



**imtac**  
Annual Report **2021**

# About Imtac

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

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

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

# About this report

Under our agreements with the Department, Imtac is required to submit an annual report to the Minister for Infrastructure. This report includes details of our achievements over the previous year and plans for the coming year. It also identifies and details key issues the Committee would advise the Minister to consider in the coming year.

## **Imtac's response to the COVID-19 outbreak (Status at July 2021)**

In March 2020 at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic like many organisations we suspended all face-to-face activities. Building on our original actions we extended these to ensure the work of the Committee continued whilst safeguarding the health and safety of our staff and members. This included making provision for home working and remote meetings. As we emerge from the pandemic Imtac will return to a more 'normal' way of working but this is likely to include a 'blended' approach to meetings.



# Chairperson's message

(2021 - 15th Report)

I am pleased to submit our 2021 Annual Report which covers a further period of challenge, change and adaptation. When I wrote my overview to our 2020 Report, I could not have imagined the impact COVID would still be having on our society. Like so many organisations much of our work this year has been carried out remotely using ZOOM and other platforms. This included a virtual meeting with Minister Mallon when we had an open and useful discussion on a range of issues including tackling pavement parking. We particularly welcomed the commitment from the Minister for ongoing engagement and her agreement to adopt the use of “walk, wheel and cycle” in proposals for “building back better.”

Despite challenges including the lockdowns, Imtac has continued to provide advice to the Department and to others in Government, local authorities and Translink. Significant outputs this year included issuing a statement on Living with Covid to help Government ensure an inclusive response to COVID-19 and working with our colleagues in DfI to develop guidance for safe travel during the pandemic. We worked with DAERA to provide accurate information around travelling with an assistance dog following the end of the Brexit transition period. We are delighted to have been asked to sit on the Co-Design Group assisting DfC develop a Disability Strategy. Working with Translink we have seen a genuine shift towards embracing inclusive standards in relation to station designs. Unfortunately, we have not seen the same progress regarding the procurement of new fully accessible buses and coaches.

I am grateful to our members, observers and many other contributors, who despite all the challenges continued to participate fully in our work. My thanks go to Michael Lorimer, our Executive Secretary, without whose input this would not have been achieved, and to our Departmental Sponsor Team for their invaluable support in spite of the many difficulties created by the pandemic.

Looking to the future, for me a key priority will be to restart our outreach and engagement work which has been curtailed by COVID. The most important priority, however, will continue to be ensuring Imtac has an active role in ensuring our recovery from the pandemic is accessible and inclusive.

**Bert Bailie**

June 2021

# Our Achievements 2020/21

As with all organisations our work has been dominated by the pandemic and dealing with the restrictions caused by COVID-19. This past year has been challenging for everyone and has required us to implement new ways of working and to be flexible in responding to a quickly changing situation.

## Supporting the COVID-19 response

The overwhelming priority for our work in the past year has been to support Deaf people, disabled people, older people, and our partners in Government and the transport sector respond to COVID-19.

During the initial stages of the pandemic and first lockdown we prioritised keeping people informed about developments and the support available. We did this by using our social media channels, regular emails and by repurposing our Accessible Travel NI website<sup>1</sup> to include COVID-19 updates.

We published a statement on Living with Covid to help Government ensure that Deaf people, disabled people and older people were included in the COVID-19 response and our emergence from the pandemic. We worked with our colleagues in DfI to develop guidance for safe travel during COVID-19 and to ensure important services such as the Blue Badge Scheme continued to be administered during the pandemic. We worked with Translink to develop guidelines for staff and passengers around how assistance could continue to be provided safely.

Travel restrictions meant there was a significant focus on promoting walking and cycling this year. Imtac played an active role on the Department's newly formed Walking and Cycling Advisory Group, advising on a number of proposals for temporary "pop up" infrastructure. We developed guidance<sup>2</sup> on creating inclusive walk, wheel and cycle infrastructure and were delighted to put this into practice assisting in installation of the Ormeau Road Parklet. Finally, we were delighted that Minister Mallon agreed with our recommendation to adopt the inclusive terminology of "walk, wheel and cycle" when the Department refers to active travel.



## Supporting policy and strategy

With the COVID-19 situation rightly dominating the agenda during the year some of our planned policy work had to be placed on hold. During year the Committee created a new “People, streets and places” working group and it has progressed work around tackling pavement parking. Imtac is amongst a number of key organisations that has written to Minister Mallon about identifying options for better enforcement with a meeting with the Minister to discuss progress likely before the summer 2021.



Imtac welcomed the decision by the Executive to progress the proposed Disability Strategy which includes addressing barriers to travel and using the built environment. The Committee was delighted to be invited to sit on the Co-Design Group assisting the Department for Communities to develop the Strategy. Our nominee, June Best, has been appointed Co-Chair of the Group. We look forward to working to ensure that the new Strategy has a significant and positive impact on the lives of all Deaf people and disabled people.

During the year we continued to work with officials from DAERA to reduce the potential impact of Brexit on people travelling with assistance dogs, particularly as the end of the transition period in December approached. The Committee issued an update<sup>3</sup> in February highlighting the benefits created by the NI Protocol for assistance dog users in Northern Ireland but highlighting difficulties for assistance dog users living in Great Britain travelling to Northern Ireland, Ireland and Europe.

## Supporting projects and service developments

Despite the restrictions and focus on the pandemic we are pleased that we have been able to assist with a number of key projects and service developments.

We worked very closely with Translink over the year around a number of proposals for station improvements. Committee members met with Translink to discuss progress with the Belfast Transport Hub and the redevelopment of Yorkgate, Lurgan, Bangor and Ballymena stations. The Committee submitted a number of recommendations for improvements for each station but overall proposals reflect a genuine shift towards embracing inclusive design proposals, incorporating key facilities such as Changing Places as standard in designs. We also engaged with the Ticketing Project Team around the proposed design of ticketing barriers in stations.

The Committee also had significant engagement with Translink during the year around vehicle design and procurement. This engagement included discussion on the design of single deck bus, zero emission double deck bus and Goldline coach design. Significant differences remain between Imtac's and Translink's position on vehicle design and the Committee has concerns that procurement decisions continue to perpetuate existing barriers that make bus travel difficult for Deaf people, disabled people and older people. Despite these differences the Committee has welcomed the proposal by Translink to remove current notice requirements for users of inter-urban bus and coach services, a long-term recommendation from the Committee. We are also pleased to have obtained agreement to formal monitoring of trials of low floor coaches.



We have continued to work with the Translink Marketing Team to improve access to information. This year the online Translink access guide<sup>4</sup> has been updated with the inclusion of a new station and facilities guide with detailed and accurate access information. The Committee welcomed an invitation from Translink to sit on a new project board looking to utilise technology to transform travel and social inclusion.

Committee members contributed to the development of design proposals from the Department for Communities for the 5Cs public realm scheme in Belfast City Centre as well as proposals for a number of smaller schemes in Belfast and elsewhere.

The Committee finalised and published two papers, completing tasks from our 2019 / 20 Work Programme. The first was a report and recommendations on improving the Strangford Lough Ferry Service following a site visit in February 2020. The second was a report and recommendations arising from the Pedestrian Workshop<sup>5</sup> organised by the Committee again February 2020. The Committee also refreshed its policy paper on improving taxi services but delayed publication in light of the pandemic.

## **Promoting engagement**

COVID-19 has had a more significant impact of Imtac's engagement activities. Due to restrictions, we were unable to undertake any public meetings or other participative events. We have endeavoured to involve a broad cross-section of our population in our work including the consultations undertaken through our working groups. We were able, however, to continue our engagement with our counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales through remote meetings of the Accessibility Four Nations Liaison Group with a particular focus on sharing experiences of the COVID response in each of the jurisdictions.

Imtac also received an invitation to sit as a member of a new Disability Forum which will advise the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities hosted jointly by the Equality Commission and Human Rights Commission.

# Our Plans for 2021/22

It is the fervent desire of the Committee that the focus of work in the coming year will be supporting the emergence from the current pandemic as well as responding to other challenges including climate change. Through our work we will continue to promote the importance of inclusive design in ensuring investment by Government benefits everyone in society. We will seek to ensure that Government meets its obligations in delivering the rights of disabled people under the United Nations Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD)<sup>6</sup>. Finally, we will seek to ensure more Deaf people, disabled people and older people have the opportunity to be involved in the design of policy and services through our engagement activities.

Our Work Programme for the coming year includes:

- Supporting Government, transport providers and others in emerging from the pandemic, ensuring that the requirements of Deaf people, disabled people and older people are a key consideration as we return to normal.
- To support the drive to “build back better” we will publish advice on how to maximise opportunities to improve accessibility and inclusion in 6 key policy areas.
- We will continue to work to ensure that accessibility and inclusion is a key consideration in policy and strategy developments. Our input to the development of a new Disability Strategy is a priority for the Committee in the coming year.
- We will continue to work to ensure that accessibility and inclusion is a key consideration during the development of major projects. The development of the Belfast Transport Hub and Phase 2 of Belfast Rapid Transit are priorities for the coming year.
- We will continue to support innovation in policy and service developments.
- We will continue to promote engagement. This year restarting and rejuvenating our engagement with Deaf people, disabled people, older people and carers will be a priority.



# Our advice to the Minister for Infrastructure

As part of our work on the new Disability Strategy Imtac has developed a number of key priorities designed to ensure meaningful change happens. Central to the change that is required is a move away from a culture which focuses on minimum compliance with legal requirements to a culture that adopts and embraces high standards that work for everyone.

We have been encouraged by our engagement to date with the Minister for Infrastructure. The recently published Planning for the Future of Transport<sup>7</sup> echoes many of the themes of our key priorities. During the coming year we want to continue to work with the Minister to affect further change in the following seven priority areas:

- 1** Involving Deaf people and disabled people (and others including older people and carers) at every stage of designing and delivering transport, public realm and active travel policy and services.
- 2** Requiring people involved in the design and delivery of transport, public realm, and active travel policy and services to undertake Disability Equality Training, training designed and delivered by Deaf people and disabled people. Decision makers must undertake the training first.
- 3** Demonstrating a clear commitment to high standards by adopting fully inclusive design standards for transport vehicles, infrastructure and the provision of information, requiring operators to meet these standards as a condition of funding.
- 4** Requiring transport operators to demonstrate that reasonable adjustments are in place where physical barriers exist in order to ensure Deaf people and disabled people can access services on an equal basis to others.
- 5** Developing and publishing action plans to (1) improve access to taxi services across Northern Ireland and (2) encourage the development of more demand responsive transport services in rural and urban areas.
- 6** Demonstrating a commitment to high standards by adopting fully inclusive design standards when investing in public realm, the built environment and active travel schemes, requiring these standards to be met as a condition of funding.

- 7 Ensuring that Blue Badge Holders are explicitly recognised as essential vehicle users in plans to tackle climate change and promote sustainable travel.

There are two specific issues we would also recommend that the Minister must look at progressing. These are:

- 1 Bringing forward proposals to tackle pavement parking, implementing the preferred option.
- 2 Addressing the disparity in concessionary fares between some groups of Deaf people and disabled people and other Deaf people, disabled people and older people, equalising the concession for all.



## Web Page Index

1. [www.accessibletravelni.org](http://www.accessibletravelni.org)
2. [www.accessibletravelni.org/your-experiences/basic-guidelines-for-the-development-of-inclusive-walking-wheeling-and-cycling-infrastructure-in-response-to-covid-19/](http://www.accessibletravelni.org/your-experiences/basic-guidelines-for-the-development-of-inclusive-walking-wheeling-and-cycling-infrastructure-in-response-to-covid-19/)
3. [www.accessibletravelni.org/your-experiences/imtac-statement-about-travel-with-assistance-dogs-post-brexit-transitional-arrangements/](http://www.accessibletravelni.org/your-experiences/imtac-statement-about-travel-with-assistance-dogs-post-brexit-transitional-arrangements/)
4. [www.translink.co.uk/usingtranslink/accessibility](http://www.translink.co.uk/usingtranslink/accessibility)
5. [www.accessibletravelni.org/your-experiences/putting-people-first-report-on-the-imtac-pedestrian-workshop-held-on-5th-february-2020/](http://www.accessibletravelni.org/your-experiences/putting-people-first-report-on-the-imtac-pedestrian-workshop-held-on-5th-february-2020/)
6. [www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html](http://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html)
7. [www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/planning-future-transport-time-change](http://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/planning-future-transport-time-change)



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