



Report on surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre undertaken in October and November 2011

January 2012

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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

In 2010 Imtac undertook a number of surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre. We did this in order to inform the advice we give to Government around changes to traffic management in the City Centre. Since the surveys were undertaken a number of changes have taken place that have resulted in a reduction in the number of parking opportunities for disabled people in the retail core of the city centre. Because of this we decided to repeat the surveys to ascertain what impact, if any, these changes have had on Blue Badge use.

How we did the surveys

Four separate surveys were undertaken in October and November 2011. As per the previous year 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 most of the same streets surveyed in 2010 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. Three streets covered in 2010 around St Anne's Cathedral were not covered. 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 – 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.

What we found

Overall picture

The weekday surveys indicate a rise Blue Badge use in the city compared with 2010. An average of 349 Blue Badge holders parked in all the streets surveyed as opposed to 335 in 2010.

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 remains significant use of on-street parking bays with on average of 31.5% of available bays being used by Blue Badge holders (this is a rise of 1.5% on 2010). There was a rise in the numbers of Blue Badge holders parking on yellow lines compared to 2010 (varying from 125 to 145). This rise can largely be explained by the re-opening of Donegall Place to Blue Badge holders.

There was drop in usage in the streets surveyed on the Saturday compared to 2010.

Retail Core

As in 2010 the retail core accounted for the highest usage by Blue Badge holders. On average 249 Blue Badge holders parked in these streets on a weekday a substantial increase on 2010 (222). There was variation in how

Badge Holders used the concession with use of the yellow line concession higher on some days than on others. Given the reduction in on-street parking in this area the percentage of bays being used by Blue Badge holders also increased on 2010 from 41.5% to 45%. This increase can be partially explained by an small increase in the number of dedicated accessible parking bays.

The majority of yellow line use was also in this area and again this usage increased significantly on 2010 (varying from 122 to 126). As previously stated this can largely be explained by the yellow line concessions being made available again in Donegall Place.

Surprisingly the Saturday survey indicates a significant drop in Blue Badge use compared to 2010 – 230 compared to 269. Yellow line use also dropped from 158 to 126.

Business areas

As in 2010 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 100 Badge holders were parked in these streets during week days compared to 111 in the previous year. This drop can be partially explained by the reduction in the number of streets surveyed.

In total for all three surveys only 34 Badge holders parked on a yellow line in these streets. On average nearly 23.5% of available on-street parking was being used by Blue Badge holders during weekdays, a slight rise on the surveys in 2010 (23%). There are no dedicated accessible parking bays on these streets.

No survey was undertaken on these streets on a Saturday.

Blue Badge misuse

As in 2010 a number of clear examples of misuse of the Blue Badge by non-disabled people were observed during surveys.

Emerging issues

The surveys have highlighted a number of issues:

- Blue Badge use is increasing in the city centre despite a reduction in parking opportunities
- More work needs to be done to establish why use is increasing
- Further reductions in parking opportunities associated with STEM will increase competition for parking and make the Blue Badge more valuable
- Misuse of the Blue Badge by non-disabled people is already happening but we cannot be sure about the extent of misuse