



## **Who we are**

Translink is Northern Ireland's public transport provider, with bus, coach and train services, connecting cities, towns and villages throughout Northern Ireland as well as some cross-border routes.

Belfast services are operated by Metro/Glider.

Coach services are operated by Goldliner.

Local bus services and town services are operated by Ulsterbus.

Train services are operated by NI Railways.

The Belfast - Dublin Enterprise train is operated in partnership with Irish Rail.

We also offer Park and Ride services and high frequency services to Belfast and Dublin airports.

Translink employs approx. 4,200 staff.

Public Transport services support the economy, boosting tourism, retail and business and are crucial to the Social, Economic and Environmental wellbeing of Northern Ireland.

## **Overview and objectives**

Translink's Safety Bus is an invaluable, free resource, promoting the safe use of buses - and promoting public transport to future users. It is a grassroots project started and curated by frontline staff, achieving results in the promotion of bus use and reduction in anti-social behaviour on/around buses.

The safety bus is celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022 and approximately 450,000 pupils have used the resource since it was first launched.

Inspired by the first 'Bee Safe' event in 2002, along with attacks on buses by children of school age, the Safety Bus was conceived by bus driver Susan O'Neill. A number of attacks on buses that year added impetus to introduce this education resource, allocating a vehicle and driver to educate young people on risks of anti-social activities such as vandalism and trespassing.

It is available at school open nights, at 'Bee Safe' events, as an introduction to safe bus use, and as part of induction activity at secondary school. It primarily runs specialised classes at schools and communities, educating children on road safety

issues around public transport with a dedicated vehicle, specially adapted and liveried with safety messages.

It features graffiti-style graphics with localised, youth-oriented sayings and a digital CCTV system which is linked to the onboard monitor to give an insight into how incidents are captured and investigated.

Children can view Translink's "Travel Safe" DVD on board, as well as a bespoke presentation (delivered by the team), illustrating the impacts of anti-social behaviour. The Safety Bus bolsters relationships with schools and the community and has been viewed by schools as an integral part of the delivery of their enriched curriculum.

The safety bus plays a vital role in educating primary and secondary school students about safe bus use, including safety features on buses, the importance of wearing seatbelts and the reason for on board CCTV.

It aims to:

- encourage young people to use public transport;
- educate them on the dangers of anti-social behaviour on and around public transport;
- provide a platform for direct engagement with young people engaged in dangerous behaviours on or around buses.

It also addresses general bus etiquette - including signalling for the driver to stop, letting people get off the bus before boarding, respecting other passengers, putting tickets in the bin, not putting bags on seats, moving up the bus to create space at the front and where to stand in preparation for disembarking.

The Safety Bus can visit approximately 350 schools, or up to 25 thousand students, each academic year and demand is high. It prioritises schools or communities where there may be issues, to engage with young people in a "different" way, which encourages buy-in from the schools and students.

A majority of the Safety Bus promotion is done through contacting new schools/educational bodies directly and explaining/demonstrating the benefits of the service.

Due to the success and popularity of the safety bus, we have found that once a school has used the safety bus, they contact us for repeat bookings each school year.

The initiator of the project, Susan O'Neill, is still at the forefront of the Safety Bus and has, along with fellow Safety Bus Co-Ordinator, Kevin Wallace, developed the initiative, presentation and learning objectives organically as the project continues to grow.

Other staff (particularly drivers' trade unions) have been briefed and involved since the Safety Bus' inception, and are hugely supportive, especially given the benefits to the safety of staff and passengers alike.

Glider, a bus rapid transit system, launched in Belfast in September 2019. The Safety Bus team incorporated Glider safety into their presentations as well as training on the all new off-vehicle ticketing systems and route information. Another recent development has been expansion to cover rail safety: key rail staff were brought along to assist in existing presentations and were encouraged to input into the further development of these presentations - and on key messages.

## **Results**

The Safety Bus has educated over 450,000 young people on road safety, including every 11-year-old child in Greater Belfast over the last decade.

Key achievements include a 50% reduction in glass bills (bus windows) in the inaugural year of the Safety Bus and a 90% recall of safety messages among past 'patrons' of the safety bus.

Drivers feel empowered and supported as they know that action will be taken if they report bad behaviour on buses involving school children.

The Safety Bus has provided a blueprint for community-based safety projects. Rail managers have also been trained to speak to schools, and rail trips and safety competitions relating to rail travel have successfully operated in schools throughout NI.

The Safety Bus team also educates on the dangers of playing in and around railways (Translink also operates the railway network in NI), especially relevant due to ongoing maintenance works on key sections of the network and engineering testing.

Translink's Safety Bus team also initiated a Community Safety Art project in West Belfast, encouraging children to design a poster on anti-social behaviour, with the winning art displayed on buses in West Belfast. They are then invited to receive prizes from the Lord Mayor of Belfast; a school trip is a further prize. This project has helped reduce the number of stone throwing attacks on buses, creating a sense of ownership among children in key areas.

Safety Bus staff are also involved in Northern Ireland's Youth Conference as the 'corporate victim' for Translink. The aim of the conference is to bring all parties together to discuss the impact of anti-social behaviour and to address how the young person can make amends for damage they have caused. The team's role within the conference is to explain to young people the effect they have on the wider Translink employees. The cost of fixing the bus, the impact on the cleaners and engineers. There is a wide range of ways that the youth justice system supports and works with

young people who offend. This includes helping young people to improve their behaviour and integrate back into their communities and it encourages young people to make amends for their crimes.

The Safety Bus is considered by educators to be a part of their curriculum, creating relationships with schools/pupils. Schools have known contacts within Translink; concerns can be resolved quickly.

We continue to develop the liaison role of Safety Bus Co-Ordinators, addressing concerns directly with schools. This is effective in targeting specific incidents of anti-social behaviour, showing that Translink take the safety of passengers seriously and will respond accordingly.

The "Travel Safe" DVD was created to support the Safety Bus. Content is currently being refreshed in line with recent learnings and developments in road safety and technology.

In 2021, the team established new links with two Special Needs schools to educate young people how to use the bus safely.

A new presentation has also been created to meet the changing needs of young people.

The Safety Bus also continues to work in partnership with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Road Traffic police on 'The Road & Bus Safety Project'.

The team has also supported local community festivals and continues to work with the Youth Justice Agency on Youth Conferences for young people who have been involved with anti-social behaviour on Buses and Trains.

The team were also involved in putting together an innovative campaign - 'Don't be a Melter' social media and video campaign in summer 2020 to educate young people about social distancing and wearing face coverings during the Coronavirus pandemic. Using their local knowledge and contacts they ensured the right people from the community were involved, sending the right message regarding safe use of Translink services in the midst of the pandemic.

The Safety Bus team also played a vital role in the Christmas "Stuff a Bus" campaign (virtual over the last two years) helping to generate awareness and support.

During the pandemic when pupils were educating at home, the team diversified and adapted to enable them to continue to play a valuable role in the local community. Linking with Colin Neighbourhood's 'Good Morning' project, they delivered activity packs for vulnerable people and seniors throughout the wider Lisburn and Moira area as well as assisting in contacting the elderly and vulnerable people each morning on the phone, asking about their well-being and offering support.

Translink is now recruiting drivers who have been positively influenced by safety bus officers in recent years, testament to the strong and positive messaging and response to the safety bus.