



**Report on surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City
Centre undertaken in April and May 2019**

(July 2019)

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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. The surveys were undertaken not only to inform the advice Imtac gives to Government around changes to traffic management in the City Centre but also to inform debate about wider Blue Badge usage in Northern Ireland.

Since the last surveys were undertaken in 2016 a number of changes have taken place. Firstly further infrastructure changes, including the provision of additional taxi ranks, have been implemented resulting in a further reduction in the number of on-street parking bays in Belfast City Centre and an overall reduction in parking opportunities for disabled people. Secondly ongoing and widespread development in the City Centre has resulted in long term, albeit temporary, restrictions on on-street parking opportunities. Finally the Primark fire in August 2018 has resulted in significant disruption to parking in the City Centre including the removal of parking opportunities as a result of the safety cordon and to facilitate rerouted bus services.

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](#), [Report on surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre undertaken in September and October 2014](#)

The Committee decided to repeat the surveys to ascertain what impact, if any, recent changes have had on Blue Badge use, and to inform the Imtac responses to any future plans for traffic management in the City Centre.

How we did the on-street surveys

This report is based on seven separate surveys undertaken in April and May 2019. Data from each survey is contained in Appendix A of this document. As per the previous reports developed by Imtac around on-street parking, surveys were carried out on different weekdays. Each of these surveys was undertaken at a different time – in the morning, over the lunch period or in the afternoon. A survey was also undertaken on a Saturday.

The surveys covered the same streets surveyed in the 2016 survey. The streets surveyed stretch 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. The City Centre was divided into two areas:

- (1) The retail core – those streets accessible to the core of the city centre
- (2) The Linen Quarter – 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. The surveys look 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 no attempt was made to gather information about how long people were using their Badges in these areas.

What we found

Overall picture

The surveys indicate a significant reduction on the level of overall Blue Badge usage compared with 2016. An average of 247 Blue Badge holders parked in all the streets surveyed compared to the average of 304 in 2016. This can be partially explained by measures introduced after the Primark fire including the removal of all parking from Donegall Place and Castle Place and significant removal of parking opportunities on North Street.

It is clear that the Primark fire has also had an impact on how people use the concessions offered by the Blue Badge. There remains significant use of on-street parking bays with an average of 28% of available bays being used by Blue Badge holders during the week (this is broadly similar to previous surveys). As in previous years this figure dropped significantly at the weekend. Yellow line usage fell significantly compared with the 2016 surveys with an average of 70 Badge Holders availing of this concession during the week compared to 94 in 2016. There was a larger reduction in yellow line parking on Saturday with numbers reducing from 122 to 70 compared with 2016.

There are 65 dedicated accessible bays in the streets surveyed. Usage of the bays dropped to 87% compared to 94% in 2016. Across all of the surveys there was a significant rise in the abuse of the bays by cars not displaying a Blue Badge rising from 2 to 17 instances. In most cases the abuse involved drivers waiting in the parked car, making enforcement extremely difficult. Only 1 of the 17 cars had received a Penalty Charge Notice.

Retail Core

As in previous surveys the retail core accounted for the highest usage by Blue Badge holders. On average 170 Blue Badge holders parked in these streets on a weekday a significant drop on previous years. This included

reductions in the level on-street parking bays, yellow line concessions and accessible bay usage compared to 2016.

The drop in usage can in some part be explained by the measures introduced as a result of the Primark fire. Analysis of the data shows that changes to access to Donegall Place, Castle Place and North Street reduced average usage by 33 compared to 2016. However other areas not directly affected by the Primark fire also experienced significant drops in usage compared to 2016. Usage on Royal Avenue, Gresham Street, Smithfield Square and Winetavern Street dropped on average by 21. The analysis does suggest that the main reductions in usage were concentrated on streets to the north of the Primark cordon.

The Saturday survey showed a similar drop in usage compared with the 2016 survey with 189 Badge Holders parked in the area compared with 255. The survey took place on the first weekend after the cordon around Primark was reduced and access to Donegall Place and Castle Place reintroduced.

Linen Quarter

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 82 Badge holders were parked in these streets during weekdays. This is a slight rise in usage compared with the 2016 survey.

Compared to 2016 there has been a significant reduction in the number of on-street parking bays. This reduction is largely due to building developments on McClintock, Street, Bedford Street and Franklin Street as well as measures introduced as part of Better Bedford Street. The reduction in parking and the slight rise in usage meant that usage of on-street bays in the area rose from 23% to 26% compared with 2016.

This year these streets were surveyed again on a Saturday to test the theory that Blue Badge use would be low due to offices and businesses

being closed. This theory was again proved to be correct only 6% of bays being used by Blue Badge holders.

Key Findings

The surveys have highlighted a number of issues:

- Both weekday and weekend Blue Badge usage has dropped significantly in Belfast City Centre compared with previous years.
- Some reduction in usage appears to be due to the restrictions introduced to Donegall Place, Castle Place and North Street following the Primark fire.
- Usage in the Linen Quarter and the southern side of Retail core remained largely the same as in 2016.
- There was a significant drop in usage in some streets in the retail core to the north of the Primark cordon.
- Occupancy of accessible parking bays fell in comparison to previous years and instances of abuse rose sharply.

The timing of the surveys may have been a factor in the difference in results this year compared to previous years. Past surveys have been conducted later in the year when demand for on-street parking is possibly higher. Despite this it is hard not to draw the conclusion that the Primark fire has had a significant negative impact on access to the City Centre for Blue Badge holders. Analysis and comparison of the data from these surveys indicates that restrictions placed on Blue Badge holders on certain streets as a result of the fire has not resulted in usage being displaced onto other streets. On the contrary the evidence suggests that Blue Badge usage has reduced significantly on other streets particularly to the northern end of the City Centre, suggesting disabled people no longer view this area as accessible.

It is right and proper that access to the City Centre be re-examined following the Primark fire and changes be considered. However any such changes must factor in the impact the fire has had on disabled people who rely on the car and accessible parking for mobility, ensuring that easy access close to the retail core is maintained. It is also essential that as restrictions are eased a clear message is communicated that the City Centre has reopened and is accessible to everyone to encourage people back to areas previously popular for Blue Badge holders.

The rise in the level of accessible parking bay abuse is also a concern. The Primark fire may have influenced this, with the surveys showing bays less likely to be fully utilised than in previous years and, perhaps, a greater temptation for non-badge holders to pull into bays. This may become less of an issue as the message gets out that the City Centre is returning to normal but in the interim the Department should look at increasing the monitoring and enforcement levels of accessible parking bays in the city centre.

Appendix A

Data from surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre undertaken by Imtac in April and May 2019

BBH is an abbreviation of Blue Badge Holder.

Survey undertaken mid-afternoon on Monday the 8th April 2019.

Street	BBH in on-street bays	BBH in accessible parking bays	BBH on yellow lines	Total BBH	Total on street parking bays	% BBH in on street bays
Donegal Place	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0
High Street/Castle Place	0	2	20	22	0	0
Bridge Street	0	1	3	4	0	0
Waring Street	1	0	0	1	2	50
North Street	3	5	2	10	7	43
Donegal Street	11	0	2	13	33	33
Royal Avenue	2	0	0	2	25	8
Gresham Street	7	4	1	12	20	35
Smithfield Sq Nrth/Winetavern St	11	2	2	15	31	35
King Street	2	0	1	3	20	10
Berry Street	0	2	8	10	0	0

Castle Street	0	0	0	0	0	0
Queen Street	0	1	1	2	0	0
College Street	0	2	2	4	0	0
Wellington Place	0	9	1	10	0	0
College Sq West	0	3	0	3	0	0
Upper Queen St	1	1	0	2	9	11
Donegal Sq Nrth	0	3	1	4	0	0
Chichester Street	8	10	1	19	15	53
Victoria Street	1	0	0	1	3	33
Gloucester Street	1	1	0	2	17	6
Montgomery Street	2	0	1	3	4	50
Upper Arthur St	0	1	1	2	1	0
Sub Total	49	47	47	143	187	26%
Alfred Street	8	0	0	8	25	32
Russell Street	2	0	0	2	6	33
Franklin Street	7	0	3	10	24	29
Clarence Street	4	0	0	4	19	21
Adelaide Street	23	0	3	26	57	40
Linenhall Street	13	0	0	13	62	21
Linenhall Street West	2	0	0	2	33	6
Bedford Street	3	0	0	3	10	20
James Street South	3	0	0	3	6	50
Clarence Street	0	0	1	1	2	0

West						
McClintock Street	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	N/A
Brunswick / Amelia Street	5	0	0	5	16	31
Great Victoria Street	1	3	0	4	4	25
Sub total	71	3	7	81	263	27%
Grand total	120	50	54	224	450	27%

Survey undertaken at lunchtime on Wednesday the 8th May 2019

Street	BBH in on-street bays	BBH in accessible parking bays	BBH on yellow lines	Total BBH	Total on street parking bays	% BBH in on street bays
Donegal Place	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0
High Street/Castle Place	0	2	20	22	0	0
Bridge Street	0	2	4	6	0	0
Waring Street	1	0	0	1	2	50
North Street	5	7	6	18	7	71
Donegal Street	7	0	4	11	33	31
Royal Avenue	2	0	0	2	25	8
Gresham Street	8	5	0	13	20	40
Smithfield Sq	12	4	6	22	31	39

Nrth/Winetavern St						
King Street	5	0	3	8	20	25
Berry Street	0	3	9	12	0	0
Castle Street	0	0	1	1	0	0
Queen Street	0	2	0	2	0	0
College Street	0	3	3	6	0	0
Wellington Place	0	10	0	10	0	0
College Sq West	0	3	0	3	0	0
Upper Queen St	3	2	1	6	9	33
Donegal Sq Nrth	0	3	1	4	0	0
Chichester Street	5	10	0	15	15	33
Victoria Street	1	0	0	1	3	33
Gloucester Street	10	1	1	12	17	59
Montgomery Street	0	0	3	3	4	0
Upper Arthur St	0	1	2	3	1	0
Sub Total	59	60	64	183	187	32%
Alfred Street	10	0	4	14	25	40
Russell Street	2	0	0	2	6	33
Franklin Street	7	0	1	8	24	29
Clarence Street	7	0	3	10	19	37
Adelaide Street	13	0	3	16	57	23

Linenhall Street	14	0	1	15	62	23
Linenhall Street West	9	0	0	9	33	27
Bedford Street	2	1	0	3	10	20
James Street South	3	0	0	3	6	50
Clarence Street West	1	0	2	3	2	50
McClintock Street	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0
Brunswick / Amelia Street	5	0	0	5	16	31
Great Victoria Street	0	3	0	3	4	0
Sub total	73	4	14	91	263	28%
Grand total	132	64	78	274	450	29%

Survey undertaken mid-morning on Thursday 16th May 2019.

Street	BBH in on-street bays	BBH in accessible parking bays	BBH on yellow lines	Total BBH	Total on street parking bays	Percentage BBH in on street bays
Donegal Place	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0
High Street/Castle Place *	0	3	19	22	0	0
Bridge Street	0	2	4	6	0	0

Waring Street	1	0	0	1	2	50
North Street	0	7	4	11	7	0
Donegal Street	8	0	2	10	33	24
Royal Avenue	5	0	0	5	25	20
Gresham Street	9	5	1	15	20	45
Smithfield Sq Nrth/Winetavern St	14	4	5	23	31	45
King Street	3	0	5	8	20	15
Berry Street	0	3	10	13	0	0
Castle Street	0	0	0	0	0	0
Queen Street	0	2	1	3	0	0
College Street	0	4	5	9	0	0
Wellington Place	0	10	1	11	0	0
Upper Queen St	3	0	1	4	9	33
College Sq West	0	2	1	3	0	0
Donegal Sq Nrth	0	3	0	3	0	0
Chichester Street	6	10	1	17	15	40
Victoria Street	2	0	0	2	3	67
Gloucester Street	6	1	1	8	17	35
Montgomery Street	1	0	2	3	4	25
Upper Arthur St	0	1	1	2	1	0

Sub Total	58	57	64	179	187	31%
Alfred Street	7	0	0	7	25	28
Russell Street	2	0	0	2	6	33
Franklin Street	2	0	0	2	24	8
Clarence Street	8	0	0	8	19	4
Adelaide Street	15	0	1	16	57	26
Linenhall Street	9	0	1	10	62	15
Linenhall Street West	3	0	0	3	33	9
Bedford Street	3	1	0	4	10	30
James Street South	3	0	0	3	6	50
Clarence Street West	0	0	0	0	2	0
McClintock Street	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0
Brunswick / Amelia Street	5	0	0	5	16	31
Great Victoria Street	0	3	0	3	4	0
Sub total	57	4	2	63	263	22%
Grand total	115	61	66	242	450	26%

- **2 more accessible parking bays reopened in Castle Place**

Survey undertaken lunchtime on Monday 20th May 2019.

Street	BBH in on-street bays	BBH in accessible parking bays	BBH on yellow lines	Total BBH	Total on street parking bays	Percentage BBH in on street bays
Donegal Place	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0
High Street/Castle Place **	0	7	19	26	0	0
Bridge Street	0	2	4	6	0	0
Waring Street	0	0	0	0	2	0
North Street	3	6	5	14	7	43
Donegal Street	8	0	5	13	28	29
Royal Avenue	3	0	1	4	19	16
Gresham Street	6	5	3	14	20	30
Smithfield Sq Nrth/Winetavern St	11	4	8	23	31	35
King Street	4	0	1	5	20	20
Berry Street	0	2	6	8	0	0
Castle Street	0	0	0	0	0	0
Queen Street	0	2	0	2	0	0
College Street	0	3	0	3	0	0
Wellington Place	0	10	0	10	0	0

Upper Queen St	2	1	0	3	9	22
College Sq West	0	2	0	2	0	0
Donegal Sq Nrth	0	3	2	5	0	0
Chichester Street	3	9	1	13	15	20
Victoria Street	1	0	0	1	3	33
Gloucester Street	11	1	1	13	17	65
Montgomery Street	1	0	2	3	4	25
Upper Arthur St	0	1	0	1	1	0
Sub Total	53	58	58	169	187	28%
Alfred Street	8	0	2	10	25	32
Russell Street	3	0	1	4	6	50
Franklin Street	5	0	2	7	24	21
Clarence Street	3	0	2	5	19	16
Adelaide Street	17	0	3	20	57	30
Linenhall Street	7	0	1	8	62	11
Linenhall Street West	5	0	0	5	33	15
Bedford Street	3	2	0	5	10	30
James Street South	3	0	0	3	6	50
Clarence Street West	0	0	0	0	2	0
McClintock	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0

Street						
Brunswick / Amelia Street	6	0	1	7	16	38
Great Victoria Street	1	3	0	4	4	25
Sub total	61	5	12	78	263	23%
Grand total	114	63	70	247	450	25%

***** 4 more accessible parking bays reopened on Castle Place.**

Survey undertaken mid-morning on Tuesday 21st May 2019.

Street	BBH in on-street bays	BBH in accessible parking bays	BBH on yellow lines	Total BBH	Total on street parking bays	Percentage BBH in on street bays
Donegal Place	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0
High Street/Castle Place	0	8	20	28	0	0
Bridge Street	0	2	5	7	0	0
Waring Street	1	0	0	1	2	50
North Street	1	7	3	11	7	14
Donegal Street	8	0	3	11	28	29
Royal Avenue	6	0	0	6	19	32
Gresham Street	11	4	0	15	20	55
Smithfield Sq Nrth/Winetavern	12	4	7	23	20	60

St						
King Street	9	0	2	11	20	45
Berry Street	0	3	16	19	0	0
Castle Street	0	0	1	1	0	0
Queen Street	0	4	1	5	0	0
College Street	0	4	4	8	0	0
Wellington Place	0	5	0	5	0	0
College Sq West	0	3	1	4	0	0
Upper Queen St	4	2	0	6	9	44
Donegal Sq Nrth	0	3	0	3	0	0
Chichester Street	4	10	1	15	15	27
Victoria Street	2	0	0	2	3	66
Gloucester Street	6	1	3	10	17	35
Montgomery Street	2	0	3	5	4	50
Upper Arthur St	0	1	0	1	1	0
Sub Total	66	61	70	197	187	35%
Alfred Street	10	0	2	12	25	40
Russell Street	3	0	0	3	6	50
Franklin Street	4	0	1	5	24	12
Clarence Street	6	0	2	8	19	32
Adelaide Street	20	0	4	24	57	35
Linenhall Street	16	0	2	18	62	26

Linenhall Street West	7	0	0	7	33	21
Bedford Street	3	1	0	4	10	31
James Street South	3	0	1	4	6	50
Clarence Street West	0	0	1	1	2	0
McClintock Street	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0
Brunswick / Amelia Street	6	0	1	7	16	37
Great Victoria Street	0	3	0	3	4	0
Sub total	78	4	14	96	263	30%
Grand total	144	65	84	293	450	32%

Survey undertaken mid afternoon on Wednesday 22nd May 2019.

Street	BBH in on-street bays	BBH in accessible parking bays	BBH on yellow lines	Total BBH	Total on street parking bays	Percentage BBH in on street bays
Donegall Place	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0
High Street/Castle Place	0	3	21	24	0	0
Bridge Street	0	2	3	5	0	0
Waring Street	2	0	0	2	2	100

North Street	4	5	2	11	7	57
Donegal Street	12	0	2	14	28	43
Royal Avenue	1	0	2	3	19	5
Gresham Street	6	2	1	9	20	30
Smithfield Sq Nrth/Winetavern St	6	3	2	11	20	30
King Street	2	0	1	3	20	10
Berry Street	0	1	7	8	0	0
Castle Street	0	0	0	0	0	0
Queen Street	0	1	0	1	0	0
College Street	0	4	2	6	0	0
Wellington Place	0	9	2	11	0	0
College Sq West	0	3	1	4	0	0
Upper Queen St	4	1	0	5	9	44
Donegal Sq Nrth	0	1	0	1	0	0
Chichester Street	6	8	0	14	15	40
Victoria Street	1	0	0	1	3	33
Gloucester Street	7	1	1	9	17	41
Montgomery Street	1	0	1	2	4	25
Upper Arthur St	0	1	1	2	1	0
Sub Total	52	45	49	146	187	28%

Alfred Street	5	0	0	5	25	20
Russell Street	4	0	0	4	6	66
Franklin Street	3	0	4	7	24	12
Clarence Street	7	0	1	8	19	37
Adelaide Street	24	0	1	25	57	33
Linenhall Street	10	0	0	10	62	16
Linenhall Street West	6	0	0	6	33	18
Bedford Street	1	1	0	2	10	10
James Street South	1	0	0	1	6	17
Clarence Street West	0	0	2	2	2	0
McClintock Street	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0
Brunswick / Amelia Street	7	0	1	8	16	44
Great Victoria Street	0	3	0	3	4	0
Sub total	68	4	9	81	263	26%
Grand total	120	49	58	227	450	27%

Survey undertaken lunchtime on Saturday 25th May 2019.

Street	BBH in on-street bays	BBH in accessible parking	BBH on yellow lines	Total BBH	Total on street parking	Percentage BBH in on street
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		bays			bays	bays
Donegall Place ***	0	0	7	7	0	0
High Street/Castle Place	0	9	19	28	0	0
Bridge Street	0	2	2	4	0	0
Waring Street	0	0	0	0	2	0
North Street	4	7	6	17	7	57
Donegal Street	7	0	4	11	28	25
Royal Avenue	2	0	0	2	19	10
Gresham Street	2	4	2	8	20	10
Smithfield Sq Nrth/Winetavern St/Samuel St	7	5	2	14	20	35
King Street	1	0	3	4	20	5
Berry Street	0	3	14	17	0	0
Castle Street	0	0	0	0	0	0
Queen Street	0	3	0	3	0	0
College Street	0	4	5	9	0	0
Wellington Place	0	9	1	10	0	0
College Sq West	0	3	1	4	0	0

Upper Queen St	3	2	0	5	9	33
Donegal Sq Nrth	0	3	1	4	0	0
Chichester Street	9	10	0	19	15	60
Victoria Street	1	0	0	1	3	33
Gloucester Street	2	0	0	2	17	12
Montgomery Street	0	0	1	1	4	0
Upper Arthur St	0	1	0	1	1	0
Sub Total	38	65	68	171	187	18%
Alfred Street	1	0	0	1	25	4
Russell Street	0	0	0	0	6	0
Franklin Street	3	0	0	3	24	12
Clarence Street	0	0	0	0	19	0
Adelaide Street	1	0	0	1	57	2
Linenhall Street	2	0	0	2	62	3
Linenhall Street West	2	0	0	2	33	6
Bedford Street	1	0	0	1	10	10
James Street South	0	0	0	0	6	0
Clarence Street	0	0	0	0	2	0

West						
McClintock Street	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0
Brunswick / Amelia Street	5	0	2	7	16	31
Great Victoria Street	0	1	0	1	4	0
Sub total	15	1	2	18	263	6%
Grand total	53	66	70	189	450	12%

***** Donegall Place reopened to Blue Badge holders**