



The Accessible Transport Strategy (ATS) 2025: Our views on the vision, strategic priorities and how to measure success for a new ATS

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Executive Summary

Background

This paper outlines the views of Imtac on the vision, strategic priorities and how to measure success for a new ATS.

Vision

A new vision for the ATS should be based on the principles of inclusive design, seeking to develop an inclusive transport system accessible to everyone.

Strategic priorities

The new ATS should prioritise improving access to public transport recognising the need to improve access to the pedestrian environment and the need to strengthen access to other transport.

Imtac suggests the following strategic priorities:

- Improved public transport and pedestrian infrastructure
- Strengthening other transport services
- Improved information
- Improved customer / individual experiences
- Improved participation and engagement with disabled and older people

Measuring success

The new ATS should seek to deliver two key outcomes:

- Increased usage of public transport services by disabled and older people
- A reduction in the barriers to travel experienced by older and disabled people

Imtac has indicated how the use of both qualitative and quantitative data can measure if these outcomes are being met.

About us

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 Regional Development.

About this report

This paper has been prepared by Imtac in our advisory role to the Department for Regional Development to inform the development of the proposed Accessible Transport Strategy 2025. The paper summarises the views of Imtac on what should be included in the vision and strategic priorities for the proposed ATS 2025. The paper also suggests ways the success of the new Strategy can be measured. The paper has been informed by the results of the recent survey of the attitudes of older and disabled people to public transport¹ and by the work of the Committee over the past decade.

¹ [Attitudes of Older and Disabled People to Public Transport November 2014 - January 2015](#)

Background

Since the publication of the Accessible Transport Strategy in 2005 there has been considerable progress in making the transport system in Northern Ireland more accessible. Positive developments include the purchase of new buses and trains and the upgrading of stations and halts to improve the compliance of transport infrastructure and services with accessibility standards. Other measures include the extension of concessions on public transport and the extension of alternative services such as rural Dial-a-Lift and Door2Door (now called Disability Action Transport Services (DATS)).

Despite these positive developments the recent survey highlights the continued barriers experienced by disabled and older people when accessing public transport. Many of these barriers are the same as those identified in developing the 2005 ATS. This is an indication of (1) the continued need for an Accessible Transport Strategy and (2) that the 2005 ATS has only been partially successful.

In developing a new ATS Imtac believes it is crucial to understand why the previous Strategy has been only partially successful. In common with many other Strategies produced by Government the ATS 2005 and subsequent Action Plans contained too many broad policies and actions, which made measuring progress difficult. Imtac recommends that the proposed ATS 2025 be more focused on a smaller number of priorities with clearer actions and outcomes. In coming to this position Imtac has looked at the approach taken in similar strategies elsewhere and in particular the strategic approach taken by Transport for London².

A new vision for the ATS

The ATS 2005 contained the following vision:

“To have an accessible transport system that enables older people and people with disabilities to participate more fully in society, enjoy greater independence and experience a better quality of life.”

² [Your Accessible Transport Network \(TfL 2012\)](#)

While Imtac believes this vision has its merits, the Committee does have concerns that the wording suggests the travel requirements of older and disabled people are in some ways distinct and separate from the rest of society and that this may have influenced some of the actions of the ATS 2005. We believe strongly that any new strategy needs to be based on the principle of inclusive design. This means future changes to the transport system work for everyone in society including disabled people, older people, people with young children, people with luggage and visitors to Northern Ireland. The Committee believes there is merit in the new Strategy reflecting a broader, more inclusive vision and suggest the following simplified vision:

“To have a transport system in Northern Ireland that is inclusive and accessible to everyone.”

A new strategic direction for the ATS

The ATS 2005 contained 7 strategic objectives covering a broad range of issues. Imtac is suggesting that the new ATS 2025 focuses on 5 priorities seeking to improve access to public transport services. In prioritising public transport services the Strategy must also take account of two linked areas:

- (1) Improving access to the pedestrian environment
- (2) Strengthening other transport services including taxis, rural transport, DATS and Shopmobility services.

Based on the above Imtac suggests the following strategic priorities:

- (1) Improved public transport and pedestrian infrastructure
- (2) Strengthening other transport services
- (3) Improved information
- (4) Improving the customer/individual experience
- (5) Improved participation and engagement

One further issue needs to be acknowledged by the new Strategy. The recent survey confirms the importance of the car to the mobility of older

and disabled people both as drivers and as passengers. The new Strategy needs to contain commitments to maintain this access through the continued provision of services such as the Blue Badge Scheme, provision of accessible parking and parking enforcement. The Department must commit to consult fully on any proposed changes that affect current provision.

Measuring success

Imtac believes that it will be easier to measure the success of a more focused ATS 2025 . The ATS should seek to deliver two key outcomes:

- (1) A reduction in the number of barriers and impact of those barriers experienced by disabled and older people using or wanting to use public transport.
- (2) Increased usage of public transport services by disabled and older people

Measuring success in delivering the two outcomes will be challenging. In relation to monitoring usage of services Imtac does believe that Concessionary Fares Scheme data on uptake and usage may be able to be used. Measuring the reduction in barriers could be achieved by repeating the recent attitudinal survey at the end of each new ATS Action Plan. However the Committee believes there are other ways the Department could seek to measure success during the implementation of ATS action plans. We have suggested some ways this could be done in the next section.

Developing a more focused ATS

Although it is our understanding that the Department proposes to consult on the strategic framework for the new ATS first, the Committee does believe there is merit in providing more information on our thoughts about potential measures for inclusion in the future Strategy. Where appropriate we have indicated how the measures detailed below could assist with measuring the success of the ATS 2025.

Improved public transport and pedestrian infrastructure

Imtac has argued for some time that significant issues remain with infrastructure³. Procurement of stepped vehicles by Translink and others means disabled and older people still find using bus services difficult or impossible. Gaps between platform and train and the step up mean using trains can be a challenge. At many smaller stations and halts steps are still prevalent. Bus stop provision is variable, particularly in rural areas, with no consistency in the step up into vehicles. Finally barriers in the pedestrian environment make getting to and from public transport difficult or impossible.

In the recent survey the barrier experienced by most disabled people in relation to using public transport was getting on and off vehicles. This raises significant question marks over how the accessibility of transport services is currently measured by Translink and DRD. Based on current measurement (DDA compliance) almost 100% of vehicles and infrastructure is compliant. The experiences of disabled and older people indicate that this measurement of accessibility is inadequate.

Imtac has previously published a paper⁴ making clear that step-free transport should form basic requirement of an inclusive transport system. The Committee understand that using step-free access as a measure of the accessibility of public transport infrastructure and vehicles will substantially reduce the perceived accessibility of the current network but it does provide the Department with a more realistic assessment of current provision. We fully understand that if the Department were to introduce step-free as the measure of accessibility in the future that fully accessible infrastructure would only be achievable in the long term (beyond the scope of the proposed Strategy) and would be dependent on resources.

As part of this process work is required early in the ATS 2025 to (1) review current standards relating to the accessibility of public transport

³ [All Aboard - an assessment of the current accessibility of public transport in Northern Ireland](#)

⁴ [Imtac Statement on Step Free Transport](#)

infrastructure including bus stops and (2) review the accessibility of the current network based on the new criteria to provide a baseline. Standards already exist for improvements to pedestrian infrastructure, and any investment in new pedestrian infrastructure should be measured against these standards.

Measuring success – Based on a new assessment of accessible infrastructure the Department can measure progress as and when resources become available for upgrading existing pedestrian and public transport infrastructure. Wholly new infrastructure, such as Belfast Rapid Transit, must be designed to be step-free. Our proposals for improving engagement and participation also provide an opportunity to measure whether infrastructure is improving.

Strengthening other transport services

Even with improvements to mainstream public transport some people may still not be able to use services or may have to use other forms of transport to access the network. Other transport includes the private car, taxis, Department funded rural transport and DATS. It is important that the ATS seeks to strengthen other transport services and their integration with mainstream public transport. This could include for example:

- The provision of accessible parking at stations, halts and Park and Ride sites
- The provision of taxi ranks and vehicle drop off points at key public transport locations

Rural and urban transport services funded by the Department are important services used by relatively small numbers of disabled and older people. We know from our work that some people are dissatisfied with these services. Many disabled and older people rely on taxis but find availability, affordability and accessibility a problem. Finally there are other transport services operated by the health and education authorities that are used by disabled and older people, but these are restrictive in terms of eligibility and where they go. The ATS 2025 cannot realistically

be expected to address all these issues but there are ongoing projects and policies that should be acknowledged by the ATS and which the ATS should influence during implementation. These include:

- Implementation of the Taxis Act 2008 including the introduction of new vehicle accessibility standards, taxi driver training and fare regulation.
- The development of the DRD Integrated Transport Project offers the opportunity to examine how Government's resources can be utilised to provide better demand responsive transport services for people who cannot use public transport or which can be used to connect to mainstream services.

Measuring success – In relation to integrating transport services it is relatively straightforward to quantify progress in relation to providing parking spaces and taxi ranks. Many of the new requirements associated with the implementation of the Taxis Act will be introduced during the lifetime of the Strategy and elements such as vehicle accessibility and driver training can be measured. As the Integrated Transport Project is still in development we do not have any firm idea of any potential outcomes or how these will be measured. Our proposals for improving engagement and participation also provide an opportunity to measure whether access to other transport services is improving.

Improving information

Problems accessing information has been consistently highlighted as a barrier to travel by disabled and older people including in the recent attitudinal survey. The survey has also informed us that disabled and older people rely on a variety of ways of accessing information including using traditional printed timetables and newer technologies including smartphone apps.

Intac has undertaken a number of pieces of work looking at information provision⁵ and as a result of this work we have identified three challenges for the future ATS 2025:

- (1) Improving the accessibility and usability of existing information
- (2) Improving detail about which services are accessible and which are not
- (3) Looking at new ways to provide information

There are a series of measures that the ATS 2025 could include to address these issues including:

- A revision of the Translink website to improve accessibility and usability and to include more detailed information about the accessibility of services through a link easily accessed from the home page
- The provision of an on-line journey planner which can provide information about the accessibility of journeys (eg a step-free option)
- Revision of existing information including maps showing information about the accessibility of services
- Improvements to the accessibility of printed information and alternative formats
- The creation of dedicated contacts to encourage queries / feedback about the accessibility of services using telephone, email and using social media
- Looking at how new technology, including smartphone apps, can improve access to information

⁵ [Assessing the impact of the ATS on the provision of information about transport services in Northern Ireland](#)

- Committing to roll out the provision of audio and visual information systems across all public transport modes including the Ulsterbus network

Measuring success – Information is the area of the new ATS where progress will be most straightforward and easy to measure success. Uptake, usage of and feedback about the changes outlined above will be a key indicator of success. Our proposals for improving engagement and participation also provide an opportunity to measure whether access to information is improving.

Improving the customer/individual experience

The survey has told us that the way services are provided can make it difficult for disabled and older people to use them. Issues raised range from the attitudes of transport staff, having to pre-arrange travel and problems accessing priority seats. Imtac believes the ATS 2025 should focus on two areas to improve the customer experience:

- (1) Challenging service providers to change the way services are provided
- (2) Looking at measures that give people the confidence to travel

Imtac recommends the following could be included amongst the initiatives in the ATS 2025:

- Requiring improved Disability Equality Training for all providers starting with senior management but eventually including all staff
- Improved levels of assistance at stations and interchanges, particularly for bus services
- A strengthening of maintenance procedures that prioritises maintaining the accessibility of services
- The removal of unnecessary restrictions such as the current 24 hour notice requirement

- The development of promotions and campaigns to encourage the use of public transport targeted at disabled and older people and the broader public
- Encouraging travel mentoring and travel training schemes
- Monitoring potential technology developments which could improve the mobility of individuals
- Initiatives designed to reduce/remove pavement clutter

Measuring success – If some of the initiatives are implemented as part of the ATS 2025, Imtac believes it will be easier to measure the success of the Strategy. For example it is relatively straightforward to monitor the numbers of staff trained, the number of stations where staff are available to provide assistance and the number of services where no notice is required. These measures and the success of campaigns, initiatives and mentoring schemes can also be measured using our proposals for improving engagement and participation.

Improved engagement and participation

Central to the success of the ATS 2025 is improving engagement with and the participation of older and disabled people. Improvements in this area will influence two areas of the new Strategy:

- (1) the design and implementation of the actions of the new ATS
- (2) measuring the success of the new ATS

The new ATS will provide the opportunity to strengthen strategic engagement through Imtac but it should also seek to broaden engagement and participation to wider groups of older and disabled people. Imtac suggests this can be done in a number of ways:

- Using a variety of mechanisms such as participation events, forums and focus groups to assist with the development of key actions and to provide feedback on their implementation

- The use of mystery shoppers to measure progress in addressing some of the major issues identified by the recent survey and to test the impact of initiatives and campaigns

Measuring success – As previously indicated improving engagement and participation will be a key way to measure the overall success of the ATS 2025. The success in doing so will be dependent on securing the input of disabled people, older people and their organisations. It will also be vital that care is taken to ensure that participation reflects disabled and older people in Northern Ireland particularly in relation age, gender, different impairments and where people live. The recent attitudinal survey illustrates that Imtac can deliver this type of project, we would suggest that the ATS 2025 seek to utilise our expertise in relation to improving participation and engagement.