

Annual Report

July 2025



About us

The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (Imtac) is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including carers and key transport professionals. Its role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of Deaf people, disabled people and older people.

The aim of Imtac is to ensure that Deaf people, disabled people and older people have the same opportunities as everyone else to travel when and where they want.

Imtac receives support from the Department for Infrastructure (herein after referred to as the Department).

About this report

Under our agreements with the Department, Imtac is required to submit an annual report to the Minister for Infrastructure. This report includes details of our achievements over the previous year and plans for the coming year. It also identifies and details key issues the Committee would advise the Minister to consider in the coming year.

Imtac's response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Status at June 2025)

Imtac recognises that for many older people and disabled people the risks from the COVID-19 pandemic are not over. We are committed to taking steps to ensure we minimise risks for our members and others participating in our work, including ensuring that our meetings include the option attend remotely.

Chairperson's Message – 2025 19th Report

This has been another busy year for Imtac during which we met three times with the Infrastructure Ministers and also had separate meetings with the Department's Permanent Secretary and senior officials. Imtac continues to bring a coherent and influential voice to the policy table, building on the platform established with stakeholders over the years.

We have undertaken a weighty work programme including development and implementation of our ambitious Transport for Health Project with the completion of a significant survey and three engagement events. A final report with recommendations should be available in the autumn. I would like to thank Imtac members June Best, Dermot Devlin, Terry McCorry and particularly Rebecca Bamford for the work they have put into the project over the year.

Travel, whether walking, wheeling, cycling, using public transport, or travelling by car, should be accessible and inclusive. We have had regular discussions with the Department for Infrastructure, Councils and others as they develop new suites of Transport Plans and public realm improvement proposals. Following engagement with the Department we have commented comprehensively on the Active Travel Delivery Plan.

We have and will continue to prioritise tackling pavement parking, improving community transport and access to taxis and to equalising travel concessions. We continue to push for low floor accessible vehicles on all interurban routes as well as the provision for two wheelchair user spaces on buses and I'm pleased to note that some of the newer Belfast Metro buses have had a second space designated.

While there is political stability, society continues to face uncertainty and many continue to struggle with the cost of living and/or encounter barriers to accessing essential services including transport so I am disappointed that the long-awaited Disability Strategy has not been published although a meeting with DfC officials indicated that there should be significant progress before the end of 2025.

Over the past six years it has been my privilege to chair this committee whose members experience the issues covered in the report. I am

grateful for their commitment and input. None of this would be possible without the dedication, experience and knowledge of our Executive Secretary, Michael Lorimer. I also thank officials for their continuing support despite the pressures they are operating under. Finally, I assure the Minister and the Department that Imtac will continue to support their efforts to contribute to a more accessible and inclusive society.

Bert Bailie

June 2025

Our Achievements 2024 / 25

Our Work Programme for April 2024 / March 2025¹ set out a series of tasks and priorities based around the four principles set out in our New Approach paper². These principles are:

1. Ensuring a shift in our cultures
2. Ensuring public and private investment contributes to an accessible and inclusive society
3. Ensuring end to end journeys are straightforward and accessible
4. Putting Deaf people, disabled people, and older people at the centre of every stage of decision making

We have recorded our achievements below under each of these headings, starting with a task that cut across all four principles.

Transport for Health Task

Imtac members and other Deaf, disabled and older people have raised issues about difficulties experienced when travelling to and from health services in Northern Ireland. This year we undertook to bring together Deaf, disabled and older people and the people who design and provide health and transport services to identify how we improve the current situation with travel to health services.

To do this we created a Steering Group bringing together disabled people and older people (including both rural and urban voices), officials from the Department for Infrastructure and Department of Health, officials from Health Trusts, Translink and community transport providers. The Steering Group provided direction and oversight to the project and contributed to the development of the survey about people's experiences.

¹ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/imtac-work-programme-2024-2025>

² <https://www.imtac.org.uk/new-approach-travel-our-streets-and-our-places>

The survey ran for a month in late 2024 receiving 400 responses. A draft report based on the findings of the survey was then used to inform the debate at a number of engagement events held in March and early April 2025, again bringing together Deaf, disabled and older people, as well as health and transport policy makers and providers. The aim of the engagement events was to identify what actions are seen as necessary to improve things taking on board the lived experience of those requiring the services. Currently a draft report with recommendations is being developed which will be subject to further engagement before being published.

Ensuring a shift in our cultures

Key to ensuring the change to inclusive and accessible travel and places is a shift in cultures, challenging and changing the traditional approaches to accessibility and inclusion as well as the current approaches to how we design travel, our streets and our places.

As part of this shift in culture Imtac promotes Disability Equality Training (DET) to anyone involved in the design or provision of transport and the built environment. This year we worked with Transport for All and Inclusion London to develop and deliver training sessions to Translink staff involved in major infrastructure projects and to the senior leadership team within the Department for Infrastructure.

The Committee also contributed to key Executive strategies. We submitted a detailed response³ to the proposals for a new Programme for Government. We contributed to the consultation⁴ setting out the roles and responsibilities of a Just Transition Commission for reaching Net Zero. We sought to ensure that the Executive delivered on work already undertaken on developing a new Disability Strategy. Our members led a briefing of the Communities Committee about concerns about delays to developing the Strategy. We subsequently held constructive discussions with officials from the Department for Communities about the next steps.

³ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/comments-imtac-about-draft-programme-government-2024-27-our-plan-doing-what-matters-most>

⁴ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/comments-imtac-about-consultation-establishment-just-transition-commission>

We worked closely with officials from our sponsor Department on programmes and plans with transformative potential. This included engagement with officials around the development of new transport plans including the overall Transport Plan for Northern Ireland, the Fermanagh and Omagh Transport Plan, the North West Transport Plan and the Eastern Transport Plan.

We also worked with the Permanent Secretary and officials involved in the Department's Including People programme, and in addition to our contribution to the arrangements for the DET for senior leaders referred to earlier, we organised a series of meetings and contributed to planning for a conference around inclusive transport.

Ensuring public and private investment contributes to an accessible and inclusive society

For Imtac it is essential the highest inclusive design standards are adopted when investing in travel, our streets and our places if we are going to achieve the change that is needed for a more accessible and inclusive society.

This year we sought to ensure that the benefits from investment in major infrastructure projects were maximised, with continued input into the ongoing development of the Belfast Transport Hub (now known as Grand Central Station)⁵ and York Street Train Station⁶. As part of this process the Committee published reports with recommendations about both projects following site visits. We have established ongoing engagement mechanisms with the Translink Infrastructure Team to ensure that consultation and discussion about accessible inclusive design of key projects starts at the earliest opportunity.

The Committee continued its work with Translink, the Department and the Consumer Council around future bus and coach procurement to ensure that vehicles purchased in upcoming contracts are easily accessible. The value of this work has been demonstrated during the year with the introduction of new vehicles with two spaces accessible to

⁵ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/initial-feedback-imtac-about-grand-central-station>

⁶ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/initial-feedback-imtac-about-york-street-railway-station>

wheelchair users. Following a request from Imtac to then Infrastructure Minister O'Dowd, work has started on revising current guidance for the design of bus stops, ensuring that benefits from improvements in vehicle design will be maximised when investing in other infrastructure.

We continue to work with the Department for Communities and local councils to ensure that investment in public realm schemes in our villages, towns and cities delivers for everyone. This year we submitted advice and recommendations about plans for public realm improvements in Hillsborough⁷, Strabane⁸ and the Linen Quarter⁹ area of Belfast City Centre.

Ensuring end to end journeys are straightforward and accessible

Nearly every journey we take involves using more than one mode and it is essential that we make each part of end-to-end journeys straightforward and accessible. While improvement in the accessibility of buses referred to in the previous section is important progress, there is still a lot to address to make end to end journeys easier for Deaf, disabled and older people.

Improving access to taxi services remains a priority for the Committee. This year we recirculated our policy paper¹⁰ first published in 2023, setting out the changes we believe are required to achieve this. We held discussions with the Infrastructure Minister and officials from the Department. We also briefed the Committee for Infrastructure about the urgent need for change.

Obstructions on footways and across crossings create unacceptable barriers to making end to end journeys. Parking on the pavement and crossings is a constant barrier encountered by Deaf, disabled, older people and others. We have had positive discussions with Ministers and officials about how we can effectively tackle the issue of pavement

⁷ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/comments-imtac-about-proposals-improve-public-realm-hillsborough>

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⁹ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/comments-and-advice-imtac-about-potential-public-realm-improvements-parts-linen-quarter>

¹⁰ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/revised-imtac-position-paper-taxis>

parking, and we developed and published a position paper¹¹ with recommendations for change.

Active travel (walking, wheeling and cycling) has a key role to play in making end to end journeys straightforward and accessible. We continue to work with the Department to ensure that the commitment to spend 10% of their budget on active travel delivers for Deaf, disabled and older people. As part of this work, we submitted a comprehensive response to the Department on their proposals for an Active Travel Delivery Plan in Northern Ireland.

Cars and other private vehicles will remain an essential mode of travel for some disabled and older people. The Committee continues to stress this in our advice to the Minister, to the Department and to others. This year we provided advice around the provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure for homes without a driveway, balancing the need to ensure everyone can benefit from the transition to electric vehicles whilst ensuring the infrastructure required does not become a barrier for others.

Putting Deaf people, disabled people, and older people at the centre of every stage of decision making

The core principle that guides our work and advice is that Deaf, disabled and older people are the experts about the barriers society creates, and consequently we should be involved in decision making from the earliest stage. The Committee seeks to embed wider participation from Deaf, disabled and older people across our communities in our work. Involving carers is a key part of this engagement.

One way we do this is to involve Deaf, disabled and older people in site visits to provide feedback on investment in infrastructure and services. This year we organised site visits to both York Street and Grand Central stations. The feedback we received informed the Imtac reports on each project.

The Committee also actively seeks to involve Deaf, disabled and older people in consultations undertaken by Government and others. We

¹¹ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/imtac-statement-pavement-parking>

circulate information about consultations not only to Imtac members but to individuals and organisations that have expressed interest in our work over the years. This year we worked with The Executive Office to host a meeting about the Programme for Government. We worked with the Department for Infrastructure to hold a consultation event about the Active Travel Delivery Plan and we agreed arrangements with the Department for Communities to host an event about the long-awaited Disability Strategy.

Involving Deaf, disabled and older people was a core component of our Transport for Health task. A wide cross-section of people was involved during the design and delivery of the survey and at subsequent engagement events with further engagement planned. Deaf, disabled and older people were also involved in the delivery of DET, with experienced public transport users leading real world guided journeys on our transport network.

Imtac continues to work with other Deaf, disabled and older people from across these islands including with our counterpart advisory committees in England and Wales¹² and Scotland¹³ through the Accessibility Four Nations Liaison Group which meets biannually. We hosted the April 2024 meeting. Imtac was also represented at a national accessible transport conference held in London in September 2024.

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disabled-persons-transport-advisory-committee>

¹³ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/our-approach/accessible-transport/mobility-and-access-committee-for-scotland-macs/>

Our plans for 2025 / 2026

The Committee has now agreed a draft Work Programme for April 2025 / April 2026 with the Department, and this will be published at a later date. We will continue to work with Executive Ministers and the Assembly to progress long standing priorities including the publication of the long-awaited Disability Strategy, to improve access to taxis and community transport services, to address the inequality of travel concessions between older people and disabled people and to tackle pavement parking.

Tasks and priorities in the work programme are grouped under the 4 key principles set out in the Imtac New Approach paper. Our work programme also reflects three other factors that continue to impact on Deaf, disabled and older people. These are:

- The ongoing impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The ongoing impacts from the cost-of-living crisis
- The ongoing impacts from climate breakdown and a transition to Net Zero

The Committee has summarised below the tasks it plans to undertake in the next 12 months.

Cross cutting tasks

We plan to complete the task looking at barriers experienced by Deaf, disabled and older people travelling to access health services. This will include the publication of a report with recommendations to address current barriers to accessing services.

Putting Deaf people, disabled people, older people and carers at the centre of every stage of decision making

We will involve broader groups of Deaf, disabled, and older people in our work and activities and encourage Government, Councils and others to consult early with these groups and individuals when developing or

implementing policy or services. This year we will reorganise our two working groups, the Translink Accessibility Working Group and the People, Streets and Places Working Group. The reorganisation will prioritise broader representation of Deaf, disabled and older people in the group membership.

The pandemic highlighted the benefits for many Deaf, disabled and older people of remote and hybrid meetings, allowing people to participate without the need to travel for face-to-face meetings. Imtac will continue to provide the option for people to attend engagement events remotely where possible and will strongly encourage others we work with to do the same.

Ensuring a shift in our cultures

We will seek to ensure that key Strategies and Plans, including the anticipated Disability Strategy and the implementation of the Climate Change Act, take full cognisance of the needs of Deaf, disabled and older people. Ensuring that the development of new transport plan proposals for Belfast City Centre delivers positive change for Deaf, disabled, and older people will continue to be a priority for the Committee.

Building on the success of this year we will continue to encourage the wider adoption of and assist in the delivery of Disability Equality Training for everyone involved in the development or implementation of policy as well as for service providers (including external consultants) to ensure a social model based¹⁴ approach becomes the norm.

Ensuring public and private investment contributes to an accessible and inclusive society

We will work with the Department, Translink, DfC, local councils and others to ensure that investment in our streets and public realm, in our

¹⁴ <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/about-us/disability-in-london/social-model/the-social-model-of-disability-and-the-cultural-model-of-deafness/>

stations and bus stops, in buses, coaches and trains and in active travel uses the highest possible inclusive design standards to maximise benefits for everyone including Deaf, disabled, and older people. This includes the development of key Executive priorities such as Belfast Rapid Transit Phase 2.

Feedback is an essential element of improving design processes and standards so post project engagement is important. Where improvements have been made, such as the introduction of buses with two wheelchair user spaces, the Committee will engage and support engagement with Deaf, disabled and older people to gain feedback.

Ensuring end to end journeys are straightforward and accessible

Unless every part of a journey is straightforward and accessible many Deaf, disabled people and older people cannot travel. Imtac will work to ensure that walking wheeling and cycling is a safe and accessible option for all including Deaf, disabled, and older people. We will work to improve access to a range of travel options including taxis, community transport services and innovative services such as autonomous vehicles and micromobility. We will seek to ensure that appropriate, timely and accessible information is provided both about services and about disruption to travel when it occurs.

Our advice to the Infrastructure Minister

Imtac members welcome the positive engagement with both Minister O'Dowd and Minister Kimmins over the past twelve months. We very much welcome the commitment by Minister Kimmins to continue to engage with Imtac members on a regular basis, recognising and demonstrating the value of engaging with Deaf, disabled and older people at a strategic level.

There are some key policy areas which continue to be longstanding priorities for Imtac members. The Committee continues to seek progress in the following areas:

- The publication of an Executive Disability Strategy, co-designed with Deaf and disabled people and our organisations.
- The identification and implementation of measures that improve access to taxi services in Northern Ireland for Deaf people, disabled people and older people.
- Progressing proposals that ban parking on pavements and across dropped kerbs in Northern Ireland.
- Equalising the travel concessions available to Deaf people, disabled people and older people in Northern Ireland.
- Bringing forward proposals to reform existing urban and rural community transport services building on experiences elsewhere with demand responsive transport.

Advice provided by Imtac is based on the principle that we maximise the benefits of any future investment, both public and private, in our services and infrastructure. There will be opportunities in the coming year to ensure investment contributes to more accessible and inclusive transport and places. From the perspective of the Committee priority opportunities this year include:

- Continuing the roll out of Disability Equality Training to Department for Infrastructure officials.
- Ensuring that the proposed Transport Plan for Northern Ireland and associated Transport Plans enshrine building in accessibility and inclusion as a condition of future investment. This includes ensuring proposals for the future of Belfast City Centre are inclusive, prioritising accessibility for Deaf, disabled and older people whether residents in the city centre or visitors to it.
- Ensuring that active travel investment maximises opportunities for Deaf people, disabled people and older people to make more walking, wheeling and cycling journeys and reduces the potential conflict between pedestrian, cyclists and other road users. We promote the application of accessible design standards to the maintenance of older footways as an element of active travel initiatives.
- Building on progress to date, continue to transform the accessibility of bus travel in Northern Ireland through procurement of the most accessible and inclusive vehicles, and the introduction of new standards for bus stops that maximise the benefits of new buses.
- Ensuring access and inclusion through early engagement with Imtac is an ongoing requirement for major Executive priorities such as Belfast Rapid Transit Phase 2.
- Ensuring that the advice and recommendations received from Imtac about major infrastructure projects, including Grand Central Station, are used to inform future projects and developments.
- Ensuring that plans and actions to manage our transition to Net Zero are inclusive, recognising that Deaf, disabled and older people are amongst those most impacted by climate breakdown and our response to it.



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