



**Report on surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre undertaken in August, September, October and November 2016**

**February 2017**

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## **About Imtac**

Imtac is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including key transport professionals. Our role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.

Our aim is to ensure that older people and disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else to travel when and where they want.

## **About the surveys**

Imtac has undertaken a number of surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre in the past<sup>1</sup>. The surveys were undertaken not only to inform the advice Imtac gives to Government around changes to traffic management in the City Centre but also to inform the debate about the potential level of Blue Badge fraud in Northern Ireland. Since the last surveys were undertaken a number of changes have taken place. Firstly further infrastructure changes have been implemented resulting in a further reduction in the number of on-street parking bays in Belfast City Centre and an overall reduction in parking opportunities for disabled people. Secondly Belfast City Council has developed a draft Parking Strategy. Finally the proposed Department for Infrastructure Delivery Plan associated with the draft Programme for Government identified parking constraint as a key tool in changing travel behaviour in the future. The Committee decided to repeat the surveys to ascertain what impact, if any, recent changes have had on Blue Badge use, and to inform the Imtac responses to the consultations on the Parking Strategy and the Programme for Government.

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<sup>1</sup> [Report on surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre undertaken in November 2010](#), [Report on surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre undertaken in October and November 2011](#), [Report on surveys of the on-street Blue Badge use in Ballymena Bangor, Belfast and Lisburn - February 2013](#), [Report on surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre undertaken in September and October 2014](#)

## **How we did the on-street surveys**

This report is based on six separate surveys undertaken in August, September, October and November 2016. Data from each survey is contained in Appendix A of this document. As per the previous four reports developed by Imtac around on-street parking, surveys were carried out on different weekdays. Each of these surveys was undertaken at a different time – in the morning, over the lunch period or in the afternoon. Two surveys were undertaken on a Saturday. In some previous reports the Saturday survey looked only at streets close to the retail core of the city centre as it is assumed that Blue Badge use in the Linen Quarter would be very low. As in 2014 this year the Saturday surveys took in the streets of the Linen Quarter as well.

The surveys covered most of the same streets surveyed in 2011, 2012 and 2014 with the addition of a small number of bays on Victoria Street and College Square East. The streets surveyed stretch from Ormeau Avenue in Southside of the city centre to Donegal Street on the Northside and Great Victoria Street on the Westside to Victoria Street on the Eastside. The City Centre was divided into two areas:

- (1) The retail core – those streets accessible to the core of the city centre
- (2) The Linen Quarter – those streets a distance from the city centre but close to large offices

The survey looked at the number of Blue Badge holders parked on a street at any given time. This is designed to give a snapshot of Blue Badge use in the city at any given time. The surveys look at how people were using their Badge – parking in an accessible bay, parking in a standard on-street bay or using the yellow line concession. Given the size of the survey area no attempt was made to gather information about how long people were using their Badges in these areas.

## **What we found**

### Overall picture

The surveys indicate a slightly reduced level of overall Blue Badge usage compared with 2014. An average of 304 Blue Badge holders parked in all the streets surveyed compared to the average of 315 in 2014. This can be explained by the inclusion of two Saturday surveys, where Blue Badge parking in the Linen Quarter is substantially lower than during weekdays.

How Badge Holders used the concession did vary from survey to survey because of greater or lesser use of the yellow line concession. There remains significant use of on-street parking bays with on average of 29% of available bays being used by Blue Badge holders during the week (this is broadly similar to previous surveys). This figure dropped significantly at the weekend. Yellow line usage rose slightly compared with the 2014 surveys with an average of 94 Badge Holders availing of this concession during the week and as before a significant rise in yellow line usage at the weekend (an average of 122).

There are 65 dedicated accessible bays in the streets surveyed. In addition there a number of other areas, such as Castle Place, where Blue Badge holders can park but there are no distinct bays. Across all of the surveys there was 94% usage of the 65 bays. Across all of the surveys there were only two cases of accessible bays were being used by a vehicle not displaying a Blue Badge.

### Retail Core

As in previous surveys the retail core accounted for the highest usage by Blue Badge holders. On average 235 Blue Badge holders parked in these streets on a weekday broadly similar with surveys previously. There was variation in how Badge Holders used the concession with use of the yellow line concession higher on some days than on others. There was a drop in use of on street parking bays compared with previous years with 38% of bays used by Blue Badge holders during weekdays compared with 41% in

2014. The majority of accessible parking bays are located in this area and occupancy remains very high.

The majority of yellow line use was also in this area with a rise in usage of this concession compared to 2014.

The Saturday survey showed a rise in usage compared with the 2014 survey with an average of 255 Badge Holders parked in the area compared with 226. Use of on-street bays rose from 23% to 32% on the Saturday with a rise in the levels of yellow line usage (122).

### Linen Quarter

As with previous surveys there was less use of the Blue Badge in these streets with much greater use of on-street parking bays than the yellow line concession. On average a total of 79 Badge holders were parked in these streets during weekdays. This is a slight drop in usage compared with the 2014 survey.

This area has seen a significant reduction in the number of on street parking bays since 2014, and there were further reductions in available bays during the surveys because of building works. This explains a slight rise in overall percentage usage of on-street parking bays by Blue Badge holders compared with 2014 (23% compared with 22%) despite a small drop in the overall numbers of Blue Badge holders parking.

This year these streets were surveyed again on a Saturday to test the theory that Blue Badge use would be low due to offices and businesses being closed. This theory was proved to be correct only 8% of bays being used by Blue Badge holders.

## Key Findings

The surveys have highlighted a number of issues:

- Blue Badge usage has largely stayed the same despite a further reduction of around 7% in the levels of available on-street parking in the City Centre since 2014.
- Occupancy of dedicated accessible parking bays across all the surveys is 94%, suggesting bays are appropriately located in areas of demand.
- High occupancy of spaces can also be a negative impact for Blue Badge Holders with a lack of availability of suitable parking a problem often raised by disabled people with Imtac.
- Only two examples were found across all six surveys of a vehicle parked in an accessible parking bay not displaying a Blue Badge. This suggests that ongoing parking enforcement continues to be effective.
- Overall use of on-street parking by Blue Badge holders in the city centre remains high. Usage in the retail core remains very high. This has major implications for any future Parking Strategy for the City Centre. Blue Badge usage must be given a greater strategic priority in the final Parking Strategy.
- There is extensive use of yellow line concessions in the retail core of the City Centre. This has implications for future traffic management projects in the City Centre that might involve changes to current yellow line provision such as the current proposals to redesign High Street. The design of any future scheme must consider mitigation for Blue Badge Holders.

- Blue Badge usage in the city centre must be a major consideration for the Department for Infrastructure around the introduction of further parking constraint measures in both Belfast City Centre and other locations.
- Whilst enforcement of accessible parking bays in the City Centre continues to be effective, enforcement of potential misuse of the Blue Badge by non-disabled people remains a more significant challenge. If plans for further parking constraint are to be progressed, enforcement of fraudulent misuse of the Blue Badge must be given greater priority.