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This submission was provided by the Asthma Society of Ireland in response to the National Transport Authority's Consultation on the Carriage of Pets on Transport for Ireland Services.

The Asthma Society of Ireland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. Operating for over 50 years as a not-for-profit patient organisation, our vision is that everyone with asthma in Ireland can live a full life, symptom free. Through a patient-centered approach, we strive to be the national representative of the 450,000 people with asthma in Ireland, amplifying their needs and interests with policy and change markers at all levels.

The Asthma Society is broadly supportive of measures that encourage increased use of public transport. Improving access and uptake of public transport is an important public health objective, particularly in the context of air quality, as reduced reliance on private vehicles can contribute to lower levels of air pollution and improved respiratory health outcomes.

We also recognise the positive role that pets play in many people's lives and understand the rationale for making public transport more accessible for pet owners.

However, we would ask that the National Transport Authority give careful consideration to the needs of people with asthma and allergies as part of this policy development. Asthma is a chronic (long-term) inflammatory disease of the airways characterised by hyper-responsiveness to a range of stimuli, including viral infections, cold air, damp environments and airborne irritants, such as dust mite and pet dander.

During an asthma flare-up, the airway lining swells, sticky mucus is produced, the surrounding muscles tighten, and airflow becomes restricted – trapping air in the lungs. This makes breathing difficult and typically results in breathlessness, chest tightness, coughing, or the wheezing sound synonymous with asthma. Exposure to certain stimuli can act as a "trigger" and exacerbate these symptoms.

In severe cases, exacerbations may progress to acute asthma attacks requiring urgent medical intervention and, in some instances, can be life-threatening. Exposure to dust mite and pet dander are well-established triggers of both asthma exacerbations and allergic responses in sensitised individuals. For some people, this can result in significant respiratory distress, impacting their ability to travel safely and comfortably on public transport.

In this context, it is important that any expansion in the carriage of pets is accompanied by measures to mitigate potential health risks. This could include consideration of enhanced cleaning protocols, clear guidance and strict adherence for pet containment (e.g. carriers), and the exploration of designated pet-free spaces or services where feasible.

Taking a balanced approach that considers both accessibility and health will help ensure that public transport remains inclusive and safe for all users, including those with respiratory conditions. We would welcome the opportunity to engage further on this issue and support the NTA where possible.

We would also encourage anyone with asthma – or their carer – who may be concerned about managing the impact of this potential policy change to contact our free Asthma Adviceline (1800 44 54 64) or WhatsApp messaging service (086 059 01 32), where specialist nurses offer personalised advice on identifying and managing asthma triggers to keep the condition under control.