



October 9<sup>th</sup> 2020

Minister Norma Foley TD  
Department of Education & Skills  
Marlborough Street  
Dublin 1  
D01 RC96

Dear Minister,

I trust you are well and keeping safe despite the calls and obligations on you to perform your Ministerial duties, especially where you must travel.

We too are on the frontline and whereas very happy to be working and back to schools transport I do need to once again raise the problem with you where some of the schools transport is contracted directly with parents and schools. These contracts are not with your transport company, Bus Eireann, but do represent a most important cohort in the overall schools transport area. The parents of these children cannot afford to pay the extra money required to comply with social distancing on their school buses. Neither do they have a car, in most cases, to avail of the grant you kindly gave to parents if they chose to not use school bus transport.

You will know, perhaps not in any positive way, that FOTO/iBus represents over 1,500 small to medium bus and coach operators as your main advices and guidance may be biased towards the state transport companies. Please know that I represent these small to medium bus and coach operators as best I can on a voluntary basis as an add on service to their insurance contracts, FOTO is a registered lobbyist. In the main I proffer solutions rather than challenge. You will have our 5 point proposal for the safe return of the children to our schools, I attach a copy for your convenience. I lodged this with you some months ago, without a response. There are suggestions within this 5 point proposal document that remain crucial to sustaining our schools transport intact, safe and manageable.



Reg No: 152032

Embassy Office Park, Kill, Co Kildare  
045 878500



Reg No: 458014

Within this 5 point proposal I am seeking a small grant to help these small to medium bus and coach operators. They are all fully compliant in all aspects of transport, I can vouch for this, but because they are not sub-contracted to Bus Eireann but directly with parents and schools they have been overlooked and are not recognised by your Department. This is unfair and it is unjust. I do intend exposing this injustice but we must immediately support these parents and schools to pay for the school transport of their choice to bring their children to school. Social distancing requirements on school buses may well see many of these parents being unable to afford the extra fare and forced into in a position of not being able to send their children to school.

I will appreciate your urgent response so that we can allay the fears of these parents and so that we can continue to provide them with schools transport.

Yours Sincerely



John Dunne  
Director  
Federation of Transport Operators (FOTO)  
iBus plc.

June 8<sup>th</sup> 2020



# 5 Point Proposal for the safe return of the school transport fleet:

As we prepare for the return of School Transport Services I write on behalf of our 1,500 plus small to medium bus and coach operators around Ireland. To ensure the orderly and safe return of these services where these small to medium bus and coach operators have suffered the single most devastating impact through the lifetime of the School Transport Services I respectfully put forward a number of proposals to support this unique sector.

- **Extension to the age of vehicles operating Schools Transport Services:**

Presently the maximum age of vehicles operating Schools Transport Services must not be in excess of 15 years. We propose that that this should increase to 20 years subject to 6 monthly CVRT testing, presently annually. This will maintain the highest standards in safety and in the roadworthiness of the vehicles whilst allowing good time for reinvestment in the School Transport fleet. These vehicles have not been used to their full extent for most of this school year and will not return to full service for quite some time into the future. The normal cycle for reinvestment has been severely interrupted with many not being in a position to borrow for replacements until they return to full service. FOTO will undertake to ensure compliance with the testing protocols through the use of photographic evidence of completed certification.

- **Extension to age of retirement for drivers on School Transport Services:**

Drivers of School Buses under contract to Bus Éireann must retire at the age of 70. This is unique to Bus Éireann contracts and has created a serious shortage of drivers within the Schools Transport System. This ruling does not apply to any other bus/coach driving duties, indeed these same drivers can drive across the EU and within Ireland on all other services!

The School Transport System is one of the least physically demanding on drivers and subject to medical certification there is no reason that these drivers should not be used. They are also tend to have a most understanding relationship with children. We propose that the age limit for drivers within the School Transport System be increased to 75 years in line with all other bus/drivers on all other services subject to Medical Certification. FOTO will undertake the management and procurement of this certification.

- **Payment for Schools Transport Services sub-contracted by Dublin Bus and directly with schools and parents :**

Bus and coach operators sub-contracted to Dublin Bus and directly by schools and parents have received no support or part payment as allowed under the Schools Transport System sub-contracts with Bus Éireann. These operators are suffering great financial hardship and require immediate assistance. The payments to Bus Éireann are equivalent to 50% of the contract price and we propose that 50% should be applied based on sight of the receipts for the last school term for this cohort of operators. FOTO undertakes to secure these receipts so that this payment can be verified and paid directly to these operators.



- **Grant Aid for the initial costs associated with returning the School Transport fleet to full Roadworthiness on the return of School Transport Services:**

The initial costs to return buses to the School Transport System include a full maintenance check, refill of fuel tanks, reinstatement of insurance, reinstatement of finance repayments, wages for drivers and other payments that will require settlement before payments will be received for these services. These bus and coach operators cannot afford such costs through further loans and we propose a once off Covid 19 Grant for the return of these services. We estimate these costs to be in the region of €3,000 for a single bus and coach operator with a further €1,500 for each bus/coach above this. FOTO undertakes to provide the required information and support to the many small bus and coach operators who are not computer literate to avail of these grants.

- **Continuation of all Covid 19 Supports until return to full operations:**

We propose the continuation of all employee support payments where the prior wages of these employees was above the present Covid 19 support payment. We must also supplement the shortfall in incomes due to distancing and other factors that might delay the return to full operations and full capacity on the buses and coaches used on these services.

I trust I outline sufficiently our reasonable proposals for your consideration. We are anxious to ensure the orderly and safe return of our School Transport services and to that end we confined our research to essential requirements and the genuine concerns of these bus and coach operators.

I will be happy to discuss or clarify any query you may have, my contact details are below.

Yours Sincerely

John Dunne  
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