



Comments on the Draft Belfast Bicycle Network 2017

(April 2017)

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Making our information accessible

As an organisation of and for disabled people and older people Imtac recognises that the way information is provided can be a barrier to accessing services and participation in public life. We are committed to providing information about our work in formats that best suit the needs of individuals.

All our documents are available in hard copy in 14pt type size as standard. We also provide word and pdf versions of our documents on our website – www.imtac.org.uk. In addition we will provide information in a range of other formats. These formats include:

- Large print
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About us

The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (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.

Imtac receives support from the Department for Infrastructure.

Comments on the Draft Belfast Bicycle Network 2017

Imtac welcomes the opportunity to comment on the current consultation on the Draft Belfast Bicycle Network 2017 and intends to submit detailed comments to the 17 questions contained in the consultation document using the online questionnaire. However it believes there is value in submitting a further written submission that highlights key issues and priorities that have informed its detailed response as well as highlighting what it views as strategic gaps in the draft proposals. The Committee has set out its issues below under four key themes.

(1) Designing for people

Imtac supports and advocates designing our streets and transport system for people and not traffic or vehicles. Research has shown that decades of designing primarily for the car has contributed greatly to inequality and that a rebalancing, giving greater priority to pedestrians, public transport and cyclists, is long overdue. The Committee recognises the importance of the private car to many older people and disabled people and has actively promoted the provision of well-designed, accessible parking as part of recent projects such as Belfast on the Move. However the Committee recognises that to create a fairer, more inclusive society greater priority must be given to enhancing alternative travel options to the car. Viewed in this context Imtac broadly supports the Draft Belfast Bicycle Network. The background to document clearly sets the proposals in the context of providing an alternative to car usage

and as part of wider improvements to make walking and travel by public transport easier.

Designing for people requires those involved to balance the different, and sometimes conflicting requirements, of the various road users. Many older people and disabled people, including Imtac members, have a negative view of cyclists, based on conflict with cyclists on pavements, paths and at crossings. If the aim of the Draft Belfast Bicycle Network in redressing this imbalance is to be successful, it needs to directly acknowledge the conflict that exists between pedestrians and cyclists. It must be made clear in the final document that reducing and removing such conflict, through the Belfast Bicycle Network, is a priority for the Department.

(2) Putting pedestrians first

The Bicycle Strategy makes clear that the Department will implement the road users hierarchy in designing projects to promote cycling. However in doing so the Department must prioritise the requirements of pedestrians above that of all other road users including cyclists. Imtac recognises that complete separation of cycling and pedestrian infrastructure is not possible or practical and that some interaction between the two is inevitable. The final design of cycle routes must, therefore, ensure that where interactions take place, pedestrians have priority at these points. The Committee believes recent work by the Department with Imtac on proposals for High Street in Belfast illustrates how this balance can be achieved.

The Committee has published two papers outlining its position in relation to shared space or shared streets. This type of infrastructure does not, in the opinion of Imtac, prioritise pedestrians as evidence shows that pedestrians, particularly disabled people and older people, avoid these streets altogether. This type of infrastructure should not be used when developing the Belfast Bicycle Network.

(3) Design an inclusive cycle network

Many disabled people and older people, including Imtac members, are cyclists. As with the wider population many others may want to cycle but feel it is unsafe because of the current infrastructure or

lack of it. The Department must ensure that the Belfast Bicycle Network is designed to be fully inclusive and that this must be reflected in the final document. The Committee recommends that the Department considers including the following in the final document:

- Many disabled people may use equipment such as tricycles and hand cranked machines that do not strictly fall under the definition of a bicycle. This is acknowledged in a short paragraph in the draft proposals referencing “specialised equipment”. Imtac believes there is a danger that such an approach places certain cyclists outside the “norm” and that this will influence the design of the network. The Committee acknowledges that “bicycle” is a recognisable, generic term so the Department must make clear from the beginning of the document that the term bicycle includes all types of cycles and cyclists and that the design of routes will reflect the requirements of everyone.
- The Department should include more images of older people and disabled people cycling in the final document and its publicity material, reflecting that cycling is an inclusive activity.
- If the Department is serious about promoting cycling as an alternative means of travel Imtac recommends that dedicated cycle routes, separated from both vehicular traffic and pedestrians, be adopted as the default position in relation to developing a Belfast Bicycle Network. All routes must be designed to be accessible to all cyclists.
- Although not ideal, the Committee recognises that on occasions shared pedestrian and cyclist footways can be used. This type of provision is only ever acceptable where (1) there is sufficient footway width and (2) the numbers of pedestrians using the footway is very low. There are many examples in Belfast of shared footways created for the convenience of traffic flow rather than the interests of cyclists and pedestrians. Difficulties or inconvenience to other vehicular traffic should never again be a justification for creating shared footways.

- Imtac recognises that green space including parks and Belfast's expanding Greenway network are essential in providing attractive, traffic free routes as part of the Belfast Bicycle Network. Whilst shared paths can be an inclusive environment, there have been mixed experiences in Belfast and some issues of conflict between pedestrians and cyclists such as on the Lagan Towpath. The Belfast Bicycle Network must learn lessons from past experience. Shared paths must be of sufficient width to accommodate both pedestrians and cyclists comfortably. Where required existing shared paths on the proposed Network, including the Towpath, must be widened. If a large number of pedestrians and/or cyclists are using a particular path consideration must be given to providing separate cycling infrastructure through these areas.

4 Promoting respect, understanding and collaboration

In the past Imtac has undertaken work with organisations that represent cyclists. It is clear from this work that cyclists experience many of the difficulties encountered by pedestrians (including older people and disabled people) and that there are major benefits in both interests working together. The final plans for a Belfast Bicycle Network must include measures that support engagement between cyclists and pedestrians including disabled people and older people. Such an approach could have the following benefits:

- Promoting an wider understanding between cyclists and pedestrians
- Ensuring the design of cycle routes minimises potential conflict between cyclists and pedestrians
- Maximise the potential to improve pedestrian journeys when developing the cycle network
- Identifying and agreeing initiatives to tackle behaviour that creates conflict between cyclists and pedestrians

Imtac would welcome the opportunity to discuss with the Department and cycling organisations suitable mechanisms to take this work forward.