



**Comments from Imtac on the consultation on the
Regional Transportation Strategy 2011 – a
sustainable transport future**

June 2011

This response is also available in alternative formats. To request a copy in an alternative format or for any other queries please see the “Contact Us” section of this response or visit our website at www.imtac.org.uk.

About Imtac

- 1 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.
- 2 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.
- 3 Imtac receives support from the Department for Regional Development.

Comments on the consultation

- 4 Imtac welcomes the opportunity to comment on the latest consultation around the development of a revised Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS). The Committee commends the Department for the steps taken to make the consultation inclusive and for taking the time to present the ideas behind the emerging RTS at a recent Imtac meeting.
- 5 The Committee has responded at previous stages of the development of the revised RTS. In our responses we stressed the linkages between a transport system linked to car usage and growing inequality in our society. We highlighted how travel is a necessity in modern life and how people who have no or limited access to a car (including many older people and disabled people) find doing everyday things difficult or impossible. The Committee is pleased that the emerging Strategy clearly makes the link between transport and tackling social exclusion and inequality. Imtac commends the Department for ensuring that these important issues are reflected in the proposed high level transport aims, Strategic objectives and suggested transport interventions.
- 6 In broad terms Imtac is supportive of the approach suggested in the consultation document. We believe it is essential that transport is viewed in terms of people not vehicles, that we make changes that reflect a need to reduce the reliance on the car and that, given the current climate, we look at ways of making better use of the resources we already have. We broadly agree with the proposed high level transport aims, strategic objectives and many of the

interventions proposed. The Committee also supports the principles behind the proposed Transport Policy Prioritisation Framework as means of assessing which proposed solutions best fit the objectives of a revised RTS.

- 7 The consultation asks respondents to rank strategic objectives in order of importance. The Committee believes that many of the objectives are interlinked and each plays a role in the ensuring others are met. We therefore feel that ranking of strategic objectives both difficult and unhelpful as it implies that greater weight is to be given to higher ranked objectives. If ranking is to be applied to the RTS then consideration should be given to elevating “Develop transport programmes focused on the user” in order to promote equality between all users rather than a focus on vehicles.
- 8 The consultation also asks respondents to comment on the value of standalone plans and approaches to issues such transport and older people and disabled people or whether these issues should be mainstreamed into the revised RTS. Imtac wholeheartedly agrees that issues for disabled people and older people should be mainstreamed and should form a part of everyday decision making about policies and services. The Accessible Transport Strategy (ATS) was developed as a result of the current RTS and was designed to be a framework to ensure issues for disabled people and older people are mainstreamed as a routine part of policy and service development in Northern Ireland. It has been a source of great frustration for Committee members that despite a standalone Strategy mainstreaming often does not happen as routine. Given the experience of the ATS Imtac is open to further discussion with the Department about issues for disabled people and older people can be more effectively mainstreamed in the future.
- 9 Imtac understands that much more work needs to be done to develop the detail of the revised RTS. The committee welcomes the commitment to work closely with all the stakeholders involved in agreeing a way forward. We look forward to working with the Department to develop more detailed proposals.
- 10 The Committee recognises that considerable improvements have been made to transport services and delivery under the existing RTS. We understand that the revised RTS is not a bidding document but we are concerned there is a danger that

improvements that have already been made may be lost if sufficient budget priority is not given to transport.

- 11 Whilst the Committee does not propose to go into great detail on our suggestions for interventions required to make travelling easier for disabled people and older people we feel it is useful to highlight some priorities which Imtac consider necessary to ensure future progress:

Interventions that increase the use of public transport by disabled people and older people

The investment in public transport here means that bus and rail services are now accessible to disabled people and older people yet all evidence available indicates that usage is low. The RTS must look at the reasons why disabled people and older people do not use public transport with a view to introducing measures to reduce barriers to travel.

Interventions that result in flexible services that connect people and communities

Currently where people can access the public transport network the potential for travel is good. However many people and communities find getting to the network difficult or impossible. Whilst alternative services are available, Imtac believes there is benefit in looking at different types of flexible service to maximise opportunities for people to travel and ensure efficient use of the resources available. As different places may benefit from different solutions future mechanisms for more local transport planning may be required.

Interventions that target additional support measures to enable people to use transport

To make the best use of what is available we should look at additional measures that increase the opportunities for people to travel. Interventions could include better and more accessible information about services, targeted travel training/travel mentoring programmes and extending free travel to more groups of disabled people.

Interventions that prioritise investment in better pedestrian facilities

Nearly all journeys involve an element of walking. For many disabled people and older people journeys are often made more difficult or impossible by barriers in the pedestrian environment. If we want to make existing resources work better for people we need to prioritise interventions that reduce these barriers.

Interventions that encourage greater cross Departmental working

Transport impacts on the delivery of many other Government Departments' programmes. If the RTS is to be successful in its focus on people and communities rather than vehicles, mechanisms must be developed to ensure that Government Departments co-operate to share resources and reduce duplication, improve access to key services and activities and reduce the need for unnecessary travel within an integrated transport system that meets the needs of society. Links between health, education and planning are particularly important.

Interventions that protect the mobility of disabled people and older people who use cars

For many older people and disabled people the Blue Badge Scheme is essential in enabling them to undertake everyday activities. Whilst Imtac broadly supports measures that reduce the impact of car usage on our society great care needs to be taken to ensure that such measures do not restrict the mobility of disabled people who have no other choice but to rely on the use of a car.

Conclusion

- 12 Imtac broadly supports the proposed way forward for the revised Regional Transportation Strategy. We understand that much more work is required to develop the detail of the future RTS and we look forward to working with the Department as a key stakeholder in developing detail proposals.

Contact us

- 13 To receive this paper in an alternative format or for any other queries contact:

**Michael Lorimer
Imtac
Enterprise House
55-59 Adelaide Street
Belfast BT2 8FE**

**Telephone: 028 9072 6020
Textphone: 028 9072 6016
Fax: 028 9024 5500
Email: Info@imtac.org.uk**