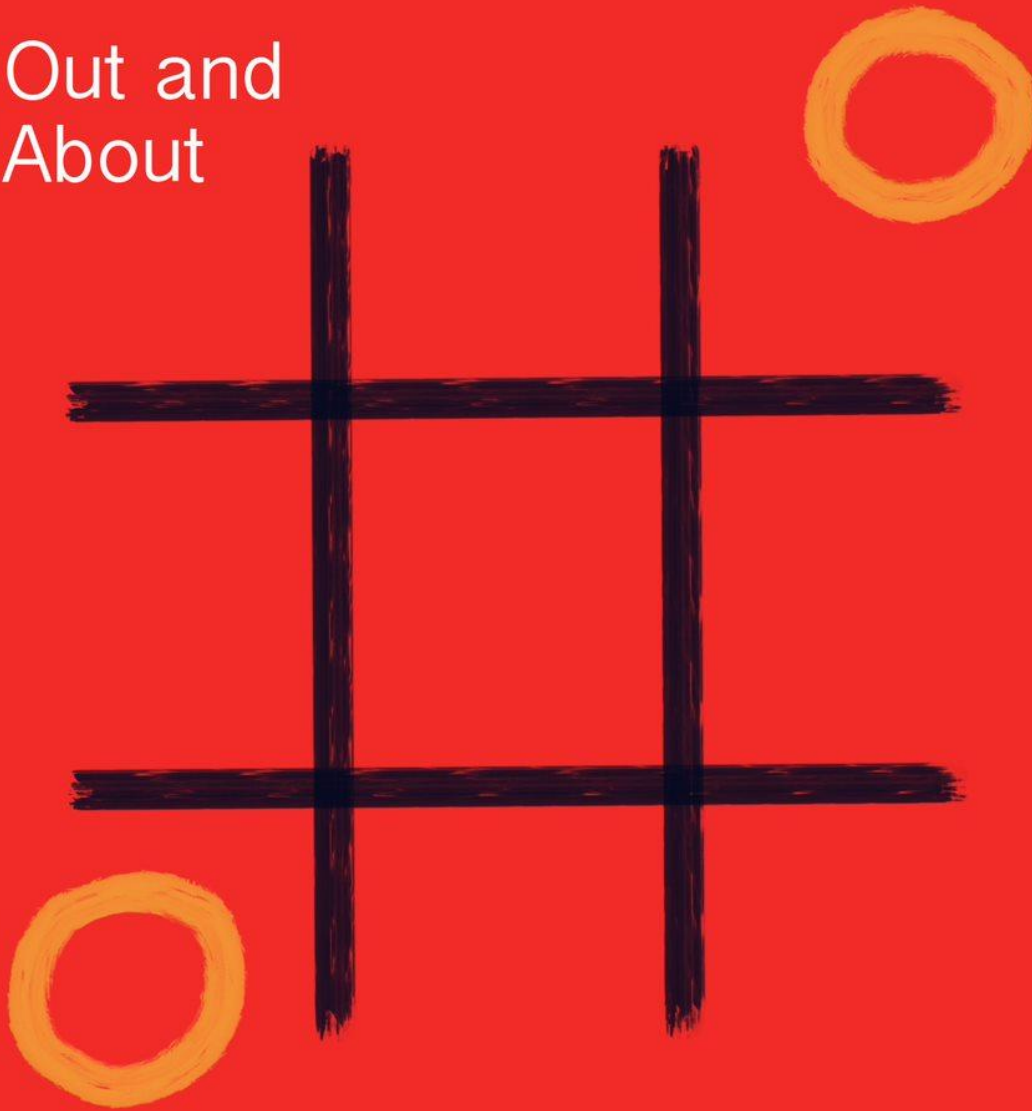


Out and About



S1E6: Out and About: Real Time Passenger Experiences

Description: A journey on the Luas in the company of Barry O' Donnell - disability advocate, member of the Luas User Group, cane user and regular traveller on public transport – and to Roger Flood, leader of the Dublin Bus Travel Assist Programme. Later in the episode, Sarah talks to Aoife O'Connell from Transdev about the Luas Travel Assistance Scheme.

Guests: Barry O'Donnell, Roger Flood and Aoife O'Connell

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Hello and welcome to All Aboard TII's accessibility podcast this is a podcast about accessibility and sustainable public transport brought to you by Transport Infrastructure Ireland I'm Claire Scott and I'm joined by our All Aboard podcast host Sarah O'Donnell throughout the series we'll be hearing first-hand accounts from people who use and design public transport systems and specifically the role accessibility plays in these experiences who is this podcast for in the first instance we hope to connect with people with disabilities who use our services but also it's for anyone who is drawn to human interest stories and has a curiosity to learn more and of course we hope to attract listeners who are designers and decision makers for Transport Systems who through the podcast might get a better understanding of some of the problems and potential solutions that are out there so without further ado let's give this a go and get all aboard TII's accessibility podcast

Hi Sarah so what's coming up on this episode Hi Claire so in this episode we take a journey on the Luas in the company of Barry O'Donnell who is a cane user and Roger Flood who leads the Dublin Bus travel assist scheme it was recorded over two sessions so a very big thank you to them both for their time and expertise later in the program we chat to Aoife O'Connell who was Communications officer with Transdev and she tells us all about the Luas Travel Assistance scheme so enjoy a short production note as Sarah mentioned parts of this episode were recorded on location and while we hope this enhances the listener experience there may be a small impact on sound quality in parts please enjoy

Okay so we're here this morning on Cabra Luas stop and I'm joined by Roger flood who leads the Dublin bus travel assist program and I'm also joined by Barry O'Donnell Barry is a cane user he's a member of the Luas user group and he's also a broadcaster and an activist I would say Barry is that a fair description so what I'd love to do is chat about the travel assist program for people who aren't that familiar with it and also then Barry maybe to talk to you about some of the features on the platform and indeed on the tram when we go on that in a while what works what doesn't work so Roger if I could start with you maybe you could tell people about the travel assist program a little bit about the background and who typically uses it okay so the travel assist program was set up 15 years ago but I if I remember correctly it was Minister Seamus Brennan who was in England senior working over there and then brought it back to Ireland and introduced it to us and the people that use the service are from the age of 18 and over and it's based on anybody that feels that he could benefit from the service so we would work with all different disability groups and we would work with the elderly and basically anybody that wants to use the service excellent and although it's called it's known as the Dublin bus travel assist you help people on all modes of Transport so Irish Rail Dart and Luas we covered all forms of Transport one in the Dublin greater the greater Dublin area very good and in your experience like we're on the Luas platform here what are the recurring issues that have come up so everything there that when we got to meet someone first it's all about confidence okay so before I actually go out with a person or one of the team would go out with a person we would have had our homework done so when we go to meet someone and I don't know which way this is going to sound when we go to meet and work with someone and we we don't have issues because everything is done we know what we're saying like for this today now if I was doing this if me and Barry were doing a journey today I would have been doing this journey blindfolded right okay getting to know the house I

would walk to journey first and then I plan for myself working on the route and I'm just looking around to see what landmarks we would have and I would I would work on that and then introduce it to the person I'm working with fantastic and Barry it's standing on the Cabra platform now maybe do you want to talk through for listeners just about some of the features even from the tactile to the help points to anything else and how you navigate that as a cane user okay so in this station itself there's a ramp leading up to road level so there's no lifts here so the ramp will bring you straight down to the platform there will be what's called Lozenge tactile.

So there's three rows of that at the platform edge to save you going over it in error so in terms of other items on the platform is there's a help point and that's located beside the ticket machine now you can press the button and you can ask the control person what time is the next Luas due and what's its direction so you don't need to have a phone or an app or be able to use a phone or an app this is always here one slight problem is trying to locate the help point because it's not kind of beside a wall like our railing like you'd have in O'Connell Street upper this is kind of in the middle of the platform so your cane Arc and the swing going from left to right you'd have a bit of trouble trying to find it I did however know where it was because somebody had used the ticket machine and it said please take your ticket and your change so that gave me my orientation but if that person hadn't been there I would have had a problem trying to find it and you've mentioned in the past very you know that what might be useful would be a line of tactile running perpendicular from the face of the platform and directing people to the help point and that would be that would be a useful addition to the platform layout yeah because as a person is scanning the Lozenge tactile with their with their cane and indeed so people walk on the Lozenge tactile having a tactile strip kind of leading towards the help point will make it a lot easier and also towards exits because trying to find exits here are a little bit complex as well so Roger in you've been doing this you said for 15 years what would you say across all the modes you know where have the improvements been or where are the areas where it just it kind of we need to make more progress I every time I probably mentioned people I work with all the time but every time that I go to work with someone I always try and work on the positives yeah so we just say even coming onto this platform now I know that myself and Barry I hope Barry would agree that if we worked on this if there was nobody buying a ticket at the machine I'm 100% sure that me and Barry for a few practice runs would have this machine and have our little landmarks in time at Barry's place yeah in terms of the positives obviously where we're standing this morning is a positive because this wasn't here a while back.

I just wanted to talk Roger about I know from like I work with the Luas user group with Barry attends the meetings and the feedback when Luas cross city was being built and there was an awful lot of construction on the street that the travel assist program was a Lifeline for people so maybe if you'd both like to talk a little bit about that and for future projects like where we're building Metrolink and there's going to be more disruption what would be important for people and maybe Roger have you started and then Barry if you'd like to speak so so again when we when we go to work with people and we have a plan a okay but we also have a plan B so when there is something going wrong whether it's traffic whether it's Works going on we have a plan B in other words that we will use a certain push through while this work is going on so we never look at anything as a major problem we look at okay this is

this is a skill I'm going to learn and it's going to add to the skill that I already have and it works out as a plus very good and Barry some of the things that have come up in the user group meetings would be the temporary polls the concrete pole Foundation yeah okay so one of the problems we had initially was we'd we'd walk out to a pedestrian Crossing pole but we couldn't find the button and we didn't realize that these were actually in concrete blocks kind of knee height concrete blocks and we just had to reach a little bit further over to try and find the buttons similarly like bus stops could end up being in these concrete poles as well so you'd run into difficulty but after a while once you became aware of what to check for or search for it became plain sailing other things like obviously streets became building sites literally with railings and hoardings Etc and something like going down from Stephen's Green from Hume Street where fighting blindness is located down to Stephen's green down to Dawson Street you could hear angle grinders drilling Kango hammers it was very difficult to find bus stops and the great thing about Roger is he showed us a way around it you know you can take another route you can take an 11 46a bus two stops around the corner to Leeson Street cross the road at CUS then take the bus stop near the Sugar Club and just you know there was a way around it you kind of go backwards to go forwards and that's a solution that worked very well the same as trying to navigate through the city centre trying to get the bus stops over O'Connell Bridge became a nightmare just because of all the road works and fencing Etc Roger showed us the way around it get the Luas from Abbey Street stop up to museum go around the corner and join the 37 from Blackhall place so there's always a way around the problem you know you might have to go backwards to go forwards you might have to take in different means of transport to get by the problem but you know that's something that Roger trained us well on and you know we picked it up Roger is that a matter of people just calling and you getting to know people and that you know if there are kind of changes happening on the ground that they can give you a call and you work together on it so I think what Barry was saying there is excellent is because sometimes the longest route is the safest route and sometimes we have to do that to ensure our own safety and in terms of when like does sorry G spine starting now soon in the Ballyfermot Cherry Orchard area and so what we've already done now is we've visited groups booked them in for talks and we're going to be starting that in October so we'll be going out and letting them know letting them know what has to be done I think next week we're going out we're putting the bus out and we're just going to show them the new number and we're just going to do a little tour of which way the bus is going to go so what will happen is the travel assist team which there's four of us will dedicate our time to that area until we can support everybody towards independent travel under new changes very good and are there plans to roll out the travel assist program to Cork I know that they've got bus connects and Luas in the future hopefully Cork at the moment has just started their the travel assist program down there Amy and Eleanor are the two travel assistants and at the moment the other super busy already they're flying along Cork is an absolutely fantastic City so accessible absolutely brilliant and I just love every bit of it that's great to hear as a Cork person I always like hearing that and of course over time Galway limerick yeah I my knowledge is right I think Limerick will be the next city to come along onboard very good and so far people who want to get in touch they might be nervous to travel independently now what advice would you give them and how do they get in touch with you one of the biggest I believe one of the biggest

issues for people when they're starting off their independent traveling life is confidence it's just the main one so what we do is one we have the service advertisement in organizations and then we have it in magazines the Irish wheelchairs magazine and then we had a big advertisement last year on our buses and but so what would what we would do is people would get in touch with us so we don't just turn over the hill and say are you right let's do a journey what we did was we'd meet them we'd have a cup of tea coffee in the house explain the service and we'd have already done the practice Journey so we'd be able to let them know what the journey is how long it takes and that'll be that.

Fantastic and Barry from your point of view what advice would you give to people maybe who aren't feeling confident at the moment but would like to try traveling independently yeah I suppose the one thing is travel assist Top Class you know Roger isn't afraid to walk the walk as he said earlier on to put a blindfold on and to cover the route and you know if Roger is happy with doing the route I'm happy with doing the route you know it's a very rewarding very positive feeling to be able to travel independently and it's great to be able to leave your front door walk to the bus stop walk to the train and the Luas and to be able to get into town do your business do what you have to do and travel home safely you know it's a it's an empowering feeling at the end of the day absolutely and I think we're hoping to maybe go on board a tram I don't know when the next one is due with a little bit of time but you spoke about the help button on the Luas stop do you want to just press down yeah so it's a stainless steel one here it's the new Cross City Line it's a round button stainless steel so I'll press it and I'll ask control what time the next tram id due towards the city centre

Presses button

Hello good afternoon. I am just at the Cabra stop and I am a blind passenger. I am just wondering what time the next Luas towards the city centre is due. Its in Broombridge now it will be in another 5 minutes. What's the destination on that? Its going to Sandyford. Thanks for your help this afternoon, bye.

Right, it leaves the one o'clock another five minutes or so another five minutes and can I ask you what the destination for that is the mission and this one is for Central gotcha that's brilliant thanks for your help this afternoon thank you good luck bye

We are aboard the next tram we'll go towards Phibsboro which is the one that's coming up next we are about to board the tram we're at Cabra stop and we're about

to go on board and continue our chat Barry but there's been high winds all morning and the tram is temporarily out of service we've been told it'll come back up in about 20 minutes or so but Barry as a cane user who travels regularly on the tram system what do you do in the event of a breakdown generally what kind of difficulties do you face no so I suppose over the years over two experiences of this one was in Drimnagh before covid just due to an unforeseen overhead line failure the tram had to stop at Drimnagh that a driver did say that tickets were valid on Dublin bus and there were PA announcements on the platform from control saying tickets are valid in Dublin bus the problem though is knowing where the nearest bus stop is and the problem is a lot of other passengers scarf and kind of disappear very quickly and when you do go up to the driver you know the driver can't leave the the tram he or she is on and when you do press the help points then you're kind of in an awkward situation you know because you're relying on revenue protection or Luas security to get to you and to help you off the tram so my own case I just had to hang tough until the overhead line fault was restored in another occasion I had to rely on the the help of a very helpful member at the public because I wouldn't be aware where the nearest bus stop is to each tram stop I might know it for two or three stops around the area but if it's an unfamiliar stop like Shore Road where is the nearest Stop so yeah it's probably something that that that needs to be addressed but how would it be could Luas control maybe arrange a taxi or something you know to get you to your to get you to your destination or to a bus stop just to get to get back on track but yeah it's something to resolve I think the other day in Connolly Station as well I was on a Luas and after about 10 minutes or so there was a crash up in St James's hospital and Dublin fire brigade had closed the road which meant that trams weren't running in either direction now with a similar experience there where by the driver can't leave the tram I was on the tram for about 40 minutes but because I'm afraid of banging my head off the back of a Footbridge on The Concourse in Connolly that was unprotected the last time I hit it I'd rather if somebody could give me a hand over so I suppose in that situation I was lucky an Irish Rail guy who would help me onto the tram 40 minutes earlier had helped me off the tram you know who helped me cross the road to Talbot Street but yeah if that guy Ryan wasn't there I would have been in trouble and the other passengers on the tram had all disappeared very quickly so or the other way if you Luas drivers could advise where the nearest bus stop is and also what routes depart from that area yeah because they're both sides of the street but it's somewhere like Drimnagh you know it could be quite a distance away and also trying to make sure that you've got as much customer support as possible where possible you know that there's guys on hand if in the event of the failure and I suppose you do have to rely that the guys on hand are relying on the Luas to get around as well.

If they if that's blocked you know that they're out in the limb as well yeah we had planned to get onboard the tram and you've mentioned before about your kind of work around to find the doors and to actually board the vehicle tell us about that Barry okay yeah so I've been using the Luas tram for a few years and one of my pet hates was trying to find the find the door and or an open one it's difficult to find the seam you know between the door and the tram because it's so smooth and shiny now you can be lucky somebody else might have already opened the door but yeah it's a very difficult like a needle in a haystack a very difficult task so thankfully I spoke to Roger Flood and Roger flood from Dublin bus travel assist gave me a very helpful tip and that was always to walk to the front of the Luas platform just before it

sloped so you can feel the slope yeah and that's it and this kind of cord right tactile at the start of it but as you feel the ramp the slope of it just stop yourself position yourself there and the Luas driver will always open the door for you so you'll hear the click and you can walk towards the door now during the covid pandemic unfortunately for about 18 months the front door of the Luas was closed and indeed the area behind the driver's cab was kind of chained off so that became very difficult for us because for people who are blind or partially sighted because we had to trail the Luas in the hope that another passenger had opened this the double doors down and sometimes they had and sometimes they hadn't and that was the difficulty sometimes it might take us a while to find the door and then the driver would just some drivers would take off kind of with you trailing it and other drivers would wait you know they'd give you the extra minute but you know it was a difficult task so we were all very impressed when the restrictions were lifted in September 2021 and the doors already opened and it was it was a game changer for us once again for the second for the first door to be opened at the front of the Luas but I suppose going forward you know when new trams are coming in or if the system has been if the trams are being retrofitted it would be brilliant if the driver had the option of opening the first maybe the second door because you had to open it automatically and it would be for vulnerable customers who would have difficulty finding the second door so maybe that could be part of a future order and Barry would you recommend for users who are blind or of cane users to stand up by the driver's cab anyway just for visibility for the driver to see you yeah an experience a few years ago in Heuston whereby I was at the back of the platform and I just made the tram in time I could feel by the slope where I was just got to the door put the cane in the get the door closed on top of my cane and the Luas took out with me took off with my cane so I was a bit stuck I was a bit high and dry and I suppose what I learned from that night was that one it was a dark night two that although a Luas door has closed on me in the past maybe once or twice over the years and indeed they've always sprung back on me in this case perhaps it's just the size of the cane is too small maybe it's only whatever one and a half two centimetres wide

So you know always go down to the front of the tram where you've got your driver visibility the driver can see you boarding can afford you extra time you know before taking off and I suppose if I was getting on the back of the tram again I would put my elbow in first because at least if the door closed and topped me it would spring back it would pick it up whereas it appears that the cane is just the thickness of it is too slim it's calibrated maybe to pick up something larger like your hand or your wrist or your body with or whatever it is so for for many reasons yeah it is better to board at the front of the Luas and on board the tram itself for people who don't know maybe who aren't used to traveling on Luas people from other parts of the country but maybe would like to try traveling independently on Luas what onboard features are there that are useful for you and yeah so I suppose the most important one is is the most modern was the intercom so on Red Line trams there's always an intercom on well red and green line trams there's always an intercom on the right hand side of the door and what that's really handy for is that if the audio announcements for whatever reason in the unlikely event weren't working on the tram you could press the button you could speak to the driver and the driver would come back to you when it's safe to do so and take your query and that query could be sorry we've no audio announcements on this tram could you advise me when we

get to Fatima please or sorry I'm a blind passenger could you give me an extra few seconds some extra time to get off when I'm alighting at the Jervis stop.

So that's very handy now on the green line on the red line older trams the help points are always on the right side of the door but on the red line trams if they're not on one side you have to go to the opposite side whereas the green line newer trams the intercom is on the right side of the door yeah it's on every door on both sides okay so that's a very good system for information and for help and just additional time so it's a nice little system and onboard the tram you have there's obviously a visual display which shows people where the next stop is and what the tram destination is but obviously if you're blind or you have a serious vision impairment you can't you can't rely on those so you're totally reliant on the audio announcements tell me a little bit about that and how important they are for yeah so it's yes so it wasn't the Luas audio announcements are essential you know they've been with the system since 2003 since the system started and for us it was a game changer for our to travel independently now obviously there's red lines and green lines and they both have different Junctions so for example the red line towards the city centre can travel to the Point or it can travel to Connolly and going out to the suburbs westbound you can go to Tallaght or Saggart now similarly with the green line you know when the green line was extended it will go to Brides Glen or Sandyford or traveling Northbound it will travel to Parnell or out to Broome bridge and one of the problems we have over the years is that while there are next stop announcements we don't know the tram destination announcements so for example we could board at Stephen's green and we're hoping to go up to Dominic Street to go to the Ilac centre and when we got on the tram we're asking people what's the destination yeah and currently there's only well what there was about a year ago when the green lines Cross City went into place there was only one tram destination announcement between the GPO O'Connell Street stop and the Upper O'Connell Street stop and for us the problem is that if we run a tram and it said the next stop is Parnell if we alighted at the O'Connell Street upper stop the next tram coming in could also say the next stop is Parnell and that means we'd end up going around in circles and because it's such a long distance to walk from Marlborough Street back to GPO again we literally could have been going around in circles all day long and something similar would happen on the red line and I'm say I'd regularly go out to Tallaght to the white cane theatre and similar kind of problem you bore the tram you're not sure is a Tallaght or is it Saggart as the destination you'd ask a fellow passenger is this for Tallaght now some people would say yeah it is Tallaght or other people would say sorry I'm only traveling a few stops I don't know and you know the first you're aware that you're on the wrong tram is when it says the next stop is Fettercairn now while there is an onboard Tram destination stop that plays between the Belgard and Kingswood stop the problem is because there are windows open on the tram and the tram could be traveling at speed you might not hear that announcement so one of the great things in the last couple of years particularly the green line last year is that there are additional tram destination announcements now between Stephen's Green and Dawson and Westmoreland Street and that allows us or forwards as additional opportunities to alight the tram and change onto the correct tram.

The great news we're hearing is that the rollout of additional tram destination announcements on the red line is imminent and that's going to be a game changer

for us because say for example we had an additional announcement between Heuston and James's or between for example Red Cow and Kingswood or Kingswood and Belgard we would have multiple opportunities to alight from the tram and board the correct tram so that's certainly going to be a welcome development over the next couple of months good stuff let's hope and in terms of technology generally there have been there's some amazing technical innovations out there so you've got your accessible apps the text voice technology all of the passenger information displays induction Loops audio announcements all of that technology plays a great role in helping people to travel independently but are there future technologies that you know of that maybe could be adopted here in Dublin yes so for example there's an RFID it's a radio frequency technology and you can have a card in your pocket and several traffic lights of dysfunctionality that if you walk within a few meters of it particularly at night time between 8 p.m. and 8 A.M where the volume on the traffic light beacon and buzzer is lowered 20% when RFID is enabled on one of these Prisma Technic traffic lights a new for suitable RFID smart card in your pocket it'll actually increase the volume on the locator beacon around the audio buzzer so it will activate the sound or the announcement potentially yeah and that's exactly what it is so yeah so you could be at a stop like upper O'Connell Street and walk by it and it's an on-demand system so it'll be you know this tram is for Parnell or this tram is for Broombridge so for us that would certainly be a game changer potentially it could also be used maybe for help points you know if that had RFID functionality and now you could walk by it and it was scanning for the card in my pocket and went help point you know I could walk towards it effectively a beacon and I could go over and you know contact control in Luas and do you know are there any systems that utilize this that you're aware of or that we could look at yeah it's something I have to check I did come across the country before I think it's Sweden and Sweden have real-time polls on the platform and when you go over and you have an RFID in your pocket card it'll scan your pocket and again there's no technology deficit you don't have to have a phone you don't have to rely on your phone having charge you know what happens if you don't have a phone this technology could just be in your pocket it's just like a regular card and it scans it within a couple of meters so that technology could certainly be a game changer.

Okay so we're actually on board the tram now we boarded at Cabra and we're heading southbound into the city centre on the Luas green line and Barry we were chatting there on the platform about just the RFID technology and how it could be used and are there other technologies that that you think would be of use I'd say probably the main one would be the RFID on the platforms definitely just for to identify the help points the tram destination announcements from the platform and they're probably the they're probably they're probably the main ones as you said the onboard one with the intercoms besides the doors to allow you to speak to the driver in the event that audio announcements weren't working yeah or for example just to give you a forge an extra few seconds to you know at your destination stop because it is nice to have the extra 20 seconds because you know anybody who's blind would probably generally have a balance issue as well so they'd have to wait until the tram has stopped before standing up and finding the door and sometimes that can take 20 or 30 seconds so it is nice to have the extra time also particularly

when you're traveling peak times when you might people in your way you know might take a little bit longer to get off the tram so it's a very handy safety net to be able to speak to the driver and the nice thing with intercoms is you don't need smartphones it's not reliant on battery power it's not relying on you know having a phone you know on the day or the mobile network exactly and you mentioned before just I suppose not everybody would be taking out an iPhone in public or if they're standing on a platform or on a busy tram to be yeah it's better not to be reliant on the phone exactly because although I use an iPhone myself I've had several stolen over the years and it's simple things like you know although you have a Luas VI app which you could load the problem is and it uses a thing called voiceover screen reader by the time you unlock your phone open the app choose the line like red and green and the actual direction of travel and pick your station by the time you do that it's about three minutes and in that three minutes somebody can steal your phone so you know most blind and visually impaired passengers would unfortunately have experienced the phones being stolen whether they'll be at a bus stop or a Luas stop over the years and generally they will just ask another passenger or will use help points and in terms of anti-social Behaviour have you had much experience in that while traveling so I mean you do an awful lot of independent traveling around the city but would you have had experience of that yeah like only a small bit is usually kind of rowdy maybe people not sorry it's rare it doesn't happen that often but when it when you are in a tram and there is anti-social Behaviour I suppose my own experience would have been once on the way back from Tallaght some guys thought it was a bit of craic to get my cane and throw it in the canal at Suir road now that ended up causing me big problems because I had to get off of Houston and I had to ring one of the Irish Rail guys to from Houston to come out and bring me over to a taxi so one it cost me a few quid then I had to buy a new cane as well so but like there's no way I could have gone home kind of gone home without a cane is like a suicide run so you know sometimes you just have to grab the bull by the horns and go home that way so that was just my own experience.

I've had another experience up on Dominic Street on the way to Broombridge of people you know jamming the doors on the Luas and the Luas was stuck there for about 20 minutes and the guys were just I don't know what they put in the door to jam it but that was kind of a an unnerving experience because you're at a station where what do you do you get off the tram and you don't know if it's going to escalate if it's going to escalate so I just home tough in that situation and security staff came out removed the obstruction that the guys had jammed the doors with but you know the security guys are very helpful and I've met them at platforms for example see Jervis and other platforms and if there's ever kind of trouble going on the platform the Luas Security Guys and indeed Revenue protection are top-notch they will bring you away from the problem you know which is admirable they will keep you safe they'll have a little chat with you for the 10 minutes while the next tram is due but you know it's great for peace of mind that the intervene they go helping you rather than the other way around excellent and I know that on board the tram at the moment there's a you know a number a text number that you can call to report anti-social Behaviour but for people who are blind they can't identify the tram vehicle number so when looking at the raised Braille and raised number lettering and that you explain how that might help so that was hard to be very beneficial so the tram we're on now I don't know what the number is is it 3005 4001 5003 I I don't

know what the tram number is and while I could ask another passenger even though their passengers sometimes can't see where the tram number is it's up in the ceiling behind the driver's cab or elsewhere on the vehicle on the tram so exactly so we're at a disadvantage at the moment if we wanted a discreetly report an anti-social Behaviour episode on the tram we don't know the tram number and likewise if the audio announcements for example weren't working on the tram or the door wasn't working like there might be a sticker around the door saying you know it's faulty but we're not aware of that until we press the door and gone a stop or two too far so we like to do our bit and try and report it so back in the 90s on Dublin bus and bus stops they used to have and its still on many of the Dublin bus stops it's what's called tactile signage so it has a it has two things it's got raised numbers for example 1673 for the bus stop it's in contrasting black and yellow colours it's raised letters but there's also Braille at the bottom so it's a kind of a catch-all it benefits people who are born blind who can't read numbers or letters and who can read Braille only but it also benefits people who like myself who've lost their sight kind of later in life who can read Braille but would be very slow at it but I can Trail the numbers and go one six seven one so it's brilliant to hear that this is going to be located beside every door on the Luas and you know it'll allow us to go that's Trail three zero five in raised letters or indeed you'd have the Braille you know the action comparable Braille yeah as well to go with that so we certainly feel enabled and to report even if it's just a door out of Action Audio announcements not working it could be an intercom button not working it's just more inclusive exactly you can report things retrospectively is what you can like if you have anything to report to the operator you know what time you were on Etc because it's the same as a traffic light on the street if I don't report the fault it'll only be there broken tomorrow as well for everyone else so you have to try and do it especially do your best as well

By all accounts you lead a very active life I know you're broadcasting you're also involved in the white cane theatre group and cyclist Cinema and I know you've play coming up on Wednesday Etc this week up in the Driocht but just and you travel very independently on all modes of Transport across the city what has this experience taught you and what advice would you give to other people who might be less the feeling of being able to leave your door at home you know get on a bus get on a train travel independently well one it saves you a lot of money in taxis it says you have to rely on friends and family bringing it to your destination and you know it's a fantastic feeling to be able to travel you know safely on a system know the next stop announcements and to reach your destination it's just a really good feel good factor to be able to do that to be able to do it independently and you know it's nice to be able to add more routes to the equation and you're continuously learning new things so for example you might have Busaras as a stop but Busaras' steps at one end of the stop so you know I'll be I'll become aware eventually that you know it's the North End of the platform is to stop to you know the part of the stuff to exit at I'm becoming aware of the help points and becoming empowered you know as time goes on so it's a great feeling to be able to push the boat out but to have so many Safety Systems but not to be at a technology deficit as well because people's phones can be broken they can be stolen it might cost 600 euros for a new phone and you mightn't be able to get that money together for a while and also some people it might take you two like two years to learn technology and then other people you might never get assistive technology so it is nice to have simple built in systems that's kind of Universal Design yeah that doesn't rely on you having 600

Quid in your pocket or having a charged up phone which you're on the day it is great to have a button you can just press so we're coming into Marlborough stop now I think we'll hop out here and we'll finish the chat on the platform

So we've come off the tram and we're on Marlborough Street and Barry you're just going to describe how you navigate from the vehicle onto the street onto the off the platform gotcha so currently I'm at the front of the platform this Lozenge tactile which are three bumps so I'm going to follow is the follow even the Lozenge tactile down I'm going to go across the road and move over towards Abbey street so there's three Lozenge tactiles under my foot coming up shortly I can feel a slope coming up shortly yeah and sometimes I go I go over the platform edge when I notice Luas no Luas behind me no there's a big pole so I'm not here that's a electricity pole maybe so I can hear pedestrian crossings ahead so I should be feeling a corduroy tactile sometime soon or possibly I missed it now here's another pole now that's a pedestrian Crossing pole so I can hear the Locator Beacon of that so I'm going to I'm there's a little arrow on it's a metal arrow and you can feel a vibrating pulse through it that gets lowered at night time between 8 pm and 8 A.M so of course I should press the button as well to change the light so I'm waiting for that pulse to change because it goes fast when it's safe to do so we have a couple of vehicles these pedestrian crossings usually change within two minutes is the cycle for them still changing now here we go so it's safe to cross the road so I'm going to cross to the opposite side of the road I usually try and walk towards one o'clock in case I drift of course and I'm on the other side of the road now I can feel the blister tactile under my foot so I'm going to walk into the building line here I think it's a pub well it was the last time I saw it anyway now so I it's getting cold so I'm feeling yeah I can hear The Pedestrian Crossing to my one o'clock so I'm going to walk towards it I don't feel any I think I hear it is yeah I must have gone past it so there's a other pedestrian Crossing we've got a pulse arrow on it and we're facing the Abbey Street Luas stop so we're in Abbey Street now it's the fast pulse this one is what my Q is and the sound as well so I'm working towards Abbey Street Luas I think I'm across now there's a railing here I'm waiting for the railing to end I just guide that with my finger and cane now so I'm now at the corduroy and I noticed a pole here I don't walk into now Barry so I'm going to go across the two Luas tracks to the westbound platform to Tallaght and Saggart so I'm crossing the two tracks now we're nearly here now so there's my corduroy now what I do here is that there's a pole there I don't walk into that so that's the pole I've walked into a few times and I'm just going to follow the platform Edge and the Lozenge tactile and my plan now is to walk towards the front of the Luas platform because the driver always opens the door at the front of the platform I can hear a tram coming in behind us so I'm just going to the front of the platform and there are people in front of me so maybe I should stop yeah no problem so I think in this case I won't be going to the front of the platform so I'll take any door that opens now that's why I'm boarding this tram not knowing its destination but I can press the button and ask the driver Okay so if somebody's opened the door right in front of me so important the Luas here now so this is one of the help points that's an empty panel Sarah you're on the Luas here

I'm here yeah so on the red line fleet it's generally just on one side so you've got the double doors facing each other and on the red lines please it's just to the right of one of the doors but on the green line please it's on both sides yeah such great system so hopefully maybe as part of a retrofit because there is a kind of a panel space for it yeah maybe that could be wired in maybe as part of a retrofit yeah in the future so both doors would have the help button then. While this intercom is only for emergencies I'll wait until the drivers at the next stop because I don't want to annoy the driver so I'm happy to press it now when the driver opens the door

Presses button

Hello driver can I ask you where the tram destination is Tallaght or Saggart? Its Tallaght great news thanks very much thank you so there you go that that worked very well so you're going to continue on to rehearsals for the play I suppose it just remains to say a big thank you to you Barry for this morning and for just talking us through how you navigate the tram that's perfect there's no problems at all you know it's all about communication is key and you know and it's great for tourists as well we have to know where you're going and you aren't dependent on having an app and being from Germany and coming over going I can't get the Luas app in my German app store or you know well Barry thank you very much it's been a pleasure and thank you for chatting to us no problems at all!

I'm joined by Aoife O'Connell from Transdev Aoife welcome to All Aboard TII's accessibility podcast so for listeners who might not be aware Transdev is the company responsible for the operation of Luas Light Rail in Dublin basically it manages the tram Services the drivers the customer agents and of course it's responsible for keeping the vehicles lovely and clean and in good working order and making sure that they run on time Aoife maybe if you could tell us about your particular role in Transdev so hi Sarah thanks for having me today yeah so I'm Aoife O'Connell I'm the customer service manager for Luas all my team I should say deal with all the customer complaints and queries and we can be contacted through our social media platforms which is Twitter and Facebook we can also be contacted through email and web form and through our phone line as well so we deal from I suppose from beginning to end with all customer queries and complaints very good and so tell us about what kind of feedback you typically receive it's not all complaints sometimes it's positive feedback and absolutely yeah we will get comments and queries suggestions on a daily basis and you know how you would get from A to B on the Luas line how you would get a connection from Luas certain Luas stop to Irish Rail or to Dublin bus queries on tickets and yeah I mean it's not all again it's not all complaints we generally get a lot of inquiries and comments and feedback excellent and actually that's what I would love to talk to you about because we spoke earlier to Roger Flood about the travel assist program which is a kind of a multi-modal assistance program but Transdev also run the Luas Travel Assistance scheme which is particular to Luas Light Rail and it's an excellent

Service provided to people who need a little help in getting to know the system so for people who might not be aware of the service tell us about how it works yeah so anybody looking to travel by Luas and who's looking for some assistance to travel from A to B they can contact Luas customer service by emailing us at info@luas.ie or they can contact us on any of our social media platforms or by giving us a ring on the phone and our customer service department will arrange for a staff to meet that person at their designated stop at the time and date requested and they will bring them from A to B on their journey we'll also facilitate then if somebody is new to the Luas line they don't necessarily want to make a journey they just want to familiarize themselves with a you know a particular route or you know to familiarize themselves with the tram where the emergency help button may be how they you know which accessible doors they need to use and so on so we do provide that service as well that's excellent so it's a one-to-one service for people and a really good way of maybe people who might be a little bit nervous about using the system who might not be familiar with the system it's a way for them to get to know it and to learn the route and then there on hopefully be able to travel independently on that route absolutely

How much feedback from that or do you find that people absolutely yeah I mean we only have ever had positive feedback but the service that we provide and the staff on the line the customer agents are very knowledgeable and are there to assist our passengers in any way possible and of course one of the things that's come up over the years is that all of your customer facing staff receive disability awareness training so like how is this of practically used people on the ground what how does this yeah so I mean I suppose when staff start as part of their induction training they all receive disability awareness training and we have our in-house trainers who provide that training to all of our staff and they also get refresher training once a year and as part of that training as well they're given Jam Card training and that's as standard for all staff all public facing staff on the line very good and the jam card is the just a minute so it's basically a badge that people can carry to say you know just bear with me you know I need a little help potentially and of course that's really good it just means that the customer agents are wise I suppose they just keep in mind that people might need help and they know how to recognize it and what to do in those instances so along with the customer agents and the training that they have and the help they provide and one of the things that's come up over the years is that like drivers I suppose are aware that if they see somebody made potentially with a cane or whatever at a stop it when the tram is approaching they've been made aware that maybe that person might need a little extra help or might need a little extra time absolutely and that you know where necessary if people need to approach the driver that they can do so if they're if they're very stuck if they're standing at the top of the platform at the driver cab or whatever and drivers are exactly yeah I mean what generally what would happen would be if a passenger did need any extra time you know or extra assistance they would stand this was close to the driver's cab make the driver aware once the driver can see them he'll be able to then give them the extra little bit of time that they need then to board a tram and like Transdev do other kind of community engagements you were telling me earlier about some of this projects you're involved in with schools yeah so recently I mean during the summer there was a family fun day out in Ballyogan it included you know fun days stuff such as bouncy castle's face painting with a Luas staff and engagement in the in the local area we've got great feedback and through our

social media platforms actually from families which attended on the day and it was it was a great day by all accounts we also liaise with different schools on the in was on the red and the green line and do some commute engagement with the with the schools as well and just teaching children how to you know how to be safe around the Luas line and you know in in terms of you know crossing the tracks and you know getting on and off trams and things like that.

So we do have yeah absolutely engagement throughout the year on different and you had recently you were approached by a school with kids with disabilities and you run a program to help those kids get familiar with the service that's correct so we had a teacher from a school so she had a classroom with children with disabilities and she approached us with a request so it was you know she was looking to bring her class out on the line and to have a member of Staff be able to familiarize the children with the tram you know where they get on the tram looking at the passage information displays on the on the platform the SOS button but also when they get on the tram then you know the best place to sit and the priority seating areas you know where the tram number is displayed where they can press the button then if they need to get into the driver and things so really just tram familiarization and platform familiarization with this group of children and I suppose it's important just to remind people that they just some of the accessibility features so you've got for example for wheelchair users the and for buggies and for anybody with mobility issues the tram has level boarding and ramps leading to the platform so there's kind of an ease of movement there and then once you're on board they're or induction Loops for people with hearing problems you have the a visual display to notify people of the next stop and of course there are audio announcements as well so there's a whole series of accessibility features exactly yeah and we pride ourselves and been able to you know to transport people from A to B seamlessly you know no matter what their situation is so Aoife thanks a million for coming in to talk to us about the Travel Assistance Program you mentioned that all that information is up on the website it is www.Luas.ie and if people want to contact you to maybe book The Travel Assistance Program they can go to info@Luas.ie or through any of the social media platforms exactly we can also be contacted by a phone on 0818 300604 fantastic thank you so much Aoife

So that's it for this episode we hope you enjoyed our conversations on disability and design and gain some insight into the role we can all play in ensuring public transport is truly for everyone thank you to our host Sarah O'Donnell to Trevor Cudden on sound to the production team Kathleen Jacoby Rachel Cahill and Claire Scott to Sinead Foley from TU Dublin who designed our fantastic graphics and to everyone else who helped make this podcast please send us your comments and feedback to All Aboard at tii.ie and for more episodes from All Aboard please go to Spotify iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts until next time...