

Rehab Group Submission to the National Transport Authority on the Draft Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy

We wish to make the following submission to the National Transport Authority (NTA) regarding the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (LSMATS).

In summary, we urge the following:

1. Rehab service users and NLN students in the Limerick-Shannon area are invited to participate in the proposed Walkability Audit
2. The provision of accessible bicycles and their parking facilities are incorporated into the Strategy to achieve the aim of providing cycling facilities for all individuals
3. People with disabilities are consulted throughout the design process of cycle lanes to ensure that they are safe for pedestrians and cyclists, and considerate of peoples' abilities
4. A consultation process that includes people with disabilities who use public transport in the Limerick-Shannon area to ensure that any changes made to the routes and bus stop facilities are accessible and safe
5. The use of private cars and taxi access in pedestrianised zones for people with disabilities in town and city centres and to include disabled parking spaces in these areas

The Rehab Group

The Rehab Group is one of the largest not-for-profit organisations in Ireland providing specialist services to persons with a disability and people who are at a disadvantage. We provide direct services to over 10,000 people including children and adults. We champion the values of diversity and inclusion for persons with a disability or disadvantage in their communities throughout Ireland.

Our mission is to help change the lives of the people we serve by helping them to become more independent and more included in their communities, by empowering them with the skills and confidence to be active in the workforce, and supporting them to be in charge of their health and wellness. The Rehab Group is comprised of RehabCare, National Learning

Network and Rehab Enterprises. We specialise in residential, supported accommodation, respite and day services, home support services, further education and training and employment for individuals with a disability and people who are disadvantaged.

We welcome the LSMATS (hereby referred to as the Strategy) consultation process which has provided us with the opportunity to present the NTA with feedback from people with disabilities that use our services. We have six services in the Limerick Shannon area. We have identified aspects of the Strategy that could affect people with disabilities living in the Limerick-Shannon area, particularly the people that use Rehab and NLN services, which we address here and make recommendations. We aim to ensure that the Strategy accommodates all abilities, and does not neglect the transport and access needs of persons with disabilities living in the area.

1. Active Journeys

The Strategy's focus on active journeys with measures to encourage the public to walk or cycle for a segment of their journey is welcome, as it promotes public health and reduces carbon emissions. However, it is not evident in the Strategy as to how this will be encouraged or supported among persons with disabilities. The Strategy references the supports required to encourage able-bodied members of the public to incorporate physical activity into their journeys. However, it does not stipulate how it will accommodate persons with limited mobility and wheelchair users to make the same healthy and environmentally-friendly choice. The concern is that people with disabilities will be excluded from making this choice, and could be penalised if not accommodated for in the Strategy.

Walking

We ask that the Strategy recognise and accommodates all people's abilities. Someone with limited mobility may find that walking or 'wheeling' to their destination from a bus stop or train station is unfeasible or difficult. We would ask that the planning of bus routes and park and ride facilities, etc., consider this to include people with limited mobility to make their journey more comfortable and accessible.

We welcome that the plan includes a Walkability Audit. This is something familiar to the Rehab Group as people who use our services in Carrick-On-Shannon participated in a Walkability Audit in the recent past. This was a successful collaboration which led to important changes to the towns footpaths, road crossings and walkways, making services in the town more accessible to people with disabilities living in the community.

We consulted our service users on the proposed Strategy. Some of the people who use our services in the Limerick-Shannon area highlighted the poor conditions of footpaths. One

person said that it's "very difficult for people with sight or mobility issues" to access the city and surrounding areas due to these conditions. People with limited mobility and wheelchair users who use footpaths regularly as part of their journeys are best placed to inform the Strategy of requirements needed to make footpaths safe and accessible.

We ask that students and service users in the area are invited to participate in the Walkability Audit suggested in the Strategy so that feedback can be given based on lived experience. This would ensure that the Strategy achieves one of its listed outcomes: a fully accessible, safe, and attractive pedestrian environment suitable for all ages and abilities.

Cycling

We equally welcome the initiative to promote cycling in the Limerick-Shannon area. The Strategy outlines its aims to give all individuals the choice to cycle and this must include people with disabilities. The Strategy includes measures to implement a Shared Bike Scheme however no reference is made to how it will accommodate people with disabilities within this scheme. Wheelchair accessible bikes and accessible bike parking facilities can contribute to the social inclusion of people with disabilities, and support them to make healthier and eco-friendly choices. These facilities must be invested in if the Strategy is to achieve its outcome of providing the option to cycle for all individuals.

We ask that accessible bicycles and facilities are incorporated into the Strategy to achieve the aim of providing cycling facilities for all in the Limerick-Shannon area.

We would also like to express concerns around the design of cycle lanes in relation to footpaths. Cycle lanes must be safe for both cyclists and pedestrians. A physical marker is necessary to segregate footpaths from cycle lanes, where people who are visually impaired can identify where the footpath is. We also recommend controlled crossing measures for pedestrians to cross cycle lanes safely, as this can be a hazard, and a deterrent, for some people with disabilities.

We ask that people with disabilities are consulted throughout the design process of the cycle lanes to ensure that they are safe for all pedestrians and cyclists, and considerate of peoples' abilities.

2. Public Transport

We welcome the Strategy's aim to provide a reliable, frequent public transport service to improve connections between Limerick City and the suburbs as well as the provision of Park and Ride services. Public transport is an essential service to many people who have a disability, particularly those living in rural and suburban areas. Public transport ensures a vital connection between people with disabilities and their families, friends, communities and services. The maintenance and enhancement of regional bus networks and Local Link

services are also of importance for those living in rural areas.

Significant changes to bus routes can be challenging for people with disabilities. We ask that the NTA consult people with disabilities who use public transport in the Limerick-Shannon area to ensure that any changes made to the routes and bus stop facilities are accessible and safe.

We also ask that disability awareness training is provided to all public transport staff in the area, and that information on transport routes are disability friendly. This will ensure an accessible and inclusive public transport service.

We ask that Park and Ride facilities accommodate persons with disabilities by providing a sufficient number of disabled car parking spaces as near to the bus stop as possible.

We also ask that that NTA include improved bus stop facilities within the Strategy. Sheltered bus stops with seating would accommodate people with limited mobility and create a more comfortable experience for people with disabilities using public transport.

3. Private Car Access to City and Town Centres

While the prioritisation of pedestrians in town and city centres is welcome, we would like to highlight the importance of private car access to city centres and high streets for people with disabilities. Some people with limited mobility and wheelchair users require the use of accessible cars and taxis to reach their destination.

We ask that the Strategy includes a plan for disabled parking in pedestrianised zones with the required safety measures to accommodate people with disabilities. This will allow wheelchair users and those with limited mobility to access high streets and town and city centres comfortably and easily like all other members of the public.