

Connecting Ireland Insights

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➤ **Over 120 new or enhanced services have been introduced since 2022 as a part of the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan.**

The aim of the five-year Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan is to improve rural bus services, therefore giving more people access to reliable and frequent public transport services which connect towns and townlands.

In 2023, a total of 4.7 million passenger journeys were recorded on Connecting Ireland rural bus routes with new connections established to 190 towns and villages, 34 colleges and 42 hospitals as well as offering 49 connections to rail services to facilitate onward travel.

The patronage on Connecting Ireland services grew 110% by the end of 2023, compared to 2019. The number of passengers using these services in rural Ireland increased by 70% year-on-year from 2022 to 2023. As a result of the new or enhanced routes added to the TFI Public Transport Network in 2022 and 2023 combined, around 500,000 people now have access to Public Transport.



So far in 2024, twenty-five new or enhanced routes have been added to the TFI Public Transport Network with routes operated by both TFI Local Link and Bus Éireann. These routes provide increased connectivity to the villages and areas of:

- Donegal Town,
- Portlaoise,
- Drogheda,
- Navan,
- Naas,
- Swords,
- Cavan,
- Gorey,
- Enniscorthy,
- Killarney,
- Dundalk,
- Carrick-on-Suir,
- Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis

And many more surrounding areas.



➤ Services in Action – Minister Ryan launches two fully-electric vehicles in Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis

On the 4th of June, Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan joined both the NTA and TFI Local Link Kerry to announce the launch of two new fully electric buses for the Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis area. This announcement builds on the significant advancements to Kerry’s public transport network since 2021. Over the last three years, the NTA in collaboration with TFI Local Link Kerry have delivered nine new or enhanced TFI Local Link services in the region.

The Electric Vehicles are operating on Route 277 and 268 and are covering over 600 emission-free kilometres every day. Both routes were introduced in December 2023 and offer multiple return services around the Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis peninsula along with improved connectivity to regional bus services, tourism, shopping and employment opportunities.

With no engine noise or vibration, passengers can now enjoy a smooth and peaceful journey. Each bus is equipped with air conditioning for both the driver and passengers, USB charging ports are also available for passengers to allow them to stay connected throughout their journey. Additionally, the buses are fully accessible which makes them suitable for all passengers.

The buses which are Yutong E10 Electric Vehicles, have 422KWh batteries and have a range of more than 370km in real conditions on a single charge. The high battery capacity of the buses, coupled with newly installed charging infrastructure, will ensure that the buses are always ready for service.

Speaking at the launch of the electric buses, **Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan TD** stated: *“The rollout of these two zero-emission buses in Dingle/ Daingean Uí Chúis is another significant step towards a more sustainable future for public transport in rural Ireland. We are in pristine and majestic countryside here in the Daingean Uí Chúis area and it is fitting that these new buses will be clean, quiet and emission-free. We will continue to invest in green technology and prioritise sustainability to ensure a cleaner and healthier environment for all.”*

Anne Graham, CEO of the National Transport Authority, expressed her support for the rollout stating: *“The launch of these two all-electric buses in the Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis area marks an important step towards sustainable public transport in rural Ireland. With over 370,000 passengers on TFI Local Link Kerry services last year, the buses will support continued passenger growth in a cleaner, greener way.”*

Alan O’Connell, the General Manager of TFI Local Link Kerry, commented: *“TFI Local Link Kerry is delighted that the Dingle Peninsula has been chosen nationally as the area to introduce these two all-electric vehicles. In collaboration with the NTA, TFI Local Link Kerry has continued to expand public transport services on the Peninsula in the region, which will now see 60,000 passenger trips annually. The introduction of these two all-electric vehicles is a vital step towards sustainability and reducing our carbon footprint while at the same time continuing to offer a first-class public transport system to residents and tourists on the Peninsula.”*



Pictured is Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan, TFI Local Link Kerry Manager Alan O’Connell and TFI Local Link Programme Manager Blathin McElligott

➤ Enhanced Services in Action – Route 458 Ballina to Enniskillen

As part of the Connecting Ireland Plan, the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Bus Éireann launched an enhanced Route 458 which provides year-round connectivity between Ballina and Enniskillen.

The enhanced route links Ballina to Enniskillen eight times per day, seven days per week, serving Dromore West, Sligo and Manorhamilton. Route 458 was designed to meet all customer needs, providing morning and evening peak services as well as services throughout the day and into the late evening seven days per week.

Since its introduction in December 2023, Route 458 has seen an 8% increase in customer trips, with this growth trend continuing into the autumn months. Customer usage has grown across all segments, particularly among students travelling to Sligo, but also among all parts of the route where customers are availing of the ability to make numerous local trips using public transport.

Speaking at the launch of the route in December 2023, Brian Connolly, Senior Operations Manager, West, for Bus Éireann said *“Bus Éireann is delighted to introduce these significant enhancements to Route 458, increasing the daily service to eight round trips Monday to Saturday and eight round trips on a Sunday. Thanks to the National Transport Authority, through the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan, we have added almost 1.8 million kilometres to our network this month, creating over 58 new jobs. Demand for our services in the West is higher than pre-pandemic, and passenger numbers nationally are 20-30% higher than they were in 2019, this enhanced service will enable us to connect our growing number of customers with what matters to them.”*



New or Enhanced Services implemented in 2024 so far

Route Number	Route Name/ Description	Operator	Implementation Date
292	Donegal – Ballyshannon	TFI Local Link Donegal Sligo Leitrim	04/01/2024
831	Rathdowney – Portlaoise	TFI Local Link Laois Offaly	06/01/2024
189	Enfield – Navan	TFI Local Link Louth Meath Fingal	29/01/2024
880	Naas – Carlow	TFI Local Link Kildare South Dublin	29/01/2024
192	Balbriggan – Swords	TFI Local Link Louth Meath Fingal	19/02/2024
163	Brú na Bóinne – Drogheda	TFI Local Link Louth Meath Fingal	26/02/2024
800/885	Baltinglass – Sallins	TFI Local Link Carlow Kilkenny Wicklow	11/03/2024
170	Cavan – Dundalk	Bus Éireann	24/03/2024
884	Wexford – Gorey	Commercial Bus Operator	12/04/2024
359	Enniscorthy – New Ross	TFI Local Link Wexford	15/04/2024
892	Dunlavin/Kilcullen – Newbridge	TFI Local Link Kildare South Dublin	07/05/2024
280	Waterville – Killarney	TFI Local Link Kerry	01/06/2024
276	Castlemaine – Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis	TFI Local Link Kerry	03/06/2024
273	Brandon – Tralee	TFI Local Link Kerry	24/06/2024
100	Dundalk – Drogheda	Bus Éireann	30/06/2024
354	Carrick-on-Suir – Dunmore East	Bus Éireann	30/06/2024
278	Fenit – Tralee	TFI Local Link Kerry	01/07/2024
274	Tarbert – Tralee	TFI Local Link Kerry	08/07/2024
523	Mitchelstown – Mallow	TFI Local Link Cork	28/07/2024
367	Dungarvan – Tramore	TFI Local Link Waterford	19/08/2024
316	Sixmilebridge – Shannon	Bus Éireann	25/08/2024
317	Limerick – Ennis	Bus Éireann	25/08/2024
330	Limerick – Shannon	Bus Éireann	25/08/2024
343	Ennis – Shannon – Limerick	Bus Éireann	25/08/2024
567	Carrick-on-Shannon – Manorhamilton	TFI Local Link Donegal Sligo Leitrim	26/08/2024

New or Enhanced Services to be implemented in 2024

Route Number	Route Name/ Description	Operator	Implementation Date
934	Gort – Loughrea	TFI Local Link Galway	Q3
187	Virginia – Kells	Bus Éireann	Q3
370	Wexford – Waterford	Bus Éireann	Q3
109B	Athboy via Kildalkey	Bus Éireann	Q3
186	Cavan – Kells	TFI Local Link Cavan Monaghan	Q4
973	Letterkenny – Fanad	TFI Local Link Donegal Sligo Leitrim	Q4
971	Dungloe – Letterkenny	TFI Local Link Donegal Sligo Leitrim	Q4
815	Athlone – Tullamore	TFI Local Link Laois Offaly	Q4
237	Skibbereen – Cork	Bus Éireann	Q4
953	Shrove – Letterkenny	TFI Local Link Donegal Sligo Leitrim	Q4
954	Carndonagh – Malin Head	TFI Local Link Donegal Sligo Leitrim	Q4
959	Buncrana – Greencastle	TFI Local Link Donegal Sligo Leitrim	Q4
966	An Fál Carrach – An Clochán Liath	TFI Local Link Donegal Sligo Leitrim	Q4
265	Skibbereen – Mizen Head	TFI Local Link Cork	Q4
266	Baltimore – Castletownsend	TFI Local Link Cork	Q4
332	Limerick – Cashel	Bus Éireann	Q4
392	Wellingtonbridge – New Ross	TFI Local Link Wexford	Q4
548	Loughrea – Athlone	TFI Local Link Galway	Q4
243	Newmarket – Cork	Bus Éireann	Q4