



**Report into issues arising from Imtac public meeting  
in Coleraine**

**(April 2018)**

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All our documents are available in hard copy in 14pt type size as standard. We also provide word and pdf versions of our documents on our website – [www.imtac.org.uk](http://www.imtac.org.uk). In addition we will provide information in a range of other formats. These formats include:

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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).

## **Background**

Imtac held a public meeting in the Lodge Hotel, Coleraine, on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018. It was attended by around 50 people including disabled people, older people and some of their representative organisations as well as transport providers and public representatives. Whilst short presentations were made by the Chairperson and the Secretary of Imtac, the bulk of the meeting involved discussion by attendees on what they saw to be the key issues in transport and travel. This report summarises the issues raised at the meeting.

## **Structure of the discussions**

The meeting involved a series of round table discussions. Each table, of around 8 to 10 people, was given the same topic guide and asked to select a person to take notes and provide feedback. The topic guide contained three general questions on travel and transport:

- (1) What currently works well?
- (2) What currently doesn't work well?
- (3) What improvements are needed?

Participants were asked to relate each question to the different modes of transport, the pedestrian environment, how easy it is to access information and how involved people felt in the design and delivery of services.

## **Feedback on what currently works well**

### *Public transport*

Most participants praised local rail services. In particular conductors on trains were seen as excellent and helpful. The provision of audio information on board trains was seen as a positive and the recently introduced hourly train service was also welcomed.

### *Concessionary fares*

The Concessionary Fares Scheme was highlighted as very beneficial for older people in particular. Free travel was seen as making an important contribution to combating loneliness and isolation amongst older people.

### *Community transport*

Many attendees used local community transport services and felt these services were vital and a lifeline for many of the older people and disabled people in the area. Staff and volunteer drivers involved in community transport were praised. The facility to use a Smartpass on community transport is also welcome.

### *Private car*

People who live in rural parts of the area highlighted the importance of having access to a car.

### *Air travel*

Some participants praised the assistance provided at airports. Others had experienced a more inconsistent service with good and bad

experiences depending on airlines and airports. This inconsistency often made air travel a very stressful experience.

## **Feedback on what currently doesn't work well**

### *Public Transport*

There was significant feedback from each table on various issues with public transport services from each table. These issues can be summarised in four areas; (1) issues with service levels, (2) issues with infrastructure and vehicles, (3) issues with staff and assistance and (4) issues with connectivity.

- (1) Many people felt that bus service levels in their area are inadequate. For people living in rural areas, including Kilrea, Garvagh, Macosquin, Castleroe and Ballybogey, bus services are either inadequate or not provided at all. For people living in towns, including Coleraine and Limavady, the lack of evening and poor weekend services are seen as a major negative.
- (2) Most attendees have issues with the accessibility of public transport infrastructure and vehicles. Buses and coaches with a number of steps are seen as inaccessible for many older people and disabled people. Also these vehicles do not have enough bell pushes easily reached by passengers. The lack of flexible space on board these vehicles creates additional problems for wheelchair users and people with assistance dogs. For many people in rural areas getting to the nearest bus stop is difficult or impossible and the lack of bus shelters in many places deters people from using bus services. The lack of audio and visual next stop information systems on buses makes travel more difficult for some disabled people.

Accessibility at some bus and railway stations is also problematic. Ballymoney railway station has particular issues with the footbridge identified as “not fit for purpose”. Toilet provision at stations is inadequate with accessible toilets locked. The absence of

Changing Places Toilets at stations means they are not fully accessible. Although trains are seen as more accessible than buses, participants felt that more could be done to advertise the availability of ramps for access to them. Others feel that the design of trains should be more flexible to allow groups of disabled people to travel together.

- (3) Issues were raised about staff and assistance they provide, included bus drivers not always being helpful and moving off before people are seated. The notice requirement for some disabled people to travel by bus is seen as unsatisfactory. The lack of staff at some stations/halts is also seen as a barrier to travel as is a lack of assistance for passengers to transfer between bus and rail services at some stations. One person commented on poor service provide by a conductor on a train to a group of disabled passengers.
- (4) Connectivity between bus and rail services and between public transport and other services is seen as a significant issue. Access to airports and hospitals by public transport was highlighted with one participant highlighting a round trip from Ballycastle to Altnagelvin which took 11 hours. Poor connectivity between bus and rail services was highlighted by a number of people.

### *Community transport*

In relation to community transport many participants are concerned about the potential impact on services of funding reductions and licensing changes. Frustrations were expressed about these services including a lack of flexibility, the need to book well in advance, the lack of evening and weekend services and their expense. One table stated that they accept these service restrictions as for many people they are only too glad to be able to get out.

## *Taxis*

Taxi issues were raised at most tables. The small numbers of wheelchair accessible taxis is an issue in the area. Those that are available are unreliable and difficult to get. Most people feel taxis are too expensive and some feel prices have risen since the introduction of meters. Drivers' attitudes can be problematic with particular issues for people who are deaf highlighted.

## *Pedestrian issues*

Participants at each table raised many issues with the pedestrian environment. In rural areas often there is no footway and walking is very difficult because of traffic. The quality of existing footways are an issue with uneven surfaces, crossfalls and poor maintenance being raised. Recent icy conditions have made pedestrian journeys very difficult with footways not gritted. Parking and cycling on footways was raised as an issue at every table. Concerns were expressed about the lack of pedestrian crossings, the timings of the pedestrian phase at crossings and the design of the new Puffin crossings. Some people raised concerns about new public realm schemes such as Limavady. It is felt these schemes look nice but are not practical. Two tables raised concerns about the potential use of shared space in public realm design. This type of design is not accessible for disabled people or older people.

## *Blue Badge and parking issues*

Most tables commented on the Blue Badge Scheme. The consensus was that there are not enough accessible parking bays and that abuse of these bays is a consistent problem, particularly in private car parks. There was criticism of the provision and design of on street accessible parking bays. These bays are seen as too narrow and not long enough, particularly for wheelchair accessible vehicles. Dropped kerbs are not always provided at bays or they are in the wrong place. Accessible bays are sometimes located too far away from key locations. Some people commented on the eligibility criteria for the Blue Badge scheme suggesting it should be broadened to include more disabled people.

### *Access to information*

In relation to accessing information, some people were unaware of services such as community transport. The accessibility of information for people with sight loss is an issue with type size on timetables a particular problem. Service information is not always provided at bus stops or is not kept up-to-date. In general some people reported that information is available but that it can be hard to find. Some older people at the event said they do not use online information and prefer paper copies.

### *Involvement and engagement*

When asked if people feel involved in the development and delivery of services all the tables responded negatively. Some people had not heard of Imtac before the meeting in Coleraine and some thought that they now had a voice through participation in the meeting.

## **Feedback on the improvements that are required**

### *Public transport*

The suggestions for improvement of public transport included a better bus service across the area including better frequency and improved links to hospitals, more buses with low-floors and access for wheelchair users, more flexible space on board buses and trains for a variety of users, better assistance for passengers at stations particularly for people changing between buses and trains, audio visual next stop information on buses, better timetable information in larger print and Changing Places Toilets at all Translink stations. There was also a suggestion to broaden the Concessionary Fares Scheme to include free travel for more disabled people.



## *Taxis*

In relation to taxis a scheme to help with the cost of fares was suggested, more wheelchair accessible vehicles and more done to stop refusals by drivers to carry passengers with assistance dogs.

## *Blue Badge and parking issues*

Attendees suggested that accessible parking design should be changed to be more accessible to power chair users with wider, longer bays and appropriate dropped kerbs. A suggestion was also made to provide drop off points for Blue Badge holders in areas of high parking demand.

## *Access to information*

Broadly people felt that Translink, the Councils and others such as the Health Service should be doing more to provide information about what transport services are available to older people and disabled people. More detail is needed about the accessibility of services than is currently available.

## *Air travel*

It was suggested that there needs to be greater consistency in the provision of assistance at airports.

## *Involvement and engagement*

The suggestion was made that Imtac should have regular smaller regional meetings with disabled people and older people throughout Northern Ireland.

## **Conclusion**

Imtac would like to thank everyone who took part in the public meeting in Coleraine. Although there were issues particular to the area, many of the issues raised by attendees are similar to issues raised at other meetings

and experienced by Imtac members themselves. The key issues discussed such as improving the accessibility of infrastructure and vehicles, the service levels and assistance provided, access to information on services and promoting the involvement of disabled people and older people in policy and service developments are central to the advice Imtac provides to Government and others.

To further highlight the issues raised at the meeting Imtac will publish this report on its website and circulate it to the key policy makers and service providers.