



# **PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

Keep it public or lose it  
to private profit



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## Public Transport Policy

### Discussion Document

COMMUNIST PARTY OF IRELAND

JAMES CONNOLLY HOUSE, 43 EAST ESSEX STREET, TEMPLE BAR, DUBLIN 2:

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## INTRODUCTION

Córas Iompair Éireann (CIE), Ireland's national transport undertaking, is the main authority for the provision of public transport. At present it operates rail and road passenger services. Road freight services have long since been run down and left completely to the private road hauliers. With a total staff of approximately 12,000, CIE is one of the largest employers in the Republic, apart from the state itself. It came into being on 1 January 1945 with the amalgamation of the Great Southern Railway Company and the Dublin United Transport Company under the terms of the Transport Act (1944). With the passing of the Transport Act (1950), CIE and the Grand Canal Company were amalgamated and brought under public ownership. Transport policy should seek to maximise the movement of the largest number of passengers and goods as quickly and safely as possible. Public transport has a key role to play in this for both environmental and social reasons. It is essential that the demand for public transport services is not left largely or entirely to market forces and that it be the subject of state regulation and provision. It is acknowledged by many experts and supported in many studies that public ownership is the best and most efficient way to run a public transport service.

From an environmental point of view there is a need to reduce road congestion, especially in urban areas, and to use less fossil fuel (oil, petrol, and diesel). In respect of emissions from fossil fuels we also have an obligation to meet our commitments under the Kyoto Agreement. This will require a significant move away from cars to public transport. This is the only efficient way to move volume and get people to their destination on time. Transport policy therefore should be geared to achieve this by careful planning, including

- Adequate investment in improving the quality of public transport services;
- Reducing fares by an appropriate policy of subvention to public transport;
- Introducing carbon taxes, to get people out of cars and to encourage more use of public transport, thus reducing harmful emissions;
- Introducing tax credits on travel expenses by public transport;
- Improving the modal split in favour of public transport, thus reducing road congestion; this might include congestion charging and parking charges;
- Providing more designated bus lanes throughout cities to improve frequency and reliability and to reduce journey times;
- Developing more frequent public transport services, particularly in urban areas and on commuter routes into cities;
- It might also be useful to hypothecate the exchequer and local authority receipts from carbon taxes, congestion charges, and other transport-related charges for the improvement of public transport.

## WHAT IS THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICY?

Today, this process is largely being undone. The Minister for Transport, Séamus Brennan, is unilaterally pressing ahead with his own right-wing neo-liberalist ideological agenda to break CIE into three separate companies and to abolish the CIE holding company. The holding company was established in its present form as a result of the campaign by the CIE Group of Unions to secure some semblance of an integrated transport system, during the restructuring that took place in 1987. The CIE management had no response to the then minister's plans for the company, and it was the workers, through their unions, who gave leadership. The three companies were set up under the Companies Acts with a view to their competing with one another. Brennan wants to privatise 25 per cent of Dublin Bus routes. Undoubtedly this is to be the start of a process leading to further privatisation.

Transnational corporations are now positioning themselves to take over the Irish bus transport service in the event of liberalisation. Some Irish bus operators have already been bought out, and transnational finance is behind new companies. The eventual result will be the replacement of the main state-owned operator with a private, foreign-owned oligopoly.

This is not the first time in CIE's history that proposals such as these have been articulated. In fact since the 1980s a number of forces have continuously attempted to place transport deregulation on the political agenda. At least one early indicator of this pressure can be seen in the McKinsey Report on CIE.

What was recommended in this report was the splitting up of CIE into separate companies, without retaining CIE as the holding company. On its publication the report was strongly condemned by CIE, which in reply issued its own commentary on it, finding a number of errors and omissions in its analysis. As CIE quite correctly stated, the report's proposal to break up the company was not based on any coherent logic; in fact the integrated nature of the company was regarded elsewhere as a model approach for providing public transport.

Alongside this report, pressure for bus deregulation became apparent from other quarters; private bus operators, some academic economists and right-of-centre political figures all began a campaign for the deregulation of public transport. Yet again deregulation was proposed in the government Green Paper on transport policy in 1985. What this paper argued for was a system of "less restrictive access to the market for scheduled services," which would then "provide opportunities for the private sector." In effect, what these proposals suggested was that private operators would compete with CIE provincial buses on a wide range of services, and not just on low-demand routes.

By the start of the 1990s it was clear from statements made by the then Minister for Transport, Séamus Brennan, that a bill was being drafted that would liberalise the Road Transport Act (1932) and increase competition for CIE. Provincial rural and city bus services would be deregulated, though at that point it appeared that Dublin city bus services would not be opened up to competition, at least at first. However, by late 1990 there was open speculation that buses in Dublin also would be subject to competition.

On a number of occasions during Séamus Brennan's term of office such changes appeared imminent, but they did not materialise. When a new minister, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, assumed office the process was further delayed, and it never materialised under her ministry. It has taken the return of Séamus Brennan to the transport portfolio twelve years later to have the matter placed firmly on the political agenda yet again.

The terms of reference of the Steer Davies Gleave report, Regulation of Buses Outside the Greater Dublin Area, were confined to the question of a regulatory framework. From the start the whole project contained a bias against state-owned public transport and in favour of various forms of privately owned transport. It is hardly surprising that the study should recommend the privatisation of large parts of CIE. Nowhere in the report is there one telling criticism of what Bus Éireann does or how it does it. Nowhere is there one telling advantage identified for a fundamental change of regulatory regime.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND CIE

Undoubtedly changes are needed in how public transport is provided. This is the only conclusion to be drawn from a consideration of the sorry history of government policy and practice in regard to this industry.

However, it is important to stress that the relationship between the state and CIE has never been particularly adequate. CIE has been expected to act like a commercial entity, yet the sort of market freedom one would expect



for this to be possible has never been forthcoming. Neither has CIE been sufficiently recompensed for the socially necessary (but financially unviable) services it has been required to provide. At one and the same time CIE has been expected to be an instrument of government policy and a coherently operable commercial organisation. Ultimately this is a confused mandate. It does not require a great deal of business acumen to understand that one simply cannot be commercially successful and at the same time operate in loss-making but socially necessary services. There has also been a failure to grant CIE commercial control over its own fares. It needs such control to raise income so as to maintain the quality and quantity of services and to develop new services. If fares are to be kept down for social reasons, then the company needs adequate compensation by way of subvention.

## IT IS INVESTMENT, NOT SUBVENTION, THAT IS NEEDED

The failure to provide adequate investment for socially necessary services is a chronic problem that has affected CIE's ability to function effectively for years. CIE gets the lowest payment of any European public transport company for the public service function it performs. The result is that CIE services were for a long time perceived as being of poor quality, shoddy, and unreliable. This was not due to any inherent defect in CIE but in the way it has been treated by its shareholder, i.e. present and past governments.

When CIE became more productive, or reduced its costs, which it has done to a very significant degree, the net result has been decreased subsidy in real terms. The main reason why there are defects in public transport services now is underfunding in the past; problems are not primarily due to state ownership, or to lack of competition. This underinvestment has led to an inability to adapt to the rapid growth in demand for services. This perpetuates low pay and low morale, with the attendant industrial relations problems.

The Minister for Finance, Charlie McCreevy, is to provide €7 billion over the seven years of the National Development Plan (2000–2006). The National Roads Authority was able to present a strategic vision of a motorway network; this envisages some €6.3 billion being spent on motorways to the border and provincial cities over seven years. The guaranteeing of funds over the next five years allows for proper planning and a schedule of work to be carried out.

Multi-annual budgeting makes possible strategic financing and allows for work to be carried out on a coherent, continuous basis. Until recently CIE had great difficulty in securing financing in the medium term, which affected its ability to plan strategically and engage in long-term thinking. Where past and present governments have seen the spending of public money on roads as a productive investment, they consider any money allocated to public transport as a drain on the exchequer. Is the spending of public money on public transport not also an investment in the country's future, just the same as on roads or other infrastructure projects?

In addition to this, the relevant department and ministers have performed multiple roles: shareholder, regulator, source of funds, shadow manager of the businesses, and industrial relations arbitrator. All the major parties now in Dáil Éireann have used appointment to the board of state and state-sponsored companies as political largesse for their financial backers, as a means of pay-back. This has allowed their business supporters the opportunity to use their connections to gain contracts and services. CIE has been plagued by bad strategic management for years, because of the very fact that most of the board depended for their membership on the minister in office.

## UNDERINVESTMENT FOR DECADES

Underinvestment in railways during the 1970s and 1980s has led also to a deterioration of infrastructure and rolling stock. Shortsighted decisions in the 1980s meant not proceeding with the construction of the remainder of the DART system as originally planned. Local authorities have shown an inability to tackle traffic congestion: for instance, there have been delays in introducing the quality bus corridor concept and an inherent reluctance to recognise that buses need freedom of streets to be effective.

This minister has a very poor record in regard to public transport. A case in point is the new rail maintenance depot in Drogheda. After Iarnród Éireann built an ultra-modern maintenance facility for its rolling stock (engines and carriages), the minister wanted to hand it over to a private company. It was only because of action by the TEEU that it remains in the hands of Iarnród Éireann. Such cases show that the minister has already made up his mind about public transport; but they also show that where workers resist privatisation, changes can be forced on the government.

The same minister refused to allow any of the CIE companies to tender for the running of the Luas light rail system in Dublin: he prevented them from doing business. They might well have presented the best tender and business plan from the point of view of the travelling public but were blocked for political reasons. Instead the transnational corporation Connex was given the contract—the same company that is now under investigation in Britain because of its practices.

Added to this, CIE fares as well as subventions have in the past undoubtedly been manipulated for political motives. A clear example of this was Michael Lowry's game of political football with CIE in 1995, which resulted in the ousting of prominent Fianna Fáil supporters from the board. This inevitably plunged the company into an unnecessary crisis.

## MINISTERS LACK OF CLARITY:

A plethora of papers has emanated from the Department of Transport over the past three years (since mid-2000), as well as a series of reports by consultants published towards the end of 2002. All these papers and reports are concerned with the structure of the public transport market, deregulation, reregulation, liberalisation, privatisation, and associated competitive issues. The central core of these proposals is the abolition of CIE, the introduction of private operators to a greater extent, the fragmentation of the public transport industry, and the regulation of competition and standards. There is no detailed consideration in these papers and reports of such matters as the social need for transport, the needs of individual transport users, the appropriate role of public transport in meeting transport needs, the effects of transport on the environment, energy consumption and social cohesion, the constraints on the provision of public transport, or how best all these social ends are to be met, technologically and economically.

This minister is concerned only with structure, and not with need, i.e. with the question of what is the function of public transport and its role in a civilised society.

The Minister for Transport has established a group called the Restructuring Implementation Group, made up of senior CIE and departmental officials, to oversee the break-up of CIE. Three immediate changes are under way:

- (1) the break-up of CIE into its three constituent operating companies, which will be independent and state-owned (at least for the time being): Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann, and Bus Átha Cliath;
- (2) the abolition of the CIE holding company in a staged process, with the transfer of its transport functions to the operating subsidiaries;
- (3) the franchising of 25 per cent of the bus market in the greater Dublin area. (No plan has been produced showing how this would work.)

None of this constitutes a policy for public transport. All the recent government papers on public transport are concerned only with the structure of the industry. But structure is only a means to an end, and the end itself is poorly understood. We need to view public transport in a holistic way, cognisant of the fact that it will be only as good as its weakest link.

There has been no strategic overview of the transport industry, including public transport, and its role in society. Such a review would take account of important social issues, such as demography, spatial strategy, land use and its relation to transport planning, social cohesion, economic effects, environmental effects, energy use, traffic congestion, and the sustainability of transport solutions. The review would be based on a rigorous analysis of all the relevant facts, including consideration of how well public transport is now performing in Ireland in comparison with other countries.

It is only on the basis of a review and analysis like this that policy objectives can be developed for public transport. After policy development comes the question of structure; and some indications of the implications of structure would be available from the review and analysis.



Finally, the matter of implementing the appropriate structure and operation of transport services would be considered. It is these last two questions (structure and operations) that the government papers address, without any of the necessary consideration of the first two (analysis and policy development).

So while everyone agrees that there is a crisis in public transport, the government policy is too narrowly focused, is fragmented, and is ideologically driven. The emphasis is on operations and structure, when it should encompass also such matters as the needs of users, modal choice, integration, infrastructure, safety, the financial resources available, and a coherent, long-term strategic policy for the industry. It is only through this process that we can secure long-term investment and a proper evaluation of public money spent and the implementation of policy to see if we are getting value for that investment of public money.

Leaving aside the fact that the strategy document manages to make use of many transport buzz-words as a substitute for substantive policy, it amounts in fact to a recipe for the kind of privatisation of bus transport that took place in Britain during the Thatcher years of the 1980s—also a politician driven by a hatred for all things public.

Most competent commentators agree that the privatisation of buses and railways in Britain was an unmitigated disaster. Competition in the bus industry was introduced first on the road, directly between practically unregulated operators, leading to unsafe practices and the bunching of services. This of course has now been abandoned as unsustainable in favour of the award of contracts by tendering. However, network benefits have been eroded in both bus and rail transport; fares and subventions have increased because of the ending of cross-subsidisation or monopolisation of the market as the larger operators gobbled up the smaller (see the tables below). Wages fell, because of competitive pressures (see table below).

The number of services on routes with high demand increased but fell on routes with lower demand. Many socially desirable services disappeared, especially in rural areas. There has been a tendency for bus companies to amalgamate, so that there are now only a few large companies (an oligopoly), thus neutralising one of the supposed benefits of deregulation—ending monopoly, creating more bus companies, and increasing competition (see the table below). Such a policy in Ireland would be equally disastrous.

## THE GLOBAL AND EUROPEAN CONTEXT

As is apparent in other sectors of public services, public transport is no longer regarded as a core responsibility of government. The process that is being initiated here is one where transport will be transferred out of public ownership and into the ownership of transnational transport companies and supply chain managers.

To understand the context in which the move towards deregulation has developed we need to take into account changes that have been taking place within capitalism. Policies of deregulation, market liberalisation and privatisation have been pursued all around the world since the late 1970s and have been applied to numerous industries. Not only have transport industries, such as airlines, shipping services, bus services, and railways, been deregulated or privatised but so to have electricity supply, water and postal services, as well as such services as telecommunications and municipal refuse collection, education, and health. Public transport is only the latest industry to be liberalised. Bus services in many countries have been privatised, and the railways now head the agenda for the same treatment.

## PRIVATE PROFITS—PUBLIC DEBTS

Behind these processes lie supranational organisations and institutions, largely unknown and unseen to most of us but actively steering these developments that affect us all. At the heart of the European Union are thousands of corporate lobbyists working to secure their interests. The European Union itself is a major factor in pushing privatisation.

The Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam and the Single European Act have all contributed to creating the legal framework and the political and economic priorities that drive deregulation and privatisation. Privatisation is concerned with weakening the role of the state in economic life. Since the end of the Second World War the state has played the role of providing public services and intervening in economic activity to provide socially necessary investment in a whole range of services, many of them also providing a return on that investment to the state.

Privatisation, actively promoted by the World Bank, has led to the demise of many shipping, airline and rail companies (particularly in developing countries) and to their routes or assets being absorbed by the global operators. For instance, First Group is actively collecting assets in rail and bus services in different countries: it recently bought Aircoach and now has a strategic foothold in the Irish transport market. The French conglomerate Vivendi has built up international portfolios that include entertainment and other utilities, such as transport, and is now pursuing the contract for car clamping in the Dublin area. Irish public transport is clearly in the sights of this and other transnational corporations.

Indeed this would explain why so many small private operators in Ireland have been relatively quiet in this process. They fear the arrival of the large transnational bus operators, such as First Bus, Stagecoach, National Express, Go-Ahead, Connex, Vivendi, and Arriva, who are the prime movers behind the drive towards a single market. In any poorly regulated market these companies are likely to implement predatory pricing to get rid of competition, and they have the desire, the capacity and the expertise to operate large networks. The result for Ireland would be control of public transport passing out of Irish hands into those of transnational conglomerates in London or Singapore.

Such transport operators are building themselves into large global operators, offering worldwide transport networks. Transport companies are increasingly becoming both international and intermodal, with investments in shipping, ports, road transport, rail, and buses. Companies such as Maersk Sealand link their port terminals to their own road and rail operations. Rail operators like the high-speed European rail consortium Thalys are entering into ticketing alliances with airlines such as American Airlines as intermodal global route networks begin to emerge.

Liberalisation succeeds best when there is standardisation between different transport modes and different regions. For this reason a huge effort is being expended by international bodies such as the World Trade Organisation and the European Union to rewrite and standardise ownership rules, technical standards, maintenance requirements, and so forth, so as to develop regional markets. This of itself is impossible, as the drive is always towards monopolisation and the maximisation of profits.

The European Commission in its report European Transport Policy for 2010: Time to Decide has been pushing for greater liberalisation of public transport. It must also be seen within the wider context of the WTO and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Services (GATS). The European Commission's special GATS web site leaves little doubt about its one-sided approach: "The GATS is not just something that exists between governments. It is first and foremost an instrument for the benefit of business." The European Union proposes that the GATS 2000 agenda be comprehensive and without a priori exceptions. For example, the present EU priorities list for GATS 2000 features market access negotiations on transport services, including public transport. The prime movers behind the drive towards a single market are the large transnational public transport operators. Such companies are now poisoning themselves to take over the Irish bus transport market in the event of liberalisation. Some of the smaller bus operators have been bought out, and transnational finance is behind the new companies starting up. The eventual result will be the replacement of the main state-owned operator by a private, foreign-owned oligopoly.

Vigorously pursuing these objectives are the well-financed and well-organised political lobbies of the transnational transport industry. They want to secure the most liberal, least restrictive and least costly set of standardised rules. Over the last ten years or so there has been a huge effort by these lobbies aimed at the dismantling of any and all regulatory barriers to an unhindered, seamless global transport system. There is now strong pressure on the World Trade Organisation to push for the complete opening of transport markets. The inevitable result is an enormous competitive strain on transport operators, which of course leads in turn to the curtailment of workers' pay and conditions.

This process is best summed up by Stuart Howard, assistant general secretary of the International Transport Workers' Federation: "The new dynamics and structure of transport have hit workers before anyone else. The process of global restructuring, along with the massive pressures to lower unit costs, have led to a wholesale assault on employment conditions and union rights. The shipping industry was the first industry in the world to truly globalise. National identity and national laws were rendered meaningless through the flag-of-convenience system. This has allowed ship-owners to crew up from around the world from countries where supplying cheap labour to the world's shipping industry has become a major industry in itself. Labour costs at sea have been driven as low as possible.

"The pressure to reduce costs has been moving along the transport chain . . . We have seen a major assault on



unions in the ports and the reintroduction of unregistered labour there. For truck drivers the pressure is to drive for longer hours to tighter deadlines. Airline crews work longer hours, with smaller crews. Ground staff have to provide faster turnarounds. Rail crews are cut, maintenance skimmed, training pared to the minimum. Costs are saved by reducing numbers of staff, outsourcing work to low-cost providers, and reducing standards of training."

These changes have penetrated deep into the economic life of the countries where they have taken place. Diverse as they are, they have one underlying ideological and economic principle: that competition in the market is the best way to promote economic efficiency in the supply of goods and services. *This is part of the continued process of the commodification of services used by and for people and of people's lives in general. In other words, we are what we consume, not human beings with many different needs and desires.*

Ireland is not immune to this process. Already the Irish Sugar Company, Irish Life, B&I and Telecom Éireann have been privatised. Despite the problems that have arisen with these privatisations, it appears inevitable that more such privatisations will eventually follow, for example Aer Lingus and Aer Rianta and the ESB.

Séamus Brennan is tearing up the National Development Plan as far as airport management and Dublin Bus are concerned, solely to line the pockets of wealthy supporters of Fianna Fáil and the PDs. If they pull this off it will be far worse than the beef industry scandal. After all, Larry Goodman was only involved in the highly risky business of exporting beef to Iraq and got preferential access to state insurance cover. The minister wants to hand over guaranteed, risk-free money-spinners to business cronies from a business built up over decades by one of the most successful state companies ever, and at the expense of the economy as a whole and especially of people in the south and west of the country.

We already have experiences of privatisation, the most glaring example being the selling off of an efficient state company, Telecom Éireann. After hundreds of millions of pounds invested to develop one of the most advanced telecommunication infrastructures in Europe it was sold to a private monopoly involved in excessive charging. Another example was Team Aer Lingus, sold for a song.

Today's transport companies must operate in an environment where competition is seen to play a pivotal role in keeping down prices and in promoting economic efficiency. Competition is generally perceived as the mechanism that will keep businesses sharp, lean, and fit, and fostering it is a central objective of the worldwide movement to liberalise and to deregulate industries. The European Union is committed to the creation of a single market, where free competition flourishes unhindered.

However, conservative political parties, employers and their spokespersons in academic circles have a much wider agenda than merely encouraging competition for economic reasons. Their strategy has a major political dimension, which includes reducing the role of the state, privatisation, fragmentation of the labour force, lowering wages, the greater use of contract, part-time and temporary workers, and the development of "popular capitalism." Those who bought shares in Eircom got a very sharp lesson in this "popular capitalism." Secure jobs and decent living standards are seen as a hindrance and an obstacle to greater profits. In the philosophy of this movement, workers are resources, not active agents. All the social sciences have been mobilised to determine how best to mould and control these resources in the interests of business.

## A PUBLIC OR A PRIVATE MONOPOLY?

It becomes a question of either a public or a private monopoly. In Britain, for example, there was a continual trend towards concentration through acquisition and take-over, as the following table shows.

**Table 1: Percentage change in market share by turnover in the British bus industry**

Company	1989	1997	Percentage change
First Bus	3.7	21.6	483.8
Stagecoach	3.9	16	310.3
Cowie Group	3.4	14.9	338.2
All major groups	11	52.5	377.3
Go Ahead	1.7	6.4	276.5
National Express	0	5.9	5.9
MTL Holding	0	3.3	3.3
Total second tier	1.7	15.6	811.8
Smaller groups	8.1	2.7	-66.7
Employee-owned	1.7	0.3	-82.4
Management-owned	13.8	7.5	-45.7
Publicly owned	30.4	6.8	-77.6
Scottish Bus	5.7	0	-100.0
London Transport	15.5	0	-100.0
Independent operators	12	14.6	21.7
Total third tier	87.2	31.9	-63.4

Source: R. Langridge and R. Sealey, "Contestability in the UK Bus Industry," *Transport Policy*, issue 7 (2000).

The aim of privatisation was to spread ownership and create competition. In both regards, this has failed. In truth, a classic depiction of the *modus operandi* of capitalism has revealed itself. Most of the management buy-outs were sold subsequently to burgeoning monopolies. This is how capitalism works: you "take out" your competitors, create a monopoly, and charge what you like.

In this sense, monopolisation should not be seen as a bad thing. In fact it often brings benefits to the public. Bus services tend towards monopolisation, because of the benefits that arise. A local monopoly will create market stability, enabling passengers to benefit from better frequency, predictability and reliability and enabling workers to enjoy better terms and conditions. Deregulation, on the other hand, tends to work against stability, with the destructive effects of competition leading to an undermining of regular timetables, a reduction in off-peak services, and downward pressures on workers' terms and conditions.

Where regulators are appointed to regulate the market and grant fare increases or control prices, the companies can get around this by reductions in services, cuts in maintenance, and poorer working conditions, which will have the desired effect of forcing a price increase or increased government subvention. So working people will pay twice over, in increased fares and increased subvention from their taxes.

Over-supply in urban areas often caused traffic chaos. At one point up to 350 buses an hour were running through Sheffield city centre. In Merthyr Tydfil in Wales, a town of 40,000 people, a bus left its tiny bus station every 30 seconds in the weekday peak period, but on an evening or Sunday they were a rare sight indeed.

A local monopoly allows bus operators to concentrate on their core business, free from the need to respond to aggressive competition from rivals on the most profitable routes. The further benefits of cross-subsidy and the cre-



ation of a local network of services are also positive outcomes, quite impossible in a fragmented competitive market.

So what is better? A public monopoly, which is at least subject to some form of democratic accountability and is not driven to put profit over social needs. Private monopolies are unrepresentative, undemocratic, and driven to realise profit at the expense of all else, with prices raised while output is reduced.

Public transport is a natural monopoly. The economies of scale are so strong that it is sensible for a product to have a single supplier. It makes sense that such natural monopolies are publicly owned. If the present public monopoly is to be turned into a private monopoly, the rationale of such a project is entirely undermined. What is there to gain from replacing a publicly owned monopoly with a privately owned one, which has no real prospect of becoming exposed to competition from other private-sector concerns, because of economies of scale and barriers to entry?

## WHAT INFLUENCES THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT?

There are three important variables that have a significant influence on the quality of public transport:

- (1) *the amount of public finance available—what the government wishes to spend on a public transport service;*
- (2) *the mandate given by the state to the public transport provider, i.e. the priorities that it sets for the transport company;*
- (3) *the efficiency of road traffic management, primarily in cities: how do you get commuters from A to B in the most efficient way and in the shortest time.*

These factors are of critical importance and are of much greater significance in determining the efficiency of public transport than the type of regulatory regime that exists.

The cost to the state is related (a) to the cost of providing public transport and (b) to the income raised from fares. The quantity and quality of public transport provided and the cost to public transport users has an impact on social cohesion and environmental sustainability, aims that the governments makes a pretence of wanting to encourage. If the government wants an effective public transport system, social cohesion, and a clean environment, then there are difficult questions to be asked and answered. Liberalisation and privatisation arise because the state has not grasped the contradiction between market failure and what is socially desirable and environmentally necessary, but instead hides behind a mountain of consultants' reports into structure, rather than engage with the substance of public transport.

## PAYING ON THE DOUBLE

There is a popular myth propagated by business interests and elements of the media that if the provision of public transport is handed over to private companies, the problems of state finance will somehow be solved, and all that will be necessary is the proper regulatory framework. Meanwhile the ideologically driven neo-liberals continue to press on with their agenda. They don't care about social cohesion and would give the operation of public transport to those private owners, largely foreign, who would provide services and make a profit, not only from commercial services but also from any subvention paid to induce better social cohesion. This approach is too simplistic, however, and a deregulated framework will not provide a solution to the continuing need for state financial support for socially necessary transport. In fact the problem will only be accentuated.

## TENDERING IS NOT A SOLUTION

There are also problems of awarding contracts by tender. This leads to a mad downward scramble in wages and conditions for bus workers, which results in operators outbidding each other to win contracts. Large private operators, many of which operate on an international scale, are likely to submit low-cost bids in order to win the initial contract. They will assume that labour costs can be driven down, particularly for future employees, who are usually employed on inferior terms and conditions. Further savings can be achieved by reducing the size of the fleet, cutting

maintenance and cleaning costs, reducing investment in new vehicles, re-organising bus routes, and cutting the less profitable services.

Take, for example, the greater Dublin area, which might hypothetically be divided into a number of distinct franchises, with a number of operators. It would mean in effect that there would be a multiplicity of small, private, geographic monopolies or oligopolies replacing a large de facto state monopoly. This would most probably result in a greater cost to the taxpayer as the state supported the establishment of a separate administrative and regulatory bureaucracy.

## RISING COST—POORER SERVICES

It is clear that competition matters such as the awarding of tenders will be subjected to some form of regulatory regime through a Public Transport Regulator. However, the one area where no regulation will apply is that of wages and employment conditions for those working in public transport. This presents potential private-sector operators with the opportunity to make significant profits by forcing down the wages and eroding the working conditions of those employed in the industry. Empirical evidence in other countries suggests that employers exploit this with relish. Take, for example, the figures for British bus workers' wages since privatisation, in comparison with other male manual workers' average wages.

**Table 2: Average earnings of bus workers compared with male manual workers, 1986–2001**

Year	Bus workers	Manual workers	% difference
1986	186.7	174.4	107.1
1987	180.3	185.5	97.2
1988	191.4	200.6	95.4
1989	199.4	217.8	91.6
1990	217.7	237.2	91.8
1991	222.3	253.1	87.8
1992	234.7	268.3	87.5
1993	239	274.3	87.1
1994	240.4	280.7	85.6
1995	243.5	291.3	83.6
1996	249.9	301.3	82.9
1997	266.4	314.3	84.8
1998	272.3	328.5	82.9
1999	286.2	335	85.4
2000	288.9	343.9	84
2001	310.7	359.9	86.3

Source: Figures presented to the Transport Select Committee by the Transport and General Workers' Union.

The dramatic reductions in operating costs in Britain (sometimes up to 52 per cent) were achieved by substantially reducing drivers' pay in real terms, as the table shows, while most other occupational groups have seen increments of a real and not simply inflationary character. Bus drivers once earned 7 per cent above average earnings; now they find themselves well down the earnings hierarchy.

Even the European Commission's regulations on public service contracts in passenger transport identify low pay as one of the important factors contributing to the lower costs of public transport in a deregulated environment. Indeed 80 per cent of a bus company's costs are labour costs; it is inevitable, therefore, that turning a bus company



into a profit-making venture will mean that the workers will pay. In fact in the first couple of years of deregulation in Britain more than 20,000 bus workers were made redundant.

Other factors include savings in investment and in repair costs, leading to an ageing fleet and problems with pollution and service reliability, feeding into higher profit levels. The price of liberalisation is paid in lost jobs, longer hours and lower pay for those who remain in the industries affected, and in poorer quality services for those who have to use public transport.

And of course the private sector will not contemplate operating in areas where no significant profits are forthcoming, and so rural areas will suffer more. Those living in areas of low population density, such as the Dingle Peninsula or County Leitrim, will have an already poor service reduced to nil, or at best one provided at an exorbitant price. Also, the integration of public transport that is privately owned is marked by a reluctance of private operators to get involved. Rather than co-ordinate services with each other or operate joint ticketing schemes or through-fares, they attempt to maximise the number of passengers and therefore income on their own services, at the expense of competitors.

### FRANCHISING HAS BEEN A DISASTER

Franchising is unlikely to be implemented in a way that protects workers' security and terms of employment. The main benefit sought through franchising is cost reduction, and such cost reductions lead to wage depression. The two models of franchising that proponents of this policy often cite are London and Copenhagen. However, before considering these cities it is worth understanding the wider background. In Britain the number of those using buses has dramatically declined—the complete opposite of what privatisation advocates claimed would happen.

**Table 3: Passenger bus numbers in Britain, 1989–99**

Period	Millions of passenger-journeys
(local bus services)	
1989/90	5,068
1990/91	4,844
1991/92	4,660
1992/93	4,475
1993/94	4,380
1994/95	4,415
1995/96	4,378
1996/97	4,345
1997/98	4,325
1998/99	4,243

Source: *Bulletin of Public Transport Statistics: Great Britain, 1999*.

This decline of 16.3% is understandable when put into context with the rise of fares and the reduction in services over the period.

**Table 4: Fares increase in Britain**

	Real value of fare increases
Greater London	35%
Other metropolitan areas	53%
Rest of England	11%
Scotland and Wales	6%
Total	23%

Source: *International Transport Federation, Report on British Bus Deregulation*.

An analysis of passengers' attitudes showed that in cities and large towns, 46 per cent thought that services had got worse since deregulation, and only 16 per cent differed from this. Passenger numbers plummeted in the larger cities, falling by 30 per cent in Manchester and 40% in Sheffield.

At the same time, the standard of buses drastically deteriorated. For big buses (with more than 32 seats) the proportion of those twelve years old or older in 1984 was 16 per cent. By 1989, only five years after privatisation, this figure had increased to 30 per cent. The decline in the purchase of new buses and coaches can be seen in the fact that between six and eight years after privatisation, more than fourteen bus and coach body builders merged or went out of business.

London itself is an exception to the trend of falling passenger numbers despite having had for several years the most unreliable buses in Europe, with only 28 per cent of users considering them satisfactory.

**Table 5: Bus Passenger Numbers in London**

Year	Passenger Journeys (millions)
1989/90	1,183
1990/91	1,180
1991/92	1,149
1992/93	1,127
1993/94	1,112
1994/95	1,159
1995/96	1,198
1996/97	1,234
1997/98	1,277
1998/99	1,267
1999/00	1,296
2000/01	1,354
2001/02	1,430

Passenger carryings fell from the late 1980s as privatisation took hold, the fall being 6.0% from 1989/90 to 1993/94 (as shown in the table; or 8.2% if the base year is taken as 1987/88). However, passenger numbers started to rise again from 1994/95, with an increase of 28.6% between 1993/94 and 2001/02. However, despite superficial appearances, and what may be argued by supporters of privatisation, it was not tendering of services which delivered these increases. Transport for London, the body responsible for the city's transport systems attributes these increases to the doubling of the government's transport grant to London, investment in vehicles and facilities, installation of many more bus lanes, and congestion charging. This is the clearest indication possible that what public transport needs is not market liberalisation or privatisation, but appropriate investment, adequate subsidy, and freedom of the streets. All these factors have been addressed forcibly by the Lord Mayor Ken Livingstone since he took charge. Transport for London is in fact considering once again operating its own services in an effort to control the six trans-national corporations that have control of 90% of the market.

Public transport in Copenhagen was deregulated in the early 1990s, and since then its costs have risen, passenger carryings have fallen, reliability of services has declined, and the Greater Copenhagen Authority is unable to control the oligopoly of three transnational operators that now completely dominate the market. It too is considering going back into business as a public transport operator.



## A Regulatory Structure for Ireland

The relationship between the state and the CIE Group needs to be redefined and placed on a more solid foundation. At present the state sets the amount of subvention to be made available (i.e. payment from the state in respect of the performance of its public service obligations) and the amount of capital spending to be approved for the following year two or three months in advance. This is unsatisfactory, and a much more sophisticated approach is needed.

The state must begin to spell out clearly, by way of public service contracts, the services it expects and the public service obligations imposed on CIE. These contracts would be negotiated between the state and the group and would cover several years and be referable to independent arbitration in the event of disagreement. The state should set the strategic goals and provide the investment and allow the CIE management to implement these. The board of the company should have greater autonomy and be free of political appointees and political party cronies.

It seems that the minister has not considered the alternative of *using* CIE, rather than abusing it. The preferred regulatory structure for Ireland is one that makes the CIE holding company the licensing authority, controlling the network, regulating competition, setting standards, operating core services, and subcontracting services from private operators. This option would leave network planning and management with CIE, which would also be the core service operator, through its subsidiary companies. Commercial and non-commercial socially necessary services would be clearly distinguished. CIE would operate services itself or franchise services to private operators. It would control competition, set and enforce standards, distribute state support payments, and so on. Its market regulatory functions would be shielded from its operating functions in the legislation so as to ensure independence and equity.

The core functions of network planning and operations would remain united, and there would be no need to duplicate structures and expertise in a separate licensing authority. Control of the provision of public transport would remain firmly in the hands of the state, and state companies, while remaining the main providers of services, would extend the scope of private operators in a controlled way. This would provide a benchmark against which to measure the performance of the state company's services.

The CIE companies work well and can be made to work better. Break up the company and, like Humpty Dumpty, it will be impossible to put it back together again.

Sustainability in transport cannot be provided by market forces alone but requires fiscal and regulatory measures, including mitigation of taxes for public transport users, selective taxing of the use of private cars in the interests of the environment, and regulatory measures in which sustainability is a central consideration.

## POSITIVE EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC OWNERSHIP IN TRANSPORT

Throughout Europe and indeed throughout the industrialised world there are many examples of excellent public transport where it is the preferred option of the travelling public. In Europe it is only necessary to look at the positive examples of Zürich, Brussels, and Paris, where well-funded state-owned public transport companies provide services by bus, metro, and rail, with high use and integrated services and ticketing.

In Helsinki, public transport comprises buses, metro, overground rail, and trams; it is easy to change from one to another. The tram traverses the city, allowing for ease of movement. Outside the city most development is concentrated at transport nodes, so that it is easy to reach most parts of the city. In the Helsinki metropolitan area the financial responsibility for public transport falls completely on the city, with no government involvement. The national policy encourages public transport to be paid for by income generated from ticket sales. However, if the service provided is considered insufficient, the Ministry of Transport may intervene and tender for additional services to be provided, with a subsidy if necessary.

In Helsinki, as in Zürich, Brussels, and Paris, there is no talk of liberalisation or privatisation. European cities with good public transport are distinguished not by the fact that the public transport is privately run but by the fact that the cities are run by people for people, and power and responsibility are used accordingly. Effective public transport requires a city government that has some degree of financial independence, some decision-making powers,

and a responsiveness to the local electorate. The city belongs to the people and not to councillors or the business community.

Clearly there is a strong case to be made for greater public accountability in the public sector. Perhaps the ways of tackling this problem would include a separate audit review that is democratically responsible, with representatives from trade unions, consumers' associations, community and social groups being elected or nominated to the boards of public bodies and companies. Other steps could be taken to improve the performance of state-owned companies without privatisation. These could include improved corporate planning techniques, investment appraisal, and adherence to performance indicators. Other steps might include the introduction of efficiency audits, the direction of subsidies towards social aspects of services that the government has decided to finance, and the establishment of financial targets in specified areas of operation.

Undoubtedly the attitude of the government is a very important variable in improving the performance of public enterprises. We should not be surprised that when we have a collection of free-market ideologues in the driving-seat they will steer in whatever way suits them and the interests they represent.

## PUBLIC OWNERSHIP AS THE WAY FORWARD

The state has, in CIE, a vehicle for the creation of a well-functioning, integrated public-sector transport system. If it had the political will it could provide sound, cost-effective public transport, supporting economic progress, environmental sustainability and social cohesion, sustaining rural communities. Any policy that depends on reducing workers' pay and conditions must be resisted and rejected. It completely contradicts any claims the government has to fostering social cohesion and further lays bare the rhetoric of "social partnership."

Ultimately, their policies will fail. Privatisation will not create jobs. In fact, as we have seen, it leads the way to lower pay, poorer conditions, and job losses. Privatisation will not improve efficiency or competitiveness: as the facts from Britain show, it will do the opposite. In any case, the argument that private enterprise is somehow more efficient than public enterprise is misleading and does not tell the full story. Throughout the world there are many examples of well-run, efficient publicly owned enterprises. At the same time, despite millions in grants and subsidies, hundreds of inefficiently managed private sector companies collapse every year. And finally, as the British example illustrates, the public too will suffer from privatisation.

And what about the claim that privatisation will give small shareholders, including employee-shareholders, a say in newly privatised companies? Experience in other countries shows that the banks and big financial institutions quickly acquire control of privatised companies. Only a very small number of individuals could afford to buy substantial shares in public enterprises or be involved in their ownership. The sale of Telecom Éireann is a case in point.

In other countries where privatisation has taken place, governments have disposed of valuable state assets at give-away prices to ensure the success of the sale. The small market in Ireland for share investment would provide opportunities for Stock Exchange sharks and predators to manipulate the prices of shares in public enterprises, while the sale of public-enterprise assets would create windfall gains for the investor, at public expense. With privatisation there could be no safeguards for ensuring that the effective control of vital national assets would be held within the state.

The quality and cost of public transport is an important determinant of participation in economic activity. It is a facilitator of social inclusion and ultimately leads to the maintenance of a more equitable society. It is essential that public transport be seen as a pivotal public amenity, where public access and safety are put ahead of commercial interests and the quest for profitability. This does not necessarily have to be based on an outright ideological opposition to private ownership or competition, but can also be the policy of anyone who believes that the interests of the travelling public and of employees in the public transport industry are not best served by this approach.

## WHO ARE THE WINNERS WITH PRIVATISATION?

The arguments in favour of privatisation are often those of tendentious special-pleading groups, which by no stretch of the imagination can claim to represent the interests of anyone beyond their own narrow constituency.



They hide their ideological commitment to private business at all costs behind the technicalities of consultants' reports.

The winners are typically senior management, board members and big investors who double, treble or quadruple their salaries within a couple of years of privatisation. There are substantial profits to be made from privatisation by professional advisers, stockbrokers, accountants, auctioneers, and solicitors. These professions make up a formidable and articulate force in favour of privatisation. Their arguments for a reduction in CIE's role and for an enhanced role for private companies should be seen for what they are: self-interested profit-seeking at the expense of the state and the public.

Even the SDG consultants' report to the Department of Transport has advised against absolute faith in the market as a solution to public transport problems. In the executive summary of the consultants' report the following statement is made:

"Whilst open competition and full deregulation may stimulate market growth in the short run, it may not provide the best long-term outcome. The provision of a comprehensive national network by Bus Éireann's Expressway currently offers significant benefits. Specifically, there is an assurance that adequate capacity will be provided to meet peaks in demands, irrespective of whether it is economic to do so. It is important, from the perspectives of social cohesion and regional economic performance that these benefits are not sacrificed in the pursuit of theoretical benefits of open competition, which may prove short lived or serve narrow sectional interests."

## PUBLIC OWNERSHIP—PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Public ownership and control ensures that public transport remains accountable to the users and the community at large through their elected representatives. Legitimate decisions regarding fares, levels of service and investment can be integrated into wider economic and social planning considerations in the best interests of the wider community. Under private ownership such decisions are made in the interests of shareholders alone and require the diversion of significant resources away from investment and day-to-day operations. Decision-making is also simpler for a private company: all it has to do is keep making a profit to satisfy shareholders.

The privatisation of public companies is not in the long-term interest of the Irish people. Having a strong public sector is essential to ensuring that the state can influence economic development, investment policy, and scientific research and development. The public sector in the past has led the way in social provision for employees, which most private companies strongly oppose. This needs to be completely re-written if it is to be kept in.

All over the globe privatisation has been concerned with maximising inducements to private capital accumulation. State regulation in a particular nation-state represents an obstacle to globally integrated capitalism. The theory behind privatisation suggests that the free market inevitably knows best, and that the state reduces and hinders innovation and initiative. While it is clear that the market as a mechanism—which in any case predates capitalism—does tend to impose financial disciplines that lead to savings, it is by no means a proven case that private ownership does this.

## WHY PUBLIC OWNERSHIP?

Privatisation was not and is not efficient; the chaos in the British rail system has forced the British government in effect to re-nationalise Railtrack, the company that owns and manages the tracks. The private train companies, such as Virgin, are regularly lacerated by the regulator for not being able to adhere to timetables. Safety has been fatally compromised in the interests of profit; the British rail system is less safe than any other system in the European Union. "Competition" has not benefited the consumer. The British pay higher rail fares than anyone else in Europe.

Leaving aside ideological arguments, public transport should remain in public control, for a number of reasons.

1. To work efficiently it has to be integrated—bus, rail, metro, inter-city transport, etc. Competition undermines integration, because competing companies are unwilling to share sensitive information and have a vested interest in driving some competitors out of business (as Stagecoach did quite viciously on bus routes in Glasgow and other cities). Integration requires a single management structure, with the same corporate goals and objectives.

2. Public transport, unlike most other industries, has to be subsidised. This is because it has externalities that benefit the wider economy. An efficient public transport system reduces the costs to all businesses by reducing congestion and gridlock, and creates an economic environment which is conducive to investment. A key reason for investment and subsidy is to change the modal split (i.e. the percentage of trips made by each mode of transport) in favour of public transport, in order to promote sustainable transport by alleviating road congestion and reducing environmentally damaging emissions.

3. It also contributes to equity, as it benefits low-income people more than high-income people. That is why public transport is subsidised virtually everywhere. A good rule of thumb is that the higher the subsidy the better the service.

4. A good public transport system is as much a part of the infrastructure of a city as the sewerage system or public lighting. As it must be to a large extent financed by the taxpayer, it must be part of the public services, not part of the market system. A public service may still be efficient or inefficient, depending on the management system; that is another matter.

5. The pay-off for public transport investment is in the long term. Private companies will invest only if the pay-off is in the short term. Therefore, many vital transport investments will not be made by a privatised industry. Consider the more than €1 billion invested in upgrading the Irish rail system to continuous-welded track and in computerised signalling: this investment was made primarily for safety reasons, and it is very hard to show on a balance sheet how this would contribute to higher profits in years to come. A private company would not be able to recoup such an investment.

Private investment in public capital projects need not be ruled out completely, as is pointed out in this document; this is possible, for example, through bond issues. A private company built the M50 toll bridge. The agreement was that they would get the revenue for twenty-five years, and then it would revert to the state. This period has now been extended, because they built an additional bridge recently.

One can argue about how long they should get the revenue for, or how much they should charge, but the principle is fine: a private company provides the asset more quickly than the public sector could have done, and gets well rewarded, but in the end it reverts to public ownership, and the exchequer will eventually have revenue in perpetuity from the arrangement.

In the end it makes more sense to have a well-run state monopoly, accountable to the taxpayer, strategically directed, and with prioritised investment. Otherwise we will have poor-quality services, private profits, and public debts.

## CONCLUSION:

It is clear from international research that one centralised publicly owned transport system gives the best, services, reliability, and value for money. It allows for the development and use of resources so as to develop public transport in a more planned and coherent way.

Retaining public ownership with one body controlling and taking a societal and national view is the best way forward. This allows all those interested in are who use public transport to have the opportunity to influence transport policy.

### WINNERS:

Where privatisation of public transport has taken place the people who have benefited the most are the private bus operators, multi-national transport companies, and investors and shareholders.

Decisions in the main have benefited the financial backers of the political establishment.

### LOSERS:

Those who lose out are, in the first instance are transport workers (and their families), the general travelling public, and the taxpayer. Workers' wages are pushed down, job security is replaced with job insecurity, part time working, longer working hours for full-time employees, and generally poorer conditions. The public will pay on the double as fares tend to increase and socially necessary services tend to disappear. You can be well assured that the owners of transport companies will not lose out and will be laughing all the way to the bank and we the taxpayer



will be left to pick up the debts.

The whole question of free public transport for pensioners must surely be called into question if public transport is privatised or we will be giving money directly into the pockets of private monopoly transport companies. This will mean that there will be only one way for prices to go up.

The action taken the CIE group of unions to prevent the break up of the company and to retain the Holding Company previously was a victory of those unions and their members and was in the best interest of the travelling public.

Like wise the action taken by the TEEU in blocking the attempts by the current minister to privatise the Drogheda Maintanance Depot and keeping it under the control of Eireann Rod was also a significant victory. It show when workers and their unions take decisive action then can win the day and advance their position and that of the public at large.

### APPENDIX 1

### Fight for your job & your children's future

#### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

The future of public transport, and of all other public services, is in your hands. It is up to the general public who use these services to inform themselves. It is very important that workers be aware of the debates and take their future into their own hands.

#### No one else will save our jobs but ourselves.

We need to turn up the heat on the politicians in regard to the privatisation of public transport. The private lobbyists, think tanks and vested interests have been making their case and pursuing their agenda. We need to clarify what we want and not just react to what the minister says or does. Workers need to win the public to their side, as we will need the maximum unity of working people.

Set up local groups in your garage or depot. Discuss what is in this document and other materials on public transport.

Equip yourself with the facts of the case.

Send letters to the Minister for Transport.

Start lobbying local TD's. E-mail them your concerns about privatisation.

Build the pressure within the political establishment.

Get your union to produce materials on keeping transport public.

Get your local tenants' or residents' group to take up the campaign to "keep it public."

Organise days of public education on "Keep it public!"

Have a national day of lobbying TD's and senators. (Learn from the farmers' organisations.)

Get your union to invite speakers from transport workers' unions in other countries to share their experiences.

Send letters to the press, and get onto local radio.

#### LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

#### DRAFT SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

This sample letter might be a useful guide in helping you draft your own letter.

Dear sir/madam,

It is clear from the statements and the actions of the present Minister for Transport, Séamus Brennan, that he is committed only to privatisation and is not willing to listen to the concerns of the workers employed in public transport or to the travelling public.

Public transport has been starved of resources for decades; it has never been given serious priority in government policy or strategy. It has been shown both here in Ireland and throughout Europe that the only efficient way to move large numbers of the travelling public safely and cost-effectively is by public transport. Experience has also shown that the privatisation of public transport has led to deteriorating service, price increases, and bus and rail chaos.

What we need is more investment in public transport, not less. We need an accountable management, free of political control and politically appointed cronies. We need public transport companies that are run by people who know what they are doing and allow workers and the travelling public to have a real voice at the highest level.

Yours sincerely,



## TURN UP THE HEAT. LET THEM KNOW YOU ARE THERE.

Official e-mail addresses of  
members of the Oireachtas:

Ann.Ormonde@oireachtas.ie  
Batt.OKeeffe@oireachtas.ie  
Bernard.Allen@oireachtas.ie  
Bernard.Durkan@oireachtas.ie  
Bernard.J.Durkan@oireachtas.ie  
Beverley.Cooper-Flynn@oireachtas.ie  
Billy.Kelleher@oireachtas.ie  
Billy.Timmins@oireachtas.ie  
Breeda.Moynihan-Cronin@oireachtas.ie  
Brendan.Howlin@oireachtas.ie  
Brendan.Ryan@oireachtas.ie  
Brendan.Smith@oireachtas.ie  
Brian.Lenihan@oireachtas.ie  
Brian.OShea@oireachtas.ie  
Camillus.Glynn@oireachtas.ie  
Cecilia.Keaveney@oireachtas.ie  
Conor.Lenihan@oireachtas.ie  
Daniel.Neville@oireachtas.ie  
David.Stanton@oireachtas.ie  
David.Norris@oireachtas.ie  
Denis.Naughten@oireachtas.ie  
Denis.ODonovan@oireachtas.ie  
Dermot.Fitzpatrick@oireachtas.ie  
Dick.Roche@oireachtas.ie  
Dinny.McGinley@oireachtas.ie  
Don.Lydon@oireachtas.ie  
Donal.Moynihan@oireachtas.ie  
Eamon.Gilmore@oireachtas.ie  
Eddie.Bohan@oireachtas.ie  
Emmet.Stagg@oireachtas.ie  
Enda.Kenny@oireachtas.ie  
Feargal.Quinn@oireachtas.ie  
Fergus.ODowd@oireachtas.ie  
Francis.O'Brien@oireachtas.ie  
Gay.Mitchell@oireachtas.ie  
GV.Wright@oireachtas.ie  
Ivor.Callely@oireachtas.ie  
Jack.Wall@oireachtas.ie  
Jackie.Healy.Rae@oireachtas.ie  
Jim.Glennon@oireachtas.ie  
Jim.OKeeffe@oireachtas.ie  
Jim.Walsh@oireachtas.ie  
Jimmy.Deenihan@oireachtas.ie

Joe.Costello@oireachtas.ie  
Joe.Higgins@oireachtas.ie  
John.Browne\_FF@oireachtas.ie  
John.Bruton@oireachtas.ie  
John.Cregan@oireachtas.ie  
John.Dardis@oireachtas.ie  
John.Dennehy@oireachtas.ie  
John.Ellis@oireachtas.ie  
John.Gormley@oireachtas.ie  
John.McGuinness@oireachtas.ie  
John.Moloney@oireachtas.ie  
John.Perry@oireachtas.ie  
Joe.OToole@oireachtas.ie  
Kathleen.Omeara@oireachtas.ie  
Labhras.Omurchu@oireachtas.ie  
Liam.Aylward@oireachtas.ie  
Liam.Fitzgerald@oireachtas.ie  
Liz.McManus@oireachtas.ie  
Margaret.Cox@oireachtas.ie  
Mary.Coughlan@oireachtas.ie  
Mary.Henry@oireachtas.ie  
Maurice.Hayes@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.Ahern@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.Collins@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.D.Higgins@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.Finneran@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.Lowry@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.Moynihan.TD@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.Noonan@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.Ring@oireachtas.ie  
Mildred.Fox@oireachtas.ie  
Noel.Ahern@oireachtas.ie  
Noel.OFlynn@oireachtas.ie  
Caoimhghin.O'Caolain@oireachtas.ie  
Olivia.Mitchell@oireachtas.ie  
Paddy.Burke@oireachtas.ie  
Padraic.McCormack@oireachtas.ie  
Paschal.Mooney@oireachtas.ie  
Pat.Carey@oireachtas.ie  
PAT.MOYLAN@oireachtas.ie  
Pat.Rabbitte@oireachtas.ie  
Paul.Coghlan@oireachtas.ie  
Paul.Connaughton@oireachtas.ie  
Paul.McGrath@oireachtas.ie  
Peter.Callanan@oireachtas.ie  
Philip.Hogan@oireachtas.ie  
Richard.Bruton@oireachtas.ie  
Roisin.Shortall@oireachtas.ie  
Rory.Kiely@oireachtas.ie  
Rory.OHanlon@oireachtas.ie  
Ruairi.Quinn@oireachtas.ie

Seamus.Kirk@oireachtas.ie  
Seamus.Pattison@oireachtas.ie  
Sean.Ardagh@oireachtas.ie  
Sean.Fleming@oireachtas.ie  
Sean.OFearghail@oireachtas.ie  
Sean.Power@oireachtas.ie  
Sean.Ryan@oireachtas.ie  
Seymour.Crawford@oireachtas.ie  
Shane.Ross@oireachtas.ie  
Simon.Coveney@oireachtas.ie  
Thomas.P.Broughan@oireachtas.ie  
Tom.Hayes@oireachtas.ie  
Tony.Gregory@oireachtas.ie  
Tony.Kett@oireachtas.ie  
Tony.Killeen@oireachtas.ie  
Trevor.Sargent@oireachtas.ie  
Willie.Penrose@oireachtas.ie  
Sean.Haughey@oireachtas.ie  
Mary.Upton@oireachtas.ie  
Mary.Hanafin@oireachtas.ie  
Eoin.Ryan@oireachtas.ie  
Seamus.Healy@oireachtas.ie  
Donie.Cassidy@oireachtas.ie  
Dermot.Ahern@oireachtas.ie  
Ned.OKeeffe@oireachtas.ie  
MJ.Nolan@oireachtas.ie  
Pat.Gallagher@oireachtas.ie  
Tom.McEllistrom@oireachtas.ie  
John.Curran@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.Mulcahy@oireachtas.ie  
Charlie.O'Connor@oireachtas.ie  
Barry.Andrews@oireachtas.ie  
Joe.Callanan@oireachtas.ie  
Peter.Kelly@oireachtas.ie  
John.Carty@oireachtas.ie  
Jimmy.Devins@oireachtas.ie  
Maire.Hoctor@oireachtas.ie  
Pat.Breen@oireachtas.ie  
Gerard.Murphy@oireachtas.ie  
Olwyn.Enright@oireachtas.ie  
Damien.English@oireachtas.ie  
John.Deasy@oireachtas.ie  
Paul.Kehoe@oireachtas.ie  
Joe.Sherlock@oireachtas.ie  
Joan.Burton@oireachtas.ie  
Kathleen.Lynch@oireachtas.ie  
Fiona.OMalley@oireachtas.ie  
Tom.Parlon@oireachtas.ie  
Mae.Sexton@oireachtas.ie  
Tim.OMalley@oireachtas.ie  
Noel.Grealish@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.McDowell@oireachtas.ie

Dan.Boyle@oireachtas.ie  
Paul.Gogarty@oireachtas.ie  
Eamon.Ryan@oireachtas.ie  
Ciaran.Cuffe@oireachtas.ie  
Aengus.OSnodaigh@oireachtas.ie  
Sean.Crowe@oireachtas.ie  
Martin.Ferris@oireachtas.ie  
Arthur.Morgan@oireachtas.ie  
Paudge.Connolly@oireachtas.ie  
James.Breen@oireachtas.ie  
Niall.Blaney@oireachtas.ie  
Finian.McGrath@oireachtas.ie  
Paddy.McHugh@oireachtas.ie  
Jerry.Cowley@oireachtas.ie  
Marian.Harkin@oireachtas.ie  
Liam.Twomey@oireachtas.ie  
Donie.Cassidy@oireachtas.ie  
Liz.ODonnell@oireachtas.ie  
Dan.Wallace@oireachtas.ie  
Peter.Power@oireachtas.ie  
Ollie.Wilkinson@oireachtas.ie  
Terry.Leyden@oireachtas.ie  
Geraldine.Feeney@oireachtas.ie  
James.Bannon@oireachtas.ie  
Maurice.Cummins@oireachtas.ie

Noel.Coonan@oireachtas.ie  
John.Hanafin@oireachtas.ie  
Frank.Feighan@oireachtas.ie  
Timmy.Dooley@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.McCarthy@oireachtas.ie  
Martin.Mansergh@oireachtas.ie  
Mark.McSharry@oireachtas.ie  
Joe.McHugh@oireachtas.ie  
JohnPaul.Phelan@oireachtas.ie  
Kieran.Phelan@oireachtas.ie  
Mary.White@oireachtas.ie  
Joanna.Tuffy@oireachtas.ie  
Diarmuid.Wilson@oireachtas.ie  
Noel.Davern@oireachtas.ie  
Sheila.Terry@oireachtas.ie  
Brian.Hayes@oireachtas.ie  
Paul.Bradford@oireachtas.ie  
Ulick.Burke@oireachtas.ie  
Jim.Higgins@oireachtas.ie  
Brendan.Daly@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.Finucane@oireachtas.ie  
Derek.McDowell@oireachtas.ie  
Brendan.Kenneally@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.P.Kitt@oireachtas.ie  
Mary.ORourke@oireachtas.ie

Michael.Brennan@oireachtas.ie  
Cyprian.Brady@oireachtas.ie  
Tom.Morrissey@oireachtas.ie  
Kate.Walsh@oireachtas.ie  
John.Minihan@oireachtas.ie  
Joe.Jacob@oireachtas.ie  
Martin.Brady@oireachtas.ie  
Jan.OSullivan@oireachtas.ie  
Marc.McSharry@oireachtas.ie  
Tony.Dempsey@oireachtas.ie  
Johnny.Brady@oireachtas.ie  
Thomas.McEllistrom@oireachtas.ie  
Fergal.Browne@oireachtas.ie  
Mary.Wallace@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.Woods@oireachtas.ie  
Eamon.Scanlon@oireachtas.ie  
Joe.Walsh@oireachtas.ie  
Eamon.O'Cuiv@oireachtas.ie  
Michael.Smith@oireachtas.ie  
Noel.Treacy@oireachtas.ie  
Tom.Kitt@oireachtas.ie  
Martin.Cullen@oireachtas.ie  
Frank.Fahey@oireachtas.ie  
Bertie.Ahern@oireachtas.ie



## AER RIANITA: A RIP OF IN PROGRESS:

As we can see with the current debate over the future of Aer Rianta, the Minister is driven more by ideology rather than any strategic plan or understanding. Any efficient and forward looking country would ensure that access into the country was as easy and as efficient as possible, and with as many financially viable points of entry as possible. The Irish state has such an efficient publicly owned vehicle in the form of Aer Rianta. It is a very profitable public company earning revenues/profits from its many investments and activities across the world coming back to the Irish taxpayer for re-investment.

Seamus Brennan (like the majority of the Cabinet is driven by a failed rightwing ideology of neo-liberalism) claims he does not want to privatise the three airports but to create three stand-alone airport companies, which will compete against each other. This proposal makes no sense unless the real agenda is privatisation.

Airports are natural spatial monopolies. They have a natural hinterland. If a Waterford person wants to fly to London, they will fly from Cork, not Shannon or Dublin. The difference in airport charges per fare would be so minimal as not to affect consumer decisions. Moreover, the National Development Plan 1994-2000 outlined an integrated strategy for the development of the three airports.

They were to be developed as catalysts for growth and development in their respective regions. Certain targets were to be met in providing the capacity to deal with planned passenger throughput and cargo traffic over the Plan period. If they are competing against each other, they will each be trying to attract passengers and cargo traffic from the others. This undermines any possibility of planned integrated development, which takes into account the different economic development needs of their catchment areas.

Aer Rianta has been extremely successful in providing for the air transport needs of the country. They have never relied on state handouts or subsidies. The company has made substantial borrowings to fund capital projects and services these debts from its own revenues. If the company is broken up then the debt burden will either have to be split between the three companies or lumped onto one - probably Dublin airport. This would be extremely damaging and could lead to the bankruptcy of one or more airport companies.

If publicly owned companies are competing against each other in a private market then they will have to behave like any other private company. The logic of the market would take over. Dublin airport would inevitably grow faster relative to the other two because it has a larger catchment population, is in the capital and would have lower unit costs per passenger due to higher volumes and greater economies of scale.

Dublin would then suffer more due to greater congestion and Cork and Shannon from losing more business to Dublin. Cork and Shannon would have less revenue to invest in upgrading runways, terminals etc. and could face long term stagnation or deterioration. This is a particular anger for Shannon where passenger numbers have been stagnant for most of the last decade despite the Celtic Tiger.

What would happen then if a stand-alone Shannon airport was losing money year after year? It could not be subsidised by the profits from Dublin airport since that would make a nonsense of breaking up Aer Rianta in the first place. It could be subsidised by the taxpayer and the state could be re-imbursed by taking more revenue from a more profitable Dublin airport but that is just an indirect cross-subsidisation from Dublin to Shannon and would equally make a nonsense of the Minister's strategy.

This strategy only makes sense if the real agenda is privatisation. Friends and supporters of Mary Harney and Charlie McCreevy, such as the McEvaddy brothers and Michael O'Leary of Ryanair, have for years been trying to get their hands on the real money-spinners at Dublin airport - land and terminals. They have been lobbying ceaselessly to get the government to force Aer Rianta to sell them land in the airport complex, to get permission to build privately owned terminals, car parks, hotels etc.

Once that is achieved, then Shannon is almost certainly doomed. The rationale for competition is more efficiency, lower costs, and prices to the consumer. The flip side of that coin is that 'inefficient' companies must be allowed to go to wall if they become bankrupt. Alternatively, a weak company can be taken over by a competitor who will move in, cut costs and jobs and restore profitability. In that case, a pri-

vate Dublin airport company would take over Cork and Shannon and we would have a private monopoly instead of a public one.

The difference is that a private monopoly would have no interest in promoting the wider socio-economic goals of a region - the interests of private airports and national and regional economic development policy would part company.

Aer Rianta is also one of the more successful companies in the world in managing airports abroad from Moscow to the Middle East and the Far East. It would be inefficient to split this international business up between three new airport companies. One of the airports would have to benefit from this at the expense of the others, thus losing the benefits of cross-subsidisation and synergy which they enjoy at present.

Seamus Brennan is tearing up the National Development Plan as far as airport management and Dublin Bus is concerned solely to line the pockets of wealthy supporters of Fianna Fáil and the PD's. If they pull this off it will be far worse than the Beef industry scandal. After all Larry Goodman was only involved in the highly risky business of exporting beef to Iraq and got preferential access to state insurance cover.

The Minister wants to hand over guaranteed, risk-free money-spinners to business cronies from a business built up over decades by one of the most successful state companies ever, and at the expense of the economy as a whole and especially at the expense of people in the south and west of the country.



## POLICY POSITION OF THE IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS

### Irish Congress of Trade Unions Draft Report

#### The Route to Success: A Policy Platform for Unions in the Public Transport Sector, August 2001

#### Bus Transport in the Greater Dublin Area

The provision of public transport by bus will continue to be a key element of any strategy for the improvement of public transport in the greater Dublin area. The Dublin Transport Authority's document a Platform for Change recognises that in the short-term buses will provide the primary mode of public transport<sup>23</sup>. The Government proposals to develop a franchising system for the provision of bus transport in the greater Dublin area, we believe, will not improve the quality of public transport for the reasons elaborated in previous sections. Therefore we propose the following:

- Dublin Bus would continue to remain in public ownership.
- An operational plan, which would outline the respective roles of Dublin Bus and private operators, would be drawn up. This plan should be developed in consultation with the social partners. The plan should also reflect the commitment of the Minister to avoid head to head competition on routes. Responsibility for the implementation of this plan would rest with the Public Transport Regulatory Body.
- The operation of new services would be subject to competitive tendering (in the case of subsidised operations), and licensing in the case of commercial routes. The allocation of new tenders and licenses would be the responsibility of the Public Transport Regulatory Body.
- The Public Transport Regulatory Body will bring forward proposals for the integration of fares across all operators and modes in the greater Dublin area, and will ensure the physical integration of current services with any new services.

#### Bus Transport outside the Greater Dublin Area

The provision of public transport outside Dublin has evolved differently. In effect, what we have seen is the development of a deregulated and largely uncontrolled market for the provision of bus services between major urban centres. As well as operating routes between major urban centres, Bus Eireann provides bus services in the other large cities. While Government has proposed to bring forward proposals for the reform of bus transport outside of the greater Dublin area, unions propose the reorganisation of bus transport outside the greater Dublin area along the following lines:

- Bus Eireann to remain in public ownership.
- One of the first functions of the public transport regulatory body would be to undertake a review of the operation of bus services between the major urban centres, with a view to regularising and regulating their operations. An operational plan for bus transport in the other major urban areas, which would outline the respective roles of Bus Eireann and private operators, would be drawn up. This plan should be developed in consultation with social partners. The plan should also reflect the commitment of the Minister to avoid head to head competition on routes. Responsibility for the implementation of this plan would rest with the Public Transport Regulatory Body.
- The operation of new services would be subject to competitive tendering (in the case of subsidised operations), and licensing in the case of commercial routes. The allocation of new tenders and licenses would be the responsibility of the Public Transport Regulatory Body.

#### The Future of Rail Transport

There can be little doubt from recent experience in Britain that the efficient and safe operation of railways is best secured through public ownership. The Government has, on a number of occasions, sought to assure unions that it has no intention of privatising the railways, but has argued that some reform is necessary, if only to allow the proposed investment proceed. Unions do recognise the need for reform and support the following proposals:

- The retention of Irish Rail in public ownership, with the operating and infrastructure side of the company consolidated under a single company structure.
- The creation of a Railway Procurement Agency with the remit to procure an operator for the LUAS, and ensure the development of the METRO in Dublin. The development of the METRO could involve the use of a PPP.
- The creation of a Railway Safety Agency.

#### Delivering Better Public Transport

The significant investment which has been proposed for public transport requires the development of a new type of relationship between all of the parties in the public transport sector in order to ensure the delivery of a quality system within the proposed timeframe.

For our part, the unions in the sector are prepared to look at ways in which the industrial relations procedures and agreements can reflect the need to develop such a relationship, and to work towards developing a real partnership between all of the parties in the industry. The unions however will not accept the break up and privatisation of the state providers and we are not prepared to stand by and allow the potential that exists to be destroyed and an essential public service on which so many rely run by profiteers.



## SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

After nearly two decades of Social Partnership it has left a mindset within the trade union movement which see workers and their organisations having no or distinct view on society and the nature of our society. Workers in public transport in particular are right to see privatisation as a threat to their jobs and living standards. That is the experience of public transport workers across the world. They do lose out when their companies are privatised. The same is true for Aer Rianta workers; it will be privatised unless workers themselves take ownership of the process.

If your position entering talks is already curtailed by your view that we have no alternative or that it is the governments right to govern no matter how it impacts upon working peoples lives then workers will lose the fight before they start. As in all industrial situations, you go in looking for the maximum and defending what you hold. Either workers impose their position on the Minister, or the Government will impose theirs. We have to break the mindset that we cannot oppose government policy because we have an agreement with them on other matters.

Privatisation is taking place because there are those with vested interests and connections to power who know they can make big profits. Government decisions are made to suit vested interests. If it was not profitable, they would not want it.

If we take the line of least resistance then jobs will go and the Irish people will pay the price in higher cost and the enrichment of a few individuals.

**THERE IS A BETTER CHANCE OF WINNING IF YOU FIGHT:  
THERE IS NO CHANCE OF WINNING IF YOU DON'T**

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

**competitive tendering**, an invitation to private-sector firms to submit a bid for contracts to supply goods or services to the public sector.

**deregulation**, the removal of economic controls over economic activity that have been imposed by the government. Deregulation may be initiated either because the controls are no longer seen as necessary or because they are too restrictive, preventing companies from taking advantage of business opportunities.

**economies of scale**, long-run reduction in average costs that occur as the amount of a firm's output is increased.

**natural monopoly**, a situation where economies of scale are so significant that costs can be minimised only when the entire output of an industry is supplied by a single producer, so that supply costs are lower than under conditions of competition.

**monopoly**, a market structure in which one firm supplies to many buyers, or where there is a lack of substitute products, or barriers to entry into the market are so severe that it is next to impossible for new firms to enter the market.

**oligopoly**, a market structure in which there are a few firms and many buyers, with identical products or differentiated from each other in some form (typically artificial differences).

**privatisation**, the denationalisation of industry, transferring it from public to private ownership. The extent of state ownership of industry depends very much on political ideology.

**Markets** - Market is the process by which you exchange one commodity (money in today's world) for other commodities you need to have. Markets have been with us since humans beings where able to produce more than they needed and exchanged or sold it to the their neighbours for goods that they had, which was surplus to their needs.

**Mode Split** - the percentage of trips made by each of the various transport modes, e.g. bus, rail, private car, commercial van or truck, motor-cycle, bicycle, walking, other.



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