



**Comments from Imtac on the Briefing on
Northern Ireland Budgetary Outlook 2018-2020**

January 2018

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About Imtac

The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (Imtac) is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including key transport professionals. Its role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.

The aim of the Committee is to ensure that older people and disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else to travel when and where they want.

Imtac receives support from the Department for Infrastructure (hereafter referred to as the Department).

General comments

Imtac does not propose to comment on the briefing document in its entirety. Instead its response will focus on its core remit of transport and travel, looking at the budgetary outlook for the Department for Infrastructure in particular.

However the Committee does wish to make a broad comment, pointing out that collectively many of the proposals resulting from each of the scenarios contained in the briefing document are likely to have a major detrimental impact on many aspects of lives of older people and disabled people. Whilst the Committee understands the document has been created to inform future Ministerial decisions, final decisions must also be subject to formal consultation process and a full Rural & Equality Impact Assessments.

Specific comments on the implications for the Department for Infrastructure

Imtac has major concerns about the proposed reductions in resource for the Department under all three scenarios but in particular under scenarios 1 and 3. These concerns can be summarised as:

- Reductions in public transport services and reductions and potential cessation of rural and urban community transport will have a direct impact on disabled people and older people

by reducing and removing what are already limited travel options.

- Reductions in resource for road and footway maintenance and the proposed switching off of street lights will again disproportionately affect older people and disabled people, creating a more hostile pedestrian environment making even short journeys difficult or impossible.
- The impact of no winter service, reduced water and sewerage services and the cessation of roads safety campaigns and programmes will affect everyone in society but Intac would argue that again the impact on groups such as older people and disabled people will again be disproportionate.

The implications for the Departments capital budgets are less severe. However it is clear that many planned schemes, outside of the major infrastructure projects, which would have involved improvements to the pedestrian environment will not proceed. Such improvements directly benefit disabled people and older people.

The Committee can see no merit for disabled people and older under any of the scenarios. Each will see a reduction in travel opportunities, particularly for those who live outside the Greater Belfast area and in rural communities. Significant research has been undertaken into the link between access to transport and social exclusion, inequality and isolation¹. Reduction in resources for transport services will not only increase social exclusion and increase inequality amongst already marginalised groups; it is also likely to be a false economy for Government as it will lead to increased costs and pressures in other areas including health. Reductions in travel opportunities will also make it impossible for any future Executive in Northern Ireland to progress many of the key outcomes, indicators and actions contained in the most recent draft Programme for Government.

Intac recognises that Government in Northern Ireland faces unprecedented budgetary pressures and that difficult choices will

¹ For the most comprehensive study see [Making the Connections - Final Report on Transport and Social Exclusion](#)

have to be made. However the Committee would urge that the budgetary resource settlement for the Department for Infrastructure be reconsidered and that other measures are examined to minimise the potential catastrophic impact on the lives of older people, disabled people and others. In order for this to happen the Committee would suggest the following:

1 Reconsider the basis for protecting some departmental budgets

Whilst Imtac members recognise the importance of both health services and our education system, the Committee questions whether the level in budget reductions being imposed on other Departments may not be counterproductive. The Committee believes that the severity of service reductions in other areas has the potential to have a significant impact across society, adding to the costs of Government and putting services such as health under greater pressure. The Committee recommends that an evidence-based assessment be undertaken of the financial, social and equality impacts of protecting some departmental budgets over others.

2 Review transport programmes and policies

Despite the importance of current transport services, too many disabled people and older people still find them difficult or impossible to use. Given the current pressures it is vital that Government takes steps to ensure that all transport services, programmes and policies promote and maximise inclusion and accessibility. The Committee believes now is the time for a fresh look at how public and community transport services are designed and delivered here with a renewed focus on user rather than the operators requirements. Whilst this process may not deliver savings in the short term, the Committee does believe there are potential major savings in the medium to long term.

Part of any review of policies must include the current Concessionary Fares Scheme. Whilst Imtac broadly supports concessionary travel for older people and disabled people, the scheme does create inequalities as it benefits people with good access to public transport the most. If services are reduced this inequality is likely to increase with many more people entitled to concessionary travel but no services to use it on. In these

circumstances Imtac view a review of current policy as a necessity, seeking to ensure as many older people and disabled people as possible continue to derive benefit from what is clearly a valued scheme.

3 *Introduce income generation measures*

Given the pressures faced across Government Imtac broadly supports the introduction of measures to generate additional income as long as such measures include protections recognising issues of equality and those on low incomes.

In relation to transport the Committee supports measures such as the introduction of charging for on-street car parking. Research previously highlighted in this response has clearly identified the link between inequality and car access. Many of the implications of Budget Outlook will impact most severely on those without access to a car and will increase inequality in our society. Although likely to be unpopular, Government must seek to offset and minimise service reductions through generating more revenue from those who will continue to enjoy the mobility and choice access to a car brings. Money raised from such measures should be ring-fenced to fund socially necessary public transport services. A precedent for this has already been set where income generated from fines for driving in bus lanes has been used to maintain the audio visual information systems on buses.