

Belfast Trust Minibuses – the benefits of low-floor

Members of Imtac had the opportunity to view one of thirteen new low-minibuses purchased by Belfast Trust in April 2013. The visit presented members with the opportunity to see at first hand the benefits of low-floor minibus design compared with traditional high-floor wheelchair accessible minibuses.

The benefits include a wide entrance step-free side entrance compared to stepped access on traditional high-floor minibuses. This entrance allows access for the majority of passengers including most wheelchair users via a ramp.



There is level access throughout the interior of the vehicle with tracking which allows flexibility in seat configuration. This means for example that a wheelchair user can sit with other passengers at the front of the vehicle rather than be restricted to the back of the vehicle as is often the case with high-floor vehicles.



There is ramped access at the rear of the vehicle. Due to the low-floor and suspension that can be lowered further the gradient of the ramp is slight. This negates the need for lifts, speeding up boarding times and reducing maintenance costs and problems when lifts break down.



There are other access features on the vehicles including colour contrasted handrails.



The feedback to date from users and Trust staff is very positive. Belfast Trust is the first agency to invest in a significant way in low-floor minibuses. It is hoped that other operators of minibuses will follow suit including other Health Trust, Education Boards and operators of DRD funded accessible urban and rural services.