



Report on surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre undertaken in November 2010

February 2011

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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

The Blue Badge is hugely important to the mobility of many disabled people. The concessions it allows enables disabled people to park close to their destinations and undertake day-to-day activities most non-disabled people take for granted. Concessions include free use of dedicated on-street accessible parking bays, free use without time limit of other on-street parking bays and time limited parking on single and double yellow lines where it is safe to do so. Currently around 100,000 Blue Badges have been issued by Roads Service to disabled people in Northern Ireland.

For some years Imtac has been involved in consultation around changes to Belfast City Centre. A key issue for the Committee has been to ensure suitable provision is made for Blue Badge holders as part of the process of change. However we had no real grasp of the numbers of Blue Badge holders currently using the City Centre. We decided, therefore, to undertake a number of surveys looking at the number of people using a Blue Badge in the City Centre in order to better inform the advice we give to Government on this issue.

How we did the surveys

Four separate surveys were undertaken in November 2010. Three surveys were carried out on different weekdays. Each of these surveys was undertaken at a different time – one in the morning, one over the lunch period and one in the afternoon. A final survey was undertaken on a Saturday. The Saturday survey looked only at streets close to the retail core of the city centre.

The surveys covered a significant area of the city centre stretching from Ormeau Avenue in Southside of the city centre to Donegall Street on the Northside and Great Victoria Street on the Westside to Victoria Street on the Eastside. This involved over 700 on-street parking bays. In looking at this area we divided streets into two distinct areas

(1) The retail core – those streets accessible to the core of the city centre

(2) The Business areas – 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. We looked at how people were using their Badge – either 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 we did not attempt to gather information about how long people were using their Badges for in these areas.

All the data associated with the surveys is available from our website at <http://www.imtac.org.uk/publications.php?pid=181>.

What we found

Overall picture

The weekday surveys indicate a consistent picture of Blue Badge use in the centre with an average of 335 Blue Badge holders parking in all the streets surveyed.

How the Badge Holders used the concession did vary from survey to survey because of greater or lesser use of the yellow line concession. There was significant use of on-street parking bays with on average 30% of available bays being used by Blue Badge holders. Around one third of Badge Holders used the concession to park on single and double yellow lines (between 107 and 120 cars).

There was a significant rise in usage in the streets surveyed on the Saturday.

Retail Core

Unsurprisingly the retail core accounted for the highest usage by Blue Badge holders. On average 222 Blue Badge holders parked in these streets on a week day. There was variation in how Badge Holders used the concession with use of the yellow line concession higher on some days than on others. Of the on-street parking available on average 41.5% were being used by Blue Badge Holders. This includes 40 dedicated accessible parking bays.

Use of the yellow line concession was greatest in these streets with a high of 107 and low of 88 Blue Badge holders parked on single or double yellow lines on weekday surveys.

The Saturday survey indicates a significant rise in Blue Badge use. In total 269 Badges were being used in these streets on a Saturday. The majority of these Badges were being used to park on single or double yellow lines (158). The percentage of on-street parking bays used by Blue Badge holders actually dropped to 36%.

Business areas

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 113 Badge holders were parked in these streets during week days. In total for all three surveys only 36 Badge holders parked on a yellow line in these streets. On average nearly 23% of available on-street parking was being used by Blue Badge holders during weekdays. There are no dedicated accessible parking bays on these streets.

No survey was undertaken on these streets on a Saturday.

Blue Badge misuse

Whilst undertaking the surveys a number of clear examples of misuse of the Blue Badge were observed involving non-disabled people using the

concessions offered by the Badge. In one example a man was observed parking in an accessible parking bay on Wellington Place. On leaving the car it was observed that the Badge displayed the photograph of holder who was an older woman.

Emerging issues

The surveys have highlighted a number of issues:

- There is widespread use of the Blue Badge throughout Belfast City Centre but particularly in streets around the retail core
- Based on these surveys plans to reduce parking opportunities in the City Centre will impact negatively on Blue Badge holders
- Our surveys indicate some Blue Badges are being used by non-disabled people in the City Centre
- More needs to be done to ensure only genuine Badge Holders benefit from the concessions
- A significant percentage of on-street parking bays are currently being used by Badge Holders – this has revenue implications for Government
- Extensive use is also being made of the yellow line concession particularly in the retail core of the city centre – this has potential safety implications

Contact us

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