



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Review of the School Transport Scheme

Phase 1 Report



January 2024

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## Executive Summary

This report of the Technical Working Group covers Phase 1 of the review of the School Transport Scheme – a report on eligibility with an examination of issues for mainstream pupils relating to the nearest and next nearest school. Other issues, as outlined in the Terms of Reference, will be dealt with in Phase 2 of the review.

Phase 1 of the review sets out to examine the eligibility criteria for pupils on mainstream transport, specifically the requirement that in order to qualify for mainstream transport pupils must be attending their nearest school. It is clear from the operation of the scheme that a significant number of pupils fulfil the distance criteria to their nearest school but attend their next nearest school and are therefore not technically eligible under the current eligibility criteria.

This report examines the issues that arise on an annual basis and explores the potential options for September 2021 for this cohort of pupils with non-eligible status.

Having fully considered the options as set out in this report and pending the outcome of the full review, the Technical Working Group recommends maintaining the scheme as it currently operates but with temporary alleviation measures similar to those in 2019 on the post-primary transport scheme. This recommendation is based on the analysis of benefits over risks/issues for each option considered and the value achieved on a per pupil basis. This option will result in transport being provided for an estimated 1,882 post-primary pupils in the 2021/2022 school year, who are eligible for transport to their nearest school but are attending their second nearest school, at an estimated cost of €1.6m for a full year.

This recommendation is made pending the outcome of the phase 2 of this Review which will involve a thorough review of the School Transport Scheme and from which recommendations for any changes of a permanent nature will ensue.

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## Review of the School Transport Scheme - Background and Overview

In October 2019, the then Minister for Education and Skills announced a review of the school transport scheme as it currently operates. This review is to be conducted to ensure funds are being spent in the most effective way and to examine potential scope for a more co-ordinated approach involving other Government departments that also fund transport services.

The review will encompass the School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs and the Primary and Post-Primary School Transport Schemes in terms of how each element of the schemes currently operate, to include eligibility criteria, trends, costs and cost drivers, overall effectiveness in meeting the objectives of the schemes and fiscal sustainability. The review will also examine the potential for integration of different strands of the scheme and a more co-ordinated approach with other Government Departments that also fund transport services.

The Review will build on the proposals in the Programme for Government, which sets out the following objectives:

- *Accelerate sustainable transport plans for schools. We will complete the review of the School Transport Scheme to seek better outcomes and reduce car journeys. The School Transport Scheme should work in liaison with the Safe Routes to Schools Programme*
- *We will conduct a comprehensive review of the School Transport Scheme, identifying recommendations for the scheme to provide better value and a better service for students, including those with special educational needs, and examining issues such as the nearest or next-nearest school*

The Working Group will review the School Transport Scheme as it currently operates and will make recommendations to a Steering Group. The Working Group will report initially on preliminary findings regarding eligibility, before moving to consider and report on broader issues such as the objectives of the scheme and the integration of the scheme with other initiatives. The Steering Group will report on the findings and recommendations of the Working Group and will prepare a report with recommendations on the future operation of the schemes. Other subgroups may be established during the course of the review if considered appropriate by the Steering Group.

This report of the Technical Working Group covers Phase 1 of the review process – a report on eligibility with an examination of issues for mainstream pupils relating to the nearest and

next nearest school. Other issues, as outlined above and including a review of transport for special education needs pupils, will be dealt with in Phase 2 of the review.

Phase 1 of the review sets out to examine the eligibility criteria for pupils on mainstream transport, specifically the requirement that in order to qualify for mainstream transport pupils must be attending their nearest school. It is clear from the operation of the scheme that a significant number of pupils fulfil the distance criteria to their nearest school but attend their next nearest school and are therefore not technically eligible under the current eligibility criteria. This report sets out to look at the issues that arise on an annual basis and the options under consideration for this cohort of pupils with non-eligible status referred to as concessionary status in this report.

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## Eligibility - Changes to the Eligibility Criteria in 2012 and Emerging Anomalies

The School Transport Scheme is a significant operation which in the 2019/2020 school year carried over 120,000 pupils including over 14,200 pupils with Special Educational Needs on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country at a cost of over €219m in 2019.

### 3.1 Scheme History

The scheme is an administrative scheme, established in 1967. It was created to facilitate access to primary and post-primary education for those pupils, who because of where they reside, might otherwise have difficulty in attending school regularly.

Changes to the school transport scheme (primary and post primary) were announced in Budget 2011, derived from recommendations in the Value for Money Review of the School Transport Scheme. **Prior to Budget 2011 the eligibility criteria was as set out below:**

**Primary Scheme** - pupils were eligible for free school transport if they resided 3.2 kilometres or more from, and were attending their nearest national school or school of amalgamation as determined by the Department. In the case of amalgamations, pupils residing in a closed school area may have been deemed eligible for transport to the school of amalgamation only. A “closed school area” was defined as an area where a primary school had been closed and amalgamated with another. Pupils for whom the closed school would have been the nearest were eligible for transport, without reference to distance rules, to the school of amalgamation, even though this school may not have been the nearest school.

**Post-primary Scheme** - Pupils were eligible for transport if they resided 4.8 kilometres or more from their local post-primary education centre, that is, the centre serving the catchment area in which they lived. The scheme was not designed to facilitate parents who chose to send their children to centres outside of the catchment area in which they resided. However, pupils who were fully eligible for transport to the post-primary centre in the catchment area in which they resided could apply for transport on a concessionary basis to a post-primary centre outside of their own catchment area – otherwise known as catchment boundary transport.

**The changes announced in 2011 encompassed** a number of elements such as national application of the distance rule of 3.2 kilometres at primary level, the cessation of the

Closed/Central School Rule at primary level, the cessation of catchment boundary area to determine eligibility at post primary level, the increase from seven to 10 eligible pupils residing in a distinct locality to retain or establish a school transport service and the introduction of charges at primary level. Pupils at that time who were eligible for school transport, retained their transport eligibility for the duration of their schooling, provided their circumstances did not change.

**Under the revised criteria introduced in 2012 on the mainstream schemes the following is the position with regard to eligibility:**

**Primary School Transport Scheme** - The Primary School Transport Scheme supports the transport to and from school of pupils who reside not less than 3.2 km from and are attending their nearest national school, having regard to ethos and language.

**Post-Primary Transport Scheme** - The Post Primary School Transport Scheme supports the transport to and from school of pupils who reside not less than 4.8 km from and are attending their nearest post-primary education centre/school, having regard to ethos and language.

In the case of both schemes, distance eligibility is determined by Bus Éireann by measuring the shortest traversable route from the child's home to the relevant school. In both schemes a minimum number of 10 eligible pupils residing in a distinct locality, as determined by Bus Éireann, is required before consideration may be given to the establishment or retention of school transport services, provided this can be done within reasonable cost limits.

A table summarising a breakdown of the changes is attached at Appendix 1.

## 3.2 Emerging Anomalies since 2012

In recent years, and again for the current school year, arising from ministerial decisions, there was and is no planned downsizing of school buses. There were, and continue to be, route changes and variations in line with normal operational decisions that occur from year to year and any impacts in terms of increases or decreases of available places nationally is marginal and in line with what occurs from year to year.

The experience of the school transport scheme shows that while the current criteria are based on the provision of transport to the nearest school, there is a significant cohort of pupils at post-primary level in particular whose historic pattern of attendance is to their next nearest school or post primary school centre. A number of such pupils are carried on a concessionary basis where seats are available. However, a shortage of concessionary places gives rise to significant disquiet on the part of parents and public representatives in various regional locations on an annual basis.

As a consequence of the changes to eligibility criteria in 2012 coupled with no planned downsizing of buses, the evidence is that a growing number of pupils are availing of school transport on a concessionary basis since 2011, as set out in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1**

School Transport Scheme - Concessionary Pupils availing of Transport									
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Total on Transport</b>	112,970	112,463	114,063	112,577	113,892	116,075	116,774	117,808	120,578
<b>Of which SEN</b>	8,238	8,317	9,239	9,791	9,822	11,650	12,500	13,410	14,221
<b>Total on MS Transport</b>	104,732	104,146	104,824	102,786	104,070	104,425	104,274	104,398	106,357
<b>Concessionary of Total</b>									
<b>Primary Concessionary</b>	4,312	6,026	7,297	9,669	12,169	12,272	14,108	14,181	15,050
<b>Post-Primary Concessionary</b>	542	2,923	5,103	8,989	12,987	12,970	14,297	14,286	15,069
<b>Total Concessionary</b>	4,854	8,949	12,400	18,658	25,156	25,242	28,405	28,467	30,119
<b>Concessionary as % of MS Total</b>	5	9	12	18	24	24	27	27	28

The amended school transport scheme has been in place since 2012 meaning there are no longer any pupils eligible under the previous eligibility criteria and all pupils on the scheme are now considered for eligibility under the post 2011 criteria. This has shown up a number of anomalies with particular regard to pupils who are eligible to their nearest school but who are attending their second nearest school based on traditional enrolment patterns.

These issues appear to be more pronounced at post-primary level where on an annual basis a significant number of issues are raised with School Transport Section, Bus Éireann and the Minister's Office in the form of calls, correspondence, PQs, representations, with regard to pupils who are not deemed eligible and who are not successful in getting a ticket. This causes particular issues for concessionary pupils who may have been allocated a ticket in previous years and who lose out in the annual selection process due to an increase in the number of eligible pupils on services.

Parental preference, transfer patterns from primary to post-primary, and admissions policies with regard to feeder schools, among other issues, all impact on school choice. This can mean that pupils may not always attend their nearest post-primary school. The evidence with regard to concessionary tickets indicates that in some areas pupils traditionally attend schools that are not their nearest, but that their next-nearest school is a similar distance away. Some 75% of post-primary pupils in these areas are over 4.8 KM from their nearest school and therefore would be eligible for transport to that school if they chose to attend it.

It was not the intention of the 2012 scheme changes, as recommended in the 2011 Value for Money Review, to effect a widespread change to the schools attended by pupils from



localities around the country. Such changes have potential implications for school planning and budgeting that were not anticipated in 2011.

### **3.3 Annual Ticket Allocation Process**

The priority order in which tickets are allocated by Bus Éireann in any given year is as follows:

1. Tickets are allocated to all eligible pupils who apply and pay on time.
2. Tickets are allocated to late eligible applicants if the selection process has not taken place for concessionary applicants. This selection process takes place within a few days of tickets being allocated to eligible pupils who apply and pay on time. If an application/payment is received for an eligible child after the payment deadline (a "late eligible") but before the selection process takes place for concessionary applicants, the late eligible is given priority over concessionary applicants.
3. Tickets are allocated to concessionary applicants who apply and pay on time (a selection process takes place and seats are allocated until service is full. Those pupils who are unsuccessful in getting a seat are given a refund on the cost of their ticket).

Where capacity remains once all eligible applicants are catered for, the selection process for allocating tickets to concessionary applicants is as follows:

Using the Family ID as a reference, first priority is given to all existing concessionary applicants (whether they had seats or not in the last school year) who have paid by the deadline date for payments plus siblings of these pupils provided they also have paid by the deadline date. Second priority is all new applicants who applied and paid by the deadline dates (i.e. those applying for transport for the first time). Finally, all other applicants (for example late applicants/payees).

## Data Analysis

### 4.1 Numbers of pupils availing of School Transport

Details of the number of pupils availing of school transport is set out in Table 4.1. The overall total number of pupils availing of transport has increased from 112,970 pupils in 2011/12 to 120,578 pupils in 2019/20, an increase of 7,608 pupils.

Over the period the total number of mainstream pupils availing of transport has remained relatively stable at about 104,000 pupils per annum rising to 106,000 pupils in the 2019/20 school year; primary pupils have declined over the period by 3,058 pupils while post-primary pupils have increased over the period by 4,773 pupils. However, when comparing the total mainstream pupil numbers attending school to those on mainstream transport, the overall trends show that there is a decline in mainstream pupils availing of the scheme, falling from 12.6% in 2011 to 11.5% in 2019.

The number of pupils availing of transport on the scheme for children with special educational needs has seen the largest increase over the period with an increase of 5,983 pupils. On examination of the total SEN pupil number attending school, the overall trends show an increase in SEN pupil numbers. When comparing the total SEN pupil numbers attending school to those on SEN transport, the overall trends show that there is a steady incline in SEN pupils availing of the scheme increasing from 80% in 2011 to 94% in 2019.

Table 4.1 also shows the split into eligible and concessionary. As can be seen, concessionary pupils have increased from 4,854 pupils in 2011/12 to 30,119 in 2019/20.

Of the pupils availing of transport on a concessionary basis in the 2019/20 school year:

- At primary – 35% of the total concessionary pupils are 3.2km or more from their nearest school but are attending their second nearest school;
- At post-primary - 74% of the total concessionary pupils are 4.8kms or more from their nearest school but are attending their second nearest school:

Of the remaining 65% primary and 26% post-primary concessionary children, these children are not attending either their nearest or second nearest school, or they are under the requisite eligibility distance criteria.

School Transport Scheme - Projected Pupil Numbers 2019 - 2027										
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	
Primary	38128	38265	37636	36940	36110	35396	34672	33894	33119	
Post-Primary	68229	69877	71768	72349	73102	73122	72389	71266	69918	
<b>Total Mainstream</b>	<b>106357</b>	<b>108142</b>	<b>109404</b>	<b>109289</b>	<b>109212</b>	<b>108518</b>	<b>107061</b>	<b>105160</b>	<b>103037</b>	
SEN	14,221	15,009	15,864	18,085	18,457	19,008	19,402	19,926	20,371	
<b>Total on Transport</b>	<b>120578</b>	<b>123151</b>	<b>125268</b>	<b>127375</b>	<b>127669</b>	<b>127526</b>	<b>126463</b>	<b>125086</b>	<b>123408</b>	
<b>Concessionary of Total</b>										
Primary Concessionary	15050	15082	14830	14554	14228	13942	13652	13346	13044	
Post Primary Concessionary	15069	15365	15811	15946	16118	16112	15967	15732	15428	
<b>Total Concessionary</b>	<b>30119</b>	<b>30447</b>	<b>30641</b>	<b>30500</b>	<b>30346</b>	<b>30054</b>	<b>29619</b>	<b>29078</b>	<b>28472</b>	

## 4.2 Projected estimated numbers of pupils to avail of School Transport

Table 4.2 presents projected demand using demographic trend data.

The estimated number of pupils to avail of transport at primary level has peaked and it is anticipated that demand (both eligible and concessionary) will decline in the next 10 years.

With regard to post-primary, demand overall is expected to peak in 2024 in line with demographics, with 2021 being the key year for increased demand for concessionary places.

School Transport Scheme - Pupil Numbers availing of Transport									
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Primary	41,186	40,490	40,711	39,893	39,952	39,630	38,729	38,294	38,128
Post-Primary	63,546	63,656	64,113	62,893	64,118	64,795	65,545	66,104	68,229
<b>Total MS</b>	<b>104,732</b>	<b>104,146</b>	<b>104,824</b>	<b>102,786</b>	<b>104,070</b>	<b>104,425</b>	<b>104,274</b>	<b>104,398</b>	<b>106,357</b>
SEN	8,238	8,317	9,239	9,791	9,822	11,650	12,500	13,410	14,221
<b>Total on Transport</b>	<b>112,970</b>	<b>112,463</b>	<b>114,063</b>	<b>112,577</b>	<b>113,892</b>	<b>116,075</b>	<b>116,774</b>	<b>117,808</b>	<b>120,578</b>
<b>Concessionary of Total</b>									
Primary Concessionary	4,312	6,026	7,297	9,669	12,169	12,272	14,108	14,181	15,050
Post-Primary Concessionary	542	2,923	5,103	8,989	12,987	12,970	14,297	14,286	15,069
<b>Total Concessionary</b>	<b>4,854</b>	<b>8,949</b>	<b>12,400</b>	<b>18,658</b>	<b>25,156</b>	<b>25,242</b>	<b>28,405</b>	<b>28,467</b>	<b>30,119</b>

## 4.3 School Transport Costs

### Total Costs

As summarised in Table 4. 3 the total cost for running the School Transport Scheme in 2019 was €223.6m\*. Over the period 2011-2019 total costs have increased by some 30% or €52.4m. Adjusting for inflation which accounts for €6.27m of this increase, this is a net increase of €46.1m or just under 27%.

(\*These costs are based on a combination of the actual costs per BÉ audited statement of account and the Departments expenditure on grants, Bus Escorts and other non BE costs as per the appropriation accounts.)

In 2011, the breakdown of costs were as follows - 52% mainstream related costs, 35% SEN related costs and 13% administration related costs. In 2019 the spend profile has shifted to 54% SEN related costs, 38% mainstream related costs and 8% administration related costs.

Some 93.71% of the total scheme costs are funded by the Exchequer with the balance of funding coming from pupil contributions.

With regard to the cost breakdown in terms of pupils on the mainstream scheme and SEN scheme, in 2019, this was:

- Mainstream services costs were 38% or €85.6m of the total scheme costs with mainstream pupil representing 88% or 106,357 pupils of the total pupils.
- SEN services costs were 54% or €121m of the total scheme costs with SEN pupil representing 12% or 14,221 pupils of the total pupils.

## 4.4 Mainstream Scheme Costs

### Total Costs

Between 2011 and 2019, costs associated with the mainstream element of the scheme have largely remained unchanged, rising by €2.9m from €99.6m in 2011 to €102.5m in 2019. The increase of costs over the 8 year period is below the CPI inflation rate of 3.6%. Factoring the pupil contributions into these costs, this reduces the overall mainstream costs from €88m in 2011 to €85m in 2019. On the other hand the numbers of mainstream pupils using scheme has increased by 1.5% from 104,732 in 2011 to 106,357 in 2019. On a national level the total number of children attending mainstream education at primary and post-primary level has increased by some 95,274 pupils or 11% during the same period.

### **Cost on a per pupil basis**

The total mainstream services cost \*\* has increased from €951.24 per pupil in 2011 to €964.63 per pupil in 2019, during the 8 year period this increase is below the CPI inflation rate of 3.6%. The cost to the exchequer during the same period has decreased at a greater proportion from €842 per pupil in 2011 to €805 in 2019. This is due to pupil contribution covering an increasing portion of the total mainstream costs from 11.5% in 2011 to 16.5% in 2019. The increase in pupil contribution can be attributed to the increase of concessionary pupil on the mainstream services, which has risen from 4.7% in 2011 of total pupil on mainstream transport to 27.9% in 2019.

(\*\*These costs are based on a combination of actual costs as per BÉ audited statement of account and the Department's expenditure on grants, Bus Escorts and other non BE costs as per the appropriation accounts.)

## **4.5 SEN Scheme Costs**

### **Total Costs**

Between 2011 and 2019, costs associated with the SEN element of the scheme have increased significantly, rising by €61.3m from €60.2m in 2011 to €121.5m in 2019. Over the 8 year period this is an increase of 100% which is above the CPI inflation rate of 3.6% for the same period. There is no pupil contributions to be factored into these costs as eligible SEN pupils are exempt from charges. The numbers of SEN pupils using scheme has increased by 72% from 8,238 in 2011 to 14,222 in 2019. On a national level the number of children attending SEN education at primary and post-primary level, and who are attending special schools or classes, has increased by some 7,337 pupils or by 72% during the same period.

### **Cost on a per pupil basis**

The total SEN services cost \*\*\* to the exchequer has increased from €7,274.26 per pupil in 2011 to €8,543.52 per pupil in 2019, this increase during the 8 year period is above the CPI inflation rate of 3.6%.

(\*\*\*These costs are based on a combination the actual costs as per BÉ audited statement of account and the Department's actual expenditure on grants, Bus Escorts and other non BE costs as per the appropriation accounts).

It is worth noting that the cost per pupil on the SEN scheme is higher than that per pupil on the mainstream scheme due to the fact that services are more specialised, can be individual in nature, tend to be longer in terms of distance travelled and may require escort support.

## 4.6 Scheme Administration Costs

Between 2011 and 2019, costs associated with administering the scheme have reduced by €6.4m from €22.8m in 2011 to €16.4m in 2019. The cost associated with inflation over this 8 year period would be €0.8m, when using the CPI inflation rate of 3.6%.

The overall pupil numbers using the scheme has increased by 6.73% from 112,970 in 2011 to 120,578 in 2019, with 79% of the new services during the 8 year period relative to SEN services.

The total administration cost \*\*\*\* per pupil has decreased from €205 in 2011 to €136 in 2019. This excludes the Department of Education's own costs.

(\*\*\*\*These costs are based on a combination of the actual costs as per BÉ audited statement of account and the Departments actual expenditure on grants, Bus Escorts and other non BE costs as per the appropriation accounts. . They also include indirect and direct costs associated with the scheme that are contained in the transport management charge and the inspectors costs. The Departments own staffing costs have not been included.)

COSTS FOR SCHOOL TRANSPORT PROVISION 2011 - 2019									
BÉ Headings	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total Mainstream costs	€ 88,139,666	€ 88,964,922	€ 85,370,838	€ 83,076,861	€ 82,708,580	€ 80,799,357	€ 81,064,539	€ 80,578,561	€ 85,651,418
Total SEN Costs	€ 60,252,726	€ 57,601,995	€ 64,008,734	€ 68,520,057	€ 72,966,623	€ 83,480,526	€ 91,794,408	€ 107,123,752	€ 121,497,460
Total frontline costs	€ 148,392,392	€ 146,566,917	€ 149,379,572	€ 151,596,918	€ 155,675,203	€ 164,279,883	€ 172,858,947	€ 187,702,313	€ 207,148,878
Total Administration Costs (excluding Dept costs)	€ 22,838,905	€ 21,019,312	€ 20,649,137	€ 20,688,533	€ 17,293,694	€ 16,919,334	€ 16,276,371	€ 15,988,518	€ 16,450,518
Actual annual Costs of running STS	€ 171,231,297	€ 167,586,229	€ 170,028,709	€ 172,285,451	€ 172,968,897	€ 181,199,217	€ 189,135,318	€ 203,690,831	€ 223,599,396
% Split of Costs	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total Mainstream	51%	53%	50%	48%	48%	45%	43%	40%	38%
Total SEN	35%	34%	38%	40%	42%	46%	49%	53%	54%
Total Admin	13%	13%	12%	12%	10%	9%	9%	8%	7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

## School Transport projected costs

An initial analysis has been conducted on the projected costs of operating the scheme. This initial analysis is based on a number of assumptions:

**Mainstream (MS) related costs** are based on the 2019 cost per MS pupil rate and take into account the annual profiled pupil numbers as set out in table 4.2 together with the following assumptions:

1. No change to the current pupil contribution rates.
2. Contractor costs assume an increase of 5% per annum in line with current trends with a subsequent decrease to 3.5% per annum in line with the projected decrease in demographics.
3. Contractor costs continue to remain at 90% of the total MS costs.

**SEN related costs** are based on the 2019 cost per SEN pupil rate and take into account the annual profiled pupil numbers as set out in table 4.2, together with the following assumptions:

1. An increase of 6% per annum on the current SEN pupil rate in line with current trends on all associated SEN costs.
2. That the uptake of SEN transport remains at 94% of the total SEN pupil population who are attending special schools and special classes.

**Administration related costs** are based on the current cost per pupil rate and take into account the annual profiled pupil numbers as set out in table 4.2, together with the following assumptions:

1. These costs to remain static in line with current trends. However, while it is noted that the cost of administering the scheme since 2011 has been relatively static, the number of routes and vehicles particularly on the SEN scheme has grown significantly. This will be analysed further in phase 2 of the review.

With regard to costs overall, a deeper analysis will be conducted as part of phase 2 of the review and this deeper analysis will take account of the impact on costs under any proposed changes to how the scheme currently operates.

As can be seen from Table 4.4 below, it is projected that in 2027 it would cost €400m to operate school transport services if all projected eligible and concessionary pupils were catered for. In 2021 prices this €400m would have a net present value (NPV) of €303m.

It is projected that the 2027 costs will be:

- Mainstream services costs - 27% or €106.6m of the total scheme costs with mainstream pupils representing 84% or 103,037 pupils of the total pupils using scheme services. In 2021 prices this would be an NPV of €105.5m.
- SEN services costs - 69% or €277.4m of the total scheme costs with SEN pupils representing 16% or 20,371 pupils of the total pupils using scheme services. In 2021 prices this would have an NPV of €198.3m.

Under the assumptions in projecting these costs, the figures indicate that the SEN scheme will continue to be the main cost driver for the scheme with both pupil numbers and costs projected to increase.

**Table 4.4**

School Transport Scheme - Projected Costs 2019-2027 with assumptions									
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Total Mainstream Costs	85,931,335	90,972,147	96,194,716	100,458,702	104,967,554	102,113,225	103,966,503	105,397,841	106,595,038
Total SEN Costs	121,518,445	135,947,019	152,312,834	184,059,237	199,112,078	217,358,701	235,172,702	256,023,457	277,436,240
Total Service Costs	207,449,780	226,919,167	248,507,550	284,517,939	304,079,632	319,471,926	339,139,205	361,421,298	384,031,277
Total Administration Costs (Excluding Dept Costs)	16,451,648	16,748,600	17,036,451	17,322,966	17,363,012	17,343,545	17,198,933	17,011,671	16,783,483
Total Projected STS Costs	223,901,428	243,667,766	265,544,001	301,840,905	321,442,644	336,815,472	356,338,138	378,432,969	400,814,761
Mainstream costs as a % of total costs	38%	37%	36%	33%	33%	30%	29%	28%	27%
SEN costs as a % of total costs	54%	56%	57%	61%	62%	65%	66%	68%	69%
Administration costs as a % of total costs	8%	7%	6%	6%	5%	5%	5%	4%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%



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## Post-Primary Transport Scheme -Temporary Alleviation Measures 2019

As outlined in section 3, the experience of the school transport scheme shows that while the current criteria are based on the provision of transport to the nearest school, there is a significant cohort of pupils at post-primary level whose historic pattern of attendance is to their next nearest school or post primary school centre. A number of such pupils are carried on a concessionary basis where seats are available. However, a shortage of concessionary places gives rise to significant disquiet on the part of parents and public representatives in various regional locations on an annual basis. In light of this, in September 2019, the then Minister for Education and Skills sanctioned an additional €1m on the school transport budget to allow for temporary alleviation measures to address a shortage of school transport capacity on the post primary scheme. These funds were allocated to those areas where there was a significant concentration of post-primary pupils who had paid on time for the 2019/2020 school year, who fulfilled the 4.8kms distance criteria from their nearest school but who were attending their second nearest school.

Under the measures, no new routes were added or created (that did not exist prior to 2012). However additional or increased sized buses were provided in order to provide transport for pupils who met this criteria on the post-primary transport scheme.

While the Minister sanctioned an additional €1m, the actual cost was in the region of €432k\* for the school year and 343 pupils who otherwise would not have been allocated a ticket were accommodated on transport for the 2019/2020 school year.

Details of the areas where these alleviation measures were implemented in 2019 are attached at Appendix 1.

*\*This cost when netted against pupil contributions was circa €312k*

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## Options with regard to Eligibility for the 2021/2022 School Year and Impacts of Same

The school transport application portal for the 2021/2022 school year opened in late January 2021, with the closing date for applying being the last Friday in April – 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021. The closing date for payment/submitting medical card details is the last Friday in July – 30<sup>th</sup> July 2021. Given this time frame and the need for a lead in time for Bus Éireann to implement any changes that would arise from changed eligibility criteria there is limited scope for changes for the 2021/2022 school year.

In examining these potential options as part of Phase 1 of the Review, the objective is not to pre-empt the outcome of the latter phase and overall review of the scheme. The objective is to examine potential options to deal with the anomalies arising from changes to eligibility criteria in 2012 and any options/recommendations arising from this phase of the review are considered provisional pending the final outcome of the full review of the School Transport Scheme.

The options considered for September 2021 are set out below:

1. Implement the 2012 Scheme Changes at primary and post-primary and remove or reduce vehicle capacity to cater for eligible pupils only.
2. Maintain the scheme in line with 2012-2019 custom and practice.
3. Maintain the scheme as it currently operates but with temporary alleviation measures on post-primary services similar to those in 2019

### Analysis of Options

#### **IMPLEMENT THE 2012 SCHEME CHANGES AT PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY AND REMOVE OR REDUCE VEHICLE CAPACITY TO CATER FOR ELIGIBLE PUPILS ONLY**

Implementing the 2012 Scheme Changes in full would involve the removal of all routes with less than 10 eligible pupils and the downsizing of vehicles to cater for eligible pupils only.

Of the total 68,229 post-primary pupils who availed of transport in the 2019/2020 school year some 15,069 pupils availed of transport on a concessionary basis. Of the total 38,128

primary pupils who availed of transport in the 2019/2020 school year, some 15,050 pupils availed of transport on a concessionary basis.

***Removal of Routes with Less than 10 Eligible Pupils (based on data for the 2019/2020 school year)***

Nationally, there were 423 standalone runs operating with less than 10 eligible pupils on those services. These include vehicles operating primary and post primary services where all routes operated carry less than 10 eligible pupils. There are a total of 5,708 pupils on these 423 routes comprising 2,251 eligible pupils and 3,457 concessionary pupils.

The annual savings in removing these routes are estimated to be in the region of €8.3m (assuming that no pupils will move school). Taking account of the pupil contributions currently made on these routes of almost €1.1m, the net saving is in the region of €7.2m per annum.

In addition, there are a number of runs that form part of a multiple run arrangement (or non-standalone) which include vehicles operating primary and post primary services where one or more routes operated carry less than 10 eligible pupils. Nationally there were 919 non-standalone runs operating with less than 10 eligible pupils. There are a total of 11,877 pupils on these routes comprising 4,196 eligible pupils and 7,681 concessionary pupils. The annual savings in removing these routes are estimated to be in the region of €7.2m (assuming that no pupils will move school). Taking account of the pupil contributions currently made on these routes of almost €1.5m, the net saving is in the region of €5.6m per annum.

**Therefore the removal of routes with less than 10 eligible pupils would give an estimated saving of €12.9 million with 11,138 concessionary pupils losing services.**

***Reduction in Bus Sizes to Cater for Eligible Pupils Only***

The full implementation of the 2012 criteria from September 2021 to cater for eligible pupils only would see a downsizing of 605 vehicles. This would lead to:

- a saving of €131k over a school year;
- the loss of 6,977 concessionary places;
- all eligible pupils catered for.

**Therefore the reduction in bus sizes to cater for eligible pupils only would give a saving of €131k per year with 6,977 concessionary pupils losing services.**

In considering the above scenarios, it should be noted that of the 35% of primary pupils and 75% of post-primary pupils currently availing of transport on a concessionary basis, are over the requisite distance criteria from their nearest school and from the school that they are attending. If these pupils chose to go to their nearest school they would therefore be eligible for transport to that school. It is not possible to estimate the number of pupils who would choose to change school or the impact on those schools should this happen. However, withdrawing concessionary seats from these pupils would likely bring into focus the fact that they meet the basic distance criterion and potentially open up a front of significant opposition to the change.

### **Summary of Potential Savings and Impacts**

- Removal of routes with less than 10 eligible pupils has the potential to create savings of €12.9m.; reduction of bus sizes to cater for eligible pupils only has the potential to create savings of €131k, giving total savings per annum €13.035m per annum.
- The removal of over 18,115 concessionary places.
- 6,447 eligible pupils displaced by the removal of buses would have to be accommodated on other services or be offered a remote area grant, the cost of which will reduce the potential annual saving by an estimated €1.9m .

Table 6.1

<b>Summary</b>						
	€'000	€'000	€'000			
	<b>Est. Saving</b>	<b>PC Foregone</b>	<b>Net Est. Saving</b>	<b>Eligible Pupils displaced</b>	<b>Concessionary Pupils to lose seats</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Standalone</b>	€8,352	-€1,131	€7,221	2,251	3,457	5,708
<b>Non-Standalone</b>	€7,241	-€1,558	€5,683	4,196	7,681	11,877
<b>Downsizing</b>	€2,030	-€1,899	€131	0	6,977	6,977
<b>Total</b>	€17,623	-€4,588	€13,035	6,447	18,115	24,562

It is worth noting that that circa 12,000 concessionary pupils would continue to be catered for under this option as spare seats would continue to be offered where capacity exists after all eligible children are catered for. If these 12,000 concessionary pupils were to be removed also from transport this would result in a potential loss of €3.5m in parental contributions.

### **Benefits arising from this option:**

- School Transport operations policy would be in line with the Government announcements in Budget 2011;
- Annual savings anticipated at that time would be realised;
- There would be a significant reduction in the current numbers of non-eligible pupils availing of transport on a concessionary basis with associated estimated savings of €13.035m per annum;
- All eligible pupils would continue to be catered for with either a service or a remote area grant.

### **Issues and Risks arising from this option:**

- If the current number concessionary pupils who currently attend their second nearest school chose to attend their nearest school, thus becoming eligible, the estimated savings are reduced.
- A significant number of eligible pupils (6,447 pupils) would be displaced by the removal of buses. Where it is not possible to offer an alternative transport service, these families would be offered a Remote Area Grant to support them with the cost of providing their own transport arrangements. The cost of providing a grant would reduce savings outlined above. The average grant paid per family is per annum is €605. Assuming an average of 2 children per family, this could result in payment of the grant to an estimated 3,238 families or an annual payment of €1.9m. The cost of providing a grant would reduce savings outlined above.
- In addition, with regard to the eligible children displaced, it may not be possible for some families, who rely on school transport to get their pupils to school, to provide their own transport arrangements, particularly in current climate where people's financial circumstances may be negatively impacted as a result of Covid (job losses, reduced income for those on Pandemic Unemployment Payment, etc.) There are similar implications for families of concessionary pupils.
- Implementing the 2012 changes in full could result in a significant movement of pupils, causing accommodation pressures in schools that the pupils might move to while leaving spare capacity in the schools these pupils are currently attending;
- There are implications for parents and there are broader socio-economic and regional development implications.
- Removing such a significant number of concessionary and eligible pupils from the School Transport Scheme has the potential to increase car journeys with an

associated increase in carbon emissions, traffic congestion in towns and increased traffic at schools.

- There are implications for procurement and contractual issues with regard to operators currently providing services under a specified contract term.
- Removing such a significant number of concessionary and eligible pupils from the School Transport Scheme has the potential to impact significantly on the operations and therefore the viability of contractors currently providing services.
- This would be a significant change for families and pupils mid-way through the current application process and is not considered feasible either in advance of a full review of the scheme or within the short timeframe in advance of the new school year.
- The changes outlined above would result in a significant reorganisation of the school transport network as no service curtailments or withdrawals have taken place over a number of years and is not considered feasible either in advance of a full review of the scheme or within the short timeframe in advance of the new school year.
- While currently the issues that arise on an annual basis with regard to concessionary transport predominantly relate to post-primary transport, any largescale removal or downsizing of current services would have a significant impact on the available capacity for both primary and post-primary school transport services.

### **MAINTAIN THE SCHEME IN LINE WITH 2012-2019 CUSTOM AND PRACTICE**

Under this option, all pupils who are eligible for mainstream school transport who apply and pay on time would be accommodated on school transport. All other pupils (late eligible applicants and concessionary applicants) would only be accommodated where capacity exists after all eligible pupils who applied and paid on time have been catered for. No services would be removed or downsized, in line with custom and practice. However, the temporary alleviation measures put in place in 2019/20 and which continued in 2020/21 would be discontinued.

In 2019/20 a total of 76,238 eligible pupils availed of school transport. The 2020/21 school year is not an accurate reflection of normal operations as a result of Covid related restrictions which reduced the overall number of pupils availing of transport. Using the data on projected numbers for the 2020/21 school year there would have been an estimated 77,695 eligible pupils on transport had services operated as normal, an increase of 1,457 pupils on the previous year. This figure is expected to increase to 78,763 eligible pupils in the 2021/2022 school year, an increase of 1,068 pupils on the previous year or a total increase of 2,525 pupils between 2019/20 and 2021/22.

In the 2019/20 school year a total of 30,119 concessionary pupils availed of school transport. This figure was projected to increase to 30,447 in the 2020/21 school year and is expected to increase to an estimated 30,641 pupils in the 2021/22 school year.

Under the terms of the scheme, all eligible children (assuming they apply and pay on time) will be catered for. The increase of 2,525 eligible pupils between the 2019/20 and the 2021/22 school year could potentially displace this number of concessionary pupils who would otherwise be offered a ticket where capacity exists once all eligible pupils are catered for. However, based on current trends, 30% of these concessionary pupils (or 758 pupils) could be catered for arising from the increase in capacity on services provided for eligible pupils, resulting in an estimated 1,767 concessionary pupils losing their seat, reducing the number of concessionary pupils to an estimated 28,874 pupils in 2021/22. In addition, a projected additional 522 concessionary pupils (based on projections of an increase of 742 post-primary and a decrease of 220 primary pupils) would not be catered for.

**Table 6.2**

<b>Summary of Concessionary Pupils displaced by Increase in Eligible Pupils</b>				
	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>Inc. 19/20 to 21/22</b>
Total Eligible - Primary and Post-Primary	76,238	77,695	78,763	<b>2,525</b>
Total Concessionary - Primary and Post-Primary	30,119	30,447	30,641	<b>522</b>
Less Projected Concessionary Pupils to lose seats			1,767	
Estimated Projected Concessionary Pupils Carried			<b>28,874</b>	
<b>Assumption: An increase of 2,525 eligible pupils could displace 2,525 concessionary pupils. However, an increase in capacity for eligible pupils could result in an increase of circa 30% capacity which could be offered to concessionary pupils (or 758 pupils), therefore potentially displacing 1,767 concessionary pupils. The projected additional 522 concessionary pupils would not be catered for.</b>				

## **COSTS**

As set out in Section 4, Table 4.4, the estimated cost to operate the scheme for 2021 is €265.5m on the assumption that all projected eligible and concessionary pupils would have a ticket/seat on a school transport services. This cost includes €96.19m for mainstream and €152.31 for SEN services.

Under this option, services provided in 2019 for temporary alleviation measures would be removed. In addition, 1,767 concessionary pupils who currently avail of services would lose their seat. A projected additional 522 concessionary pupils (based on projections of an increase of 742 post-primary and a decrease of 220 primary) would not be catered for.

This would result in an estimated budget of €263.5m in 2021

**Benefits associated with this option:**

- No increased costs over above normal year on year increases as no additional concessionary or late eligible pupils will be catered for.
- All eligible pupils (who apply and pay on time) will be catered for.

**Issues and Risks associated with this option:**

- Due to the increase in projected eligible pupils, an estimated 1,767 concessionary pupils would lose their place on transport and no additional concessionary pupils would be offered a seat – a projected additional 522 concessionary pupils would not be catered for. This will impact mainly post-primary transport services and pupils.
- Potential savings of €13.035m not realised as a result of no downsizing or removal of routes.
- Removal of services for such a significant number of pupils could cause difficulty for families who rely on school transport to get their children to school and could result in barriers to education for these pupils.
- There would be increased and significant disquiet among parents and public representatives, due to the increased number of concessionary pupils who would lose transport services (with particular regard to post-primary pupils who may be eligible for transport to their nearest school but who are attending their second nearest school, in particular for areas where there is long-standing tradition for pupils to attend certain schools).
- Potential for greater impact in certain areas of the country particularly in rural communities where there may be no alternative modes of public transport.

**1. Maintain the scheme as it currently operates but with temporary alleviation measures on post-primary services similar to those in 2019**

This option involves the proposed implementation on a temporary basis of alleviation measures at post-primary in line with those implemented in 2019.

In 2019/20 a total of 76,238 eligible pupils availed of school transport, comprising 23,078 primary and 53,160 post-primary pupils. The 2020/21 school year is not an accurate reflection of normal operations as a result of Covid related restrictions which reduced the overall number of pupils availing of transport. Using the data on projected numbers for the 2020/21 school year there would have been an estimated total of 77,695 eligible pupils on



transport had services operated as normal, an increase of 1,457 pupils on the previous year. This figure is expected to increase to a total of 78,763 eligible pupils in the 2021/2022 school year, an increase of 1,068 pupils on the previous year or a total increase of 2,525 pupils between 2019/20 and 2021/22.

In the 2019/20 school year, 68,229 post primary pupils availed of school transport services. Of this figure, 15,069 pupils travelled on a concessionary ticket. Demand overall for transport at post-primary level is expected to peak in 2024 in line with demographics, with 2021 being the key year for increased demand for concessionary places.

As outlined above, in the 2019/2020 school year there were 15,069 post-primary pupils availing of transport on a concessionary basis. Based on projections, this number would have been expected to increase to 15,365 in 2020/21 and is expected to increase to 15,811 in 2021/22, or a total increase of 742 pupils between 2019/20 and 2021/22.

A combination of concessionary pupils displaced by the increase in eligible pupils of 1,767 pupils (as outlined in Option 2) and the additional projected number of 742 concessionary pupils would see a potential to provide for 2,509 concessionary post-primary pupils who would otherwise not be accommodated.

Based on current trends, and assuming that 75% of these pupils would meet the temporary alleviation criteria, transport would be provided for 1,882 pupils on a concessionary basis in 2021/22 who otherwise would not be accommodated on transport.

**Table 6.3**

<b>Summary of Projected Post-Primary Pupils to be Accommodated under Temporary Alleviation Criteria</b>				
	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>Inc. 19/20 to 21/22</b>
Total Eligible - Primary and Post-Primary	76,238	77,695	78,763	2,525
Total Concessionary - Primary and Post-Primary	30,119	30,447	30,641	522
Less Projected Concessionary Pupils to lose seats			<b>1,767</b>	
	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>Inc. 19/20 to 21/22</b>
Total Eligible - Post-Primary only	53,160	54,512	55,957	2,797
Total Concessionary - Post-Primary only	15,069	15,365	15,811	<b>742</b>
<b>Assumption: A combination of concessionary pupils displaced by the increase in eligible pupils, of 1,767 pupils, plus the additional projected 742 post-primary concessionary pupils would see a potential 2,509 concessionary pupils who would not be otherwise catered for. Based on current trends of 75% of post-primary pupils meeting the temporary alleviation criteria, transport would be provided for 1,882 pupils who otherwise would not be catered for <math>(742 + 1,767 = 2,509) \times 75\% = 1,882</math></b>				

Under this option, implementing temporary alleviation measures year would take the following format:

- Tickets would be issued to all eligible pupils who applied and paid on time (eligible pupils who apply or pay late are provided with a seat where possible).
- Bus Éireann would then identify areas where there is a significant concentration of post-primary pupils who have paid on time for the 2021/2022 school year, who are 4.8kms or more from their nearest school and who are attending their second nearest school. Additional services or increased sized buses would be provided in order to provide transport for pupils who meet this criteria on the post-primary transport scheme. This would only be considered where an existing bus route is in place and no new routes would be created.
- Any additional spare seats on services can then be issued to any concessionary pupils who do not fall into this category (e.g. pupils who are attending their third or fourth nearest school or who do not meet the requisite distance criteria)

## **COSTS**

As set out in Section 4, Table 4.4, the estimated cost to operate the scheme for 2021 is €265.5m on the assumption that all projected eligible and concessionary pupils (a total of 109,404 pupils) would have a ticket/seat on a school transport services.

An estimated 1,882 concessionary pupils would be accommodated on school transport in September 2021 under these temporary alleviation measures, with 627 concessionary pupils who would not be catered because they don't meet the criteria, giving total projected 108,777 pupils in 2021/22 at a projected cost of €265m, a reduction of €0.5m on the estimate above. This includes a cost of €1.67m to cater for concessionary pupils who meet the temporary alleviation criteria (this is based on an estimated cost per pupil of €887.51 per pupil but may vary dependent on the type of solution, i.e re-organisation of existing services or provision of an additional vehicle).

This results in an estimated budget of €265m in 2021.

### **Benefits arising from this option**

- An estimated 1,882 concessionary pupils would be accommodated on school transport in September 2021 thus reducing the disquiet and frustration among parents and families.
- It would remove the risk of the potential to increase car journeys with an associated increase in carbon emissions, traffic congestion in towns and at schools and associated traffic management issues
- This option set out to carry the maximum number of pupils, thus reducing the number of single use vehicles on roads therefore reducing carbon emissions and traffic congestion at schools.
- This option provides a better cost per pupil rate therefore increasing the efficiency of the expenditure on the scheme.

### **Issues and Risks arising from this option**

- Annual estimated savings of €13.035m that would be achieved from full implementation of 2012 scheme changes would not be realised.
- The estimated cost to cater for pupils under these measures is €1.6m.
- There is a risk of pressure on resources such as vehicles and drivers particularly if social distancing requirements are still in place in the 2021/2022 school year.

## Case Studies

For the purposes of this review, we have examined two areas where there have been a significant number of queries relating to requests for additional concessionary school transport in recent years. We have examined them to understand the reasons for concessionary transport growth and to examine the impact of the proposed scheme adjustment would have locally. We have examined both the implications of the full implementation of the 2012 criteria and the impact of implementing a scheme with temporary alleviation criteria. As the issues that arise on an annual basis with regard to eligibility are in the main on the post-primary scheme, the case studies have both been conducted on post-primary centres (PPCs). The two areas examined are Hospital PPC, Co. Limerick and Trim PPC, Co. Meath. Full details of the case studies are attached at appendix 2.

In summary, the implementation of the 2012 criteria in the two areas would result in:

- the removal of 6 routes;
- the downsizing of the vehicles on 3 routes;
- estimated savings of €87,013 per annum;
- the loss of approximately 295 concessionary places;
- the reassignment or payment of remote area grant for 94 eligible pupils displaced by removal of services.

**It is worth noting that in the Trim case study, the gross cost saving achieved through reducing bus sizes to cater for eligible pupils only is estimated to be €10,164 for the school year. Factoring in the loss of €26,050 from parental contributions from concessionary pupils who would lose their seats, would result in a net additional cost of €10,036 to cater for eligible pupils only.**

Overall implications of implementing temporary alleviation measures in the six areas will result in:

- 184 pupils who are eligible for transport to their nearest school but who are attending their second nearest school would be catered for;
- the savings outlined above would not be realised;
- Additional costs of circa 27k per annum could arise to cater for additional pupils who meet the criteria.

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## Issues Highlighted that Require Further Analysis in Phase 2

As part of the discussions of the Technical Working Group a number of issues were highlighted that the group felt further analysis is warranted. It was agreed that these issues are captured within the Terms of Reference for the review and that further examination and analysis of these issues will be considered in greater detail in the second phase of the review. The issues raised include:

- The need to consider the objectives of the scheme and whether it is to increase numbers on transport and reduce car journeys or is it to reduce costs of the scheme;
- Consideration to be given to an increase in the annual ticket charge;
- Consideration to be given to the impact of any changes to the scheme on the administration (in both terms of work/costs) of the scheme;
- Consideration to be given to the need to consider integration with public transport;
- Consideration to be given climate action consideration of reducing car journeys, reducing carbon emissions and fleet issues.

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## Findings and Recommendations

The 2012 scheme changes with regard to eligibility have never been implemented and this has resulted in a number of anomalies and in increasing numbers of children availing of school transport on a concessionary basis annually. The issues are more pronounced at post-primary level where every year there is a significant amount of disquiet from parents and political representatives where pupils who are deemed not eligible are not successful in getting a ticket for school transport, and causes particular issues for pupils who may have been allocated a ticket in previous years. In the majority of cases these pupils are eligible for transport to their nearest school but are attending their second nearest school.

A relatively small number of concessionary pupils are unsuccessful in getting a ticket on an annual basis but this causes a significant amount of disquiet and frustration for parents and impacts significantly on the time and resources of both School Transport Section and Bus Éireann on an annual basis.

It was not the intention of the 2012 scheme changes, as recommended in the 2011 Value for Money Review, to effect a widespread change to the schools traditionally attended by pupils from localities around the country. Such changes have potential implications for school planning and budgeting that were not anticipated in 2011.

With regard to scheme costs, the main cost driver on the Scheme in recent years is the SEN Transport Scheme. SEN costs increased by €61.3m between 2011 and 2019 while over the same period mainstream costs increased by €2.9m. The initial analysis on projected costs indicates, on the assumption that the scheme continues to operate as it does currently, that the SEN scheme will continue to be the main cost driver.

In considering these findings, the potential options considered by the Technical Working Group were:

- Fully Implement the 2012 Scheme Changes and remove/reduce services to cater for eligible pupils only.
- Maintain the scheme in line with 2012 to 2019 custom and practice
- Maintain the scheme as it currently operates but with temporary alleviation measures on post-primary services similar to those in 2019

A summary of the options is set out in Table 9.1 below:

Table 9.1

	<b>Option 1 Fully Implement the 2012 Scheme Changes and remove/reduce services to cater for eligible pupils only.</b>	<b>Option 2 Maintain the scheme in line with 2012 to 2019 custom and practice</b>	<b>Option 3 Maintain the scheme as it currently operates but with temporary alleviation measures on post-primary services similar to those in 2019</b>
Impact on Pupils availing of School Transport	<p>An estimated total of 84,842 mainstream pupils would be accommodated.</p> <p>An estimated 18,115 concessionary pupils would be removed from school transport.</p> <p>An estimated 6,447 eligible pupils would be displaced by the removal of these services.</p>	<p>An estimated total of 107,115 mainstream pupils would be accommodated.</p> <p>An estimated 1,767 concessionary pupils would lose their seat and an additional 522 pupils based on projections would not be catered for, a total of 2,289 concessionary pupils</p> <p>All eligible pupils who apply and pay on time would be accommodated.</p>	<p>An estimated total of 108,777 mainstream pupils would be accommodated.</p> <p>An estimated 1,882 concessionary post-primary pupils who meet the criteria would be catered for.</p> <p>All eligible pupils who apply and pay on time would be accommodated.</p>
Change in Exchequer costs arising from option	<p>Estimated annual savings of €13m. The estimated cost of the scheme in 2021 would be reduced pro-rata from September to December by €5.2m.</p> <p>This figure would be offset somewhat by grants in the estimated annual amount of €1.9m that may have to be offered to those displaced eligible pupils.</p>	<p>Savings of €13m forgone, or a saving of €5.2m in 2021 when reduced pro-rata from September to December 2021.</p> <p>The estimated cost of the scheme in 2021 would be €263.5m.</p>	<p>Savings of €13m forgone, or a saving of €5.2m in 2021 when reduced pro-rata from September to December 2021.</p> <p>The estimated cost of the scheme in 2021 would be €265m (which includes a cost of €1.67m to cater for pupils who meet the temporary alleviation criteria).</p>
Summary of Benefits	<p>Annual estimated savings of €13m would be achieved. However, this saving would be off-set somewhat by the cost of paying a grant to displaced eligible</p>	<p>All eligible pupils who apply and pay on time will be accommodated.</p>	<p>An estimated 1,882 concessionary post-primary pupils who meet the criteria would be catered for.</p> <p>All eligible pupils who apply and pay on time will be accommodated.</p>

	children, an estimated cost of €1.9m.		
Summary of Issues and Risks (excluding costs)	<p>This would be a significant change for families and pupils mid-way through the application process.</p> <p>A significant number of eligible children would also be displaced by the removal of services.</p> <p>Removing a significant number of children from transport could cause significant difficulties for families who rely on the scheme to get their children to school, particularly for families who may be impacted financially by the current pandemic.</p> <p>There are potential impacts on school accommodation, increased traffic congestion and carbon emissions.</p> <p>Potential procurement/contractual issues.</p> <p>A significant re-organisation of the school transport network would be required.</p> <p>While the issues with concessionary transport are currently more pronounced at</p>	<p>An estimated 2,289 concessionary pupils would not be accommodated, including an estimated 1,767 pupils currently on transport who would lose their seat.</p> <p>Continued and increased disquiet and frustration among families with particular regard to post-primary pupils who are eligible for transport to their nearest school but who are attending their second nearest school.</p> <p>Removing a significant number of children from transport could cause significant difficulties for families who rely on the scheme to get their children to school, particularly for families who may be impacted financially by the current pandemic</p>	<p>Potential pressure on resources such as vehicles and drivers particularly if social distancing remains a requirement on post-primary services for the 2021/2022 school year.</p>



	post-primary, this option would impact significantly on primary children also.		
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**Table 9.2**

<b>Costings under the different options</b>	<b>Option 1</b>	<b>Option 2</b>	<b>Option 3</b>
Projected total STS Costs 2021*	€265.5 m	€265.5m	265.5m
Projected Mainstream service Costs 2021*	€96.2m	€96.2m	€96.2m
Projected savings as outlined	€13.0m	€2.0m	€0.6m
Additional projected spend elsewhere as outlined	-€1.9m		-
Total projected cost in calendar year	€254.4m	€263.5m	€264.9m
Revised projected Mainstream costs based on above assumptions	€85.1m	€94.2m	€95.6m
Total Projected mainstream pupils in 2021	109404	109404	109404
Less concessionary not catered for.	-18115	-2289	-627
Less eligible displaced	-6447	0	0
Total projected mainstream pupils in calendar year under each option	84842	107115	108777
Projected rate per mainstream pupil under each option	€1,003	€879.43	€878.86

In considering the options, the Technical Working Group was mindful of the following:

- Given that a thorough review of the School Transport Scheme is required, it is important that any changes recommended from this phase are of a temporary nature so as not to impinge on the further deliberations and recommendations that will come from phase 2 of this review.
- The applications portal for the 2021/2022 school year is open and it is not considered possible to implement any permanent or significant changes to the scheme in advance of the upcoming school year.
- It is important to address, if even on a temporary basis for the upcoming school year, the issues that arise on an annual basis for the relatively small number of

mainly post-primary concessionary children who are not successful in getting a ticket for school transport.

- The potential impact of Covid and any restrictions that may be in place for September 2021 are an unknown at this stage.

## Conclusion

Having fully considered the options and pending the outcome of the full review the Technical Working Group recommends implementation of option 3 for September 2021 – that is, maintain the scheme as it currently operates but with temporary alleviation measures similar to those in 2019 on post-primary transport. This recommendation is based on the analysis of benefits over risks/issues for each option and the value achieved on a per pupil basis. This option displaces the least amount of eligible pupils and provides transport to meet expected demand for service users and is therefore aligned to the commitment in the Programme for Government to reduce car journeys thus promoting sustainable transport, reducing traffic congestion at schools and in towns, and supports rural communities where alternative means of public transport may not be an option. This option will result in transport being provided for an estimated 1,882 post-primary pupils in the 2021/2022 school year, who are eligible for transport to their nearest school but are attending their second nearest school, at an estimated cost of €1.6m for a full year.

While any associated Covid-19 restrictions that may be required from September 2021 are an unknown at this stage, an analysis has been conducted to estimate the net cost of school transport services in 2021. This costings takes account of the following:

- savings in the earlier part of the school year arising from school closures – estimated to be €20.5m
- Additional costs of Covid-19 related measures from September to December 2021 as are currently in place (50% capacity on post primary service and additional cleaning costs on all routes) – estimated to be €42m.
- a provision for temporary alleviation measures from September to December 2021 including Covid-19 measures – estimated to be €933k.

The total revised budget requirement for 2021 is estimated to be €323.3. (total allocation for 2021 is €320.7m). This revised budget requirement includes an estimated budget cost of €74.4m for Covid-19 measures.

This recommendation to implement temporary alleviation measures on post-primary services in September 2021 is made pending the outcome of the Phase 2 of this Review which will involve a thorough review of the School Transport Scheme and from which recommendations for any changes of a permanent nature will ensue.

## Next Steps

The Technical Working Group will present this Phase 1 report to the Steering Group for their consideration and deliberations on the proposed recommended option.

Following this, and in consultation with the Steering Group, the Technical Working Group will commence work on Phase 2 of the review. This will involve a more in-depth analysis of the School Transport Scheme in line with the Terms of Reference. This next phase of the review will build on the data gathering exercise and findings of Phase 1 and will involve a comprehensive examination of the scheme in terms of how each element of the scheme currently operates, to include eligibility criteria, trends, costs and cost drivers, overall effectiveness in meeting the objectives of the scheme and fiscal sustainability. Phase 2 of the review will also examine the potential for integration of different strands of the scheme and a more co-ordinated approach with other Government Departments that also fund transport services.

The Technical Working Group will report to the Steering Group on an interim basis, in line with an agreed project plan, with a view to preparing a final report with recommendations on the future operation of the School Transport Scheme.

## Appendix 1 - table of breakdown of changes to the schemes

### PRIMARY CHANGES FROM 2011/12 and 2012/13

	Pre 2011/12, 2012/13	Current
3.2 KMS OR OVER FROM NEAREST SCHOOL	ELIGIBLE	ELIGIBLE
CLOSED SCHOOL	ELIGIBLE	CEASED
CENTRAL SCHOOL	ELIGIBLE	CEASED
ONE TEACHER SCHOOL	ELIGIBLE TO NEXT NEAREST	
CHARGE	NO CHARGE IF ELIGIBLE  €200 IF NOT ELIGIBLE (FARE PAYING CONCESSIONARY)	NOW €100 per child for both eligible and concessionary, €200 for 2 children and family max. of €220
MEDICAL CARD WAIVER – IF ELIGIBLE	NO CHARGE	NO CHARGE
MEDICAL CARD WAIVER – IF NOT ELIGIBLE	€200	CHARGE
MINIMUM NUMBERS FOR RETENTION OF SERVICES	7	10

### POST PRIMARY CHANGES FROM 2011/12 and 2012/13

	Pre 2011/12, 2012/13	Current
4.8KMS OR OVER FROM NEAREST POST PRIMARY CENTRE/SCHOOL	ELIGIBLE	ELIGIBLE

<b>4.8KMS FROM NEXT NEAREST POST PRIMARY CENTRE</b>	<b>CATCHMENT BOUNDARY ELIGIBLE</b>	<b>NOT ELIGIBLE</b>
<b>CHARGE</b>	<b>€300</b> <b>FAMILY MAX €650</b>	<b>€350</b> <b>FAMILY MAX €650</b>
<b>MEDICAL CARD WAIVER – IF ELIGIBLE</b>	<b>NO CHARGE IF FULLY ELIGIBLE OR CATCHMENT BOUNDARY ELIGIBLE</b>	<b>NO CHARGE IF ELIGIBLE</b>
<b>MEDICAL CARD WAIVER – IF NOT ELIGIBLE</b>	<b>CHARGE</b>	<b>CHARGE</b>
<b>MINIMUM NUMBERS FOR RETENTION OF SERVICES</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>

## Appendix 2 – Temporary Alleviation Measures 2012 – List of Areas

Area	Number of Pupils Alleviated
Coachford	10
Fermoy	16
Kinsale	51
Carnew	8
Trim	51
Sixmilebridge	20
Monaghan	9
Gorey	33
Johnstown	21
Loughrea	13
Johnstown Bridge Kilcock	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>
<b>Tranche 2</b>	
Cahir	12
Kilmuckridge	11
Spiddeal	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Tranche 3</b>	
Bandon	15
Middleton	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Tranche 4</b>	
New Ross	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Total Number of Pupils</b>	<b>343</b>

## Appendix 3 – Case Studies

### Case Study 1 – Hospital Post Primary Area

#### **2012 Implementation**

This section outlines the implications of implementing the 2012 scheme criteria in full from September 2021.

In total there are 15 routes into the Hospital post primary centre carrying 679 pupils of whom 432 are eligible and 247 concessionary. Of the 247 concessionary pupils, 164 pupils are over 4.8km from their nearest school and therefore would be eligible for school transport if they attended that school.

There will be two main areas of change:

- Where there are fewer than 10 eligible pupils routes will be removed
- Vehicles will be downsized to cater for eligible pupils only.

#### ***Removal of Routes***

Based on statistics available for the 19/20 school year there are 2 routes with fewer than 10 eligible pupils and this would be removed. This will lead to:

- In the short-term, a saving of €18,159 (net of parental contributions)
- the loss of 93 concessionary places,
- The reassignment of 2 pupils to other routes or giving them the remote area grant.

#### ***Downsizing of Vehicles***

The full implementation of the 2012 criteria from September 2021 would see a reduced bus size on 1 route. This will lead to:

- a saving of €7,006 over a school year, (net of parental contributions)
- the loss of 43 concessionary places,
- all eligible pupils catered for.

#### ***Conclusion***



In conclusion therefore the implementation of the 2012 criteria will result in:

- the removal of 2 routes
- the downsizing of the vehicle on 1 route.
- estimated savings of €25,165
- the loss of approximately 136 concessionary places

**Temporary Alleviation Measures for September 2021 and No Downsizing of Buses/Removal of routes pending the outcome of the Review**

If the Temporary Alleviation Measures were applied to the Hospital Post Primary Centre from September 2021 there will be a number of implications:

- 164 ineligible pupils who are attending their next nearest school will be accommodated on School Transport.
- There will be no medical card waiver for the 164 pupils as they remain to be considered concessionary
- There are 17 pupils who applied for but did not receive a concessionary ticket and vehicles may be required to be put on for these at a cost of €17,000 (this is on the assumption of a cost of €1,000 on average per pupil).
- There may be a further cohort of pupils who would apply for transport based on the new criteria though it is not possible to assess the impact of this at this local level.

**Conclusion**

To implement Temporary Alleviation Measures for September 2021 will result in:

- Savings of €25,165 will not be realised.
- Additional costs of €17,000 will arise for catering for the ineligible pupils who are attending their next nearest school.

## **Case Study 2 – Trim Post-Primary Area**

### **2012 Implementation**

This section outlines the implications of implementing the 2012 scheme criteria in full from September 2021.

In total there are 12 routes into the Trim post primary centre carrying 462 pupils of whom 258 are eligible and 204 are concessionary. Of the 204 concessionary pupils, 185 are over 4.8km from their nearest school and therefore would be eligible for school transport if they attended that school.

There will be two main areas of change:

- Where there are fewer than 10 eligible pupils routes will be removed
- Vehicles will be downsized to cater for eligible pupils only.

### ***Removal of Routes***

Based on statistics available for the 19/20 school year there are 4 routes with fewer than 10 eligible pupils and this would be removed. This will lead to:

- In the short-term, a saving of €71,884 (net of parental contributions)
- the loss of 90 concessionary places,
- The reassignment of 8 pupils to other routes or giving them the remote area grant.

### ***Downsizing of Vehicles***

The full implementation of the 2012 criteria from September 2021 would see a reduced bus size on 2 routes. This will lead to:

- Savings of €10,614 over a school year. However it would also see a loss of parental contributions in the amount of €20,650 resulting in a net increase of €10,036 over a school year.
- the loss of 69 concessionary places,
- all eligible pupils catered for.

### ***Conclusion***

In conclusion therefore the implementation of the 2012 criteria will result in:

- the removal of 4 routes

- the downsizing of the vehicle on 2 routes
- estimated net savings of €61,848
- the loss of approximately 159 concessionary places

**Temporary Alleviation Measures for September 2021 and No Downsizing of Buses/Removal of routes pending the outcome of the Review**

If the Temporary Alleviation Measures were applied to the Trim Post Primary Centre from September 2021 the will be a number of implications:

- 185 ineligible pupils who are attending their next nearest school will be accommodated on School Transport.
- There will no medical card waiver for the 185 pupils as they remain to be considered concessionary
- There are 10 pupils who applied for but did not receive a concessionary ticket and vehicles may be required to be put on for these at a cost of €10,000 (this is on the assumption of a cost of €1,000 on average per pupil).
- There may be a further cohort of pupils who would apply for transport based on the new criteria though it is not possible to assess the impact of this at this local level.

**Conclusion**

To implement Temporary Alleviation Measures for September 2021 will result in:

- Savings of €61,848 will not be realised.
- Additional costs of €10,000 will arise for catering for the ineligible pupils who are attending their next nearest school.