



**Comments from Imtac on Future Railway
Investment: A consultation paper**

April 2013

Imtac is committed to making information about our work accessible. Details of how to obtain information in your preferred format are included on the next page.

Making our information accessible

As an organisation of and for disabled people and older people Imtac recognises that the way information is provided can be a barrier to accessing services and participation in public life. We are committed to providing information about our work in formats that best suit the needs of individuals.

All our documents are available in hard copy in 14pt type size as standard. We also provide word and pdf versions of our documents on our website – www.imtac.org.uk. In addition we will provide information in a range of other formats. These formats include:

- Large print
- Audio cassette or CD
- Daisy disc
- Braille
- Electronic copies on disc or via email in PDF or word
- Easy read

We will also provide information about our work in other languages if you require this.

If you would like this publication in any of the formats listed above or if you have any other information requirements please contact:

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

Telephone/Textphone: 028 9072 6020
Fax: 028 9024 5500
Email: info@imtac.org.uk

About Imtac

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.

Comments on the consultation

Imtac welcomes the opportunity to comment on the current consultation. The Committee believes there is value in examining different approaches to long term investment in our railways particularly in light of the New Approach to Regional Transportation in Northern Ireland. Having said this the Committee did find it difficult to comment on the investment in railways in isolation, without fully considering how proposals would sit in a wider transportation strategy.

Government investment in the railways over the past decade has delivered positive benefits for disabled people and older people. New modern and accessible rolling stock coupled with better infrastructure means that many more older people and disabled people now have the option of travelling by train. The availability of concessionary travel also encourages many older people and disabled people to use public transport. However the Committee acknowledges relatively small rail network in Northern Ireland limits the benefits of these changes.

Imtac recognises that the packages outlined in the consultation would improve the railways in Northern Ireland by improving and extending the current network. In an ideal world the Committee would support each of the packages. However the costs associated with the various packages are tremendous and the evidence supporting the consultation raises questions over how effective some of the packages for further investment will be in meeting longer term transportation aims and objectives such as

benefits to the economy. The key transportation consideration for Imtac is to balance substantial costs against how effective such investment will be in delivering increased travel choice for disabled people and older people and more broadly in addressing social inclusion and the impact of the costs on other transport measures. It is disappointing that the consultation did not provide more information around the impact of investment on social inclusion specifically in relation to accessibility for disabled people and older people.

The following is a summary of the position of Imtac around the eight packages outlined in the consultation:

- Priority must be maintaining the current network as outlined in package one in order to sustain a railway service in Northern Ireland.
- Packages seven and eight, proposing significant extension to the current network, are too costly and will only have limited impact in addressing issues around social inclusion due to the distance people still have to travel to access the network given the rural nature of areas concerned.
- The Committee believes there is merit in considering the other packages detailed in the consultation that seek to enhance the current network including reopening the Antrim/Knockmore line. Imtac would particularly welcome investment that further improves the accessibility of the current network for disabled people and older people. Imtac recently completed an audit of unstaffed rail stations and halts which could inform potential future improvements.
- However the Committee has significant concerns about the impact on the wider transport budget of the significant resources required to implement each of these packages.
- We believe that other key transport interventions such as funding for local bus services including demand responsive transport services¹ are a better way to deliver increased

¹ See [Flexible Future: Lessons from the development of demand responsive transport in Great Britain and Ireland](#)

travel choice for older people and disabled people and more broadly address issues around social inclusion in society at large. In developing local services a priority should be to improve integration with existing rail services. Improved local services should be given priority over further investment in railways in excess of Package 1 until such time that it is clear that existing network capacity will be unable to cope with demand.

- It is crucial that under any proposals for future enhancement of the rail network there is a rigorous and detailed assessment of whether the investment will contribute to social inclusion.

Conclusion

Imtac would like to thank the Department for the opportunity to comment on the current consultation. The Committee supports maintaining our current rail network and where affordable making improvements to the current network. However the Committee believes improving local travel options through better bus services including demand responsive services are more effective in addressing the transport requirements of older people, disabled people and others and should be prioritised over additional investment in rail services.