



Recommendations from Imtac on public realm proposals for the Clifton Gateway in Belfast

(November 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).

About this report

This report has been developed by Imtac in response to a request from the Department for Communities (DfC) for a street audit of the area covered by the proposed Clifton Gateway Project in Belfast. Following an audit undertaken in September 2018 this paper examines current issues and challenges on the streets concerned as well as setting out the key recommendations of the Committee designed to ensure planned improvements deliver maximum benefits for older people and disabled people in particular.

Street audit findings

The main streets included in the proposed public realm scheme include Clifton Street, Carlisle Circus and parts of Donegall Street, Union Street, Carrick Hill, Trinity Street, Stanhope Street, Henry Place, Crumlin Road and Antrim Road. The routes include significant places of historic interest as well as major entrances and exits to the Westlink.

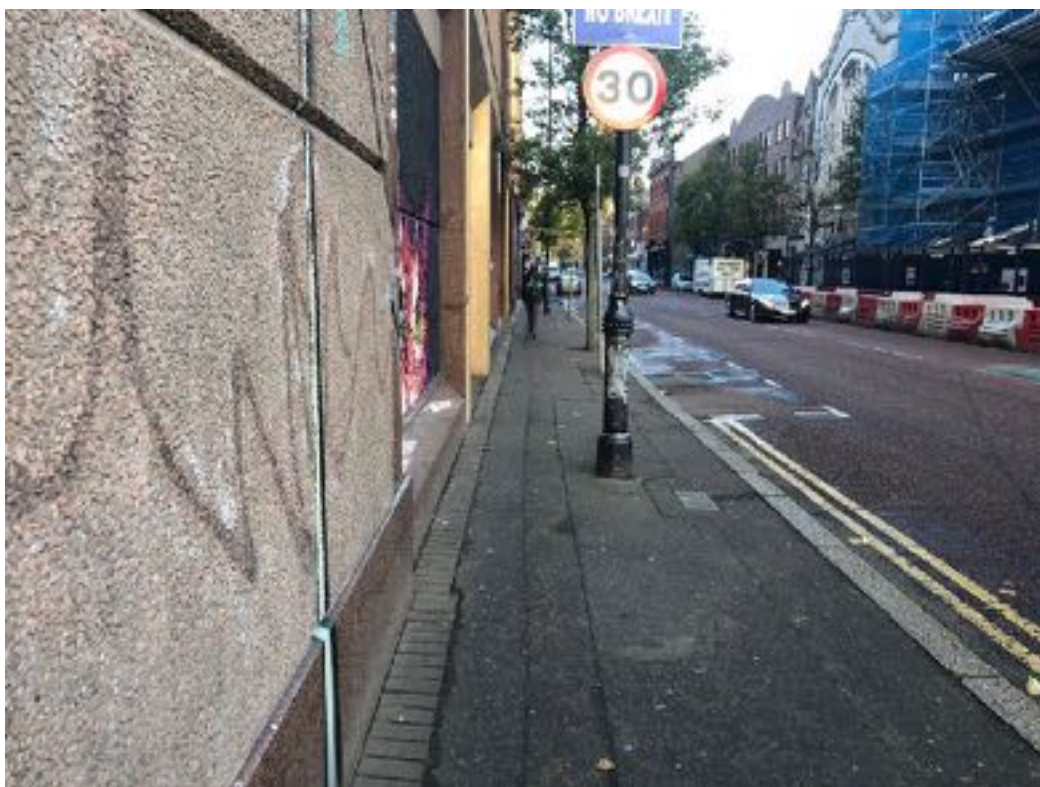
Donegall Street

Only a section of Donegall Street is included in the proposed public realm scheme. This stretches from the Belfast Telegraph building at its junction with Royal Avenue beside the Belfast Telegraph building to its northern junction with Carrick Hill at St Patrick's Church. It is proposed to include a short section of Union Street abutting Donegall Street in the scheme.

There is a controlled crossing across Donegall Street at its junction with Royal Avenue. The contrast between tactile paving and surrounding paving is poor.



The location of street lighting columns in the middle of the footway on the western footway create an obvious obstruction to the already narrow west side footway.



A vehicle entrance to the Telegraph Building results in a section of raised kerb along the footway. A road works sign obstructs the footway shortly after this point.



There is an uncontrolled crossing across the junction with Union Street. Whilst in-line and using the correct tactile paving the carriageway surface is in poor condition creating a potential hazard.



The western footway on Donegall Street continues along a section that is mainly clutter free, although there is a vehicle entrance to a funeral parlour.



Shop displays on the footway and the location of street lighting columns create potential hazards approaching the junction with Carrick Hill.



The footway broadens shortly after a bus stop, opposite St Patrick's Church. The footway surface here is rough and uneven.



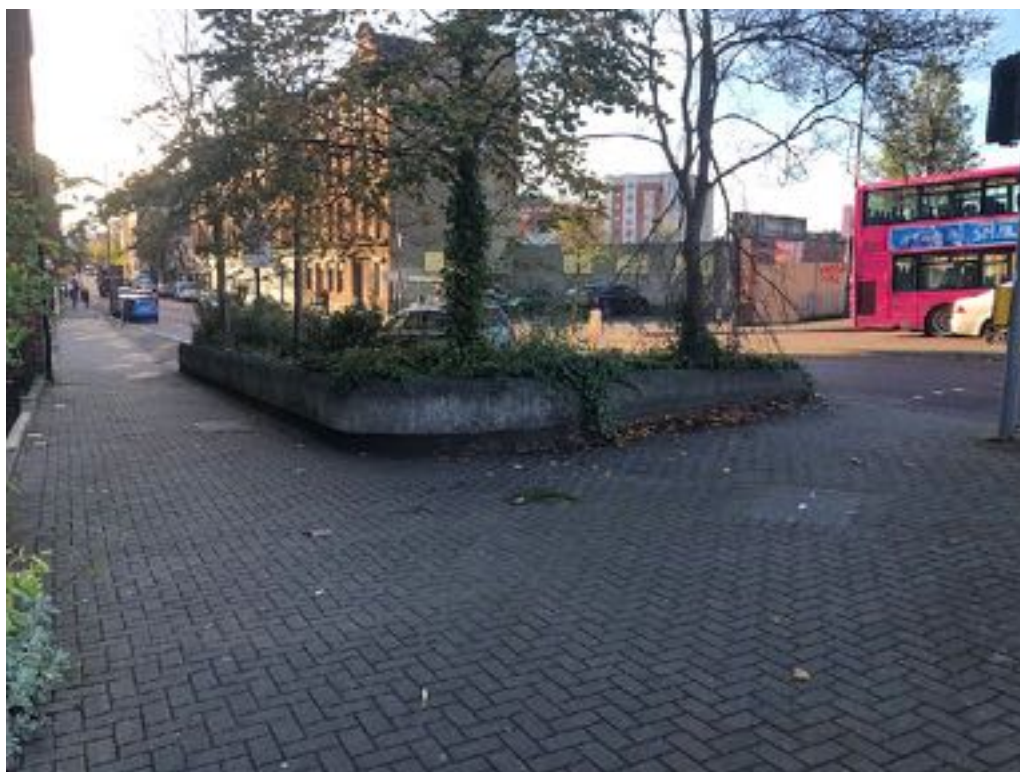
There is a staggered pedestrian crossing with central traffic island across Donegall Street at its junction with Carrick Hill. An uncontrolled rather than a controlled crossing provides access from the western footway to a traffic island. This is likely to create difficulties for some people with a visual impairment. The depth of tactile paving and location of control boxes are issues.



The tactile paving on the eastern footway does not contrast with the surrounding paving on the controlled crossing across Donegall Street on the eastern footway.



The eastern footway on Donegall Street is relatively wide and uncluttered at this point. Planting and a wall along the kerb line provides screening from what is a busy junction.



The footway broadens at the front of St Patrick's Church, however a deep dish drainage channel runs the length of this section creating a potential hazard.



There is an uncontrolled crossing at the junction with Donegall Lane. The tactile paving on the does not meet design requirements in terms of depth. There is a significant section of this junction where the kerb is flush with the carriageway without tactile paving.



Cars are parked on the footway in front of buildings to the south of this junction. This parking reduces footway widths significantly in parts.



The eastern footway narrows considerably outside the Irish News offices. Railings create further narrowing as the footway turns sharply round the corner of the building.



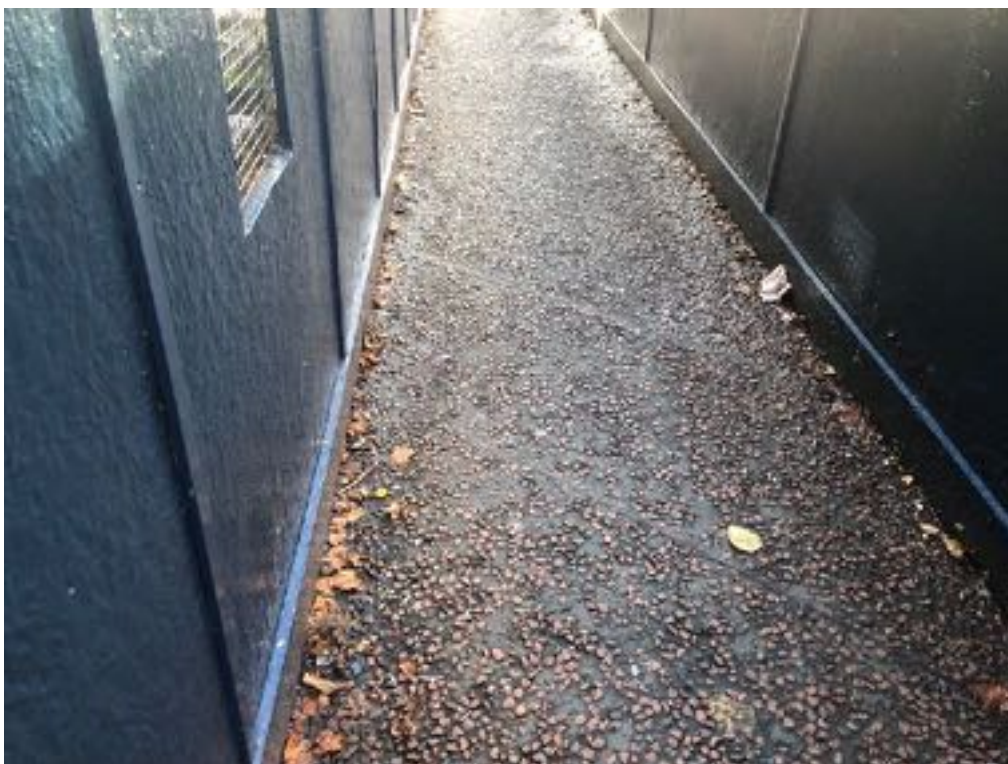
The footway after this turn is relatively clutter free with signage and trees located in a line close to the kerb.



Ramped access to the temporary footway associated with the redevelopment of the University of Ulster has been provided. The design and condition of the ramp is poor and will be a hazard to some disabled people.



The temporary route is narrow and is poorly maintained with broken glass a problem.



An existing dropped kerb provides access to the controlled crossing across the north section of Donegall Street at its junction with Royal Avenue. It should be noted that once works at the University is completed this will be an uncontrolled crossing for people travelling across Royal Avenue.



Union Street

The southern footway on Union Street is narrow and in poor condition.



There is no safe and accessible opportunity to cross Union Street at its junction with Little Donegall Street.



The northern footway on Union Street is narrow and in poor condition with large bins further reducing footway width.



Carrick Hill

A short section of Carrick Hill is included in the scheme. This includes the junction with Donegall Street and the sections between its junctions with North Queen Street and Frederick Street.

A staggered controlled crossing including a central traffic island is provided across Carrick Hill from the western footway of Donegall Street. The incorrect positioning of control boxes is problematic.



Completion of access on the western side of the northern footway of Carrick Hill is via another narrow traffic island and a uncontrolled crossing. This design incorporating controlled and uncontrolled crossing on one route is potentially confusing for a range of users.



There is a staggered controlled crossing across Carrick Hill from eastern footway of Donegall Street. The crossing includes both a traffic island and refuge mid way between the footway and the island. The tactile paving and surrounding pavement do not contrast on the southern side of the crossing.



The controls boxes on the traffic island associated with the controlled crossing on the northern footway of Carrick Hill are incorrectly positioned.



There is a footway along the southern side of Carrick Hill approaching its junction with Frederick Street. The area includes some green space which provides some protection from traffic but it is currently overgrown and uninviting.



A staggered controlled crossing has been provided where Carrick Hill meets Frederick Street. Tails have been provided with the tactile on the traffic island which is not standard.



Access to the northern footway of Carrick Hill at this point is via a series of narrow, poorly designed traffic islands across its junction with North Queen Street. Although dropped kerbs have been provided, the absence of tactile paving means there is no safe or accessible way for people with a visual impairment to cross the westbound North Queen Street carriageway.



The footway along the northern section of Carrick Hill close to Clifton House is narrowed below acceptable standard by the positioning of trees and signage.



Clifton Street

The scheme proposes to include short sections of Trinity Street, Stanhope Street and Henry Place which are side streets off Clifton Street.

There is a staggered controlled crossing across Clifton Street at its junction with Carrick Hill. The incorrect positioning of control boxes on the traffic island is likely to create difficulties for people with visual impairment.



The footway surface on the eastern side of Clifton Street is rough and uneven and is narrowed below acceptable standards at points by the positioning of trees and street signs.



There are controlled crossings on the eastern footway of Clifton Street at its junction with the Westlink slip-on and slip off and a staggered controlled crossing across Clifton Street. The positioning of tactile paving and control boxes makes these junctions difficult to navigate for some disabled people.





There is a in-line uncontrolled crossing across Clifton Street at its junction with Henry Place. The section of this crossing beside the doctors surgery has a substantial section of dropped kerb around the radius of the corner without tactile paving.



There is a Zebra crossing across Clifton Street close to Carlisle Circus. The tactile paving has been laid incorrectly on the eastern side and the footway condition is poor.



The Zebra crossing has a central refuge with tactile paving and the beacon located centrally, creating a hazard. The tactile paving on the western side has also been laid incorrectly.



The footway on the western side is narrowed by the pedestrian guardrail and the security screening around a building. Its surface is rough and uneven.



On the west side there is a controlled crossing across the exit from the Westlink onto Clifton Street. The control box at city centre side of the crossing is not beside the tactile paving.



There is a further controlled crossing on the west side across the Westlink westbound on-slip. The positioning of the control box is an issue on the city centre side of the crossing.



There is a staggered controlled crossing with traffic island across Clifton Street at this point. The incorrect positioning of the control boxes and the single tile depth of tactile paving on the island is problematic.



Although broad the footway on the eastern side between the eastbound on-slip and Stanhope Street after this point is rough and uneven. A large dish drainage channel runs down its centre.



There is an in-line uncontrolled crossing across the junction with Stanhope Street. Tactile paving depth has been reduced in sections due the radius of the kerb at the junction.



A bin has been placed in the centre of the eastern footway, creating an obvious hazard. A deep transverse dish drainage channel is also a hazard.



No tactile paving to warn pedestrians with a visual impairment has been provided at the vehicle exit to the garage on Clifton Street.



There is an in-line uncontrolled crossing at the junction with Trinity Street. Tactile paving has been poorly laid and lacks the appropriate depth and width particularly on the city centre side partly due to the radius of the kerb.



The footway approaching Carrick Hill is rough and uneven and includes dish drainage channels. There is a substantial section of dropped kerb to allow access to a garage.



Trinity Street

The footway on the southern side of Trinity Street is very rough and uneven with granite kerbing presenting a potential trip hazard at historic vehicle entrances. Cars are parked partially on the pavement.



There is no footway on large parts of the northern section of Trinity Street because of the entrance to the garage with no tactile warning provided for pedestrians with a visual impairment. The section footway that is provided is obstructed by parked vehicles.



Stanhope Street

A kerbed vehicle entrance to an off-street car park means step free access along the southern footway of Stanhope Street is impossible.

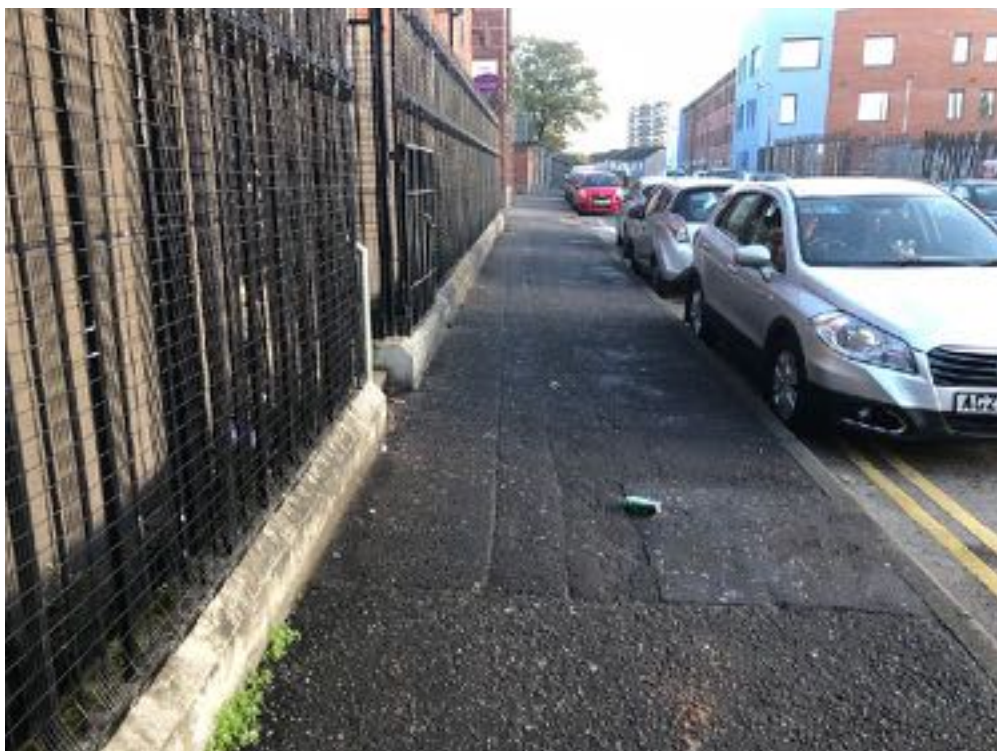


The condition of the northern section of footway is very poor and parked cars reduce its width.



Henry Place

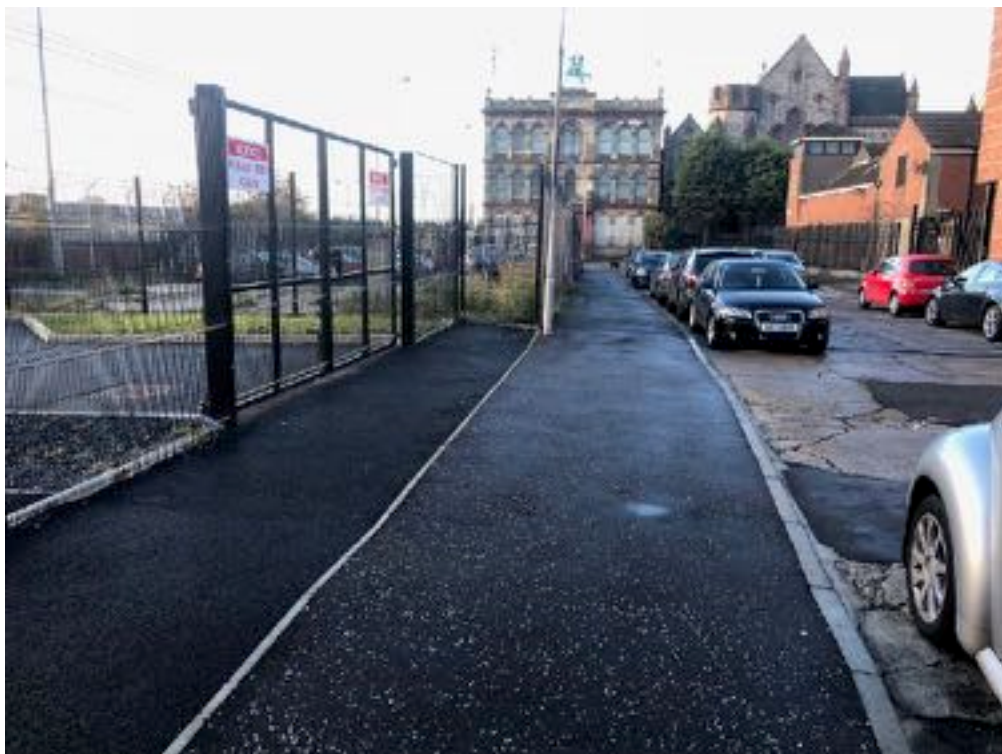
The northern section of footway along Henry Place is generally clutter free. The surface is rough and uneven.



The granite kerbs around the entrance to the historic Clifton Street Cemetery mean there is not barrier free access to the cemetery or the footway as it continues eastwards.



The southern section of footway is clutter free and is in much better condition. However there is a lengthy section of footway flush with the carriageway which could potentially allow someone with a visual impairment to stray onto the carriageway.



Carlisle Circus

The quality of the footway surface improves in the area around Carlisle Circus. However the corrugated metal hoardings on the southern side narrows the footway and make the area uninviting.



There is a wide section of footway on the southern side of the Denmark Street junction, partially screened off by security fencing. A parked car is partially obstructing the footway close to the uncontrolled crossing.



There is an in-line uncontrolled crossing across the junction with Denmark Street. The contrast between paving and the tactile on the southern section is poor. The crossing distance may present an issue for some given traffic levels in the area. There is a case for the provision of a pedestrian refuge at the mid point of the crossing.



The footway on the western section between Denmark Street and Crumlin Road is broad and uncluttered. There is an under-utilised public space here containing planters and protected by a series of stainless steel bollards.



The footway on the northern section of Carlisle Circus between Crumlin Road and Antrim Road is rough and uneven but largely clutter free.



There is an uncontrolled crossing across the junction with Antrim Road which includes a central traffic island with appropriate tactile paving.



The footway on the eastern section of Carlisle Circus close to the Antrim Road is partially obstructed by a parked vehicle.



The remaining section of footway is rough and uneven but in the main clutter free as it approaches Clifton Street.



Antrim Road

A short section of Antrim Road is included in the scheme, up to and including the first controlled crossing.

The footway on the western side of the Antrim Road close to Carlisle Circus is obstructed by the location of lighting columns and multiple large A Boards. It also includes a dish drainage channel running along the centre of the footway.



A-Boards partially obstruct an in-line uncontrolled crossing at the junction with Annesley Street. Sections of the footway are flush with the carriageway with no provision of tactile paving.



There is a further good example of an in-line uncontrolled crossing with appropriate tactile paving at the junction with Adela Street.



There is a well designed controlled crossing across Antrim Road north of Adela Street at this point with appropriate tactile paving and control box provision.



A-Boards, a dish drainage channel and footway parking create barriers on the footway around the shops approaching Carlisle Circus.



Crumlin Road

The section of Crumlin Road included in the scheme starts at the junction with Carlisle Circus and ends at its junctions with Agnes Street and Clifton Park Avenue.

There is a Zebra crossing across Crumlin Road close to Carlisle Circus. The tactile paving has been laid incorrectly.



The surface of the footway on the southern side is rough and uneven but relatively clutter free.



There is an in-line uncontrolled crossing across the junction with Hopewell Street. An additional line of tiles is required to meet tactile paving standards. The carriageway surface is rough and uneven.



There is a gated vehicle entrance to facilities connected to the Mater Hospital. Although the kerb has been dropped, no tactile paving has been provided to alert pedestrians with a visual impairment.



A good example of a controlled crossing is provided across Crumlin Road opposite the entrance to the Mater Hospital.



Heading away from the city centre there is another gated vehicle entrance. Once again whilst the kerb is dropped no tactile paving has been provided.



Continuing west historic, redundant vehicle entrances retain granite kerbs which represent potential trip hazards for some disabled people and older people.



There is an in-line uncontrolled crossing across the junction with Florence Place. The depth of the tactile paving does not meet acceptable standards, partially due to the radius of the kerb. The carriageway surface is rough and uneven.



There are a number of currently unused vehicle entrances around the courthouse which retain granite kerbing and represent a potential trip hazard for some older people and disabled people.



There is an uncontrolled crossing at the entrance to the Crumlin Road Health Centre. The tactile paving is the wrong colour and is not correctly aligned.



The footway on the western side approaching Agnes Street is rough and uneven. A temporary, large roadworks sign blocks the footway at this point making it difficult or impossible for many users to use the footway at the time of the audit.



There is a large clear area of footway around the junction of Agnes Street and Crumlin Road. Finding the two controlled crossings, across Agnes Street and Crumlin Road will be a challenge for people with a visual impairment particularly given the limited tactile tail at each crossing.



There is a good example of a controlled crossing on the eastern side of Crumlin Road across its junction with Clifton Park Avenue. Signs associated with road works partially obstruct the northern footway.



On the northern footway from Agnes Street towards the city centre there is an in-line un-controlled crossing across the junction with Landscape Terrace. The depth of tactile is an issue.



A-Boards associated with the garage obstruct the footway which is rough and uneven.



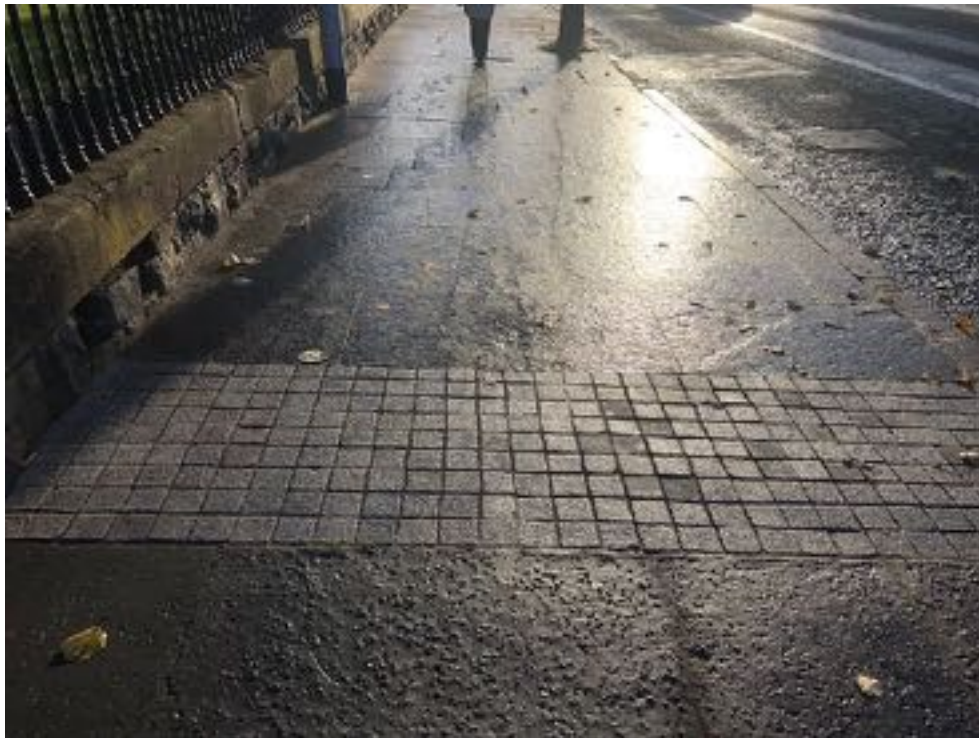
The kerbs are dropped at the garage exit but there is no tactile paving provided to warn pedestrians with a visual impairment. A Boards again obstruct the footway after the exit.



Continuing towards the city centre the footway is rough and uneven with frequent dish drainage channels. Historic vehicle entrance to the Gaol retain granite kerbing which represents a trip hazard for some disabled people and older people.



A newer smoother, level surface of paving has been used in the approach to the Gaol entrance.



The design and placement of a cycle hoop creates a potential hazard. The main pedestrian entrance to the jail retains granite kerbing some of which represents a potential trip hazard.



The footway reverts back to a rough and uneven surface approaching the Mater hospital. Kerbing around trees represents a potential trip hazard.



This is a good example of an in-line uncontrolled crossing at the vehicle entrance to the hospital. The positioning of the Belfast Bikes docking station could create a potential hazard close to the crossing when bikes are docked.



There are a number of other vehicle entrances across the footway at the front of the hospital. Each uses granite kerbing which is dropped but does not provide flush crossing. No tactile paving is provided at these crossings. Design and positioning of cycle hoops is problematic.



There is good example of an in-line uncontrolled crossing across the junction with Fleetwood Street.



Signage and wayfinding

Many of the streets include wayfinding signage and information signage about the streets and key destinations. Whilst positioned in a way not to create obstructions there are issues around the use of contrasting colours and text size that limit the usefulness of this signage.



Public transport provision

The streets audited all well served by frequent Metro services. Shelters and regular stops are provided along each of the main streets covered by this report. For the most part shelters have been positioned to minimise obstructions for pedestrians.



Key issues and challenges

The street audit has identified a number of key issues and challenges around the current public realm addressing which must be a priority for to be addressed in the public realm improvements.

The first issue is the overall **condition** of footways in the streets audited. Surfaces across the vast majority of the footways surveyed are in a poor condition, mostly rough and uneven, partially due to many utility reinstatements. Kerbing associated with existing and historic vehicle entrances is a significant issue, regularly presenting potential trip hazards on existing footways. Furthermore the almost universal use of deep dish drainage channels creates footways that are hazardous and uncomfortable for many people to use.

The second issue is **clutter and obstruction** on the footways. Some these issues are caused by the poor siting of street furniture including bins, trees, street lighting columns, traffic signs and cycling parking hoops. A-Boards and shop displays are also an issue in some locations. Parking on footways, although not common, still occurs on some of the streets.

Perhaps the biggest barrier to pedestrian journeys is the volume of traffic in the area. The streets include access points to and from the Westlink and parts of the inner ring road around the city centre as well as the busy Crumlin and Antrim Roads. Sharing space with up to five lanes of motorised traffic is not an environment where pedestrians feel welcome or safe. Moreover the air quality on the streets concerned must be poor and potentially have detrimental impact on the health of any pedestrian using the area.

Linked to traffic the generally poor quality and provision of **crossings** on the streets concerned is a major barrier for all pedestrians. At some locations uncontrolled crossings have been provided at busy junctions making their use by people with visual impairment almost impossible. At the some of the busiest junctions small traffic islands are used for traffic management and signage adjacent to a number of potential crossing opportunities. These islands are potential confusing and dangerous for a range of users. On other controlled crossings tactile paving has not been laid properly and control boxes are incorrectly positioned. These issues make using crossings at what are very busy junctions almost impossible for people with visual impairment. Additionally the quality and provision of tactile paving at many uncontrolled crossings is poor and does not meet standards. It is clear that investment has been made in an attempt to improve crossing facilities in an area which for decades has been heavily trafficked. However it is equally clear that most of the pedestrian infrastructure has been fitted around the vehicular traffic

requirements and as such does not fully meet modern requirements for pedestrians and for many disabled people the crossings are simply not safe enough to use independently.

There is little in the way of **public space** on the streets audited where people could potentially sit and rest for a while. The two areas (located at St Patricks church and Carlisle Circus) that would perhaps encourage this are currently uninviting and not somewhere most pedestrian would see as safe space.

The streets audited include a number of site of historic interest and visitor attractions. The current design of wayfinding and information **signage** which is used frequently along the streets is not inclusive with the text size and the lack of colour contrasting a major issue.

Recommendations

The streets involved provide important access to the City Centre for local communities as well as access from the city centre to key visitor attractions. As identified by this audit the current design of the streets creates an environment for all pedestrians which is unpleasant but also creates specific barriers for older people and disabled people that makes journeys difficult or impossible. Resolving these issues will not be easy and will require input and collaboration between a number of agencies including the Department for Communities, the Department for Infrastructure and Belfast City Council.

The proposed public realm scheme should address current issues with the condition of footways. New, level surfaces will immediately make the area more attractive and accessible. It is important that accessibility is particularly addressed around the many redundant and existing vehicle entrances on the routes. Materials used, including drainage solutions, must ensure a level surface is provided along the entire length of the footway.

The public realm scheme also represents a opportunity to address some current issues around created by the positioning of street furniture. Furniture such as lighting columns, bins, cycle parking hoops and traffic signage must be placed in a line that minimises obstructions and maximises clear pavement width. Infrastructure for cyclists should include a tap rail making it easy for people with a visual impairment to identify it. Trees should only be included where pavement width allows.

Other illegal clutter and obstructions also need to be addressed if the scheme is to be successful. Over the past number of years there has been an explosion in the use of A Boards across Belfast and beyond. As well as increasing in number the boards are also increasing in size. It is now time that agencies responsible adopt a zero tolerance to a practice which is illegal and creates a major hazard for older people and disabled people. Imtac recommends that Belfast adopt a city wide ban of the use of A Boards on pavements similar to that recently announced by Edinburgh City Council.

The report has also identified some issues with the accessibility of signage. As the Committee is aware this is a Belfast City Council city wide initiative, it recommends the Council undertake a review of current provision and specifically engage with disabled people and older people about improvements to accessibility.

There are very few opportunities on the streets to provide seating or public space where people can dwell. The two places where these do exist are at the top of Donegall Street/Carrick Hill close to St Patrick's church and on Carlisle Circus. Currently both areas are uninviting whose design is more

likely to attract anti-social behaviour rather than encourage people to sit and rest. If the streets are to be more inclusive it is important that space is created along the route where people can sit in comfort and safety. The Committee recommends that the two areas it has highlighted provide such facilities. Where seating is provided this should include a range of different types to suit including seating with armrests and perch style seating. Good lighting must also be an essential element of making these areas and the wider scheme a safer environment.

By far the greatest challenge on the current streets are the number of very busy roads that pedestrians must cross. The crossings currently provided simply do not provide a safe and accessible environment for many older people and disabled. If the public realm scheme is to be successful it is essential that the Department for Communities and the Department for Infrastructure work together to review and revise the current pedestrian infrastructure along the routes. In particular Intac makes the following recommendations:

- The provision of tactile paving and the location of control boxes at controlled crossings be reviewed and the necessary changes be made to ensure compliance with inclusive design standards at each crossing.
- Uncontrolled crossings currently located at busy junctions such as on Carrick Hill/Donagall Street be replaced by controlled crossings.
- The small triangular traffic islands with a number of potential crossing opportunities are extremely confusing and therefore hazardous to some disabled people. The use of this type of infrastructure should be designed out of any new scheme.
- Zebra crossings currently used in and around Carlisle Circus should be replaced with Puffin crossings.
- An additional control crossing should be considered close to the Crumlin Road Jail/Courthouse.
- The provision of dropped kerbs and tactile paving at uncontrolled crossings be reviewed with the final scheme ensuring compliance with inclusive design standards at each crossing.

The final and most challenging barrier that currently makes the street environment hostile for pedestrians is the volume of traffic. As part of the development of the scheme it is essential that the agencies involved examine ways to reduce the impact of and actual levels of traffic. The Committee recognises how challenging this is given the strategic importance of some

roads and junctions involved. One suggestion might be to improve public transport and cycling infrastructure along the routes to encourage more sustainable journeys. This could include better bus priority and bus stop infrastructure along the routes. To increase accessibility public realm improvements could use bus boarding kerbs similar to those used for the BRT/Glider service. Infrastructure to promote cycling should be segregated from vehicular traffic and pedestrians and should not use shared use pedestrian and cycling facilities. All cycling infrastructure must be accessible to disabled people who use non-standard or adapted cycles.