

Re-Introduction of Direct Sligo-Athlone Bus Eireann Service

Bus Eireann operated a once daily Athlone-Sligo and return Bus service, Monday-Saturday inclusive, until its withdrawal in about 2009 (service no 461). It was the only direct Public Transport link between those Two Centres. The service departed Athlone at 08.30 each Morning arriving in Sligo at 11.30, returning from Sligo at 15.00 and arriving back in Athlone at 18.00. The service operated on the Main Roads Athlone-Roscommon-Strokestown-Elphin- Boyle. From Boyle it ran to Sligo by a different route per day. On some days it ran from Boyle via Ballymote to Sligo, on other days via Corrigeenroe cross, Ballindoon and Riverstown. Those routes were on narrow, winding and badly surfaced roads unsuitable for a large Bus. Problems were also encountered meeting and trailing slow moving Vehicles eg tractors, work vehicles etc. This led to timekeeping problems. It was not a well utilised service as it ran at unsuitable times for commuters. Also for People from Boyle, Strokestown or Elphin travelling to Roscommon or Athlone there was no same day return service.

There is a need for a more direct Service operating at times suitable for Commuters and Students etc. Sligo and Athlone are large Population centres with a lot of private and public sector employment and third level education facilities. Operating a more direct route and on the main roads a suitable service could be operated in about 2.5 hours. Departing Sligo at say 06.00 via Ballisodare, Collooney, Boyle, Carrick-on-Shannon, Elphin, Strokestown, Roscommon town and Knockcroghery with a number of request stops in smaller centres, arrival in Athlone would be by 08.30. This would be sufficient time to allow commuters to get to work and students to college by 09.00. Also this service would provide a connection into the extensive Dublin-Galway services at Athlone serving Ballinasloe, Porticuncla hospital, Loughrea and Oranmore. There are frequent connections off this service at Craughwell to Ennis, Shannon Airport, Limerick and Cork. Connections would also be provided into the frequent bus service to Dublin city and Airport at Athlone and also into the Athlone-Waterford bus. In the opposite direction a bus would depart Athlone at say 06.00 and operating the opposite route arrive in Sligo at say 08.30. This would also be sufficient time for commuters to be at their place of work and students in college by 09.00. Also connections would be provided into the extensive Bus Eireann services from Sligo.

Then as the bus and driver have to return to their home depot, a useful service could be provided here. As the bus/driver who worked the 06.00 Sligo-Athlone services have to return to base a mid morning service would be provided. Leaving Athlone say 09.15 and operating its reverse route would allow a connection in Athlone off the first Dublin-Galway and Galway-Dublin bus and provide a morning service to Roscommon town 2.5hours earlier than at present. At Roscommon connections would be made from the morning Westport-Athlone bus which served Ireland West Airport en route. Also at Strokestown connections would be made into and out of Dublin-Ballina services which at Charlestown have services to Ireland West Airport. This 09.15

ex Athlone would arrive back in Sligo about 11.45, again connecting into the extensive services from Sligo. As the bus/driver that provided the 06.00 Athlone-Sligo services also have to return to their base they would provide say a 09.15 service on their return from Sligo arriving in Athlone 11.45 operating over their reverse outward route. This would provide a mid morning Boyle, Carrick on Shannon, Elphin and Strokestown to Roscommon and Athlone Service. This would be useful for travelling to the County Town and Hospital. Again at Strokestown connections would be provided with Dublin-Ballina and Ireland West Airport via Charlestown services. On arrival back in Athlone connections into the Dublin-Galway services are available.

Next the evening services for the commuters & students returning home. A suitable service could be provided by starting a bus at both Athlone and Sligo at say 14.00 reaching their respective destinations about 16.30 providing afternoon Sligo-Athlone and Athlone-Sligo service providing connections at Strokestown with Ballina-Dublin services which have connections to Dublin and Ireland West Airports. Again at Sligo and Athlone connections are made with their extensive Bus eireann services. Those original services could be timed to depart Athlone returning to Sligo and Sligo returning to Athlone at say 17.30 a suitable time for students and commuters returning home with again a Sligo-Athlone running time of approx 2.5 hours and vice versa. This also would allow the driver/bus which provided the 14.00 departures from both Sligo and Athlone return to their base. Again connections would be provided at Roscommon, Strokestown, Boyle and Collooney with other services and again connecting with the services at Sligo and Athlone.

I hope you will use your position and influence to support the development of those services. If you require any clarifications or have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me at [REDACTED]

Many thanks,
Neil McGarry.