

# **Transport and Fleet Maintenance**

## **Service Transformation**

APSE Transport & Fleet Maintenance Advisory Group 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023

# Background to EANI Transport

- The Education Authority was established under the Education Act Northern Ireland 2014, and became operational on 1 April 2015 following the amalgamation of the five former Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland. The Education Authority (EA) is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department of Education (DE).
- EA is responsible to DE for ensuring that efficient and effective primary and secondary education services are available to meet the needs of children and young people
- The EA helps with all aspects of a child's journey through education from admission to pre-school, getting transport to school, changing schools, to moving through primary and post-primary
- The EA provides transport assistance to eligible pupils in accordance with DE policy – Circular No 1996/41
- EA Transport manages home to school transport for 90,000 pupils daily across all of Northern Ireland to mainstream and SEN schools.
- Transport is delivered using EA own fleet of school buses, Translink (public transport) passes and Private Operator / taxi services.

# EA Transport Resource

- 85 EA Transport Office Staff and Management
- 700 EA School Bus Drivers
- 525 Bus Escorts

- 820 EA School Buses (23,000 pupils)
- 325 Private Operators (8,000 pupils)
- 1100 Taxis (4,000 pupils)
- Translink (51,000 pupils)
- Parental Allowance (4,000)

## Mix of Internal and Outsourced Vehicle Maintenance

- 5 Outsourced VM Providers
- 6 EA VM Garages
- 35 Foremen / Mechanics / Support Roles
  
- EA holds two Vehicle Operating Licences
  - International Bus Operators Licence
  - Restricted Goods Vehicle Operating Licence



# Service Transformation



The establishment of the EA in 2015 highlighted inevitable regional variances from the former structure of five education and library boards but, critically, the underpinning government transport policy relating to school transport remained unchanged

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By 2019 EA Transport faced an aging fleet with reliability issues, EA garages with out-of-date procedures and lack of mechanic training, a lack of driver training, five versions of every procedure from the former ELB areas and almost entirely manual administration procedures. A radical transformation of EA Transport was required and has been on-going since 2019.

## Achieving Transformation

Staff Restructure to introduce three specialist Transport services:

- Transport Operations
- Business and Performance
- Fleet Services

# Service Transformation Completed

- Approval for £50m investment over 5 years in EA school buses, with £36m of new buses now in service, improving driver and pupil experience.
- EA Mechanic training to ensure the new vehicles can be maintained to the highest standard to protect our investment for many years to come, and the introduction of an apprentice scheme to ensure new talent is recruited to secure our garage future.
- Full driver familiarisation training for new vehicles.
- The introduction of online transport applications and an online transport eligibility checker.
- Investment in a Private Operator Portal to manage outsourced transport compliance.
- Introduction of Locality Inspector roles to check Private Operator and taxi compliance.
- Revised Driver Handbook
- Full revision of Risk Assessments for all Transport procedures



# Service Transformation in Progress

- SMART Bus – Business case in progress to introduce digitalisation to EA Transport
  - Route Optimisation software for efficient route planning
  - Telematics for fuel efficiency and managing driving behaviours
  - Tracking of pupils utilising the service for improved safeguarding
- Following the implementation of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland 2022) Northern Ireland is required by law to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 and must reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 48% by 2030. The EA currently has a £200m budget deficit and therefore the introduction of zero emission vehicles has been postponed. However, the following actions are in progress:
  - Trial of HVO as renewable fuel source
  - Queens University Belfast MEng Research Project on Zero Emission Fleet Solutions for EA Home to School Transport
  - Internal Project initiation for Zero Emission Fleet Solutions for EA Home to School Transport which will include outputs of QUB MEng Research Project.
  - SBRI Carbon Capture Project to digitalise the mapping and monitoring of the EA Carbon Footprint.



# Transformation Challenges

- £200m budget deficit. Currently no capital available for projects. BAU only.
- Challenges with recruiting and retaining drivers, escorts and vehicle maintenance staff due to pay rates compared to Private Sector.
- Significant increase in number of SEN referrals each year.
- Limited provision of taxi and private operator services creating cost increases
- Limited staff resource to work on projects.

The challenges are huge with budgetary pressures and increasing service demand, but the spirit and tenacity of the EA Transport Team is its greatest strength, which will ensure we continue to transform our service for many years to come.



Thank you!

Any  
Questions?

