommodation for small dogs where a carrier is impractical for older or disabled passengers (e.g., lap/at-feet, off seats).
- Defined capacity/peak-time rules and a clear policy that the animal should remain close to their owner. (predictable return-journey options).
- Staff training and enforcement protocols that are consistent and proportionate, including powers to require disembarkation for disruption.

Conclusion

Within the self-identified disabled, long-term ill and older persons cohort sentiment is predominantly supportive yet conditional on safeguards that prevent new barriers for other vulnerable passengers. Respondents repeatedly emphasise independence, reduced isolation and practical access to essential travel as key benefits, while requesting clear rules, predictable enforcement and options that protect passengers with allergies, asthma or fear of dogs. Overall, the evidence indicates that an inclusive, workable policy for this cohort is likely to depend on clarity, proportionality alongside enforceable standards of control and hygiene.