

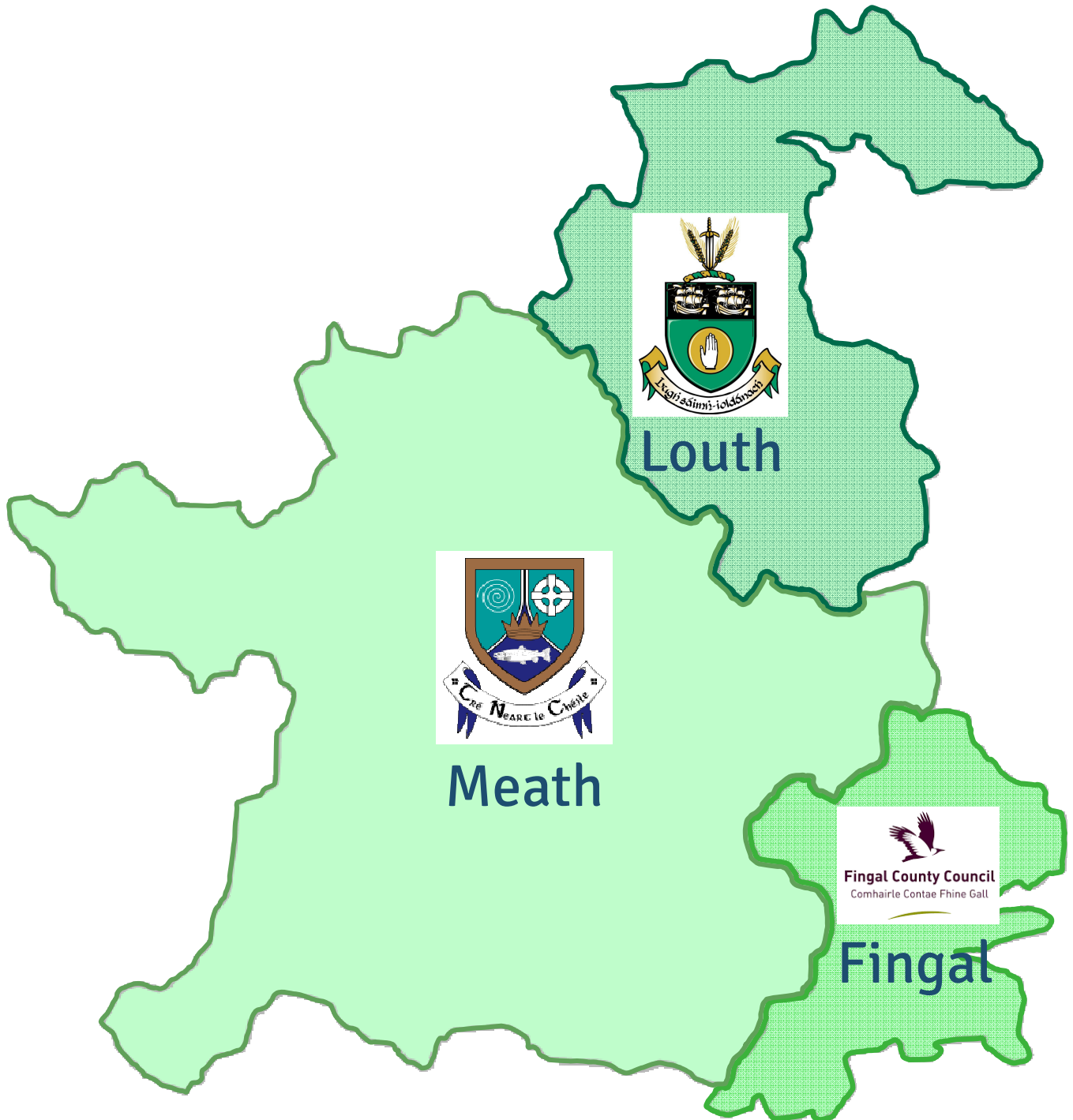


Local Link

Rural Transport Programme

Louth, Meath and Fingal

4 Year Strategic Plan 2019-2022



**“Flexibus - A lifeline to many.
A necessity for communities.”**



Local Link
Rural Transport Programme
Louth, Meath and Fingal

4 Year Strategic Plan
2019-2022

Document for Discussion Purposes Only

Adopted by the Board at its meeting on 15th November 2018

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Foreword:

John Burns, Chairperson, Board of Directors



The launch of this Strategic Plan 2019-2022 comes at a crucial time for the development of rural transport in Ireland.

With the publication of the *'Local Link Rural Transport Programme Strategic Plan 2018 to 2022'* by the National Transport Authority and the publication of the Action Plan for Rural Development *'Realising our Rural Potential'* there is a welcome focus on the role that transport plays in developing sustainable rural communities.

Flexibus is now in its 16th year of providing rural accessible transport services. In 2014 we were awarded the role of Transport Co-ordination Unit (TCU) for Counties Meath, Louth and Fingal.

The growth in passenger numbers in this period has been remarkable, and speak for themselves from just under 4,000 in 2002 to 170,840 in 2017. Flexibus, in existence since 2002, became the Transport Co-ordination Unit (TCU) for Louth Meath and Fingal under the Local Link banner in 2014.

This Plan is the next phase for the Company and is the culmination of research with stakeholders and community interests at Board level over many months. It seeks to provide a framework in which the transport needs of the three counties can be identified and met. It would not have been possible without the wholehearted support and input of Meath, Louth and Fingal County Councils, and is framed in the context of their respective County Development plans.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank so many for their input into the Strategic Plan, individuals and groups who have shaped Flexibus into the company that it is today, and future proofing Flexibus for the incumbent changes that lie ahead. With a strong Board of Directors, a great workforce, Flexibus is delighted to present this Strategic Plan.

In the coming years we will face many challenges in implementing this plan but, working with the National Transport Authority and the Local Authorities in Louth, Meath and Fingal, the Board of Directors, Management and Staff have shown that they are ready and able for the task.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Burns', written over a horizontal line.

John Burns
Chairperson



Chapter 1 : Introduction

Introduction

This 4-year Strategic Plan (2019-2022) coincides with the NTA Local Link Rural Transport Programme Strategic Plan 2018 to 2022 and has been adopted by the Board of **Flexibus Local Link** following consultation with local community and voluntary groups* and more recently with the Local Authorities in Louth, Meath and Fingal.

*Details of consultations undertaken are as Appendix 1.

The Structure of the Plan

In this Chapter, we introduce our approach to preparing the Plan and set down our **Vision**, our **Mission** and **Values**, and our **Aims** and **Objectives**. Chapter 2 provides a **background to the Company** and in Chapter 3 we set down our **Priority Areas** and **Actions** which follow those of the NTA Strategic Plan for the RTP. Chapter 4 considers **financial matters** and **planned new additional services** and Chapter 5 deals with **key issues for the Board**.

- **Our Vision** expresses the type of rural transport framework we aspire to create within our region.
- **Our Mission** defines the essential purpose of Flexibus, particularly why it is in existence, the nature of business it is in, and the customer it seeks to serve and satisfy.
- **Our Aims** are short term milestones we must achieve in order for long term objectives to be reached.
- **Our Objectives** represent a managerial commitment to achieve specified results in a specified period of time. They clearly spell out the priority areas and actions of performance to be achieved, the time period, the process and the person who is responsible for the achievement of the objective.

National Policies

Counties Fingal and Meath are part of the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) for the purposes of national transport planning and service delivery and, therefore, in preparing this Plan we were guided by:

- The National Transport Authority Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035, Ireland 2040 and the National Development Plan 2018-2027 which underpins the National Planning Framework.
- The NTA Local Link Rural Transport Programme Strategic Plan 2018 to 2022, March 2018.
- Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.

In addition, we took account of:

- The County Development Plans of Counties Louth, Meath and Fingal.
- The views of each PPN through our Board members who represent also the interests of each PPN.

Also, we have taken account of the various bodies in local authority sub-structures – LECPs, CDPs and other bodies: AFI, Healthy Ireland, Disability Ireland and The National Rural Development Plan: 'Realising our Rural Potential'.

A background paper on these policy documents - **Strategic Context** - can be found as Appendix 6.



Chapter 2:

Introducing Flexibus - Louth, Meath and Fingal

The Company and the Board of Directors

Flexibus is the trade name of Meath Accessible Transport Project CLG, a company limited by guarantee, founded in 2002. It is a 'not for profit' registered charity. A brief history of the Company is at Appendix 2.

The Board of Directors (13) of Flexibus has the responsibility to oversee the management of the Company. The Board representation is as follows:

- Representatives of the Local Authority and PPNs in Louth, Meath and Fingal.
- Representatives from Community and Voluntary Agencies.
- Representatives from Service Users.
- Representatives from the Disability Sector.
- Representatives from Statutory Agencies.

The Board has a broad mix of skills to meet the needs of the company and as members rotate and retire, the Board composition is reviewed to ensure that company aims and needs continue to be met.

The Company's policies as regards corporate compliance, corporate governance, financial policies and health and safety arrangements are set down in the Board's Governance and Health and Safety Framework documents which are reviewed annually by the Board.

Company Roles

Flexibus fulfils three important roles in relation to rural transport in counties Louth, Meath and Fingal:

- As a **Transport Coordination Unit** (TCU)
- As a **Rural Transport Service Provider**, and
- As a **Social Enterprise** entity.

Social Enterprises are businesses that **trade for the common good** rather than private gain.

They **address social needs, strengthen communities**, improve **people's life chances, enhance culture** or **protect the environment**.

They address a need and respond quickly.

Where surpluses are made they are **reinvested** towards the Company's aims. Directors receive no dividends.

Table 1 below summarises these roles, which are explained in more detail at Appendix 3.

Table 1

Roles	Partners	Timeframe	Inputs	Outcome/performance
Role 1: TCU	NTA, LAs and community and voluntary sector to assist in the design and planning of services, consistent with national, regional and county plans	Continuous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NTA • HSE • Dept. of Social Protection • Dept. of Rural Affairs • LAs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which national and regional county plans are being implemented in LMF. • Increase in service provision regionally. • Broad range of services provided. • Increased Social Participation.
Role 2: RTP Service Provider	Own Fleet, and contracted private operators	Continuous	Funding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NTA • HSE • Dept. of Social Protection for Free Travel • Donations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of passengers carried on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day and evening, scheduled and once-off services, • Accessible services throughout the region
Role 3: Social Enterprise entity	NTA, LAs and community and voluntary sector	Continuous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NTA • LAs • Solas • HSE • Partnerships • LMETB • Community Groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced isolation, • Enhanced lifestyle • Pilot initiatives • Increased contracts • Job creation from Live Register

Our Vision for the future:

It is the vision of Flexibus Local Link that the people, of all abilities, young and old, living in towns, villages, communities and rural areas, particularly in isolated areas, in Counties Louth Meath and Fingal, would have a network of demand led transport services to meet their varying needs, across the counties and the neighbouring regions and which would interconnect with the established public transport networks in a seamless manner.



Our Mission Statement

The mission of Flexibus - Meath Accessible Transport Project CLG is to provide innovative transport service models that meet the local and rural needs of all people in counties Louth, Meath and Fingal.

Our Aims

This Plan has been adopted with the following aims:

- Ensuring the Company continues to **provide a customer-focused and efficient service** to persons living in rural communities.
- **Informing** the Board in its planning and delivery of services across all three counties over the coming four-year period.
- **Guiding** the Board in **fulfilling its aims and objectives** and to continue to ensure itself that it operates in a manner consistent with national and county development plans, policies and guidelines.
- **Responding to the NTA** in terms of how best to meet rural transport needs across the three counties and its links with interconnecting catchment areas beyond, in a way consistent with the NTA Local Link Rural Transport Programme Strategic Plan.
- **Informing** the Board in its **adoption of the annual POA**.
- **Guiding management and staff** in its day-to-day delivery of services, and
- **Ensuring** the Plan and **our ambitions are consistent with:**
 - The plans of key stakeholders (NTA, three Local Authorities, HSE), the community and voluntary sector, and
 - Our obligations to our statutory regulators (CRO, CRA, RSA, DTTAS and other funding groups) on our plans and our ambitions, and
 - Giving clarity to the dedicated team of management and staff in relation to the next steps in the development of the Company.



Our Objectives

- **Continue to develop a community-based transport model** in Louth, Meath and Fingal.
- **Co-ordinate transport provision** in Louth Meath and Fingal to meet the needs of the most marginalised and promote social inclusion.
- **Provide services to anyone with a transport need** in Louth, Meath and Fingal.
- **Be the first point of contact** for any one individual or organisation/agency with a transport need in Louth, Meath and Fingal and adjoining hinterland regions.
- **Successfully co-ordinate a county-wide partnership of public, and non-profit providers;** local community and County organisations and agencies, organisations and individuals concerned with accessible transport provision.
- **Implement the business plan** and transport development strategy of the Board.
- **Provide safe, efficient, and cost effective rural transport services** to the people of Louth, Meath and Fingal.

Our Values

Our core values are key guiding influences in the shaping of the Company as it evolves.



Value for Money: Staff and Passengers

Action	Partners	Inputs	Outcome
<p>Staff</p> <p>Staff come from Long Term Unemployed.</p> <p>Staff recruited through CE and TÚS schemes.</p> <p>Full training given.</p> <p>Opportunity for Professional Development.</p> <p>Supported return to work.</p> <p>Management Team</p>	<p>SOLAS</p> <p>TÚS</p> <p>CE</p> <p>Job Club</p> <p>LMETB</p> <p>Board</p> <p>NTA</p> <p>HSE</p> <p>Networks</p>	<p>Training in professional transport given to all employees.</p> <p>Support to individuals and family to return to work.</p> <p>Professional development opportunities.</p> <p>Life-Long Learning throughout employment.</p> <p>Flexibility in working arrangements.</p> <p>Continuous Professional Development.</p> <p>Strong Network Skills.</p>	<p>-Highly trained and Professional Staff.</p> <p>-Staff have pride in their Job.</p> <p>-Confidence within the local Community</p> <p>-Positive knock on effect on family life – more money available within the family unit.</p> <p>-Increased spending power in the community.</p> <p>-Increased income to exchequer.</p> <p>The positive psychological effects and the knock on effect of going from long term unemployed to employment.</p> <p>Better outcomes and employability for the person.</p> <p>Flexibus have wonderfully friendly and caring staff who are passenger focused and love their jobs.</p> <p>Better outcomes and employability for the person.</p> <p>Flexibus have wonderfully friendly and caring staff who are passenger focused and love their jobs.</p> <p>Confidence of Board and key stakeholders in the activities of the company to deliver safe reliant efficient and responsive services in accordance with mission statement.</p>
<p>Passengers</p> <p>Passengers supported to access rural transport services.</p> <p>Passengers identify needed services.</p> <p>Passengers promote services.</p> <p>Independence for Passengers.</p>	<p>Local communities.</p> <p>Social workers.</p> <p>District Nurses.</p>	<p>Flexibus drivers support the needs of their passengers.</p> <p>Flexibus office staff listen to passengers and respond in positive way.</p> <p>Services tailored to meet local needs.</p> <p>Flexibus through the RTN, IRL lobby and advocate on behalf of passengers and their families.</p>	<p>-Access to Rural Transport services identified locally.</p> <p>-Door to door pick up.</p> <p>-Social Connections with friends and community.</p> <p>-Social outlet through interactions on the bus.</p> <p>-Independence.</p> <p>-Ownership of services.</p> <p>The opportunity to spend their money locally.</p>



Value for Money: Vehicles and Rural Development

Action	Partners	Inputs	Outcome
<p>Vehicles</p> <p>Accessible with electric steps, lifts and low floor.</p> <p>Flexible services to respond to local needs.</p> <p>Useable vehicles with flat floors that respond to needs.</p> <p>Ownership gives choices and changes of service at little or no cost.</p>	<p>Board of Directors</p> <p>NTA</p> <p>H&S Authority</p> <p>Taxi Regulator</p> <p>Our Wheelchair users</p>	<p>-Investment in accessible vehicles.</p> <p>-Flexible response to local needs.</p> <p>-Services coordinated to get best use of vehicle.</p> <p>-Vehicles can take 3 wheelchairs and 6 passengers or 16 passengers.</p>	<p>-Vehicles can meet the needs of passengers.</p> <p>-Flexible drivers give optimum service.</p> <p>-Vehicles can be changed to suit demand.</p> <p>Vehicle in use all day giving value for money.</p> <p>Flexibus are a "Go-To" accessible Transport Company for other Transport providers both Private Operators and NGOs.</p>
<p>Rural Development</p> <p>Bottom up approach to all service provision.</p> <p>Services identified within the community.</p> <p>Capacity building within communities.</p> <p>Communities adopt local services.</p>	<p>Bottom up Approach.</p> <p>Community Led.</p> <p>Capacity Building.</p> <p>Integrated Community - sense of belonging.</p>	<p>Regular local meetings to respond to communities.</p> <p>Focus groups to identify needs.</p> <p>Planning for the future.</p> <p>Local pilots to try out services at low cost.</p>	<p>-Service suit local area and can be altered to suit changing needs.</p> <p>Flexibus services to meet changing demands.</p> <p>-Communities will support their service.</p> <p>-Services respond to local area and local needs.</p> <p>- Flexibus can attract other grants or matching funding for new services.</p> <p>Through Flexibus running pilot services, it allows a service to thrive or fail at a low cost to the exchequer.</p>



Rural Transport Celebration Day: Visiting TDs, Management and Staff.

Chapter 3:

The Strategic Objectives/Priorities for Flexibus

Under the Local Link Rural Transport Programme, the NTA has identified **nine priority areas** for the future development of the rural transport:

- Priority Area 1** Sustaining the Rural Transport Programme
- Priority Area 2** Route Development and Expansion
- Priority Area 3** Integration with other Statutory Services
- Priority Area 4** Accessibility of Services
- Priority Area 5** Access for All
- Priority Area 6** Ensuring the RTP delivers an optimum Customer Experience
- Priority Area 7** Children and Young People
- Priority Area 8** Encouraging Innovation in Rural Transport Service Provision
- Priority Area 9** Monitoring Progress of the RTP in Louth, Meath and Fingal

As a **Social Enterprise**, Flexibus has identified three further priorities:

- Priority Area 10** Governance
- Priority Area 11** Linking to the NTA, Irish Rural Link and RTP Network
- Priority Area 12** Provide a strong Social Enterprise culture to meet the needs of Rural Transport in the Region

The Board has adopted these 12 Priority Areas to guide it into the future and we set out below our actions in respect of each priority. Appendix 4 contains more detail.



Strategic Priority 1: Sustaining the RTP

Action	Partners	Inputs	Outcome/Measuring Performance
Action 1 Increase passenger numbers on existing services.	NTA. Disability Authority IWA	Publicity in local areas through church bulletins, local papers, Facebook and Twitter.	- Increased passenger numbers on existing services. - Increased wheelchair users on services. - Increased local community activity.
Action 2 Support for the Direct Award model of service delivery.	Dept. of Transport Tourism and Sport. NTA Dept. of Employment and Social Protection	Agreement to allow depreciation. Cost benefit analysis on Model. Social benefit analysis on Model.	- Increased community services. - Model replicated in other counties. - Access to hospital and healthcare at acceptable cost. - Best use of existing finances.
Action 3 Respond to transport needs within communities.	LAs Community and Voluntary groups. Community Foundation of Ireland	Meet with LCDCs Inform local politicians Continuous contact with local networks and communities.	- Sustaining the RTP with new and additional services. - Change/adapt existing services as needed. - Implement needs analysis results. - Pilot local transport to establish need for service.
Action 4 Maintain and increase health and community services under the 'Once Off' Community Funding	HSE Community Groups Disability organisations, IWA, Enable Ireland, Independent Living	Continued funding under 'Once-Off' Grant. Respond to local needs and ensure that transport is suitable for passenger.	- Sustaining the RTP by delivering health services to the most isolated and excluded in rural areas. - Ensuring that community individuals and groups attend local events and activities.

Strategic Priority 2: Routes Development and Expansion

Action	Partners	Inputs	Outcome
Action 1 Expand and adapt services in line with identified transport needs and in line with LA transport plans.	NTA LAs Disability groups LCDC Local Politicians	Continued funding of extra routes Inclusion in PPN networks.	- Increased services in rural and urban areas in County. - Evening service pilot in each county.
Action 2 Increased services within each LA area in line with needs analysis. Work with NTA on Bus Connect Initiative	NTA Local Link LAs NTA	Ensure Local Link involvement in transport plans for the county through Board reps and local meetings.	- Increased variety of services - Increased passenger numbers. - Liaise with Board members re Council planning. - Integration with Bus Connect and other transport services
Action 3 Ensuring the expertise within Flexibus is used to best advantage in planning new services and networking with Community Groups and agencies.	Own staff Board of Directors NTA	Inform the Board of all planned and new services. Work with local agencies to achieve best outcomes for new services.	- Planned services that meet the needs of rural dwellers in connecting to work, training and services.

Strategic Priority 3: Integration with other Statutory Services

Action	Partners	Inputs	Outcome
Action 1 Disability Services Respond to demand for disability services in conjunction with HSE.	Disability groups Independent Living People with disabilities LCDC NTA HSE	Work with Enable Ireland to use Flexibus vehicles to deliver their services with their drivers.	- More transport opportunities to attend services and social events at low cost through partnership - Increased initiatives with other disability groups.
Action 2 Continue to provide transport services to people with addictions through partnership with Solas.	Solas Tabor House Navan NTDI Service	Work with Solas to get better outcomes for people who have difficulties or who need to get to training.	- Transport supports people in training to become contributing members of their community. - Continue service to Tabor House.
Action 3 Develop and implement Beauford School Pilot.	CYPSE Navan LMETB School Completion Flexibus Local Link NTA	Funding for pilot project and get value for money	- Improved outcomes for vulnerable teens progressing to second level school. - Permanent funding agreed.
Action 4 Respond to once-off events, e.g. Fleadh Cheoil, Papal visit, etc.	HSE Disability groups	Continue to work with the HSE to forge better outcomes for people with disabilities.	- Provide access to transport for once-off activities that is accessible and available.

Strategic Priority 4: Accessibility to Services

Action	Partners	Inputs	Outcome
Action 1 Improve connectivity for rural customers to essential services.	Local Authorities Rural Communities District Nurse Carers Primary Care Centres Doctors' Surgeries	Contact with local communities and local activists. Local Councillors.	- Accessibility to local services. - People more included in their communities. - Hospital appointments
Action 2 Utilisation of up to date information to inform the maintenance of existing and future routes.	NTA LAs Local Link	Timetables accessible to all on newspapers, on social media, on church bulletins, easy to access and understand.	- Accessibility to Services - increase in passengers from remote areas accessing rural transport
Action 3 Assist the delivery of Action Plan on Rural Development by improving economic activity in rural towns and villages through a flexible Rural Transport Programme	Local Businesses Community Groups Local Link LEOs	Provide access to information about local business. Provide transport service to local businesses.	- Passenger numbers and variety of trips. - Increased local turnover.

Strategic Priority 5: Access for All

Action	Partners	Inputs	Outcome
Action 1 Maintain and expand services for people with disabilities.	HSE NTA Disability groups Local Link	Respond to requests for accessible services.	- Access for all - Number of customers using evening services
Action 2 Provide access to timely and accurate information.	Front line staff Community groups Social Media LAs	Ensure information on services is accessible to everyone.	- Increased number of people accessing new services linking to structured services with Bus Eireann and other operators
Action 3 Invest in suitable equipment to meet the needs of an increasing obesogenic society.	NTA Disability Authority IWA Enable Ireland	Source and fit to fleet suitable lifts that will take weights exceeding 350 kgs.	- 'Transport for All' implemented on Local Link services. - Flexibus carries approx. 9,000 wheelchair users each year and our vehicles must have the lift capacity for all passengers.

Strategic Priority 6: Ensure RTP delivers an optimum Customer Experience

Action	Partners	Inputs	Outcome
Action 1 Ensure the Rural Transport Day continues and grows so our passengers can meet and discuss local and regional services, with attendance from local politicians and Councillors.	Gardaí LAs HSE NTA Pos Sponsors	Information to all passengers about the day. Invitation to all passengers and private operators to attend. Invitation to the NTA and LA's representatives. Transport for all attending particularly people with disabilities.	- Increase knowledge of RTP services. - Needs analysis with passengers. - Increase interaction between passenger and between operators. - Opportunity for passengers to meet local Councillors and TDs
Action 2 Adopt all marketing materials and advice given by the NTA under the new Local Link programme.	NTA Local Press Radio Social Media	Branding of all vehicles on Local Link services. Using Local Link brand in all media and publicity.	- Increased identification of Local Link brand. - Local timetables available in local areas.
Action 3 Develop and implement all pilot opportunities coming from National and Local programmes that will benefit the customer.	Various Government Departments LAs	Flexibus. Various stakeholders as required. Funding opportunities.	- Opportunity to pilot local transport services for viability. - Improve the availability of accessible services. - Testing legislation as needed to allow for new opportunities.
Action 4 Continued professional development of staff / volunteers to meet the needs the customers and the NTA.	Approved and suitable training courses suitable to the needs of staff. NTA, HSE, HSA, RSA, and others as identified.	Development of our own training centre to improve the professionalism and personal development of all.	- Improve employability of staff in other areas - transport and disability - Ensure staff are the best they can possibly be to carry out their tasks. - Upskill staff.

Strategic Priority 7: Children and Young People

Action	Partners	Inputs	Outcome
Action 1 Provide evening services to meet the needs of young people.	NTA Private Operators Local Representatives	Continued information through Social Media to inform young people of services. Information distribution through local radio, press and church bulletins of evening services.	- Increase transport for young people. - Inclusion for individuals to socialise and attend local community activities. - Promote independence of young people, taking pressure off parents.
Action 2 Implement the Kids Go Free Programme	NTA Private Operators Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)	Increased publicity to all private operators and passengers to invite more young people to travel.	- Awareness for younger people of local rural services. - Increase in passenger numbers to prove Programme worked. - Opportunity for young people to see local transport is for everyone.
Action 3 Optimise access to service timetable for young people through appropriate Social Media platforms.	Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) Youth-centred Information Champions/ Influencers	Time for staff to use and respond on Social Media platforms.	- Increased services and independence for young people. - Opportunity to inform young people with disabilities of available services.

Strategic Priority 8: Encouraging Innovation in Rural Transport Service Provision

Action	Partners	Inputs	Outcome
Action 1 Work in partnership Louth Age Friendly to host Pan European Conference on Social Enterprise.	AFI LAF Louth Co. Council Other partners as identified through the process	Contact and networking with stakeholders.	- Board constitution. - Positive outcomes for a brighter future.
Action 2 Examine environmental issues.	NTA SEAI RTP LAs IBM	Examine with SEAI and NTA other types of environmentally friendly transport options.	- Reduce impact on the environment. - Source vehicles suitable in size and battery power for rural transport services.
Action 3 Progress and Develop Technology Strategy.	Community Foundation for Ireland AFI Meath Co. Council	Community, transport providers, NTA, Age Friendly Ireland	- Develop transport solutions using latest technology.
Action 4 Partner in pilot projects through the Healthy Ireland Fund working to improve the quality of life.	AFI ARG NTA Board of Directors HSE	Manpower, finances, partnerships with H.I.	- Improved accessibility, fitness and mental wellbeing.

Strategic Priority 9: Monitoring Progress of RTP

Action	Partners	Inputs	Outcome
Action 1 Provide updates to the Board monthly.	Management Board NTA	Report all activities to the Board at meetings. Organise where needed sub-committees to support the Board and management team.	- The Board is well informed of all activities and can make decisions for the company for the future based on sound financial advice.
Action 2 Monthly financial reports to the NTA.	NTA, Finance	Finance Manager prepares all documents for financial oversight.	- The Board is kept informed of all Company activities. - The Board can plan for the future. - The NTA are aware of strong Board input.
Action 3 Ensure the capacity of the Board reflects the needs of the company to deliver the RTP programmes.	Board, with external support as need arises.	Assessment of Board expertise, based on PER Guidelines (see Code of Conduct guidelines)	- Strong belief in the capacity of the Board to deliver the Rural Transport Programme and other local services across the region.
Action 4 Provide updates to the 3 LECP Local Authorities updating processes.	Louth LECP Meath LECP Fingal LECP	Formal lines of communication that work both way Perhaps putting it as an agenda item on the Transport, Community, Disability and Area meetings	- Increased interaction between Local Link services and the community. - Opportunity to plan for future services.

Strategic Priority 10: Strong Governance

Action	Partners	Inputs	Outcome
Action 1 Ensure Board members and Company are in full compliance with statutory obligations.	Board Members CEO Company Secretary	Increased interaction for Board with management and staff. Strong Board to support management.	- A compliant organisation with is respected across the community and valued as trustworthy, safe and reliable, in line with core values.
Action 2 Ensure that the Governance, Health and Safety Management System is up to date at all times.	BOM, HSA, HSE RSA, FTAI Dept. of Transport NTA Other stakeholders as required.	Ensure timely reports to Board from Health and Safety Committee, Management Committee, Finance Committee Ensure ongoing review of legislation. Annual Financial and Health and Safety audit reportable to Board.	- Ensure compliance of financial and safety standards by Staff and Management. - No financial irregularities. - Reduction in accidents and incidents. - Staff safe in the knowledge of good practice.
Action 3 Build a strong Board to assist, direct and oversee the management of the Company.	Agencies Communities Disability	Identify Board competencies needed and expand. The Board to meet these needs. See PER guide	- Strong leadership and direction from the Board. - Development of the company as a charitable business. - Direct the management in Company compliance.
Action 4 Comply with all standards in Financial Management.	Professional Assistance in Auditing NTA	Annual financial audit. Financial reporting at every Board meeting. Finance Sub-Committee maintained.	- Board satisfied that Flexibus complies with all legislative standards.

Strategic Priority 11: Linking to the NTA, IRL, RTP and RTN

Action	Partners	Inputs	Outcome
Action 1 Remain compliant with the NTA National Programme and Strategic Plan 2018-2022.	National Transport Authority. Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. Board of Directors	Working within the priority areas agreed by the NTA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased services in Louth, Meath and Fingal. - Financial information returned to the NTA in a timely manner - Responding to information requests in a timely manner - Maintaining a professional relationship with these key stakeholders.
Action 2 Remain actively involved in the Local Link Network, and IRL to discuss ideas and plans and have our voice heard at central government level.	Board of Directors. Local Link Network IRL and other participants in the network.	Board members to represent Flexibus at meetings and report back at Board meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased networking gives more information and ideas to help the Company. - Greater voice for advocating for passengers.
Action 3 Inform our local and national politicians of the Local Link services, plans and concerns.	Local TDs Senators Councillors	Keep the local politicians informed of new developments and difficulties within Local Link.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased awareness of our services and information on areas and individuals with transport needs.
Action 4 Keep communication paths with Irish Rural Link open and transparent, ensuring they are informed of urgent rural issues.	Irish Rural Link Pobal Board of Directors	Manager to remain on the Board of IRL.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness within Government and rurality of service provision and service deficiencies. - Keeping the Local Link programme to the fore of government planning and funding. - Keep Local Link in NGO Sector?

Strategic Priority 12: Provide a strong Social Enterprise to meet the needs of Rural Transport in the Region

Action	Partners	Inputs	Outcome
Action 1 Increase the employment and training of Long-Term Unemployed to meet our staffing needs.	TÚS Community Employment Solas LMETB DDL ETB Other stakeholders as required	Organise training with LMETB to upskill drivers as there is a national demand for drivers. Work with ETBs and other training bodies to run courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with ETBs, Solas, Meath Job Club, TÚS and CE to increase the employability of Long Term unemployed. - Upskill drivers to meet demand.
Action 2 Contracts: Maintain the current level of contracts.	HSE NTA HSE RSA Bus Éireann Other Contractors	Formal ongoing communications to ensure all partners are happy with the Service Level Agreement, staff and current contracts in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased services for people with disabilities and good level of service provision.
Action 3 Ensure that training continues to meet top Irish and International Standards and that, as an enterprise, it continues to evolve.	Flexibus Training Centre RSA HSE HSA NTA ETBs The Wheel Other grant-givers	Grant Applications, Community Organisations, Disability groups, Professional competencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting high level training for drivers leading to increased road awareness and reduction in accidents and incidents.
Action 4 Responding to the needs of individuals in the community not covered by Local Link Programme.	Local community leaders District Nurse Carers Primary Care Centres	Continued resourcing of the Once-Off Community Grant. Increased Social Capital among communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased services for individuals who need health and hospital service particularly single men living alone with limited supports.
Action 5 Continue to innovate the production of training manuals pertinent to the need of staff and trainees.	Current staff Volunteers New staff Mechanic Health and Safety Committee DAPA partners	Updates as required due to changes in practice, operations, legislation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better trained, up to date staff, professionalism, compliant in all areas of the business. - Access to reference material at all times.

Chapter 4:

Financial and Funding Issues and Planned New Services

Current Financial Position

The financial position of Flexibus as at 31 December 2017, together with projections for 2019-2022, are shown in Appendix 5.

As the figures show, total operations had a loss (€38k) for 2017 but a small surplus is forecast based for the future on the assumptions.

Day-to-day cash flow was strong with cash in hand at year end at €215k, and the priority for this retained cash in hand is to:

- 1 Meet the financial requirements of retaining our Road Transport Operator Licence, renewed in March 2018 of a fleet of 30 buses,
- 2 Meet our liabilities under Companies Act, and
- 3 As working capital.

Maintaining Existing Services

Existing operations and services are heavily dependent on the NTA funding and other contracts (60% and 30% of total revenue) and a critical success factor will be to retain current contracts. Maintaining current service levels in the future across all three counties is dependent on increased NTA funding and increased contract income to cover:

- Continued increases in general costs increasing annually in line with general inflation (2% per annum assumed) e.g. fuel, general expenses.
- Increased maintenance and insurance costs, increasing by an average of 5% annually.
- Full funding by NTA of RTP staffing costs (wages and salaries) to reflect national pay increases and adequate pensions provision. (2% annually as a minimum) Cost of subcontractor services are fully costed, including a charge for overheads which is fully reimbursed by the NTA.
- The trend for fares trend is a continued decline, reducing from €200k over last number of years to €185k in 2017. Thereafter fares are increased by 2% over the period of the Plan.

One of the ongoing major challenges for the Board is to obtain a satisfactory commitment from the NTA to fund, under our 'Direct Award Contract', the cost of bus replacement which is not currently addressed in the Direct Award Annual Budgets.

The vehicle fleet continues to get older and cost of maintenance will increase and unless the NTA meets our true cost, whether by capital grant or increased subsidy, services cannot be sustained.

Accordingly, the Board must adopt a very prudent approach to managing the company finances over the coming period in the absence of additional funding support from the NTA. Company reserves are only adequate to replace two buses of a fleet of 30.

Also, we have not factored into the projections any new proposal for NTA to insist on only 'green buses' being introduced from 2019 as traditionally we buy only second-hand buses. For projections for the future up to 2022, we have worked on the basis of financial projections for existing services.

The cost of additional new services can be readily produced once the specification for the services is defined: Route size, Anticipated carryings, Frequency, etc.

Planned New Services

Based on our assessment of future settlement patterns and transport needs, influenced by Appendix 6 and the outcome of consultation in recent times, the Board has identified the need to introduce the following new services across the region over the period of the plan and we will be putting our proposals to the NTA, HSE and other sources for the funding of these services.

List of New Services:

- Baltray, Termonfeckin and Clogherhead to Drogheda evening service. Extra service for Sunday for the summer months.
- Laytown, Bettystown, Mornington to Drogheda evening service and increased service for the summer months.
- Omeath and the Cooley peninsula evening service to Dundalk.
- Dunleer and Castlebellingham evening service to Drogheda and Dundalk.
- Ardee to Drogheda evening service.
- *Drumconrath and Lobinstown to Ardee weekly service.
- *Drumconrath and Lobinstown service to Dundalk and Drogheda monthly service.
- Athboy, Fordstown, Cortown to Kells.
- Kilmessan, Bective, Robinstown to Navan.
- Ballivor, Kildalkey, Rathmoylon and Summerhill to Trim daily.
- Ashbourne, Ratoath, Dunshaughlin to Pace daily.
- Kilcloon and Batterstown to Trim.
- *Maynalvy, Culmullin, Kilcloon, Batterstown, Dunboyne.
- *Skryne and Rathfeigh to Navan weekly.
- Ashbourne to Swords commuter service.
- Howth local service.
- Howth and Baldoyle to Swords weekly service.
- Carnaross and environs to Post Office / Kells.

In designing and rolling out these services, they will be linked in with existing Bus Éireann services, and those of other scheduled private operators. All services will be tendered with the exception of the five services with asterisks (these would be piloted first with Flexibus and they put to public tender, if proven viable).

Consideration must be given to funding opportunities that may become available from the NTA or other funders and some ad hoc service must be continued.

- Once-off services
- Evening services
- Hospital and health appointments
- Community services
- Youth services

The **additional new services** listed above can be undertaken but only when costs of provision (both capital and operating costs) are reimbursed in full by NTA, on a fully costed basis. Such expansion can take only place through:

- 1 Purchase of additional vehicles and recruiting additional staff, with additional admin support.
- 2 Through tendering for contracted services from local private operators.

In the meantime, additional services for HSE will be provided as they demand. Their services are on a fully costed basis.

As a Social Enterprise, Flexibus will always be looking at expansion because there is strong demand for transport outside of 'Local Link' services. It is understood and accepted that under the National Transport Authority policies, Flexibus will not be tendering for additional Local Link services over and above what is already directly provided but will contract with local operators. This is to avoid a conflict of interest with the role as a TCU.

However, there is other work that will allow Flexibus to expand the business that will give greater transport to the people who need it.

Flexibus will continue to contract with private operators in each of our counties. The current arrangement works well and there is a good relationship with transport operators and Flexibus appreciate that they give a great service to passengers.

Flexibus has great flexibility between private operators and its own fleet to answer local demand for transport. It will allow Flexibus Local Link to pilot other services that may become mainstream in the future if proven to work well, or withdraw them if they do not fulfil their potential at a smaller cost to the NTA. Service considerations must always be: 'What is the need?', 'Will the service work?' and 'What funding is needed?'

The decision to place an accessible vehicle in both Louth and Fingal has worked well. Flexibus can respond to the need for hospital and health appointments, meals on wheels and give individual transport to people with disabilities.

Health and Hospital Services

From extensive needs analysis in the three counties, the lack of transport to attend hospital and health appointments and the demand for accessible transport for local activities is highest on the list of services needed. This was made possible through Dormant Accounts, Co.Co., HSE, TÚS. **This is a vital link in both areas, and vehicles are fully utilised.**

The costing of these services depends on scheduling and frequency, size of bus and this task can be easily undertaken when approval in principle to proceed is settled.

Chapter 5: Key Issues for the Board of Directors

In the overall, Flexibus has a proven track record and a strong reputation with key stakeholders in the delivery of rural transport services in counties Louth, Meath and Fingal. The Board believes it enjoys the full confidence of the NTA as a key member of the RTP Network. The Board sees it as vital to sustain these key relationships to ensure the continued success of the Company.

The Company has the capacity to expand over the coming period and the list of services we wish to undertake, over the period of this plan, informed by national, regional and county plans, are listed above.

While Flexibus has emerged from County Meath and expanded into Fingal and Louth, one of its key successes is its close involvement with local communities across towns and villages and local groups and communities. The Board's social enterprise role must not be lost as otherwise the role of preserving the fabric of local communities will be diminished. One of the challenges for an expanded organisation will be to try and best maintain this key feature.

An increase in day-to-day funding to meet inflationary pressures on pay and conditions, and general costs - fuel, insurance, maintenance, must be a priority for engagement with the NTA to sustain services across the region. In addition, we have highlighted in Chapter 5 the Board's concerns re sustainability of all existing services in the absence of a commitment from the NTA in relation to the costs of vehicle replacement.

To achieve the ambitious objectives within this Plan the Board will work with the NTA to put the day-to-day plans in place.

The Board has the capacity and experience as a flexible, efficient, well-managed and innovative organisation to take on new services and roles in surrounding counties in the event of changing policy approach to the RTP by the NTA.



TLAs used in this Plan:

AFI	Age Friendly Ireland
ARG	Active Retirement Group
BOM	Board of Management
CDP	Community Development Plan
CE	Community Employment
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CLG	Company Limited by Guarantee
CRA	Charity Regulator Authority
CRO	Company Registrations Office
CYPSE	Children and Youth People's Services Committee
DDLETB	Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board
DDTAS	Dept of Transport, Tourism and Sport
ETB	Education and Training Board
FTAI	Freight Transport Association of Ireland
GDA	Greater Dublin Area
H.I.	Healthy Ireland
HSE	Health Service Executive
IBM	IBM - computer manufacturing company
IRL	Irish Rural Link
IWA	Irish Wheelchair Association
LA	Local Authority
LAF	Local Government's Local Adjustment Factor
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
LEO	Local Enterprise Office
LMETB	Louth, Meath Education and Training Board
LMF	Louth, Meath and Fingal
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NTA	National Transport Authority
PER Guidelines	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Consultation Guidelines
POs	Private Operators
PPN	Public Participation Network
RSA	Road Safety Authority
RTP	Rural Transport Programme
SEAI	Sustainability Authority of Ireland
TCU	Transport Co-Ordination Unit
TLAs	Three-Letter Abbreviations
TÚS	Community Work Placement Initiative



Flexibus Local Link Louth, Meath and Fingal

Unit 23, Mullaghboy Industrial Estate,
Old Athboy Road, Navan, Co. Meath C15WK09

Phone: 046 907 4830 Text: 086 602 7009
Freephone: 1800 303 707

