

Imtac Annual Report 2017

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November 2017

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
- Audio cassette or CD
- Daisy disc
- Braille
- Electronic copies on disc or via email in PDF or word
- Easy read

We will also provide information about our work in other languages if you require this.

If you would like this publication in any of the formats listed above or if you have any other information requirements please contact:

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About Imtac

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

Imtac's 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 (hereafter referred to as the Department).

About this report

The Accessible Transport Strategy (ATS) 2015 requires Imtac to produce an annual report with details of our achievements over the previous year. The Committee are also required to identify key issues that we would advise the Department to address in the coming year and submit these to the Minister.

Chairperson's message

Imtac continues to make a significant contribution to the development of policy and services that make travel more accessible and inclusive. Over the past year members have played an active role in influencing the design of key projects including the development of the Belfast and North West Transport Hubs, Belfast Rapid Transport (BRT) and Translinks Ticketing Project. The Committee also made a significant contribution to the development of the draft Programme for Government (PfG). From the Chairperson's perspective I was delighted that the Department gave significant prominence to accessibility and inclusion in its draft PfG Delivery Plan.

Involving disabled people and older people in its work remains a major priority for Imtac. During the last twelve months the Committee was able to organise a series of workshops on a number of key policy and service developments, involving people from outside the membership of the Committee. This included the opportunity for people to view and give their opinions on a mock up of the interior of the proposed BRT vehicle. I am particularly pleased that Imtac was able to organise a successful public meeting in Omagh, which was attended by around 60 people. It is my belief that disabled people and older people are best placed to advise on issues that affect their lives. As Chairperson I am fully committed to involving as many older people and disabled people as possible in the work of Imtac.

Unfortunately by the end of the year Imtac, like many other organisations, was faced by the uncertainty created when the Executive collapsed. These events were particularly disappointing as they followed a very positive meeting between Imtac members and then Infrastructure Minister Hazzard. I am concerned about the impact of the absence of an Executive on disabled people and older people, particularly in relation to the development of the new Accessible Transport Strategy and the Programme for Government. However I am heartened by the strengthened and positive relationship that has developed between Imtac and officials within the Department and believe that positive progress can still be made despite the current uncertainty.

Finally I would, as always, like to thank all Imtac members for their contribution and commitment over the past year. I would also like

to record my gratitude to the officials from the Department and Observers from our partnership organisations for contribution and help with the work of Imtac. Last but not least and on behalf of the Committee, disabled people and older people I would like to thank our Executive Secretary, Michael Lorimer, for the support, hard work and expertise he has given to the Committee over the last twelve months. I would also like to recognise the support given by Michael to individuals and organisations that have approached Imtac with issues during the past year.

G Max O'Brien

November 2017

Achievements in 2016/17

The following outlines the contribution Imtac has made in the past twelve months towards and a more inclusive and accessible transport system

1 Supporting the development of the new Accessible Transport Strategy 2025

Over the past twelve months Imtac has continued to work with officials in the Department to develop the draft Accessible Transport Strategy.

The Committee also made a significant contribution to the development of the draft Programme for Government, submitting two detailed consultation responses and attending workshops organised by the Department and others.

2 Supporting better engagement with disabled people and older people

Imtac views engagement with and the involvement of disabled people and older people as a key component of developing inclusive transport policies and services. During the year the Committee:

- Routinely involved disabled people and older people in our work with the Department, Translink and others. This included looking at a mock-up of the proposed interior of the BRT vehicle, meetings about the Belfast and North West Transport Hubs and a meeting about Translink's Ticketing Project.
- Held a public meeting in Omagh to discuss local transport issues. Around 60 people attended the meeting.
- Took part in a number of events including the Northern Ireland Pensioner Parliament.
- Drafted a paper highlighting potential mechanisms for improving future engagement.

3 Supporting more accessible travel

A key part of the work of Imtac is to advise the Department and others around removing barriers to travel for disabled people and older people. The work of the Committee includes all aspects of travel including pedestrian journeys, travel by public transport, travel by taxis, travel by community transport, travel by sea and air, and travel by private transport and parking. During the past year Imtac has undertaken activities in the following areas:

Pedestrian issues

- Working with Guide Dogs, RNIB and Disability Action, Imtac sought to advise Transport NI and local councils on the development of guidance, including access requirements, around the licensing of pavements cafes.
- Contributed to proposals for the development of two public realm schemes in Derry and Portrush. To inform the work on Portrush Committee members undertook a site visit and developed a report highlighting barriers in the pedestrian environment in the town.
- Worked with the Cycling Unit to ensure accessibility and inclusion were a priority in the development of a scheme to improve pedestrian and cycling facilities on High Street in Belfast City Centre.

Public and Community Transport

- Advised the Department on the proposed vehicle design for Belfast Rapid Transport and plans for a transport hub in West Belfast linked to BRT.
- Met with the architects responsible for the development of the North West Transport Hub and submitted detailed comments on the proposals.
- Met with the design consultants responsible for the development of the Belfast Transport Hub. Following a wider meeting involving disabled people, older people and other organisations, Imtac submitted detailed comments on the proposals.
- Met with Translink to discuss its Integrated Ticketing Project and helped to organise a wider engagement event with older people, disabled people and interested organisations.

Following engagement Imtac submitted comments to Translink highlighting key concerns/issues around the project.

- Provided the Department with some initial comments on the proposed review of the current Bus Stop Design Guide.
- Met with the Chief Executive of Translink to discuss a range of issues including future bus procurement.
- Took part in meetings of the Department's Integrated Passenger Transport Project stakeholder group.

Taxis

As a member of the newly formed Taxi Forum Imtac raised concerns about:

- A drop in the number of wheelchair accessible taxis since the introduction of new regulations.
- The continued refusal by drivers to carry assistance dogs.
- Concerns around the impact of regulation requiring drivers to undertake training about disabled people.

Private transport and parking

- Advised the Department about the development of the new online application process and forms for the Blue Badge Scheme.
- Assisted the Department to disseminate information about delays to the processing of Blue Badge applications.
- Took part in meetings of a Driver and Vehicle Agency group looking at the proposed implementation of graduated driver licensing and testing.
- Responded to Belfast City Councils draft Parking Strategy. To inform this response the Committee undertook parking surveys in the City Centre and published a report.

Other projects

- Developed a proposal to create a website that will provide comprehensive information on issues around travel for disabled people and older people living in Northern Ireland.

Our plans for 2017/18

Over the next twelve months Imtac will seek the further development of an inclusive transport system by engaging and listening to disabled people and older people as well as working with and advising policy makers and transport providers. Imtac has published a Work Programme agreed with the Department for 2017/18 that details tasks that will be undertaken in the next twelve months. Imtac will:

- Work with the Department to finalise the Accessible Transport Strategy and agree actions for inclusion in the Strategy that Imtac will take forward.
- Continue to provide advice on ensuring major infrastructure projects are designed to be accessible and inclusive. Projects include the Belfast and North West Transport Hubs and Belfast Rapid Transport.
- Continue to advise on how other key projects including the Taxis Forum, the Integrated Passenger Transport Project and the Integrated Ticketing Project, can deliver benefits to disabled people and older people.
- Develop a template that can be used to measure the accessibility of bus and train stations.
- Support and advise the proposed review of the renewal process for Blue Badge holders for people with life long mobility issues.
- Undertake a survey of the accessibility and provision of off-street car parking in Belfast City Centre.
- Continue to advise on key public realm schemes across Northern Ireland.
- Advise the Cycling Unit on implementation of the Bicycle Strategy.
- Develop a report assessing the impact of pavement café licensing during its first year of operation.
- Undertake an assessment of information about transport and travel contained on the NI Direct website.
- Assist Translink with the redesign of its website.
- Work with the Department to undertake a survey of the experiences of older people and disabled people using taxis.
- Work with Translink to establish a working group of disabled people and older people to develop proposals for improvements in key areas.

- Further develop a project that will look at measures to involve more older people and disabled people in service and policy development.
- Submit a funding application aimed at creating a new online resource for disabled people and older people around transport and travel.
- Review the current Memorandum of Understanding between Intac and the Department.

Our advice to Government

The publication of a new ATS remains a major priority for Imtac. **During the next year the Department should continue to work with the Committee to further develop the emerging Strategy and associated Action Plan.**

Imtac will continue to work with the Department, Translink and others to make public transport a realistic option for more disabled people and older people. However many older people and disabled people continue to rely on other services including rural Dial-a-Lift and urban DATS. Many people tell Imtac they find accessing these services difficult or impossible. **Imtac believes that research is required, involving disabled people and older people, to better understand the barriers that prevent people from using these services and to better inform the future policy and service development in this area.**

Taxis remain important to many older people and disabled people. Changes introduced under the Taxis Act were designed to improve services including providing increased numbers and better quality wheelchair accessible vehicles. Feedback Imtac has received from disabled people indicates the opposite has happened, with the numbers of available wheelchair accessible vehicles dropping alarmingly. **The drop in the number of wheelchair accessible taxis is a major concern to Imtac and more broadly disabled people. Urgent action is required by the Department to address this issue.**

Almost every journey involves using the pedestrian environment. Barriers in the pedestrian environment make many journeys difficult or impossible for many disabled people and older people, reducing the impact of Government investment elsewhere, such as improved public transport. Imtac acknowledges that improving all pedestrian infrastructure to an accessible standard will take time and additional investment. However there are a series of barriers created by the activities of Government and others, which can be addressed now. These include:

- Parking on footways and across dropped kerbs
- Unnecessary clutter on footways including advertising boards

- The positioning of equipment on the footway by utility companies.
- A permissive pavement café licensing regime that prioritises the requirements of businesses over accessibility for pedestrians
- A failure to make adequate and accessible provision for pedestrians during street and building work
- Forcing cyclists and pedestrians to share the footway
- A failure to meet or maintain design standards when carrying out upgrades to the current pedestrian infrastructure

Imtac believes that the above is indicative of a society that assigns little value to the part played by pedestrian journeys in contributing to an accessible and inclusive transport system. The Committee has welcomed the change in approach by the Department outlined in the draft Programme of Government from prioritising the movement of traffic and vehicles to prioritising the movement of people. **Imtac believes a key part of this change is for Government to demonstrate a greater commitment to pedestrian journeys. Beginning to address some of the activities outlined above could demonstrate the change in approach that is required.**