NDA submission for the DART+ North Project

# Introduction

The National Disability Authority (NDA), as the independent statutory body provides information and advice to the Government on policy and practice relevant to the lives of persons with disabilities. We have a role to assist the Minister for Children, Disability, Equality and Integration in the co-ordination of disability policy. We work through our [Centre for Excellence in Universal Design](http://universaldesign.ie/) (CEUD) to promote the universal design of the built environment, products, services and information and communication technologies, so that they can be easily accessed, understood and used by everyone, including persons with disabilities.

The NDA welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the consultation on DART+ North which is being managed by Irish Rail. Transport plays a crucial role in empowering people with disabilities to participate in everyday life and the activities of their communities. Approximately one in ten people with disabilities said that inadequate/inaccessible transport systems prevented them from participating in social events.[[1]](#footnote-1) About one in six people with a disability are not in work who would be interested in a job, cite transport or parking as an issue for them. Those with sight, mobility or intellectual disabilities are most likely to cite transport as an issue for employment.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In this context therefore, the NDA advises that Irish Rail should adopt and implement a Universal Design approach when deciding the preferred route for DART+ North and continue this approach throughout the entire project. Of the total population of 1,174,502 people in the counties of Louth, Meath, Fingal and Dublin City that the DART+ North Coastal Line runs through, 153,961 have disabilities, and 136,255 are aged over 65.[[3]](#footnote-3) This is a significant number of people that stand to benefit from improved transport access through universal design.

# Delivering Universally Designed DART+ North transport services

The NDA advises that the DART+ North project should consider planning approaches that ensure that each element regarding the development and delivery of this programme includes accessibility as a key component to support all users to access transport services so they can participate in mainstream society. This includes persons with disabilities. There at present, no details provided in the current report on the DART+ Coastal North Report as to how Irish Rail has ensured that the preferred option will meet the needs of persons with disabilities or will enable more persons with disabilities and older people to access public transport services.

The **Accessibility of Public Transport for People with Disabilities** report produced by theJoint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport in November 2018 recommended that public transport services should be universally designed so that they are easy to access, easy to understand and easy to use by everyone regardless of age, size, ability or disability.

The NDA advises that Irish Rail adopt and implement this Universal Design approach for every aspect of the DART+ North project as set out in this submission, which is summarised as follows:

**Information and consultation**

* Developing and publishing a strategy on the DART+ North website detailing how Irish Rail will ensure that any future impact assessments for this proposed project will **examine the potential effects this project could have on persons with disabilities and older people**. This strategy should also have a clear commitment from Irish Rail that it will ensure that every element of the proposed DART+ North project will meet the needs of persons with disabilities and older people
* The NDA notes that as part of the report on the DART+ Coastal North project, Stage 2 of the process did involve analysis under a framework which included accessibility and social inclusion. However, the NDA would recommend more consideration be put into this element of the assessment. The NDA recommends developing and publishing a strategy on the DART+ Coastal North website detailing how the Irish Rail will ensure that any future impact assessments for this proposed project will **examine the potential effects this project could have on persons with disabilities and older people**. This strategy should also have a clear commitment from Irish Rail that it will ensure that every element of the proposed DART+ Coastal North route will meet the needs of persons with disabilities and older people. The NDA would like to remind Irish Rail that a Disability Impact Assessment is an obligatory requirement of all substantive proposals requiring Government approval as stipulated in [The Cabinet Handbook](https://assets.gov.ie/6813/2a580791a7b24decb97a550539a0faff.pdf)[[4]](#footnote-4) when there is:
* a change in policy;
* the introduction, abolition or significant change in an existing scheme; or
* a decision which impacts on the public at large, or
* on a significant subset of that population.

It is evident that the DART+ Coastal North route represents a significant change and would impact the public at large, therefore the requirement for such an assessment is evident. The Department of Justice provides Guidelines on **How to Conduct a Disability Impact Assessment.[[5]](#footnote-5)**

* Having a clear commitment in the DART+ North project that Irish Rail will **have a sustained engagement process with a diverse set of users**. This sustained engagement process could be achieved by establishing and consulting with an advisory committee that includes, persons with different disabilities, older people, architects, urban planners, IT professionals, representatives from the local authorities and the NDA. This diverse level of expertise will help Irish Rail to address the different impacts that the proposed DART+ North project will have on the lived experience of all users of the built environment, public spaces, other transport services such as the bus and rail services, etc.
* The NDA also suggests that the DART+ North project should contain an action and key deliverables for a **cross departmental approach** between Irish Rail, the NTA, the NDA, the public transport service providers, relevant Government Departments and related agencies to ensure the effective development and implementation of the proposed DART+ North project so that it will provide integrated universally designed public transport services
* **User testing** will be an important part of this sustained engagement process. Impact assessments for this project should have user testing as a key criterion to facilitate the development and progression of this project. The NDA suggests a proposed action that could be included in the Preliminary Options Selection Report that Irish Rail and the proposed advisory committee could develop and pilot an audit tool to assess the capacity of the proposed project to provide integrated universally designed public transport services that are easy to access, easy to understand and easy to use by everyone regardless of age, size ability and disability. The NDA is happy to advise Irish Rail on developing and piloting this audit tool

**Route considerations**

* The NDA suggests that as part the DART+ North project that Irish Rail and the proposed advisory committee could commit to **reviewing the catchment areas** for the proposed route to determine if these areas have the capacity to provide integrated universally designed public transport services
* As part of the sustained engagement process that Irish Rail uses **a definition of accessibility** that details how every element of the proposed DART+ North project will be universally designed so that it is easy to access, easy to understand and easy to use by everyone regardless of age, size ability and disability. This definition could also be applied to future assessments that will be carried out for the proposed DART+ North project and for Irish Rail’s existing and future projects

**Infrastructure considerations**

* **Accessible services** are one of the key criteria in the provision of universally designed services. Every aspect of the service including:
* the design of DART stations;
* the location of DART stations;
* the design and location of the proposed pedestrian level crossings;
* the pedestrian pathways;
* interchanges;
* way finders;
* tactile surfaces;
* the built environment;
* the number of transfers a person may need to make in one journey; the exterior and interior design of the trains,

need to be easy to access, easy to understand and easy to use for everyone regardless of age, size, ability or disability. All personnel involved in the planning and design of this project and all staff who will be providing public transport services on DART+ North should be trained to provide services and supports to persons with different disabilities and older people.

* The design and procurement of certain products and services must comply with **EU Directive 2019/882 on the accessibility requirements for products and services** (harmonised standard EN 301 549). We also recommend that you implement the **European standard I.S. EN 17161:2019 ‘Design for All - Accessibility following a Design for All approach in products, goods and services - Extending the range of users’** when designing and procuring products, goods and services. This standard enables an organisation to apply a Universal Design approach for accessibility and meet its statutory and regulatory requirements in terms of accessibility of its products, goods and services.
* The NDA would also recommend you implement the **European Standard** **I.S. EN 17210:2021** **‘Accessibility and usability of the built environment - Functional requirements’**, which sets out the requirements that the built environment, including urban areas, needs to fulfill in order to be considered accessible and usable and covers many requirements relevant to transport. It is also worth noting that under the **European Accessibility Act** electronic ticketing machines, check in machines and information terminals must comply with accessibility requirements set out in this Act. Member states are obliged to transpose the European Accessibility Act into national legislation by 28th June 2022 with implementation commencing from June 2025.

**Information considerations**

* **Accessible information** is one of the key criteria for universally designed services that should be incorporated into the proposed audit tool and for existing and future Irish Rail projects. All information (written, spoken, signed and digital) delivered by a public transport services provider (which includes consultation information), should be universally designed. The NDA suggests thatIrish Rail should usethe **Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service - A Universal Design Approach** which will help to produce universally designed written, verbal and digital communications that can be easily accessed, understood and used by everyone. Websites must comply with the accessibility criteria laid out in the **EU Directive on Web Accessibility 2016/2102**. Accessible information also includes audio visual announcements on public transport, information received from self-service terminals, processes for requesting information and making complaints. It should also be noted by Irish Rail that the Irish Sign Language (ISL) Act, 2017 places duty on all public bodies to provide ISL speakers with free interpretation when availing of or seeking to access statutory entitlements and services.

**Monitoring and reporting**

* The NDAs **Code of Practice on the Accessibility of Public Services and Information provided by Public Bodies** outlines the statutory obligations public bodies have in providing accessible services and information under section 26, 27 and 28 of the **Disability Act 2005**. These sections of the Disability Act 2005, incorporate the core elements of an integrated universally designed public transport service as mentioned previously. The NDA recommends that the DART+ North project use this Code of Practice to deliver an integrated universally designed public transport service. The NDA, has a statutory role to **monitor the implementation of this Code of Practice** and report our findings to the Minister. We will shortly undertake a monitoring activity to identify the level of conformance of Irish Rail services with the Code of Practice.

# Rationale for adopting the Universal Design approach

Ireland’s population is changing. In the 2016 Census, the overall number of people with disabilities has increased, comprising 13.5% of the total population compared to 13% in 2011. There are now 643,131 people with a disability living in Ireland.[[6]](#footnote-6) People are living longer, as can be seen in the changes in the population aged over 65 which has increased by 19.1% since 2011. According to the 2016 Census figures the number of people aged 66 and over has increased to 637,567 people (13.4% of the population).[[7]](#footnote-7)

The importance of integrated universally designed public transport services that include the built environment and information and communication technologies is underpinned by **Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**. Ireland ratified the UN Convention in 2018. Article 9 states that in order for persons with disabilities to live independently and fully participate in all aspects of life, they need to have access not only to accessible transportation but also to infrastructure, the built environment, information and communication processes and technologies and to other public facilities and services.

Integrated universally designed public transport systems are also perceived as being integral to the development and maintenance of inclusive and sustainable communities. The [**2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**,](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld) adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 identifies integrated universally designed transport systems as core elements in creating healthy, sustainable and inclusive cities and communities.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Section 6.3 of the **National Planning Framework for Project Ireland 2040** also identifies universally designed transport services, in addition to housing, education, and health services, as key areas that need to be developed to facilitate the development and progression of diverse and inclusive communities. [[9]](#footnote-9)

**The Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016 –2035** states that the provision of accessible public transport services is a key objective that will contribute to the economic, social and cultural progress of the Greater Dublin Area by providing for the efficient, effective and sustainable movement of people and goods.

The importance of transport in the lives of persons with disabilities and the necessity for transport services that are accessible to everyone is also highlighted in **The Comprehensive Employment Strategy 2015 – 2024**; **National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021**.

# Conclusion

The NDA is happy to meet with Irish Rail to discuss this submission. The NDA is looking forward to continuing to work with Irish Rail to develop and implement integrated universally designed public transport services.

1. National Disability Survey (2006) Vol. 2, Table 7.30 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. National Disability Survey (2006) Vol. 2, Table 7.30 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://cso.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=4d19cf7b1251408c99ccde18859ff739 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/05c2e2-cabinet-handbook/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/20120305%20DIA%20Guidelines.pdf/Files/20120305%20DIA%20Guidelines.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Census 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Census 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld) adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Scheme 2040 is the Government’s long-term strategy to make Ireland a better country for all of its people by investing in its public infrastructure. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)