

Age Action

IRELAND

For All Older People

Age Action pre-Budget briefing document

The need to protect and develop Ireland's rural transport scheme

Background

The 37 rural transport projects currently operating in Ireland provide a vital service to the communities they serve, but especially older people for whom they are a lifeline. But these services are under threat if the Government implements the recommendation in the McCarthy report to end state funding for them. They currently cost the State €1 million annually.

The revised programme for government does not clearly state a commitment to maintain the existing structure and funding. It says: "We will explore the provision of a full scale transport system in rural areas using the network expertise of Bus Eireann, the physical infrastructure and personnel resources of the school transport system and the financial resources currently being spent on transport by the HSE and the Department of Education and Science."

Age Action welcomes the focus on utilising existing services more efficiently, but believes this should complement the RTP, not replace it.

The need

As people age, they become more reliant on public and other forms of transport as their ability to drive themselves declines. Just one-in-eight women (12.8%) and less than half of men (44.5%) aged 80+ have a driving licence. Recent information shows that 58% of users of the RTP are aged 65 years and over.

Many parts of rural Ireland are poorly served by mainstream public transport services. More than half older people surveyed in rural areas reported difficulty accessing public transport, compared to 11% of older people in urban areas.

Older people in rural Ireland who do not have access to private transport e.g. their own car or lifts provided by family, friends or neighbours, and those on low incomes, would have no form of transport without this scheme.

Rural transport is integral for independent living, participation, self-fulfilment and dignity. Without it, people would struggle to perform basic tasks such as collecting their pension,

shopping, maintaining social contacts and attending medical appointments. Inadequate rural transport is also a major factor in rural isolation and social exclusion.

There are many inconsistencies with the implementation of the current Rural Transport Programme. The RTP is not streamlined with national bus and rail systems and in some cases it does not provide the 'first journey' to connect a person's home with existing public transport. Additionally, the 37 current projects are provided separately so often they do not link up services as you move from one area to another.

What older people are demanding

The Government must prioritise the development of public transport and within this context it would ensure that rural transport is adequate, sufficiently resourced, and further developed.

- Ensure that Government follow through on its commitment in the revised programme for Government to rural transport in order to provide a full scale rural transport system;
- Maintain the Rural Transport Programme ;
- Examine ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing service.

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