



# Connecting Ireland and Rural Public Transport Investment - Opportunities for Rural Regeneration

**Conor O'Donovan**  
Senior Transport Planner,  
National Transport Authority

**Frances Byrne**  
Manager, Local Link Laois  
Offaly

**Cormac Ross**  
A/Senior Executive Engineer,  
Meath County Council

Friday 28 April 2023

# Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008

---

Principal functions  
of Authority.

**11.—(1)** The principal functions of the Authority are to—

- (a) undertake strategic planning of transport,
- (b) promote the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network,
- (c) secure the—
  - (i) provision of public passenger transport services,
  - (ii) provision of public transport infrastructure,
  - (iii) provision of integrated ticketing and information systems for public transport,



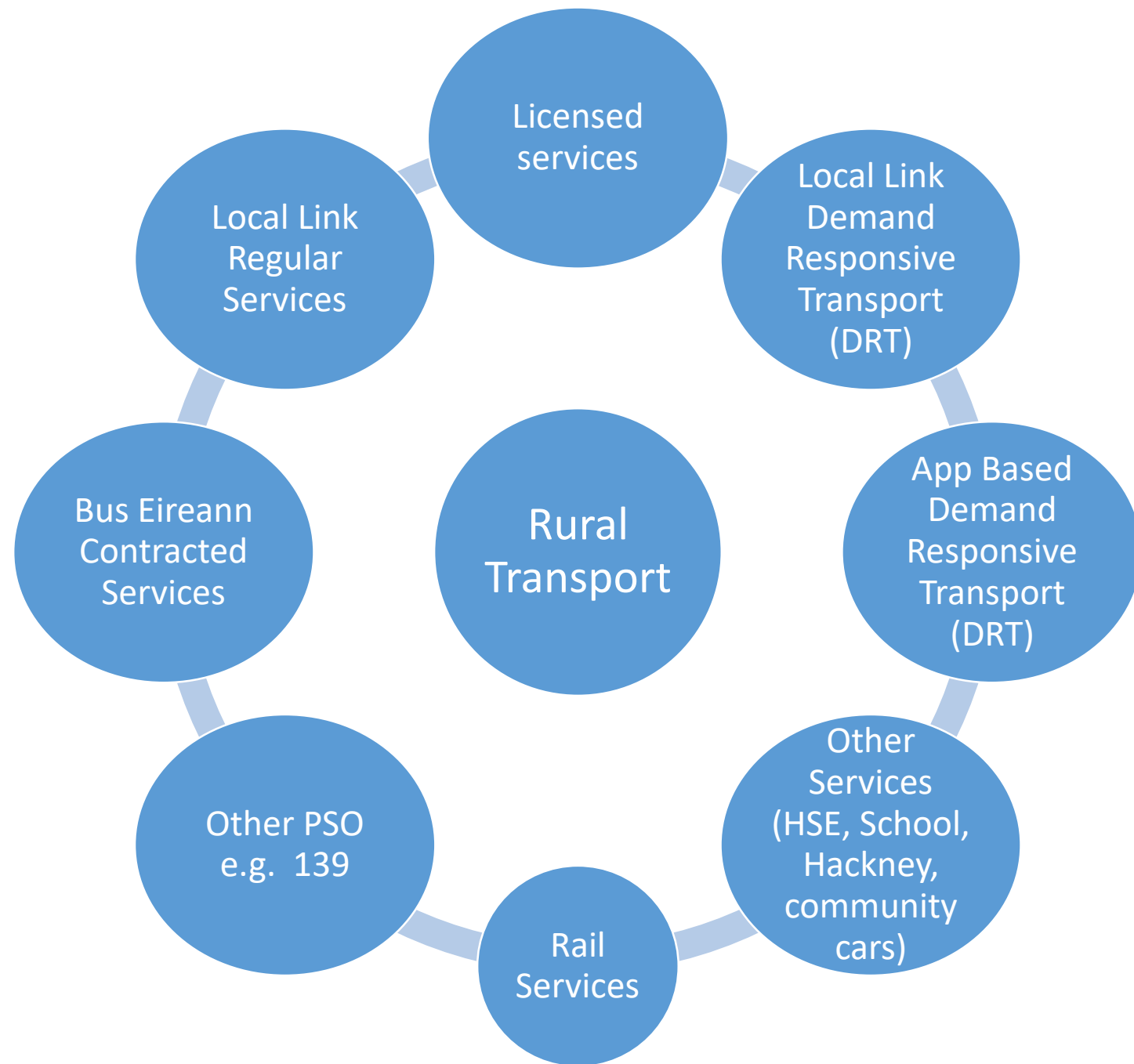
# Public Transport Services in Ireland



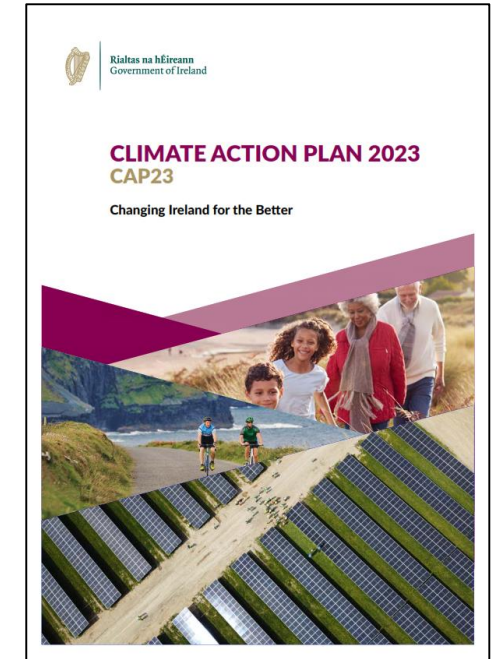
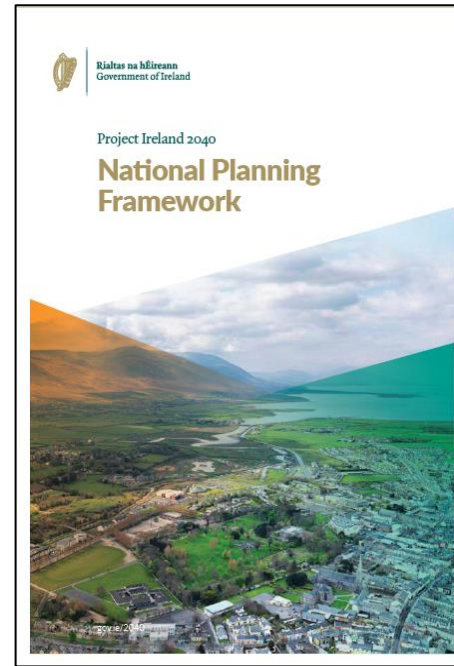
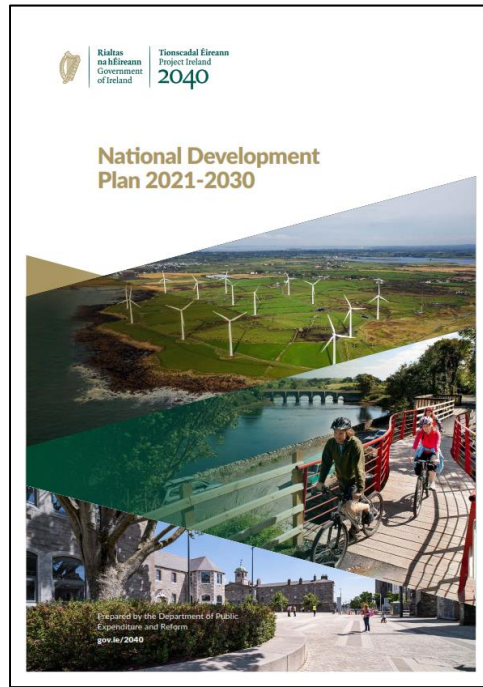
## Contracted Public Transport Services

## Public Bus Passenger Licensed Services





# Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan



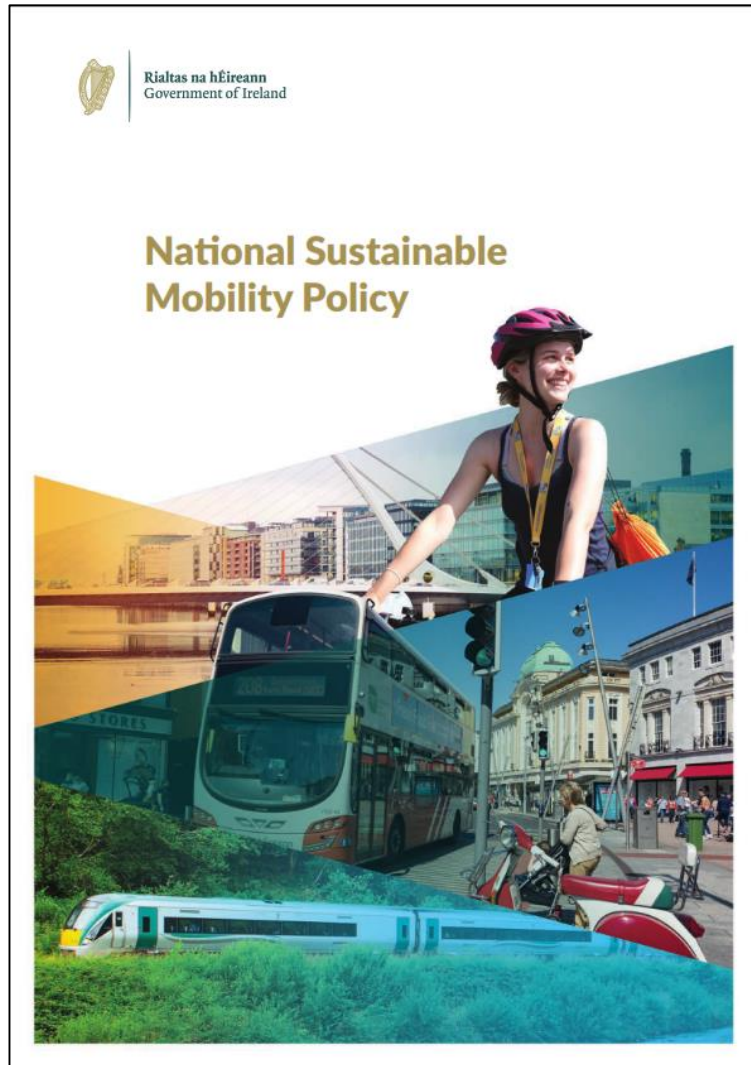
## Climate Action Plan

### 2023 - 2025 Actions

Action Number	Actions	Steps necessary for delivery	Output	Timeline	Lead	Stakeholders
(J)	PT Services Investment & NTA Connecting Ireland – Rural Mobility Programme	Continued roll-out and expansion of NTA Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Programme, and demand responsive services, and further analysis to develop multi-annual programme cost to meet decarbonisation pathway targets	Expansion of rural transport to support achievement of min. 70% rural coverage as per CAP23 targets	Q4 Annual	DOT	DPER, NTA, NewERA



# National Sustainable Mobility Policy



## National Sustainable Mobility Policy

32. Implement an enhanced rural transport system through delivery of Connecting Ireland. (Complements CAP action 245)

NTA

LAs, transport operators

2022: Connecting Ireland programme commenced for bus, rail and alternative solutions.

# What is Connecting Ireland?

---

- A **five-year programme** of public transport improvements
- Consists of a range of **regional and local bus** service improvements and pilots of complementary non-conventional transport improvements
- A **plan-led intensification** of the Authority's service review process
- To offer a viable **alternative to the car**
- A **partnership** approach to public transport network planning

Objectives	
<b>Quantity</b>	Connecting more people to more opportunities in more places
<b>Quality</b>	Providing an attractive service as an alternative to the car for some trips
<b>Utility</b>	Providing an integrated, useful network
<b>Plan Led</b>	A <b>systematic</b> and <b>strategic</b> approach to planning public transport services in <b>rural Ireland</b>

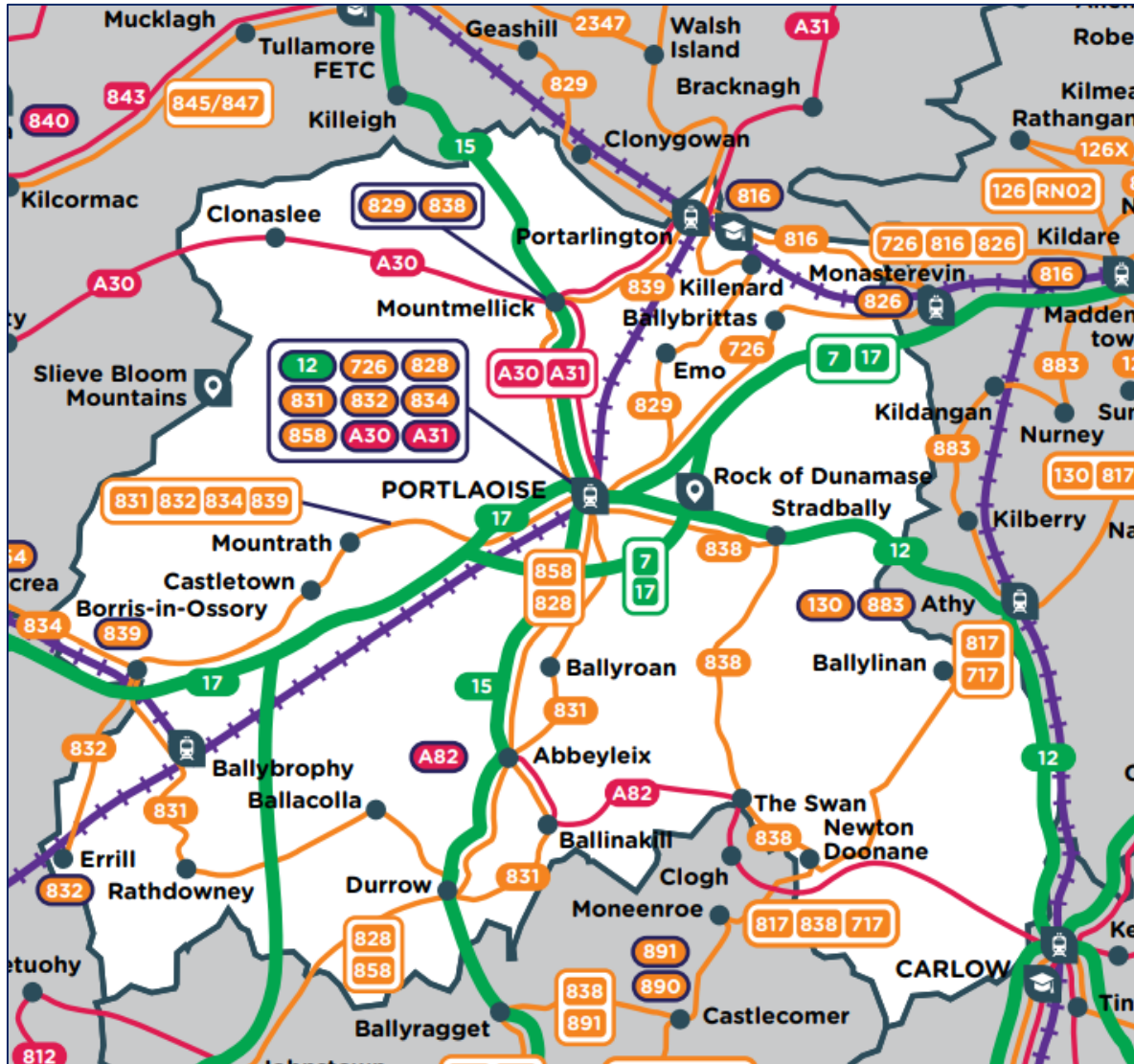


# Timeline

---



# Connecting Ireland Network



- Regional Corridor Proposals
- Local Route Proposals
- Existing Routes

# Dispersed Rural Housing and Connecting Ireland

The above principles will help guide improvements to fixed route bus services. In sparsely populated, dispersed settlements fixed routes will not be an appropriate solution and we will therefore need to tailor our approach. This can be achieved in several ways including expansion of the DRT network and utilising innovative approaches to improve public transport connectivity in these areas. The overall aim is to connect outlying areas with their nearest town at times of the day and week that are useful to most residents.



# Delivery of Connecting Ireland Network

---

The Connecting Ireland Network is being delivered through a number of mechanisms:

- Local Link PSO (Public Service Obligation) services;
- Revision of existing PSO operator contracts e.g. Bus Eireann, Irish Rail;
- New PSO direct award contracts;
- Licensed services; and
- Non conventional public transport e.g. DRT/ App Based DRT.

# Connecting Ireland Principles

---

## **We will apply a range of principles and standards to develop the network, including:**

- ▶ Increasing frequency on existing routes to attract more passengers
- ▶ Design useful and integrated timetables
- ▶ Schedule services to arrive at a centre before 09:00, particularly for work and education trips
- ▶ Allow for trips in the middle of the day for those shopping, attending health appointments, or visiting friends and family
- ▶ Schedule a return home at around 17:30 and potentially provide later services for socialising and evening retail where there is demand
- ▶ Provide services seven days a week
- ▶ Provide local routes that connect smaller settlements with the regional public transport network with integrated timetables that allow more interchange opportunities
- ▶ Serve key locations within towns, e.g. hospitals, train stations, educational institutes, etc.



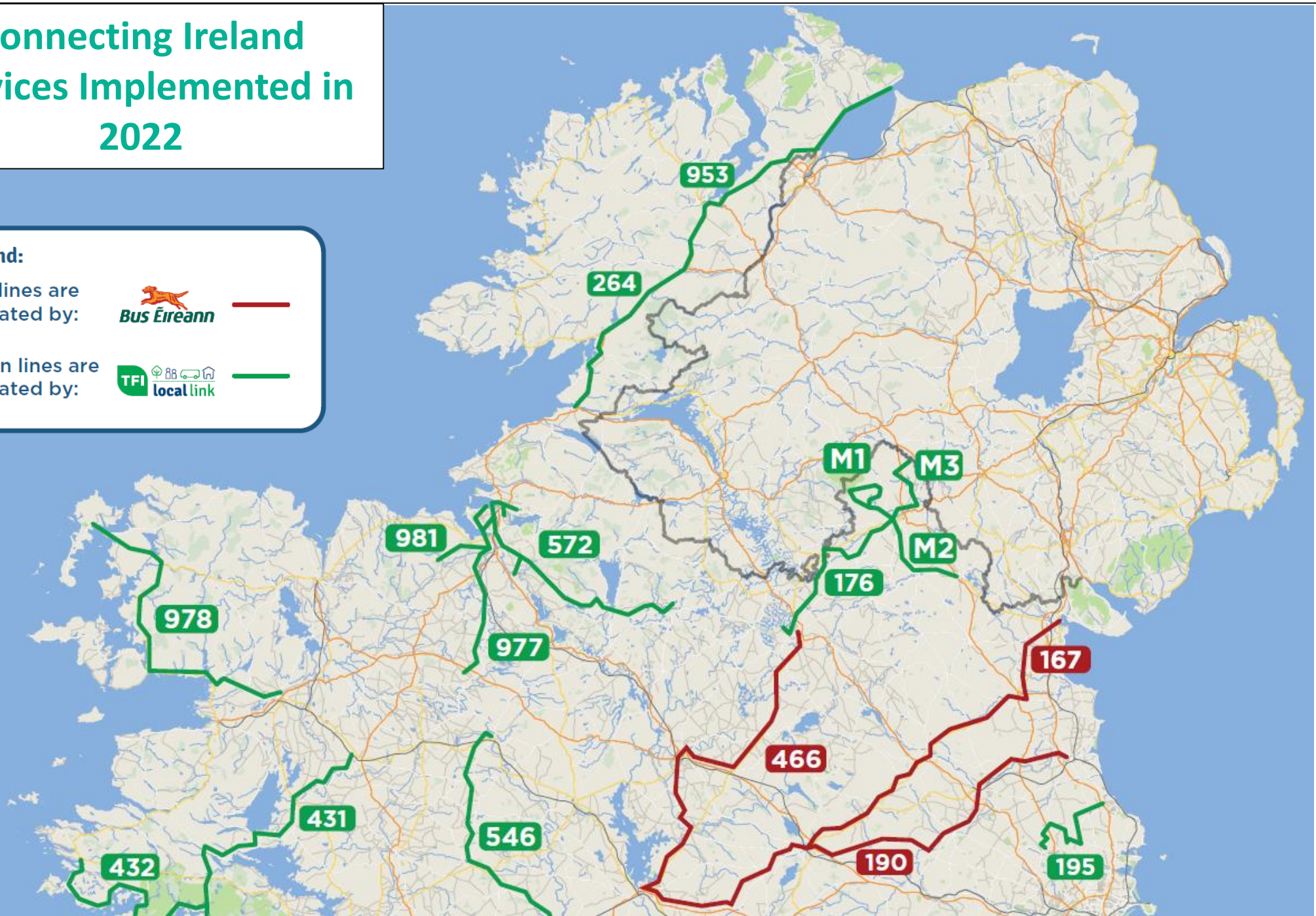
# Connecting Ireland Services Implemented in 2022

## Legend:

Red lines are  
operated by:

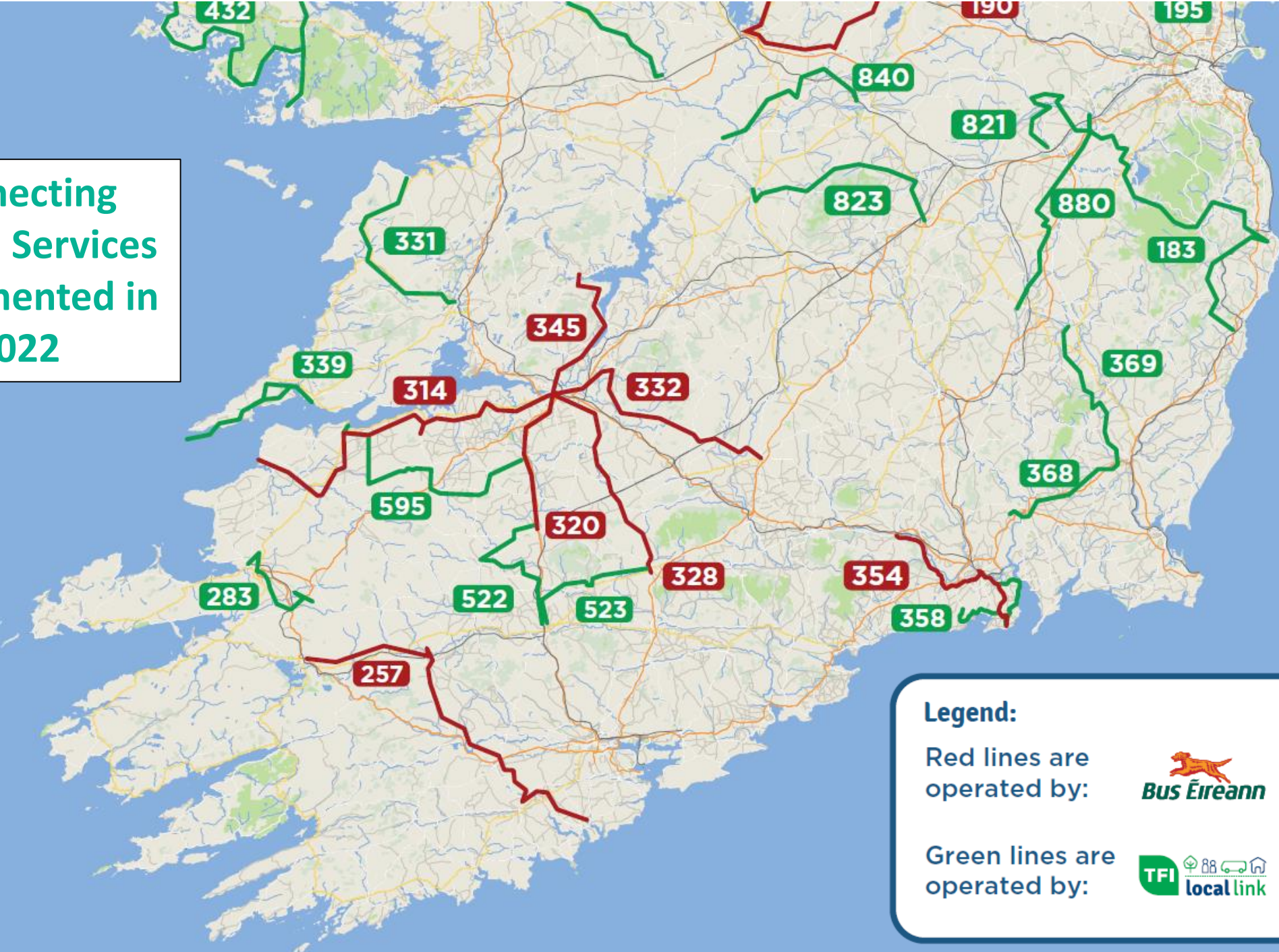


Green lines are  
operated by:





# Connecting Ireland Services Implemented in 2022



### Legend:

Red lines are operated by:



Green lines are operated by:





# Phase 1 Key Achievements

Since the implementation of Phase 1 in January 2022, the programme has delivered 38 new and enhanced bus services throughout the country. The introduction of these services has increased connectivity, particularly for people living outside major towns and cities. By designing all routes to connect with the wider TFI bus and rail network, local communities now have improved access to educational, employment and health care facilities – supporting a cleaner, greener and more sustainable future.

342,607



passenger journeys took place on the 38 new and enhanced bus services



Over  
100,000



weekly kilometres were added to  
the Public Transport Network

Connected over



new towns and villages



patronage growth on the  
enhanced services

# Service Planning Issues

---

- 1) Licensing issues and Commercial Bus Operator (CBO) retrenchment/expansion;
- 2) Driver Issues (Availability/ Hours/ Breaks);
- 3) Operator Issues and capacity of market;
- 4) Bus Fleet availability;
- 5) Planning resource capacity/ new priorities (e.g. Ukraine refugee transport);
- 6) Integration Issues;
- 7) Post implementation issues/ subsequent timetable amendments; and
- 8) Customer feedback and issues.

# Connecting Ireland – Bus Stop Infrastructure

---

- There are c.16,000 stop locations in urban and rural locations in the state.
- To expedite service implementation, the Authority commenced new CI services in advance of the roll out of new bus stop infrastructure, using existing bus infrastructure.
- The Authority is currently planning the design of bus stop infrastructure for Connecting Ireland services and is rolling out stops in parts of the network during the lifetime of the programme. The construction of new stops is already commencing and will be ramped up in 2024.
- The Authority is commencing a review of key stops in CSO settlements along Connecting Ireland routes to ensure bus infrastructure is prioritised.
- In 2022, the NTA upgraded c.1,200 stops. For most new stop infrastructure, there is a requirement to do the following:
  - Agree location of stops;
  - Obtain stop permission from local authority/landowner;
  - Site visit and assessment;
  - Safety audit;
  - Design drawings;
  - Procure construction and install poles, sockets, bus cage, carousels; and
  - Stop information etc.

# Connecting Ireland – Planning

---

- New services significantly improve the quality of life for residents, particularly for those who don't have access to private vehicles.
- The consolidation of development in key settlements along route corridors supports the provision of bus services and allows residents to access jobs, schools, shops, social services etc. This supports the development of the rural economy and adds to the vibrancy of rural areas, contributing to rural regeneration.
- Where development occurs in key settlements, safe pedestrian access within reasonable walking distance to public transport stops should be a key consideration. Consideration needs to be given to providing bus infrastructure as part of any new large development (stops, shelters, layovers, turnaround facilities etc.).
- Rural stops outside of settlements are particularly problematic given the lack of pedestrian facilities, road safety and passenger welfare issues. Given the dispersed development patterns in much of rural Ireland, it is not possible to provide reasonably frequent, regular public transport services within safe walking distance of many houses in rural areas.

# Transport for Ireland (TFI) Local Link

---

- Responsibility for the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) was assigned to NTA in 2012, rebranded to TFI Local Link.
- 15 Transport Coordination Units (TCU) administer and manager TFI Local Link on behalf of the Authority.
- TFI Local Link bus services connect communities throughout rural Ireland as part of the Transport for Ireland public transport network.
- TFI Local Link operate two different types of service - Regular Rural Bus Services (RRS) which offer fixed routes between towns and villages that have a scheduled timetable; and Door-to-Door Bus Services (DRT) which collect and drop off pre-booked passengers directly to their homes.
- During 2022, TFI Local Link regular services nationally carried a total of 2.8 million passengers reaching 55,000 passengers per week during February 2023 (from 6,000 passengers per week in 2018).

