

Bus services in West Cork: 2011 and beyond.

Submission to Bus Éireann

Sustainable Clonakilty Transport Group

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Where we're coming from.

[Sustainable Clonakilty](#) is a community initiative covering the greater Clonakilty area whose mission is to lessen our contribution to climate change and our dependence on diminishing resources, principally oil. As part of this campaign our Transport Group looks at ways in which we can promote the use of public transport, making it the first choice rather than the last resort for those needing to travel within West Cork, to Cork City and beyond.

We live in extremely challenging economic times, and we are fully aware of the economic pressures on public transport operators within the State. We are looking therefore at simple and realistic measures that may be taken in the short term in order to enhance the service, increase passenger numbers and generate new revenue at little or no marginal cost.

Bus Éireann: a trusted brand.

Perceptions of Bus Éireann within our groups membership and from informal soundings in the wider community are immensely strong. In particular the drivers' professionalism and commitment are widely recognised and much appreciated. They are in general extremely helpful and excellent ambassadors for the company.

Bus Éireann is known as a national brand, and in providing through tickets to destinations across Ireland (as well as international services) it can provide a convenient and cost-effective means of travelling from West Cork to Limerick, Galway, Dublin or even Belfast. The online ticket system is an excellent platform for such long-distance business, and the provision of real-time bus information online and by text an excellent service, though it does not appear to be well-known.

Background.

The [Smarter Travel](#) programme has reaffirmed the commitment of the Irish government to reduce per-capita transport emissions, to enhance the role of public transport and to integrate different transport modes in a meaningful and useful way. It explicitly proposes a reduction of almost a third in the modal share of private cars in commuting to work by 2020, for example. Smarter Travel also commits the government explicitly to the promotion of bus transport, and some of its statements on bus transport are worth repeating here:

Commuters will only begin to consider a shift from car to bus transport when the advantages of the bus are greater than those of the car. To date, much of the emphasis on improving bus services has been on better bus priority compared with other traffic but this, on its own, is not sufficient to deliver additional patronage. Bus services must also be convenient, reliable, frequent, comfortable, have journey times favourably comparable to the car and be supported by first class customer information and service. The application of modern technology can underpin many of these requirements.

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Bus use is particularly important for those without access to a car, the young, older people and people with mobility issues. If we are to encourage the use of public transport in Ireland, the availability of a safe, accessible, integrated and reliable service for 18+ hours of the day is essential in any attempts to increase patronage and gain more users. This featured strongly in feedback in the public consultation process.

A sustainable transport future: a new transport policy for Ireland 2009-2020, p.40.
SmarterTravel.ie, 2009.

For our part, informal local consultations and a small survey on our website suggest that while these factors are extremely important so too is the cost, with a number of people indicating that they believed it was cheaper for them to drive.

We do not at this stage propose that Bus Eireann increase the numbers of services operating, but rather, consider that the actions we recommend below will, through demand stimulation, themselves help make the business case for a future extension.

Making it easy: service usability.

It is widely accepted that the key to promoting public transport use is to make it convenient, easy to use, reliable and affordable. We consider that, in line with the Smarter Travel objectives, modal integration and provision of information are key to this.

The recommendations in this section are divided into four groups: Integration, Fares and Incentives Information, and Comfort and Convenience. These categories are not mutually exclusive and each recommendation has the potential to bring benefits in more than one area. The recommendations are designed to be easy to implement within the current infrastructure.

Integration.

Recommendation 1: *Integration with rail services.* We propose an extension of the services from West Cork to Kent St. Station, Cork timed to arrive approximately 20 minutes before the departure of the Dublin train (at 10 past the hour: the train departs at 30 minutes past the hour). Return train times are variable but in general a regular departure at 10 past the hour would also be convenient. This would add slightly less than 2 km to the route. This would in part generate new business, enabling people who might otherwise have left their car at Kent St Station to travel by bus, and in part improve the service to existing passengers who currently have a long walk, often with baggage, to reach the station.

Recommendation 2: *Integration with air services.* It appears to us that it would be feasible for some services to be rerouted via Ballinahassig, Fivemilebridge and Cork Airport. This would add approximately 3.5 km to the overall journey, but open up direct links from the airport and airport business park to West Cork, reducing journey times from two hours to less than an hour. It seems probable that this would generate largely new business, as the current time and the inconvenience of changing in Cork act as disincentives to bus use. Note that the increased use of e-ticketing and online check-in by airlines has reduced substantially the waiting time at the airport.

Recommendation 3: *Extension of the “journey ticket” concept* to include onward trips within Cork City (or other destinations). The idea of the “journey ticket” is to reflect the needs of the customer by pricing the ticket according to the customer’s needs rather than the provider’s operational decisions. This is already reflected in inter-city travel, where journey tickets are available to most destinations and we propose to extend this to the city itself by permitting the customer onward travel on city buses for a period of 60 minutes following the arrival of the service (as well as on buses connecting to departing services).

Recommendation 4: *Integration with cycling routes and networks.* We propose the provision of quick-access cycle racks on buses, to permit people to cycle one way and return by bus, or vice-versa. It seems probable that business generated in this way would be largely new business as cyclists and cycle tourists have been unable to use public transport in the past.

Fares and incentives.

Recommendation 5: *Midday (off-peak) pricing.* We consider that there may be significant scope to generate business through differential pricing, targeting services in the middle of the day that may currently be poorly used. These could be low fares valid on particular services, limited promotional fares sold on a first come first served basis or a combination of the two. Such an initiative, could be a significant

benefit to communities along the routes, particularly if eye-catching fares were used to promote travel between the towns in the region.

Comfort and convenience.

Recommendation 6: *Seat reservations.* While online ticketing permits the traveller to book tickets to almost anywhere in the country, there is no immediate guarantee that a seat will be available on the chosen connection. This is a powerful disincentive to taking the bus, particularly for long journeys with connections, where missing one bus can cause a disproportionate delay in arrival. This would require some change to the Bus Éireann online systems; however the main components are already present on the website.

Recommendation 7: *Purchase of tickets with seat reservations offline* at newsagents, supermarkets and other appropriate outlets in the area. Not all people are comfortable with online buying and again it is the young (without credit cards) and older people (who may not use the internet) who are disproportionately disadvantaged. This would be a low cost change, as the agents could use the same website technology and would only require a small fee per ticket sold.

Recommendation 8: *Additional stage stops in towns* and promotion of greater awareness of the request stop rules. Clonakilty currently only has one stage stop on the eastern side of the town: this is approximately two kilometres from Dunnes Stores on the western side of town, and is not an easy walk with baggage. We propose therefore an additional stage stop at Dunnes Stores or the Maxol (Mace) garage. Furthermore some stops (Rosscarbery for example) do not appear in the online booking facility at all while others do not permit online booking directly, and we would suggest that Bus Éireann provide additional information on printed timetables and the website to make these stops easier to use.

Note: the implementation of these three Comfort and convenience recommendations requires a small change to the current online ticketing system in that the rule that you must board the bus at a specific stage stop would need to be abolished and passengers allowed to board at any stop after the commencement stage indicated on their printed voucher (this refers the restriction specified on the [Bus Éireann online booking form](#)).

Information.

Recommendation 9: *a local publicity campaign* to make known the facilities that Bus Éireann already offers – online ticketing, through ticketing, multi-trip tickets, etc – as well as new ones that it may come to offer, such as those detailed here. This is an area where Sustainable Clonakilty and other community groups in West Cork may be able to provide support, using our websites, social networks and media contacts to improve local awareness of the enhanced services on offer.

Recommendation 10: *Provision of real-time displays* at stage stops to show the due times of the next bus in real-time.

Looking ahead.

While our focus in this document is on simple steps that can be taken immediately, we are also working to establish a strategy for the development of public transport in the region in the next decade and would hope to be able to work co-operatively with Bus Éireann as well as other organisations to achieve this. Some ideas we would like to pursue in the future include:

- Establishing a basic principle that anyone in the county of Cork should be able to travel to Cork City and return using public transport on the same day, get to Dublin by bus and rail before midday and return from Dublin by rail and bus taking a train leaving after 16:00.
- Establishing a principle that anyone within 2 hours bus travel from Cork City should be able to spend an evening in Cork at reasonably timed evening events and be able to return home by public transport.
- The possibility of providing a “park and ride” facility in Clonakilty: a dedicated bus stop and parking area enabling people living in rural areas away from a bus route to use the service more easily.
- A means of ordering a taxi to meet the bus for late evening services.
- Exploring the TaxiBus concept (also known as “bus on demand”) for local routes in the Clonakilty area and beyond. These buses have a specific route and timetable but you must contact the operator beforehand to travel: if there are no passengers the service does not operate.
- Development of coastal services linking Clonakilty with Timoleague, Garretstown and Kinsale as well as inland routes connecting to Enniskeane and Dunmanway.

These ideas require further development, feasibility studies and possibly some pilot projects All of them are in line with national and local policies and we consider them worthy of substantial consideration.

Conclusions and next steps.

In this document we have put together a number of recommendations that, we believe, are in line not only with our objectives as an organisation but also with government plans for transport in the next decade and the direction that Bus Éireann is already taking. We find these strategies extremely encouraging and consider that our proposals support them strongly: promoting modal integration, facilitating the public transport user to make better use of the network and bringing the customer to the centre of the service development process.



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We would like to thank you for your time in reading this submission, and make it clear that we are available to discuss these proposals or any other aspect of public transport in the region with you in person, by telephone or by email at any mutually-convenient time.

Sources.

Sustainable Clonakilty website, <http://www.sustainableclonakilty.com>, last accessed 28th November 2010.

Smarter Travel Policy Document,
http://www.smartertravel.ie/download/1/NS1264_Smarter_Travel_english_PN_WEB.pdf, last accessed 29th November 2010.

AA Ireland Route Planner, <http://www.aaireland.com>, last accessed 30th November 2010.

Bus Éireann website, <http://www.buseireann.ie>, last accessed 2nd December 2010.

Iarnród Éireann website, <http://www.irishrail.ie>, last accessed 30th November 2010

Verkehrsbund Rhein-Ruhr (official public transport site of the Rhine-Ruhr area in Germany), explanation of the TaxiBus concept (in German only),
<http://www.vrr.de/de/service/mobilitaetsangebote/taxibus/index.html>, last accessed 2nd December 2010.

Summary of recommendations.

Recommendation	Title	Description
1.	<u><i>Integration with rail services.</i></u>	Extend services to Kent St. station to connect with services to Dublin and elsewhere.
2.	<u><i>Integration with air services.</i></u>	Re-route some services via Ballinahassig, Fivemilebridge and Cork Airport, including the Cork Airport Business Park.
3.	<u><i>Extension of the "journey ticket" concept</i></u>	Permit onward travel within Cork City for 60 minutes following the arrival of the service and before the departure of the return service.
4.	<u><i>Integration with cycling routes and networks</i></u>	We propose the provision of quick-access cycle racks on buses, to permit people to cycle one way and return by bus, or vice-versa.
5.	<u><i>Midday (off-peak) pricing.</i></u>	Generate off-peak business through differential pricing and low-fare offers.
6.	<u><i>Seat reservations</i></u>	Permit advance reservation of seats.
7.	<u><i>Offline purchase of tickets with seat reservations.</i></u>	Using newsagents, supermarkets and other appropriate outlets to sell tickets and seat reservations.
8.	<u><i>Additional stage stops in towns</i></u>	New stops, better awareness of the request stop rules and clarification of the available stops in online information.
9.	<u><i>Local publicity campaign.</i></u>	Improve awareness of current and future service offerings among potential customers.
10.	<u><i>Provision of real-time displays</i></u>	Provision of real-time displays at stage stops to show the due times of the next bus in real-time.