

# FAQs – Pilot Projects for 2024/2025 School Year

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### 1. Why are pilot integration projects happening?

The planned pilot projects in the 2024/2025 school year will provide valuable insights on the impact increased demand will have on the scheme, the potential to integrate public transport services with school transport services, and the facilitation of more sustainable modes of transport. These insights will give an indication of the scale of planning and implementation required for a national roll out of a revised School Transport Scheme, to include the integration of public transport and school transport services. The School Transport Scheme and Public Transport integration project is a joint effort between the Department of Education and the Department of Transport, supported by the National Transport Authority and Bus Éireann.

### 2. Why were the two areas chosen for these pilots?

#### Limerick Pilot Project

For the 2024/2025 school year, a pilot project will be conducted along the existing public transport Route 343 on the Limerick-Shannon-Ennis corridor to assess the benefits of integrating school and public transport for post-primary students. The 343 corridor was chosen because of its many advantages as a pilot area: it is a busy public transport corridor operating from Limerick/Shannon to Ennis; it had already been earmarked by the NTA for capacity enhancements; there are a number of

post-primary schools on the route, and dedicated school transport services are operating in parallel along the corridor.

It will examine the potential for re-routing to accommodate additional post-primary schools, and ensure capacity meets demand for eligible school transport scheme students. It affords the opportunity to integrate school transport and public transport services to support with some of the existing market supply constraints and to ensure maximum utilisation of public transport and school transport services in the area.

Building on a concept developed on the alignment of school transport with governmental policy on sustainability and connectivity, it utilises the cross functional experience and knowledge that Bus Éireann has developed from its years of administration and operation of the School Transport scheme, alongside its network of commercial and PSO services nationwide.

### **Roscommon Pilot Project**

For the 2024/2025 school year, a pilot project will be conducted in the Roscommon town/Athlone town area to assess the impact of expanded eligibility and associated demand for primary/special needs services. The villages of Lecarrow and Knockcroghery will be used as the basis for the assessment, and the associated assessment of these villages as feeder areas to the Roscommon town and Athlone town post-primary centres.

This location was chosen as it builds on an existing proposal from the community. To this end, it is proposed that the pilot will support wider community travel/ mobility efforts in the Ballymurray, Knockcroghery, Lecarrow and Rahara areas.

### **3. Will there be other areas included for pilot projects for the 2024/2025 school year?**

Following closure of the application process for the upcoming school year, consideration will be given to further pilots in other areas of the country. These will be considered in areas where potential demand exists and where capacity/resources are not a particular issue.

The School Transport Scheme is significant in scale and changes as recommended in the review will take time and careful planning to implement. As part of the analysis undertaken for the review the Department has identified projected growth of pupil numbers nationally. Work is commencing on plotting and mapping this data, using GIS technology, to ensure optimal planning for the expansion of the scheme. Engagement with stakeholders, including families and school communities, will continue as the scheme changes are implemented.

### **4. How will parents find out if they are included in one of the pilot areas?**

The Department of Education will make direct contact with the families in the pilot areas via the school that their children attend to advise them that they are in a pilot area and to provide them with details on how to apply.

### **5. What will it mean for pupils who become eligible for school transport under new eligibility criteria?**

The eligibility criteria are changing. The eligibility distance criteria are being reduced from 3.2km to 1km at primary level and from 4.8km to 2km at post-primary level. The nearest school criteria is also being removed. This means that if a child lives >1km at primary and >2km at post-primary from the school they attend and there is an existing service to that school, they will be eligible to apply for

transport to that school. Transport may be provided on a dedicated school transport service or may be provided on a public transport service (post-primary only).

#### 6. What will it mean for pupils who are currently eligible for school transport?

Children who are currently eligible for school transport should not see any significant change and they will remain eligible under the new eligibility criteria. However, at post-primary level, children may be offered a ticket to travel on a dedicated school transport service or on a public transport service. For some children, if they are an existing school transport, there may be changes to their school transport arrangements i.e. pick up and set down points, and they will be advised of any changes in advance of the new school year.

#### 7. What is the closing date to apply and pay/enter medical card details?

To express interest and apply for the school transport under this pilot project, families should apply via the standard online application online on the Bus Éireann website at [School Transport - Bus Éireann Family Portal \(buseireann.ie\)](https://www.buseireann.ie/SchoolTransport)

For new applicants (those who have not used School Transport Scheme Services previously or who have changed school (including moving from primary to post-primary) or changed address since the last school year, applications should be submitted by **7<sup>th</sup> June 2024**.

For existing users of School Transport Scheme services, there is no need to re-apply. Applications will roll over from the previous school year.

Families who have already submitted an application or paid/entered medical card do not need to take any further action and will be contacted in July about their transport arrangements for the 2024/2025 school year.

Children with a full medical card are exempt from the annual charge. If your child is in possession of a valid medical card, you can avail of the school transport fee waiver. For further information on this, please contact the dedicated email address for your area:

[LimerickSTPilot@buseireann.ie](mailto:LimerickSTPilot@buseireann.ie)

[RoscommonSTPilot@buseireann.ie](mailto:RoscommonSTPilot@buseireann.ie)

#### 8. Will there be a charge for the ticket/service?

All users (new applicants and existing users) must pay or enter medical card details by 7<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

The current annual charge for a ticket for post-primary transport services is €50 per child at primary level, €75 per child at post-primary level with an overall family max of €125. Children with a full medical card are exempt from the annual charge.

Bus Éireann will contact families in July to provide information on their transport arrangements for the 2024/2025 school year.

#### 9. What type of ticket will be issued?

As part of the pilot project, children will be issued with a Leap card which they will use to validate against a ticket reader when getting on the bus.

#### 10. Can tickets be used on other public transport services and/or outside of normal school days and times?

The issued Leap card will be used by the child on the transport service that they are assigned to during normal school days and times. However, the Leap card can also be used on other public transport services outside of normal school times provided the Leap card is first topped up with travel credit.

#### 11. Will this service be continued in the 2025/2026 school year in the pilot areas?

It is envisaged that pilot projects will continue (subject to review), and other areas may be added or the 2025/2026 school year and the 2026/2027 school years.

#### 12. Will parents/children be offered a choice of travelling on public transport or a dedicated school transport service (affecting post-primary children only)?

At post-primary level, children will be offered a ticket to travel on either a dedicated school transport service or a public transport service. The service to be offered will be determined by Bus Éireann in consultation with the National Transport Authority and either one or the other will be offered to families in order to provide transport for their child or children to school. This is in line with the plan to have more integration between school transport and public transport into the future and to ensure best use of resources.

#### 13. What does this mean for children travelling on school transport services for children with special educational needs (SEN)?

There are no immediate changes planned for the current eligibility criteria for the SEN scheme, in that the scheme will continue to provide transport for eligible children to the nearest school that is or can be resourced to meet their special educational needs and that this will continue to be determined in consultation with the NCSE. However, in the interests of promoting inclusivity, steps will be taken to support children with special educational needs whose parents wish for them to travel on available mainstream services, where they wish to do so. Parents who would like to be considered for this option should contact [LimerickSTPilot@buseireann.ie](mailto:LimerickSTPilot@buseireann.ie) or [RoscommonSTPilot@buseireann.ie](mailto:RoscommonSTPilot@buseireann.ie) and they will be contacted by a member of the School Transport team.

#### 14. Who to contact for any other queries in regard to the pilot projects.

For all other queries in regard to the pilot projects please contact School Transport Section of the Department of Education at [SchoolTransportPilots@education.gov.ie](mailto:SchoolTransportPilots@education.gov.ie)