



Report on surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre undertaken in September and October 2014

February 2015

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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

Imtac has undertaken a number of surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre in the past¹. We did this not only in order to inform the advice we give to Government around changes to traffic management in the City Centre but also to inform the debate about the potential level of Blue Badge fraud in Northern Ireland. Since the last surveys were undertaken a number of changes have taken place. Firstly Belfast on the Move has been implemented resulting in a significant reduction in the number of on-street parking bays in Belfast City Centre and an overall reduction in parking opportunities for disabled people. Secondly Imtac is currently updating a paper around enforcement of Blue Badge fraud². We decided to repeat the surveys to ascertain what impact, if any, the Belfast on the Move changes have had on Blue Badge use and inform the updated Imtac paper on Blue Badge fraud.

¹ [Report on surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre undertaken in November 2010, Report on surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre undertaken in October and November 2011, Report on surveys of the on-street Blue Badge use in Ballymena Bangor, Belfast and Lisburn - February 2013.](#)

² [Enforcement of Blue Badge Fraud and Misuse \(Imtac 2011\)](#)

How we did the surveys

Four separate surveys³ were undertaken in September and October 2014. As per the previous three surveys, these 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. In previous surveys the Saturday survey looked only at streets close to the retail core of the city centre as we assumed that Blue Badge use in other areas would be very low. This year we looked at all areas to test this assumption.

The surveys covered most of the same streets surveyed in 2011 and 2012 stretching from Ormeau Avenue in Southside of the city centre to Donegal Street on the Northside and Great Victoria Street on the Westside to Victoria Street on the Eastside. We divided the City Centre into two 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.

³ [Data from surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre undertaken by Imtac in September and October 2014](#)

What we found

Overall picture

The weekday surveys indicate a slight drop Blue Badge use in the city compared with 2010, 2011 but a rise from 2012. An average of 315 Blue Badge holders parked in all the streets surveyed compared to the highest previous average of 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 29% of available bays being used by Blue Badge holders during the week (this is broadly similar to previous surveys). This figure dropped significantly at the weekend. Yellow line usage dropped considerably compared with previous surveys with an average of 84 Badge Holders availing of this concession during the week and as before a significant rise in yellow line usage at the weekend (115).

The drop in yellow line usage may be down to the significant increase in provision of dedicated accessible parking in the City Centre as part of the Belfast on the Move project. There are 46 dedicated accessible bays in the streets surveyed. In addition there a number of other areas, such as Wellington Place and Castle Place, where Blue Badge holders can park but there are no distinct bays. Across all of the surveys there was 98% usage of the 46 bays. Across all of the surveys only one accessible bay was being used by a vehicle not displaying a Blue Badge.

Retail Core

As in previous surveys the retail core accounted for the highest usage by Blue Badge holders. On average 226 Blue Badge holders parked in these streets on a weekday broadly similar with surveys previously. There was variation in how Badge Holders used the concession with use of the yellow line concession higher on some days than on others. The use of on street parking bays was broadly comparable with previous years with 41% of bays used by Blue Badge holders during weekdays. The use of dedicated

accessible bays increased due to the extension in the number of bays provided under the Belfast on the Move project.

The majority of yellow line use was also in this area. As previously stated usage of the yellow line concession has dropped compared to previous years, perhaps due to the increased provision of dedicated accessible parking.

The Saturday survey is broadly comparable with the 2011 survey with 225 Badge Holders parked in the area. Use of on-street bays dropped to 23% on the Saturday with increased usage of yellow line concessions. One possible explanation for this is that weekday usage is longer term with Blue Badge holders parking all day for work whereas on Saturday usage is people visiting for shorter periods for shopping.

Business areas

As with previous surveys 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 88 Badge holders were parked in these streets during weekdays. This is a slight drop in usage compared with the 2010 and 2011 surveys.

On average nearly 22% of available on-street parking was being used by Blue Badge holders during weekdays, again a slight reduction on previous surveys. Two new accessible parking bays have been added to these streets as a result of Belfast on the Move.

This year these streets were also surveyed on a Saturday to test the theory that Blue Badge use would be low due to offices and businesses being closed. This theory was proved to be correct only 8% of bays being used by Blue Badge holders.

Key Findings

The surveys have highlighted a number of issues:

- Blue Badge usage has largely been maintained despite the reductions in parking in the City Centre under Belfast on the Move.
- The mitigating measures introduced under Belfast on the Move including more accessible parking opportunities and dedicated bays have been successful in maintaining access for Blue Badge holders.
- Occupancy of dedicated accessible parking bays across all the surveys is 98%, suggesting bays are located in areas of demand.
- Only one example was found across all four surveys of a vehicle parked in an accessible parking bay not displaying a Blue Badge. This suggests that ongoing parking enforcement continues to be effective.
- Use of on-street parking by Blue Badge holders in the core of the city centre remains very high at 40%.
- Differences between weekday and weekend usage suggest more Blue Badge holders park all day during the week.