



**An assessment of the information about  
transport and travel relevant to older people and  
disabled people currently provided on the NI  
Direct website**

**December 2017**

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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 paper**

As part of its 2017/18 Work Programme Imtac has agreed to provide an assessment of the information about transport and travel relevant to older people and disabled people currently provided on the NI Direct website ([www.nidirectgov.uk](http://www.nidirectgov.uk)). The paper provides an overview of information provided on the NI Direct website, an assessment of its content and recommendations for improvement.

## **How Imtac carried out the assessment**

The NI Direct website includes the following statement about its aim and purpose:

*“NI Direct is the official government website for Northern Ireland citizens. NI Direct aims to make it easier to access government information and services. It does this by working closely with Northern Ireland departments and other public bodies to collate key information based on users' needs.”*

This assessment of the website therefore examines whether NI Direct is meeting this aim and purpose from the perspective of older people and disabled people.

To further inform its assessment of NI Direct Imtac undertook a survey that asked older people and disabled people about their use of websites. One of the main purposes of the survey was to identify the main difficulties encountered by disabled people and older people when accessing online information.

Over 100 survey responses were received. The key findings of the survey are:

- Whilst most people who responded use websites to get information, a significant minority (over 20%) never use websites. This presents challenges to Government's digital first agenda.
- For those that use websites 86% sometimes or frequently had difficulties accessing information online.
- The most common difficulties encountered by people are finding the right information (36%) and a lack of detail (35%).
- 22% of people who responded highlighted difficulties caused by the inaccessibility of websites.

Based on the aims of NI Direct, the feedback obtained from the survey and Imtac members own experiences it was agreed that the following measures be used to carry out the assessment of the website:

- Whether or not information about travel and transport relevant to older people and disabled people is easy find on the NI Direct website
- Whether or not the detailed information currently provided about travel and transport on NI Direct is relevant and useful to disabled people and older people
- How accessible the NI Direct website is for older people and disabled people

## Overview of current content

Information about travel and transport for disabled people and to a lesser extent older people can be accessed in two areas of the website:

- People with Disabilities section
- Travel, Transport and Roads section

Both sections are included in prominent links from the home page of NI Direct, providing users with a direct link to a sub section with a further link to specific information about travel and transport for disabled people. In the People with Disabilities section the subsection is called “Motoring and Transport.” In the Travel, Transport and Travel section the subsection is called “Travel Information for People with Reduced Mobility”.

The Motoring and Transport section includes a further four sub sections:

- Accessible parking bays
- The Blue Badge Scheme
- Motoring and Transport information
- Travel Safe

The Accessible Parking Bays sub-section provides information on how to apply for an accessible parking bay. The Blue Badge Scheme sub-section provides information about the scheme as well as the opportunity to apply online. The Motoring and Transport information sub-section contains twelve further sub-sections linking to information about a broad range of services including Motability, public transport and rights when using transport. The Travel Safe section provides an online version of the guide for people with learning disabilities produced by the Department for Infrastructure.

Issues around air and sea travel in the People with Disabilities section are included under the Travel, Holidays and Breaks sub-section and are not mentioned anywhere in the Motoring and Transport sub-section.

The Travel for People with Reduced Mobility section contains links to these eleven sub-sections:

- Ferries and seaports
- Airlines and airports
- Car Travel
- Bus Travel
- Rail Travel
- Taxi Travel
- Community transport
- Accommodation
- Other information on accessibility
- Further advice
- Comments

Pictograms are used to illustrate the topic of each subsection. Each sub-section contains basic information on each topic and uses links to other parts of the NI Direct website and external websites such as Translink and Imtac to signpost users to more detailed information.

### **Assessment of current content**

*How easy is it to find information about travel and transport relevant to older people and disabled people on NI Direct?*

During discussions about the assessment it was clear that some Imtac members were unaware of NI Direct or the fact that the website contained information and advice about transport and travel. As the Committee is broadly representative of disabled people and older people these appear to confirm the need to do more to raise awareness amongst both groups (and the general public) of the role, purpose and benefits of NI Direct.

Most Imtac members found the initial sections about travel and transport relevant to older people relatively easy to find. Interestingly some members accessed the information through the People with Disabilities section, others through the Travel, Transport and Roads section. Members felt it was important that relevant information be retained in both these sections in the future.

Within the sub-sections of these two sections members had a different experience. The Travel for People with Reduced Mobility sub-sections contained a comprehensive list of topics, making it relatively straightforward for users to identify where to access the most appropriate information. The list of topics under the Motoring and Transport is much more limited. Members who used this option had much more difficulty identifying where to access the most appropriate information.

*Was the information about travel and transport relevant to older people and disabled people on NI Direct useful?*

Members found that some sections of the NI Direct website contained excellent, detailed information about services. A good example of this was the section about the Blue Badge Scheme in the Motoring and Transport section. However across both sections of the website there were a number of examples where content could be improved. Too often members identified examples of content that lacked the level of detail required to be useful. In other areas there was more detailed content, however members felt this could be further improved to better reflect the information users might be looking for. Finally there are examples of information that is out-of-date or a link to an external website that no longer works (including the Imtac website). In summary the usefulness of the information on NI Direct varied, dependant on the topic and section of the website visited.

*How accessible is NI Direct?*

As with other aspects of this assessment there are both positives and negatives when considering the accessibility of NI Direct.

Members who use assistive technology such as screen readers to access the site reported finding NI Direct easy to use and navigate. Members noted other positive aspects of the site including the use of pictograms to illustrate topics under the Travel for People with Reduced Mobility section and the inclusion of audio information under the Travel Safe section.

The main criticism in relation to the accessibility of NI Direct was related to the text heavy content. Members felt that this makes NI Direct less accessible to some disabled people including people with a learning disability and people with conditions such as

dementia. The consensus of members is that the accessibility of the website could be improved by using easy read language and the increased use of images, illustrations, video and audio content.

One final issue that needs to be considered is the use of links to external websites. Care needs to be taken to ensure that external websites have the same accessibility as NI Direct and that links do not link users to formats, such as pdf documents, that may not be accessible to assistive technology.

## **Recommendations for improvement**

The assessment by lmtac illustrates that there are many positives for disabled people and older people around the current provision of information on NI Direct. It is relatively easy to find relevant information on travel and transport from the Home Page, in many cases the content of the site is good and useful and clearly consideration has been given to making the site accessible to a variety of users. Committee members do believe, however, that improvements can be made to the current website to make it a more useful resource to more people. The Committee has made the following recommendations:

*Recommendation one – Make changes to ensure users have consistent experience using NI Direct.*

Entering the site from the home page a user has a different experience depending on which path they use. Using the People with Disabilities section, users can then choose the Motoring and Transport option, which opens a menu with just 4 options. Using the Travel Transport and Roads section, users can then choose the Travel information for people with reduced mobilities option, which opens a menu with 11 options.

From a users perspective the experience is different depending on which link is used for initial access. The Travel, Transport and Roads section is better at directing people to relevant topics in the shortest possible time. The use of pictograms is also very helpful for users of this section.



**The Committee recommends that the current option of accessing information on both the “People with Disabilities” section and the “Travel, Transport and Roads” section be retained but that changes be made to ensure the same format and content is used on both sections. This will ensure that users will receive consistent advice and information regardless of which section is used.**

*Recommendation two – Make Changes to ensure users can access the information they are looking for more quickly.*

There are clear differences in menu options between the two sections. The Travel information for people with reduced mobilities section includes options for sea and air travel, taxis as well as accommodation advice not available on the Motoring and Transport Section. The subsections of the four options on the Motoring and Transport section contain options to links to a range of more specific services and support available for disabled people not readily identifiable from the Travel information for people with reduced mobilities.

A users experience will be completely different depending on which section of the site they try to access information from. The Travel information for people with reduced mobilities section has clear generic topics options but not links to specific services or support available to disabled people. The Motoring and Transport Section is more geared towards linking people to information about specific services and support. Ideally both sections should start with easily identifiable generic topics, which then link people to specific services and support relevant to those topics.

**As it is important that users can access the most relevant information quickly from the homepage of NI Direct the Committee recommends that changes be made to subsections to ensure users access a comprehensive list of relevant topics at the earliest opportunity.**

*Recommendation three – Make changes to ensure users can better access the information they are looking for.*

Based on the assessment Imtac believes there are areas of the NI Direct website where current content could be improved to provide more relevant information and advice. The Committee has

included a number of examples of content that could be improved in both sections of NI Direct in an appendix at the end of this report.

**In addition to revising the list of sub-section topics Imtac also recommends the opportunity be taken to refresh and strengthen the content of each topic.**

*Recommendation four – Make changes to ensure more people have the opportunity to benefit from NI Direct.*

**In addition to the recommendations aimed at improving usability and the content of NI Direct, Imtac also recommends that options to further improve the accessibility of the website for users are also considered including:**

- **A greater use of easy read text including using images and illustrations**
- **A greater use of audio and video content**
- **Ensuring external links, where provided, are accessible to users**

### **Next steps**

The recommendations made by Imtac in this report are broad, indicating key areas where the information provided by the current NI Direct site could be improved. The Committee is aware that significant, more detailed work is required to achieve the changes it envisages. As a first step in this process the Committee would welcome the opportunity to meet with officials from NI Direct to discuss its recommendations in more detail.

## **Appendix 1 - Examples of differences and inconsistencies in the content of different sections of NI Direct**

The actual information provided about services and support is different depending on which section of the site that a user visits. Examples include:

Travel information for people with reduced mobilities section includes a section on **car travel**. This has generic information about speed limits and information about the Blue Badge Scheme with a link to detailed information. In contrast the Motoring and Transport section contains specific links to the Blue Badge Scheme and Accessible Parking Bays. Subsections provide links to information about adapting your vehicle, learning to drive, driving and disability and Motability. The user experience is completely different depending on the section chosen. Ideally the initial page would contain a clearly identifiable generic option on the Blue Badge and car travel with subsections highlighting the range of services and support available.

Looking at the issue of **Bus Travel and Train Travel** the content on each section of the site is different. The Travel information for people with reduced mobilities section takes a consistent approach to each section providing, general information about services, specific information about accessibility and information about concessionary fares. It uses links to Translink and other parts of NI Direct to direct people to more detailed information. The Motoring and Transport section about bus travel contains a vague statement about bus accessibility alongside information about half-fare concessions. This is not a particularly useful or informative. The section about train travel has a little more detail about planning journeys and generic statements about accessibility. It provides a link to general contacts for Translink and generic information about the DDA. Again this is not a particularly useful or informative section.

The final example is information on **DATS, community transport and Shopmobility**. Travel information for people with reduced mobilities section has a link a Community Transport subsection with sections on DATS, the Rural Partnerships that rely heavily on links to other sites to direct people to more detailed information. Unfortunately some of these links do not have any relevant information or do not work. This is not a particularly useful section.

The Motoring and transport information subsection of the Motoring and Transport section has three further subsections with detailed information on DATS and Dial-a-Lift with a further section with generic information on Rural Partnerships and Shopmobility. From a user perspective the information in this section of NI Direct is more helpful than the information on the Travel information for people with reduced mobilities section.