



Lessons from the current approach of Passenger Transport Executives (PTE's) to access and inclusion

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Summary

About the report

This paper looks at the lessons to be learned, if any, from the approaches of Passenger Transport Executives (PTE's) in Great Britain to issues around access and inclusion.

PTE's are strategic transport bodies in six major urban areas in England. Imtac also included the work of other transport bodies such as Transport for London and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport in this report.

How we compiled the report

We undertook a desktop study using the websites of organisations involved and other useful websites such as the Passenger Transport Executive Group.

Having identified Transport for London as an exemplar we undertook a study visit to TfL to gather more information.

What we have found

Although we found examples of good practice the approach in Northern Ireland compares favourably with the approaches of the majority of PTE's and other strategic transport bodies.

The exception to this is Transport for London.

The approach of TfL in key areas goes beyond current approaches in Northern Ireland.

These key areas include engagement with disabled people and older people, better information and promotion of services, better training and customer service and improvements to infrastructure based on clear standards.

Recommendations

With the Accessible Transport Strategy due to end in 2015 Imtac believes TfL represents a template for a future strategic commitment here to build on progress made to date.

About us

Imtac is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including key transport professionals. Our role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.

Our aim 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 Regional Development.

Background to this report

It is now accepted that a public transport system should be inclusive and accessible to everyone. This principle is enshrined in legislation¹ and current Government policy². The past decade has seen unprecedented levels of investment in public transport services³ in Northern Ireland including the introduction of modern and accessible buses and trains and significant improvements to transport infrastructure. These changes potentially mean that many disabled people and older people have the opportunity to routinely use public transport for the first time.

However it is widely understood that legislation and investment alone cannot deliver an accessible and inclusive transport system. Speaking

¹ Most notably within the provision of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and more recently the Disability Discrimination (Transport Vehicles) Regulations (NI) 2009

² See the Accessible Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005-2015 (DRD 2005)

³ For an assessment see “All Aboard – an assessment of the current accessibility of public transport in Northern Ireland” (Imtac 2013)

at the Breaking the Barriers Conference in Belfast in 2004 Ann Frye⁴ identified the following as major strategic barriers to accessibility:

- A lack of commitment
- A lack of understanding
- A lack of clear direction
- A lack of engagement with disabled people
- Inadequate enforcement of standards

The publication of the Accessible Transport Strategy in 2005 marked an important step forward in Northern Ireland in recognising that other barriers in the design and delivery of transport services need to be addressed to enable our society to achieve a truly accessible transport system.

The current scope of the ATS will end in 2015. As part of a process of identifying how effective the Strategy has been Imtac wanted to contrast the approach to access and inclusion in Northern Ireland with other areas in Great Britain. Imtac decided there was particular merit in looking at the approaches of Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs)⁵ and a number of other key strategic transport bodies. As well as making an assessment of how approaches compared with current approaches in Northern Ireland the Committee was keen to identify good practice.

Who and what we looked at

Imtac looked at the work of the following PTE's – Centro (West Midlands), Merseytravel (Merseyside), Metro (West Yorkshire), Nexus (Tyne and Wear), SYPTE (South Yorkshire) and Transport for Greater

⁴ Speaking as then Head of the Mobility and Inclusion Unit with the Department for Transport

⁵ PTE's are strategic transport bodies serving the six major urban areas outside London.

Manchester (Greater Manchester). In addition we also looked at the work of a number of other bodies that are associated members of the Passenger Transport Executive Group (PTEG). These bodies are – Transport for London (Greater London), Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (Greater Strathclyde area), Leicester City Council, Nottingham City Council and Travel in the West of England.

The Committee decided to undertake a desktop study using the websites of each organisation. Our rationale was that the information provided on websites would quickly establish the priority given by each body to access and inclusion in general and improving services for disabled people and older people in particular. In carrying out our assessment we took into account the differences in operating environments for public transport in Great Britain compared to Northern Ireland as well as the predominantly, though not exclusively, urban environments covered by the work of PTE's.

What we found

All the organisations we looked at provided basic information about the accessibility of public transport services. Generally PTE's are keen to promote the message that public transport was becoming more accessible but equally further improvements are required. Broadly the information provided on websites included:

- Limited details about accessible low-floor buses and the routes they run on
- Details about restrictions on the use of wheelchairs and scooters on public transport
- Details about the accessibility of the rail network and assistance available
- Details about station and infrastructure accessibility
- Details about alternative dial-a-ride type services
- Details about the availability of information in alternative formats

- Details of concessionary travel

There was a variation in the detail of information provided each PTE and how easy this information was to find. Good examples included:

- Merseytravel: A prominent section on accessibility on the website with information about each mode of travel as well as an Access Guide leaflet.
- Transport for Greater Manchester: A prominent section on accessibility on the website with information about a range of services including buses and door2door transport. A series of Guides have been produced around accessibility of services.
- Centro: A comprehensive Access Guide to all modes and services although not easily accessible from the homepage.

A number PTE's have undertaken specific initiatives around access and accessibility. Good examples include:

- Centro: A promotional video about the accessibility of services, passenger assistance cards, bus hailer signs and pads to help communicate with transport staff.
- Transport for Greater Manchester: A wheelchair priority campaign aimed at parents with buggies on buses

The approach of Transport for London stands out as significantly different from other PTE's. Clearly London has benefited from significantly higher levels of investment in public transport than other parts of the United Kingdom (partly as a consequence of the Olympic legacy). However it is clear from the TfL website that improving accessibility and promoting inclusive transport has been given a major priority when making this investment.

Some of the key features of this investment include:

- A fully low-floor bus network all equipped with audio and visual information systems with investment in bus stops with enhanced accessibility;

- Significant improvements to overground and underground rail network with more step-free stations and modern accessible trains
- Significant improvements to make pedestrian infrastructure more accessible
- Continued support for London Dial-a-Ride service and Taxicard services with improvements including the use of low-floor minibuses

In addition to this direct investment in services TfL has also invested in a number initiatives designed to further improve access for disabled people and older people including:

- A requirement that bus drivers receive disability awareness training
- A Travel mentoring scheme to encourage more disabled people to use public transport
- A Travel Support Card to help disabled people communicate with transport staff
- Innovative “how to” films where disabled passengers demonstrate how to get the best use out of different aspects of the transport network
- A poster campaign on buses encouraging buggy users to give up priority seats for wheelchair users
- A wide range of information (including printed, audio and online information) about access to services including information about “step-free” routes and journeys

TfL has also published a strategic plan⁶ aimed at further improving access to transport in London. The plan contains commitments around four key priorities:

⁶ Your accessible transport network – the Mayor’s commitment to making it even easier for you to travel around London (TfL 2012)

- Better, more accessible information
- Further improvements to infrastructure making more journeys accessible
- Improved staff training over all modes
- Improved engagement with disabled people

Study visit to Transport for London

Following the desktop exercise members of Imtac and representatives from Translink and DRD undertook a study visit to Transport for London to gather more information about the approach of the organisation. The visit took place on the 20th March 2014 and involved a morning discussing key initiatives with TfL officials and an afternoon seeing at first hand improvements on the transport network.

The study visit proved to be very useful in adding detail to the information gained from the desktop study. The key findings of visit include:

Engagement

From our discussions it is clear that the approach of TfL is informed and underpinned by direct and on-going engagement with disabled people and older people. This engagement is at all levels of the organisation. Membership of the Board of TfL includes a disabled person. In addition to this TfL has a high level strategic advisory group of disabled people called the Independent Disability Advisory Group (IDAG). IDAG members have specific roles and work with key business areas of the organisation. TfL routinely works with disabled people's organisations including Transport for All and Inclusion London as well as representative organisations such as RNIB and Age UK. Engagement also takes place at a local level with formal Sub-Regional Forums as well as more informal mechanisms for engagement.

In addition to on-going formalised engagement TfL has held two recent large-scale engagement events with disabled people and older people.

A “Thinking Outside the Bus” event focused on developments and improvements on the bus network. The “On the Right Track” event looked issues around the underground and overground rail services. Both events have been used to inform TfL’s plans for the future. A further pan-TfL engagement is planned in the future.

At a more local level TfL organises frequent Meet the Manager days at local depots as well as initiatives such as Local Bus Days when groups of disabled and older people experience travel on buses and chat to TfL staff in pleasant and relaxed environment.

TfL also use of disabled and older “mystery shoppers”. Around 100 people regularly check and test the accessibility of the transport network provided by TfL as part of monitoring and evaluating the results of investment in services.

Training and Customer Care

Members received briefings from TfL officials from bus, Underground and Overground rail networks about training provided to transport staff.

With regard to the bus network there are 24,500 bus drivers in London, employed by a number of different operators. The scale and nature of bus operations means that providing training to drivers is a major challenge. TfL has worked in partnership with Transport for All and Age UK to develop a driver training DVD entitled All Aboard. The DVD has significant contributions from disabled people and older people and takes a disability equality⁷ approach to the training based on the social model of disability.

In relation to the Underground and Overground rail network TfL has worked in partnership with Transport for All and Inclusion London to develop a Disability Equality Training course based on the social model of disability. This course has been delivered to frontline staff by disabled people in conjunction with TfL’s own trainers.

⁷ For an explanation of what Disability Equality Training is see “Improving the provision of Disability Equality and disability awareness training – Good practice guidelines for transport providers (Imtac 2013)”

TfL has undertaken evaluation of both training courses and this indicates the training has been effective for both staff and disabled and older people. The approach taken by TfL to training broadly follows an approach recommended by Imtac in a number of papers⁸.

Promotion, Campaigns and Information

Members were given an overview of TfL's approach to information about and promotion of bus and underground and overground rail services to disabled people and older people. A key priority for TfL is providing accurate information about services in a range of formats including audio versions. TfL produces a range of guides and maps including step-free guides to the Underground and Overground rail network. The online journey planner includes a range of accessibility options including a step-free journey option. Recent developments include a competition to design smartphone apps that would particularly benefit disabled people. In relation to infrastructure TfL has introduced clear and accessible signage at stations to indicate accessible routes. Providing audio and visual information on all transport modes is also a key priority for TfL.

Coupled with accessible and inclusive information TfL has also run a number of high profile campaigns to promote the accessibility of services. A good example of this was a campaign to encourage buggy users to give up the wheelchair space on buses. Imtac members saw at first hand the use of posters at bus stops in London to highlight the campaign. In addition to this TfL produced packs for the managers and drivers from the various bus companies encouraging their staff to take steps, such as asking passengers to move from the wheelchair space, to support the campaign. Using the mystery shoppers TfL has been able to measure how effective this aspect of the campaign has been. Prior to the campaign only around 40% of drivers asked passengers to move, since the campaign this has risen to nearly 90%. TfL has recently

⁸ See "Improving the provision of Disability Equality and disability awareness training – Good practice guidelines for transport providers" (Imtac 2013) and "Survey of disability training provision by transport providers" (Imtac 2014)

launched a broader campaign called “Come on board”⁹ to encourage more disabled people and older people to use public transport.

TfL also provides direct support to disabled people and older people. This support includes the Mentor Scheme, which provides advice and direct support to disabled people to help them gain the confidence to become an independent traveller using public transport. Linked to this service TfL also operates a Mobility Aid Recognition Scheme. This scheme is for scooter and wheelchair users. TfL staff advise passengers on whether scooters and wheelchairs are suitable for use on buses and trains and issue individuals with a card to show to drivers and staff to confirm the suitability of the mobility equipment. Members also heard about the Travel Support Card. This card enables the passenger to write a message about assistance or information requirements that they can then show to staff when using the transport network.

Improvements to infrastructure

Intac members were briefed and were able to experience at first hand the improvements made to transport services and infrastructure in London. Underpinning all the changes to infrastructure is a clearly defined set of standards. Significant priority has been given to improvements to the pedestrian environment. This includes a standard design of accessible bus stop with appropriate kerb heights for the effective operation of low-floor buses. Members travelled on the bus network, which is totally served using low-floor vehicles fitted with the lbus audio-visual information system as standard. During the briefing session TfL officials highlighted the improvements being made and planned for the Underground and Overground rail network. When making improvements it is the priority for TfL to provide step-free access to services, including access into and around the station and onto the train, together with high quality audio-visual information at stations and on-board trains. Members had the opportunity to see the improvements

⁹ Details of the campaign including a new video can be obtained from the TfL website at <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/transport-accessibility/>

made to stations and to travel on both the underground and overground network. This included looking at platform improvements which provide level access to trains including the use of platform humps. Members also travelled on new trains designed to the highest standards of access. Travelling on services also gave members the opportunity to look at many other improvements including signage.

During briefings TfL officials stressed the importance of transport staff in providing assistance to support disabled people and older people using services and infrastructure. Every station and facility has staff available to provide support when services are running. Some key stations have been designated as Centres of Excellence where staff have received enhanced levels of training delivered in partnership with disabled people.

Imtac members were able to observe this in action during our trip on the network. For example barriers at Underground stations are staffed and these staff are usually located at the wider, accessible barriers. Imtac members also had the opportunity to use the rail network unaccompanied by TfL officials and were impressed by the pro-active approach of the staff at stations and the levels of assistance provided.

During our visit TfL announced a “Turn Up and Go” service for disabled people on rail services. This effectively removed the previous requirement for disabled people to pre-notify the need for assistance before travelling. Turn up and go reflects the improved level of service now available across the London transport network. It should be noted that people can still request assistance in advance if they prefer to do this.

Assessing what we found

Based on our desktop review the majority of organisations we looked at only provide basic and limited information about the accessibility of public transport services. The information provided broadly reflects the current legal requirements with little focus on promoting public transport as a realistic option for disabled people and older people.

There are exceptions to this approach. Centro, Transport for Greater Manchester and Merseytravel do provide more detailed information

about the accessibility of services. These organisations have also developed a number of initiatives designed to make using public transport easier for disabled people and older people. The approach of these organisations is commendable, however overall it does not reflect a clear, comprehensive and strategic approach to addressing the barriers that make using public transport difficult for disabled people and older people.

The approach of Transport for London is significantly different from that of the other organisations surveyed. Not only has TfL invested significantly in services but has importantly invested in initiatives designed to make using services easier. TfL provides the most comprehensive information specifically designed to help disabled people get the most out of transport services. Better training for bus drivers, Underground and Overground staff is a major priority and the involvement of disabled people in the design and delivery of this training is highly commendable. TfL has invested in a mentor scheme designed to support disabled people to gain the confidence to use services. The range of “how to” videos are innovative, providing an opportunity for disabled people to promote the use of public transport to other disabled people.

Clearly there has been a high level of engagement with disabled people in developing TfL’s approach. This is reflected in practical interventions such as a recent poster campaign to highlight issues faced by wheelchair users and access to priority spaces on buses. It is also reflected at a strategic level with disabled people represented on the TfL Board level and IDAG. Finally TfL is the only organisation that we looked at that has published a clear strategic plan for making further improvements to the accessibility of public transport services.

It would be easy to dismiss the positive approach of TfL on the grounds of the substantially higher levels of investment in public transport in London compared to other parts of the United Kingdom. However this overlooks the clear message that TfL has decided to make improving accessibility for disabled people a strategic priority in its work whilst it would appear others have not. TfL has been proactive in ensuring that disabled people benefit from the investment that is being made with a

strategic approach informed by an awareness of the barriers to accessibility highlighted in the introduction to this report. Put in simple terms TfL's approach highlights a clear commitment to improve services, has a clear direction based on an understanding of disabled and older peoples needs and as a result TfL is working to clear standards on a range of issues including information and infrastructure design. Underpinning all of this there is a clear commitment to engage directly with disabled and older people. None of the other organisations we looked took such a proactive approach and appear content to improve services within the confines of current legislation.

Lessons for Northern Ireland

Imtac has previously recognised the improvements made to the accessibility of public transport in Northern Ireland over the past decade¹⁰. Our report has highlighted that the major drivers for these changes were (1) investment by Government and (2) legislation requiring new vehicles and infrastructure to meet minimum levels of accessibility.

Our report also highlighted a third driver for change in the Accessible Transport Strategy published by DRD in 2005. The aim of the ATS was to mainstream issues for disabled and older people during the development and design of policy and services. There is no doubt that the ATS has had some positive impact since its publication. Measures such as the development of the Travel Safe Guide by DRD and the Translink Access Guide are examples of positive initiatives around the provision of information that are unlikely to have been progressed without the ATS.

Whilst acknowledging that progress has taken place Imtac has consistently raised concerns that many of the key mainstreaming policies contained in the ATS are not always factored in to service and policy development. The Committee has argued that failure to do this

¹⁰ All Aboard – an assessment of the current accessibility of public transport in Northern Ireland (Imtac 2013)

has lessened the impact of the positive investment in bus and rail services here. Key areas of the ATS where Imtac has highlighted the need for better implementation include (1) engagement with disabled people and older people, (2) better training involving disabled people based on the social model of disability, (3) clearer standards for the provision of services (including issues such as step-free access and audio-visual information), (4) better and more inclusive information about transport services, (5) the need for promotion and awareness raising about the improvements made to services and (6) additional support measures to assist disabled and older people to use public transport¹¹.

In relation to the issues addressed by the current report the approach taken in Northern Ireland compares favourably, in our opinion, to many other parts of Great Britain. This indicates that despite our reservations the ATS has had a positive impact.

The great exception identified by this report is of course London. The approach of Transport for London is remarkable. Our desktop research and the subsequent study visit indicates that London has been more successful in mainstreaming accessibility and inclusion into the design of the public transport network than we have in Northern Ireland. Many of the key policies of the ATS central to mainstreaming access and inclusion in Northern Ireland are part of the clear strategic approach of TfL and more importantly are demonstrably being implemented through a range of initiatives.

With the ATS implementation period due to come to an end in 2015 the time is now right to look at successor arrangements to the Strategy. Imtac strongly recommends that the Department for Regional Development publish a new plan committing Government in Northern Ireland to making further improvements to the mainstream accessible public transport network. Based on this report the Committee believes the approach of TfL provides the perfect model to base further improvements.

¹¹ These issues are regularly raised in Imtac reports and consultation responses but are perhaps best summarized in our response to the Accessible Transport Strategy Draft Action Plan 2009-2012.

Based on the London experience (as well as previous advice from Imtac) we believe the successor to the ATS should focus on the following strategic priorities:

- Improving engagement with disabled and older people at all levels when designing future policy and services
- Ensuring that future investment in vehicles and infrastructure are based on clear and agreed standards which include step-free access and audio/visual information on all modes
- Improved Disability Equality Training for policy makers and service providers based on the social model of disability which involves disabled people in the design and delivery of training
- Improving information about services including more detailed information about step-free routes
- Ensuring the design and provision of information is inclusive
- Promoting and raising awareness of increased opportunities for disabled and older people to travel using public transport through targeted campaigns and information
- Improving support, including travel training/mentoring, to enable disabled people and older people to travel more often using public transport

Imtac believes there is also merit in looking at how many of individual initiatives undertaken by TfL, which could be replicated in Northern Ireland. These initiatives could become tangible actions under a future strategy document. Initiatives could include “how to” videos, a priority seat poster campaign, meet the manager and local bus/train days. The large scale engagement events such as “On the Right Tracks” could also be replicated.