



Assessing the current accessibility of bus and rail stations and halts in Northern Ireland

June 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). Recommendations from Imtac on public realm proposals for Dromore town centre - (1st Draft May 2018)

Background

In order to have the confidence to travel by public transport many disabled people and older people need to be certain that each part of their journey is accessible. This not only requires that all vehicles, stations and halts are accessible; it also requires that individuals involved can access accurate information about the journeys before travelling.

The purpose of this paper is to look at what information is currently provided about the accessibility of stations and halts, provide an assessment of the accuracy and usefulness of this information and make recommendations for improvement.

Current information provision

Translink has developed a Guide to Station Facilities¹ as part of its overall Access Guide for disabled and older passengers. The current Guide was published in 2013 with input from Imtac.

The Guide to Station Facilities is based on the following 13 criteria:

¹ Available via the following link
<http://www.translink.co.uk/Documents/footers/accessibility/6608%20Access%20Guide%20Station%20Facilities%202016.pdf>

- Step free access around the station.
- Easy access around all facilities for wheelchair users.
- Staff available to provide assistance
- Accessible ticket offices
- Well-designed timetable information available
- Hearing loop system
- Sheltered waiting facilities and seating
- Accessible information boards
- Audio announcements
- Accessible toilets
- Accessible parking
- Tactile surfaces including edging on platforms
- Other accessible transport such as taxis available

The accessibility of stations and halts is graded using the following 5 categories:

1. Staffed station with all facilities listed.
2. Staffed / Unstaffed station with most facilities.
3. Staffed / Unstaffed station with restricted access.
4. Unstaffed station with ramped access.
5. Unstaffed station with basic access.

Each bus and rail station and rail halt is then listed in the guide with an indication of its accessibility grading and some further comments about facilities at the station/halt. Information about the railways is listed by order along the various lines. Information about bus stations is listed alphabetically.

Assessment of current information

In making an assessment of current information provision Imtac is focused entirely on the requirements of users and potential users of services. For the information to be of use to disabled people and older people it must meet three key criteria. Firstly it must be **available** and easy to find, secondly it must also be **accessible** (taking account of the individual's accessibility requirements) and finally it must be relevant and **accurate**.

The immediate barrier users currently face is finding the information, as it is currently only available online. However there is no visible link from the homepage of the Translink website to sections on accessibility including the information about stations

and halts. The information can only be found using an internet search.

With regard to accessibility the link provided from the Translink website is to a pdf document. Pdf formats can present accessibility issues for some disabled people who use assistive technology such as screen reading software. From a usability perspective, listing rail facilities by line rather than alphabetically, is unhelpful for people who do not or rarely travel by train in Northern Ireland.

Looking at the accuracy and relevance of information a number of issues arise. Firstly whilst the 13 criteria used to measure the accessibility of stations/halts are broadly sound, there are questions as whether each station has been rigorously assessed against the criteria both from the perspective of current design standards but also some operational issues. To give an operational example, many stations are closed at evenings and weekends when services are still operating. During these times many of the facilities advertised in the guide are not available but the guide does not make users aware of this. The Committee also has concerns that assessments have been made without taking full account of accessibility standards. In particular walking distances over 50m are likely to be challenging for many disabled people, as will lengthy ramped access. It is unclear whether the information contained in the current guide takes full account of these issues, and as currently presented some facilities are portrayed as more accessible than they actually are.

The detail of information provided in Guide under each station is not consistent in its approach with more detail provided under some locations, less under others. This inconsistency and lack of detail makes it difficult for users of the guide to obtain a clear and realistic assessment of the accessibility of many of the stations and halts listed. Some of the comments with regard to rail halts use industry terms such as LLPA audio, likely to be meaningless to the majority of users.

The use of grading for stations has merits. However the detail contained within the guide is again inconsistent and likely to confuse users. For example the advice for many of the Categories 4 and 5 stations advise passengers who require assistance to contact Translink before travelling. Given the restrictions at these stations and halts this is sound advice but the guide provides no

information about how passengers can contact Translink. There are 7 Category 5 stations and 13 Category 4 halts, which do not include this advice. Based on work² previously undertaken by Imtac, the Committee is aware that some disabled people and older people would find using these facilities extremely difficult or impossible without assistance. However the guide gives no indication of potential difficulties for passengers and could encourage users to believe the facility is more accessible than it is.

Based on its assessment of the current guide Imtac has identified significant issues with the availability, accessibility and accuracy of current provision of information about Translink facilities. Inadequacies in the current provision of information are, in the opinion of the Committee, likely to deter some disabled people and older people from using public transport services.

Recommendations for improvement

1 Fully utilise the opportunity offered by the redevelopment of the Translink website

Translink plans to redevelop its current website in the next 12 months. This offers Translink the opportunity to rethink current provision of information and to give greater prominence to the information it provides about the accessibility of its services. Imtac recommends the following:

- Translink work with Imtac to review and revise the current Access Policy, Access Guide and Guide to Station Facilities.
- Part of this review must include changes to the format of current information to broaden its accessibility to more users.
- Translink should seek to mainstream some access issues as part of the website redevelopment. For example a revised journey planner could include the selection of options around accessibility
- A revised Guide should also include information about new Park & Ride facilities
- In future information about facilities should be listed alphabetically

² [Report on access surveys of rail halts](#)

2 *Carry out a revised assessment of the accessibility of current facilities*

As part of the review of the current facilities, and to ensure information is accurate, Imtac recommends that a new assessment be undertaken of each station/halt taking account of current design standards³ and operational issues such as opening hours

Appendix A contains a draft template developed by Imtac highlighting key issues to be addressed as part of a revised accessibility assessment process.

3 *Adopt a consistent approach to the information provided about all facilities*

Detailed and consistent information should be provided about each facility listed in a revised guide. This must include information about whether or not each of the facilities have key accessible facilities and include additional information, such as opening times, likely to be most useful to passengers.

Appendix B contains a list of key accessibility information that should be provided about all facilities in the future.

4 *Adopt a simplified grading of facilities*

The current grading of facilities is overly complex and does not make clear how accessible stations are or any potential difficulties users may encounter when using the facilities. If grading of facilities is to be used in the future Imtac believes this should be simplified and proposes the following:

1. A staffed station with accessible facilities during all operational hours
2. A staffed station with accessible facilities with restricted opening during operational hours
3. Unstaffed station or halt during operational hours

³ Design standards include "[Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations](#)" and "[Inclusive Mobility](#)"

In future generic advice should be that anyone who may require assistance to travel from an unstaffed facility or during a time when facilities are closed and unstaffed should contact Translink in advance. Detailed information should be provided about how people can contact Translink.

Appendix A - Station/Halt accessibility assessment

To be useful information about the accessibility of stations and halts must be based on a robust accessibility assessment of each facility, using the accepted design standards highlighted on Page 4 of this report. Below Imtac has identified the key issues to be addressed by an assessment.

Arrival/departure points

Accessible car parking – yes/no

If yes:

- Assessment of walking distance to and from entrance/exit (50m or less)
- Assessment of accessibility of pedestrian routes to and from car park and main entrance/exit
- Number of accessible parking bays
- Design of accessible parking bays
- Assessment of payment and other equipment

Taxi rank – yes/no

If yes:

- Assessment of walking distances to and from entrance/exit (50m or less)
- Assessment of accessibility of pedestrian routes to and from taxi rank and main entrance /exit
- Assessment of taxi rank design (including kerbing and footway widths)
- Provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) - yes/no

Bus services (rail only) – yes/no

If yes

- Assessment of walking distances to and from entrance/exit (50m or less)

- Assessment of accessibility of pedestrian routes to and from bus stop/stand and main entrance /exit
- Assessment of bus stop/stand design (including kerbing and footway)
- Shelter/seating provided - yes/no
- Accessible timetable information provided –yes/no

Access to & within buildings

General issues

1 Step-free access throughout - yes/no

If no:

- Detail and assessment of step provision

If yes:

- Details of access provision and walking distances involved (level throughout, lift access, ramp access, lift & ramp access)

2 Staff available to provide assistance - yes/no

If yes

- Details of hours when staff are available (where applicable)
- Details of nature of staffing (on concourse/platform, at desk, by request)

Station/halt facilities

1 Doors - yes/no

If yes:

- Assessment of the provision and standard of entrance/exit doors (including details of automation)

- Assessment of the provision and standard of internal doors (including details of automation)
- 2 Steps, ramps, lifts and escalators provision (details of each where applicable)
- Assessment of the provision and standard of external and internal steps (including handrail provision and contrasting)
 - Assessment of the provision and standard of external and internal ramps (including length, gradient and handrail provision)
 - Assessment of the provision and standard of external and internal lifts (including dimensions)
 - Assessment of the provision and standard of external and internal escalators
- 3 Footbridges, tunnels and underpasses – yes/no
- If yes:
- Assessment of the provision and standard of a footbridge (including handrail provision and contrasting)
 - Assessment of the provision and standard of a tunnel or underpass (including lighting and walking distances)
- 4 Platform provision (where applicable)
- Assessment of the provision and standard of railway platforms (including seating, shelter provision, and tactile surfaces)
- 5 Bus stand provision (where applicable)
- Assessment of the provision and standard of bus stands (including seating, shelter and access for wheelchair users)
- 6 Ticketing arrangements

- Assessment of the provision and standard of ticket offices and machines (including accessible counters, payment facilities and provision of an induction loop)

7 Seating and waiting areas – yes/no

If yes:

- Assessment of the provision and standard of external and internal seating and waiting areas (including type of seating provided)

8 Accessible toilet facilities - yes/no

If yes:

- Assessment of the provision and standard of toilet facilities (including provision of Changing Places toilet and access arrangements)

9 Provision for assistance dogs – yes/no

If yes:

- Assessment of the provision and standard of facilities for assistance dogs (including a spending area)

10 Refreshment, cafés and other retail facilities – yes/no

If yes:

- Assessment of the provision and standard of refreshment, café and other retail facilities (including vending machines)

Signage and information

Assessment of the provision and standard of the following:

- 1 Internal and external fixed signage
- 2 Visual display screens

- 3 Audible announcements
- 4 Timetable information
- 5 Tactile signage

Lighting and security

Assessment of the provision and standard of the following:

- 1 External and internal lighting
- 2 Provision of CCTV – yes/no

Appendix B – Key Station /Halt passenger information requirements

Listed below is key information likely to be most useful to passengers. Although passengers do not need every detail of accessibility at a station or halt, the information provided does need to be based on the robust accessibility assessment for each facility.

1 Staffing

Whether a station is staffed or unstaffed is a key issue for many disabled people and older people. Information needs not only to identify which stations are staffed but also any times when services are running but staff are not available.

2 Easy access around all facilities for all users including wheelchair users

This should be a yes or a no answer. If it is no, further explanation is required about what barriers to access at the station are.

3 Step free access

As well as a yes or no answer passenger may also need additional information. In relation to no, passengers need to know about the nature and extent of steps at the station/halt. In relation to yes, some passengers will require additional information about the type of access including: (1) whether all facilities are on one level, (2) whether step free access provided via ramps, (3) whether step free access via lifts or (4) whether step free access via lifts and ramps.

4 Accessible parking

Passengers will require information about the number of bays and, where appropriate, ticketing/access arrangements.

5 Sheltered seating/waiting areas

Passengers will want to know if seating is provided indoors or outdoors or both.

6 Accessible toilets

Passengers will need information on what toilet facilities are provided (including Changing Places Toilets), whether accessible toilets are locked and times when these facilities are not available.

7 *Ticket offices*

Passengers will need information on opening hours and how to obtain tickets if not open.

8 *Passenger information screens*

Passengers will need to know about times when screens are not available.

9 *Audio announcements*

Passengers will need to know if all, some or no services will be announced.

10 *Printed timetable information available*

Passengers will need to know if printed timetable information at the station or halt.

11 Spending facilities for assistance dogs

Passengers will need to know if the station/halt has a spending facility for assistance dogs.

12 Passenger safety & security

Passengers will need to know if the station/halt is well and evenly lit and has CCTV.

13 Retail facilities

Passengers will need to know about retail facilities at stations/halts including, where applicable shops, cafés and vending machines.