

Iarnród Éireann
Irish Rail

Case study

Iarnród
Éireann
(Irish Rail)

On the right track.





Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail) operates the national railway network of Ireland. It runs InterCity, Commuter, and freight railway services across the republic. Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail manages over 50 million passenger journeys annually, a figure that's growing year on year.

The payroll team of eight runs payroll for more than 5,000 employees, keeping their colleagues paid correctly and on time.

After 40+ years of a legacy payroll system, Irish Rail recently invested in a new payroll solution. We caught up with John Kennedy, Head of HR Organisational Development at Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail, to hear how they embraced this once-in-a-generation move.

Legacy payroll system

John described their legacy payroll system, which was built on an old COBOL mainframe. Maintaining the system was becoming an increasing challenge due to its outdated technology

“The payroll system was purpose-built for us with the first line of code written around 1964-65. You know a product is nearing the end of its life when you having to source replacement parts from eBay,” John joked.

Their support partner indicated that the technology was outdated, and they would no longer support it. This necessitated the move to a new system to ensure continued support and functionality.

This was not the first time Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail had investigated changing their payroll. The change in 2020 was the third such attempt. Previous attempts in 2002 and 2011 were unsuccessful due to funding issues and the financial crash.



Partnering with Zellis

The project was resurrected in 2017 when John was joined by Suzie Walsh as Project Manager and along with a couple of colleagues the project team was born. As part of understanding the market John visited the CIPD Festival of Work tradeshow to evaluate the market and gauge potential suppliers.

"We operate as a semi-state company in Ireland, and we're governed by EU procurement guidelines as we are spending taxpayers' money. We had to create an open transparent procurement process to make a level playing field for all the vendors."

In addition to the technical requirement, GDPR legislation was on the horizon so there was a lot of contractual issues at play. During initial contractual discussions with vendors, some found the contract detail too onerous and dropped out of the process.

Zellis was awarded the contract based on our strong technical performance and commercially advantageous bid.





**Implementing a new
system against the clock**

The Zellis and Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail project teams worked closely with each other over the course of 2019 and were ready to implement the solution just at the Covid pandemic struck in early 2020.

John explained the challenges faced during the project due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which required adapting to remote work.

The original plan for the user acceptance testing (UAT) was that the Irish Rail and Zellis teams would meet in person every few weeks to check progress. During 2020, these sessions were moved online, which presented its own challenges.

“For some people who worked in the tech industry previously, remote working was fine. But for us, it was totally alien.”

Despite the challenges the teams persevered, and Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail processed the first payroll in 2021, with three subsequent payrolls during pandemic restrictions.



Improved efficiency and serving employees better than ever

Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail needs to run many different payrolls: there are station staff with a uniform work pattern the fleet maintenance team who work on a three-week roster (four days on, two days off, four days on, two days off) and, at the other extreme, the track maintenance team that can switch day / night duties on an ad hoc basis. The team can be out all nights, all days, and in all kinds of weather responding to different track situations. This results in a very complicated payroll.

There are five different payrolls: one monthly and four weekly payrolls. Before the changeover, the four weekly payrolls all had different week endings, each with their own pay dates

Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail took the opportunity to rationalise and streamline. Now, the whole company is on the same pay week, and employees are paid five days after payroll closure.



Employee benefits

One of the great advantages of the new system is the visibility Irish Rail employees now have.

Previously, colleagues had to remember for themselves which shift they were on, the hours they'd worked, and any overtime. The timeliness of the payroll changes that.

"It's human nature to look at the bottom right-hand corner of the payslip and wonder if that accounts for all the work I did. There were often questions about the final pay. That's all changed now."

There are other advantages too.

As part of its sustainability goals, Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail wanted to eliminate paper payslips. The adoption of Zellis payroll was the catalyst for this change. In an effort to improve employee engagement, mobile phones were issued to employees allowing them to digitally access to their payslips.



The Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail team are also encouraging colleagues to add their timesheets digitally.

There is also greater visibility of the allowance's employees receive. Certain roles receive additional allowances, for example when on night duty. These allowances had previously been presented as a single total figure. The new Zellis payslips break out each allowance type for greater clarity.

Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail colleagues now also have access to their personal data and can update their details as required.

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"Previously, someone would have filled out a timesheet on behalf of the employee, and that would have been imported into the payroll system. Employees will have the ability to input their own time, simplifying the whole process and saving time.

The new branded payslips have been a real game changer.

Employees were unable to view or update their own details previously and I think they see the value in [being able to do that now]."

John Kennedy, Head of HR Organisational Development, **Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail**





Start of a new era

John feels this is the start of a new era for Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail, and he has a number of new projects in the pipeline.

There are other aspects of the business that were streamlined during the payroll project, with Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail taking the expenses module to pay out-of-pocket expenses too. This simplifies yet another challenging task.

The payroll system has been in place for a while now and John and his team are working on other business improvements, including close integration with the HR system.





Final thoughts

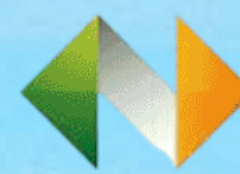
Reflecting on the project itself, John is most pleased with the close collaboration between Zellis and the Irish Rail team.

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"We quickly formed a close partnership. Maybe the challenges of the pandemic brought us close together. Zellis has been very flexible and supportive throughout the project. Despite challenges, including a last-minute delay in going live with the final payroll, the partnership remained strong, with both parties working together to resolve issues. The responsiveness of Zellis, their willingness to quickly arrange meetings and resolve issues, is greatly appreciated. It is not always the case with other vendors. I'd like to thank all those involved in the project – it wouldn't have been successful with their input."

John Kennedy, Head of HR Organisational Development, **Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail**





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Thank you for reading

If you're ready to transform your own HR and payroll processes, get in touch today to find out how Zellis and our partners can guide you on your journey.

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