



Walking Routes in Belfast City Centre - an update

February 2013

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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.

About this paper

As part of the development of the Access & Mobility Study for Belfast City Centre an audit was undertaken of key walking routes around the City Centre in March 2010. The main route options were assessed from Great Victoria Street Station to Donegall Square, this process was repeated for main route options from Donegall Square to Central Station.

The routes were assessed for comfort and convenience and the crossing points were assessed against normal good practice as outlined in the DfT Guidance on the Use of Tactile Paving and Inclusive Mobility.

The following are the main recurring issues that were identified by the previous audit:

- Inconsistent use and application of tactile paving on crossings and vehicle entrances.
- Incorrect layout to crossings can cause confusion, other factors such as height and position of button can add to this.
- Vehicle overrun and parking on pavement needs to be enforced to assist in reducing the maintenance required on the pavement and the crossing surfaces and to ensure open and accessible pavements.

- Good routine maintenance is essential in the up keep of the pavement. Robust paving reinstatements by utility companies are also very important. Common flaws include solid covers within tactile surfaces, or failure to use tactile surface in recessed covers and paving slabs re-laid without being properly bedded or mortared in place. Similarly reinstatement or replacement over time of tactile surfaces has resulted in multiple instances of crossings with a mix of red slabs for controlled crossings with buff slabs for an uncontrolled crossing, or where one side of the street is paved differently than the other. For crossing points, it is crucial that in any reinstatement of the surface that the original design layout is reinstated correctly.
- High drop kerbs can pose a tripping hazard to the infirm and an obstruction to wheelchair and powerchair users.
- Obstructions caused by parked cars, A boards, external seating and other street furniture on the pedestrian desire line is an issue throughout the city centre. They are a significant hindrance and can add a further level of confusion at crossing points and in some instances are causing a hazard.

Since the previous audit there have been significant changes to the pedestrian environment in Belfast City Centre arising out of the Belfast on the Move project. A further audit was undertaken in October 2012 to identify whether progress has been made in reducing barriers identified by the previous report.

Route one – Great Victoria Street/ Europa Station to Donegal Place

- 1 Issue - At the Great Northern Mall entrance there is no corduroy hazard warning paving at the top or bottom of steps and ramps. The provision of bollards (without contrasting bands) create hazards at the bottom of steps and ramps.

Progress – none



- 2 Issue - At the entrance to the Europa Hotel in line tactile paving is provided. However currently the paving is a mix of buff and red (it should be buff only). The paving should also be 3 slabs deep rather than the current 2. The current drop kerb height could present a trip hazard.

Progress – none



- 3 Issue - No tactile paving is provided at the exit to the Europa Hotel.
The provision of unmarked bollards creates an additional hazard.

Progress – none



- 4 Issue - The tactile paving on the in line crossing at the junction of Great Victoria Street and Glengall Street should be three rather than two slabs deep.

Progress – none



- 5 Issue - The station side footway on Glengall Street is blocked with cars. Bollards across the footway not have been fitted with an appropriate contrasting visibility strip.

Progress – Bollards have been fitted with white visibility strip.
Obstructions on the pavement remain an issue.



- 6 Issue – A good high capacity crossing on Great Victoria Street is let down by low contrast of tactile paving against the pavement colour.

Progress – none



- 7 Issue - On Amelia Street there appears to be tactile paving relating to a redundant offline crossing which needs to be removed.

Progress – none



- 8 Issue – Lack of tactile paving around inline crossings around Blackstaff Square and no crossing facilities at the junction of Franklin Street

Progress – Significant improvements have been made in the area with tactile paving included on inline crossings and a new high quality uncontrolled crossings incorporated around Franklin Street.



- 9 Issue - Bins and vehicles parked on the footway create additional hazards on Blackstaff Square.

Progress – Both remain a problem.



- 10 Issue – Vehicle entrances on Brunswick Street take precedence over the footway with no tactile paving. Drop kerbs are inconsistent in height.

Progress – None



- 11 Issue - There is tactile paving on vehicle entrances on Howard Street but in one case the paving is aligned directly with a sign post.

Progress – None - bins left on the pavement create an additional hazard.



- 12 Issue - The controlled pedestrian crossing across Great Victoria Street at the Grosvenor Road/Howard Street Junction has a narrow traffic island. This would be exceptionally difficult to navigate in a wheelchair. The button on the traffic island is a long way from the edge of the tactile paving and the tactile paving has worn smooth. Footfall on this narrow crossing is high.

Progress – None



- 13 Issue - On the Howard Street side of this crossing the tail of the tactile crossing is incorrectly installed as it does not line the person up with the button. There is a lack of contrast between the paving and the tactile paving at this crossing.

Progress – None



- 14 Issue - There is a controlled crossing across Howard Street (the Centra Store on GVS). Utility covers cut into the provision of tactile paving at this crossing potentially meaning a blind person could step into a very busy road. The button at the crossing is far away from the tactile paving and is obstructed by another pole.

Progress – None



- 15 Issue - At the opposite side of the crossing on Howard Street (around the Spires) there is a step crossfall on the pavement.

Progress – None



- 16 Issue – Controlled and uncontrolled crossings at the junction of Howard Street and Upper Queen Street had numerous issues including damaged paving and poorly dropped kerbs.

Progress – The junction has been upgraded to high quality controlled crossings.



- 17 Issue - On Donegall Square West the pedestrian route is significantly narrowed by street furniture (including bus shelters) and tables and chairs from cafes. The unrestricted nature of the street clutter is a significant hazard.

Progress – None



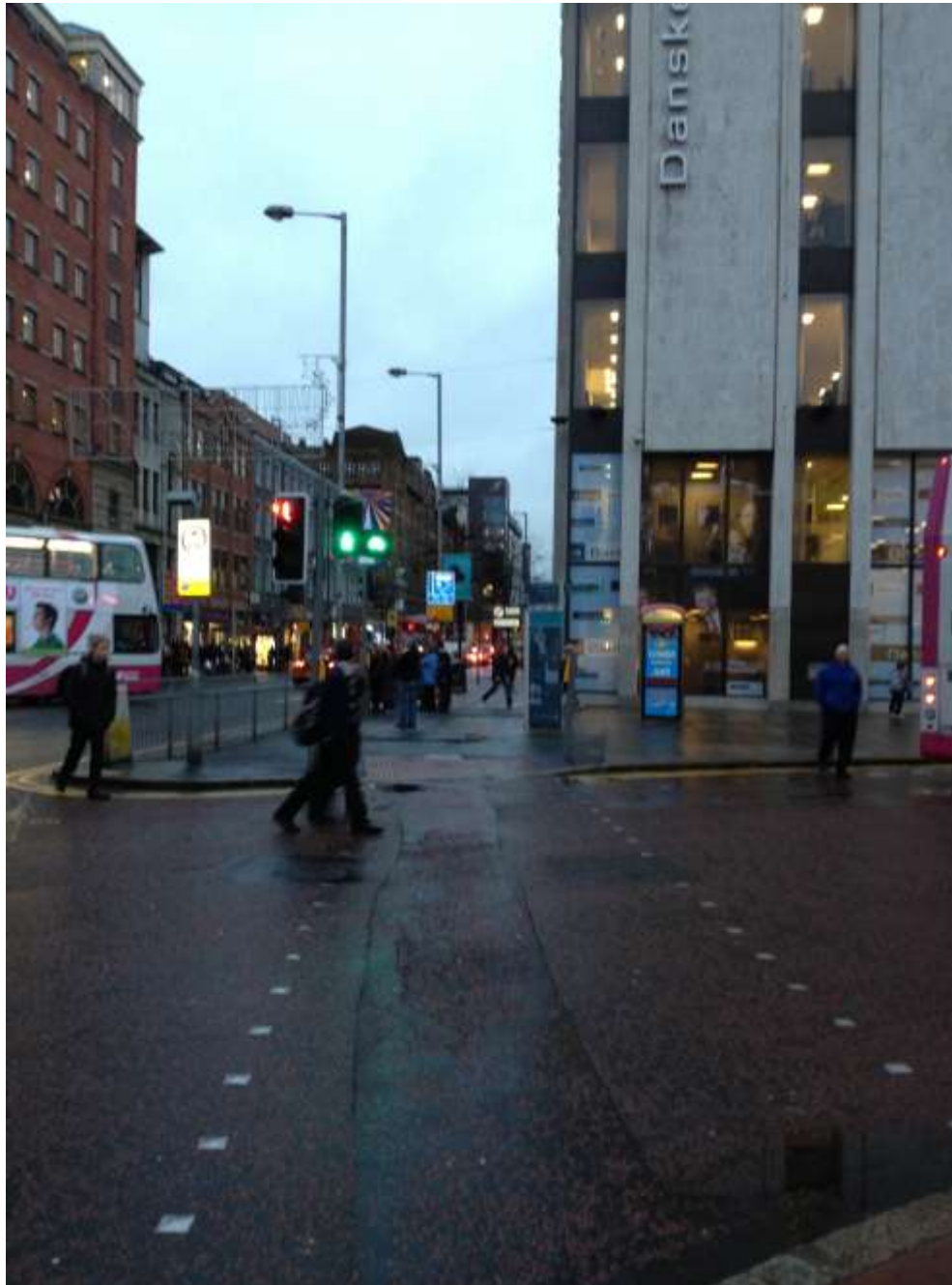
- 18 Issue - There is a significant pinch point at the northern end of Donegall Square West which could be resolved by realigning street furniture.

Progress – None



- 19 Issue - The previous audit highlighted the potential benefits of an additional pedestrian crossing at the southern end of Donegall Square West.

Progress - Pedestrian crossing has been provided at the southern end of Donegall Square West



Additional Progress - Since the first audit the controlled crossing at Wellington Place (at Upper Queen Street and Queen Street) has been upgraded and meets best practice and represents an alternative route into the City Centre avoiding Donegal Square West. However the benefits of the improvements are reduced by street cafes at two corners of the junction.



Route 2 – Main Route options from Donegall Square to Central Station

20 Issue - At the controlled crossing across Donegall Square North (towards Donegall Place) had issues with the alignment of tactile paving and the location of the button.

Progress – The crossing has been upgraded to a high standard



- 21 Issue - At the controlled crossing on the junction of Donegall Square North and East (City Hall side) the button is mounted too high on the pole and the pole is located too far from the tactile paving. There is a high drop kerb that would represent a significant trip hazard. There is use of non-standard tactile paving in this area. There is a high drop kerb on the eastern side of this crossing and the tactile paving is badly worn and needs replaced.

Progress – none



22 Issue - At the controlled crossing across Chichester Street (at Donegall Square) the use of the wrong coloured tactile paving and location of the buttons posed problems.

Progress – This crossing has been upgraded to a high standard



- 23 Issue - At the junction of Callender Street and Chichester Street the in line crossing has a mix of colour paving slabs (should be buff). Also there should be a depth of three slabs on the Café Nero side of the junction.

Progress – None



- 24 There is a good example of an inline crossing at the entrance to the surface car park on the corner of Arthur Street.

Update – Noted bin obstructing the pavement reducing the impact of good provision



- 25 There is a good example of a controlled crossing at the junction of Chichester Street and Montgomery Street.



26 Issue - A dish drainage channel obstructs the in line crossing at the junction of Chichester Street and William Street South.

Progress – None



27 Issue - There is no provision of tactile paving on the entrance to the Victoria Square service yard on Chichester Street.

Progress – None



- 28 Issue - There is a good example of an inline uncontrolled crossing across Montgomery Street. Unfortunately clutter on the pavement reduces the accessibility of this crossing.

Progress – none



- 29 Issue - Accessible parking bays provided on Chichester Street do not meet the standard width. Drop kerb provision is limited and could be improved by dropping the entire length of bays.

Progress – None

Additional update -The route towards the law courts on Chichester Street is restricted by significant pavement clutter.



Additional Update - There is a good example of a controlled crossing at the top end of Chichester Street (entrance to House of Fraser). Buttons have been provided at either side of the tactile paving.



30 Issue - The controlled crossing on Victoria Street (towards the Law Courts) was good but could benefit from increased capacity.

Progress – The crossing has been improved to a high standard.



- 31 Issue - There is an inline crossing across Victoria Street at the entrance to the Law Courts (Lower Chichester Street). However there is no contrast between the paving and tactile and the paving should be extended to a depth of three slabs.

Progress – None



32 Issue - The walking route through the area in front of the law courts is fraught with difficulty. When open to traffic there is little to delineate between walking and traffic areas. The design of lighting columns represents a trip hazard as do the random placement of bollards in this area.

Progress –The area is no longer open to traffic



- 33 Issue - As with the opposite end the inline crossing across Oxford Street at the end of Lower Chichester Street has inadequate provision of tactile paving.

Progress – none



- 34 Issue - There is a controlled crossing across Oxford Street. On the Waterfront Hall side of Oxford Street. There is inadequate non-standard tactile paving on the crossing which needs replaced.

Progress – None



- 35 Issue - There are a series of steps and ramps around the Waterfront Hall which do not have corduroy paving or appropriate contrast.

Progress – none



36 Issue - Unexpected changes in levels, bins, bollards and A-boards provide additional hazards in this area.

Progress – None



- 37 Issue - There is poor or no provision of tactile paving at crossings around the Hilton Hotel.

Progress – None



38 Issue - There are multiple obstructions in the area around the stepped access towards Central Station.

Progress – None



- 39 Issue - The design of the steps is poor with no corduroy paving. The short tread means the steps are very steep. In places steps descend into hazards such as trees. There are no handrails.

Progress – Handrails have now been added to the steps



40 Issue - There is a long alternative ramp provided but no handrail or corduroy paving.

Progress – None



- 41 Issue - Access to East Bridge Street is via a ramp. The ramp is steep and long with no handrail or landings where people could rest. Steps at the top of the ramp providing access to the road have no corduroy paving, lack contrast and require a lower handrail. An alternative ramp is provided which is steep and has inadequate handrail. The base of the guardrail is open and does not provide adequate protection.

Progress – None



42 Issue - The controlled crossing across East Bridge Street at Central Station could be wider and allow a greater crossing time.

Progress - None

Route 3 - Alternative route from Central Station to Donegall Square

43 Issue - The depth of tactile paving needs to be increased at the junction of Stewart Street and East Bridge Street.

Progress – None



- 44 Issue - The tail of tactile paving at the controlled crossing on the corner of Oxford Street and East Bridge Street does not continue through covers for utilities.

Progress – None



- 45 Issue - There are multiple obstructions on the footway on Oxford Street outside St Georges Market. There is also a significant crossfall.

Progress – none



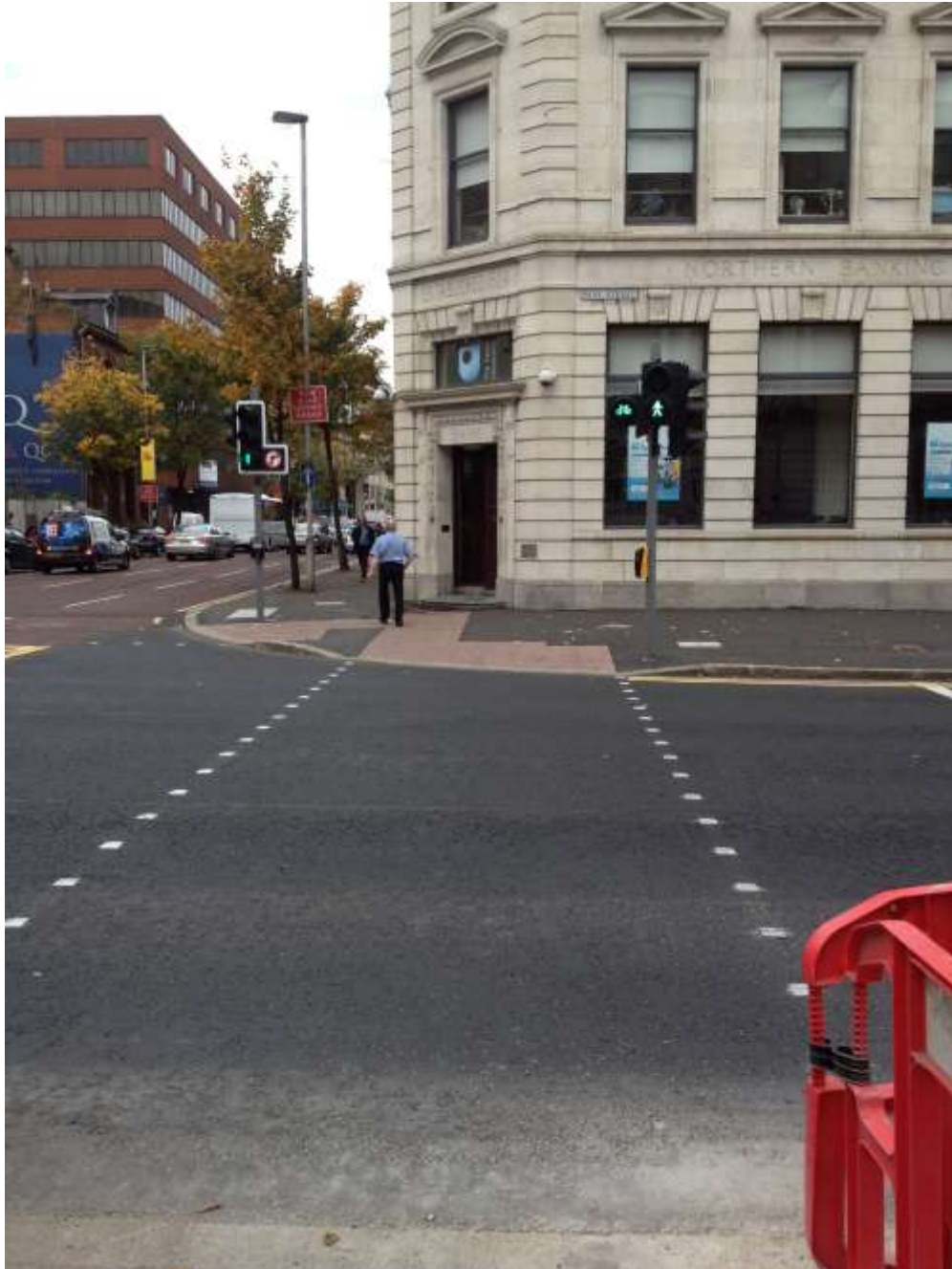
- 46 Issue - There are bollards placed in the middle of tactile paving at the controlled crossing across May Street. While these are there for security reasons they do create an unexpected hazard.

Progress – None



- 47 Issue - There are numerous issues with the controlled crossings at the junction of May Street, Cromac Street and Victoria Street including trip hazards, positions of columns and tactile paving not in line.

Progress – The junctions have been upgraded to provide high quality facilities.

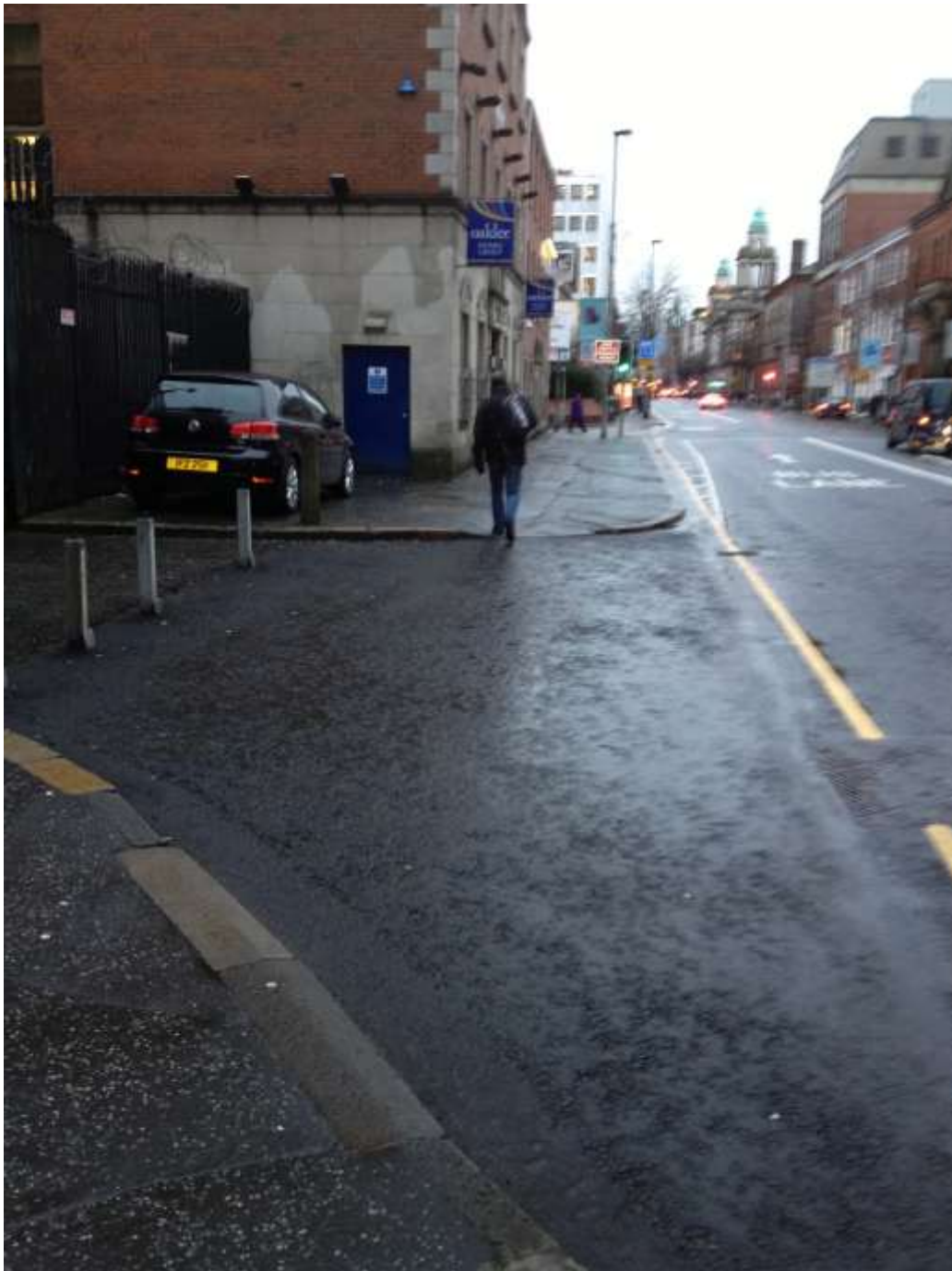


- 48 There is a good example of an in line crossing at the junction of May Street and Seymour Street.



- 49 Issue - There are a series of vehicle entrances on May Street where no tactile paving has been provided. Pedestrian priority measures could resolve this.

Progress – None



- 50 There are good examples of both an inline uncontrolled crossing and a controlled crossing at the junction of Montgomery Street and May Street.



Additional Update - The junction of May Street and Upper Arthur Street/Alfred Street has been upgraded to provide a high quality controlled crossing.



- 51 There is a good example of a controlled crossing across May Street at the junction of Adelaide Street and Donegall Square East.



52 Issue -The dropped kerbs on the controlled crossings across Donegall square East are too high and represent a trip hazard.

Progress – None



53 Issue – The entrances to City Hall on Donegall Square East have no dropped kerbs.

Progress – Kerbs have been dropped but no tactile paving included



- 54 Issue - There are in line tactile paving at the vehicle entrances to City Hall on Donegall Square South. There is more paving used than is necessary.

Progress – None



55 Issue – There is an acute crossfall at the junction of Linenhall Street and Donegall Square South making using the uncontrolled crossing difficult.

Progress – The junction has been upgraded to provide high quality controlled crossings.



56 Issue – The controlled crossings at junction on Bedford Street/Howard Street/Donnegall Square South are in a poor state of repair and would benefit from upgrading.

Progress – The junction has been upgraded to provide high quality controlled crossings



Our findings and recommendations

The second audit has identified significant progress has been made in improving the pedestrian environment in Belfast City Centre. Many of these improvements have involved the upgrading of key pedestrian crossings in the city centre as part of the Belfast on the Move process. The work has been carried out to high standard taking into account issues raised in the previous audit. In addition to the changes connected to Belfast on the Move, Roads Service has addressed problems in other locations after consultation with Belfast City Centre Management and Imtac. These upgrades have undoubtedly improved pedestrian routes in and around the city centre, making the city more accessible to disabled people and older people.

It is clear that many of the improvements that have been made have been informed by the previous audit and the subsequent positive engagement between Roads Service and organisations such as Imtac. The Committee welcomes this engagement and we believe that the process highlights how engagement with disabled people and older people can ensure that the benefits of investment in pedestrian improvements are maximised.

Despite clear improvements the remaining significant issues mean we are still some way off barrier free pedestrian routes in and around Belfast City Centre. This means that everyday journeys are still difficult for many disabled people.

In relation to the remaining issues around the pedestrian infrastructure Imtac recommends Roads Service maximise opportunities to make improvements during the next phases of Belfast on the Move. Those issues not included within the Belfast on the Move project should continue to be monitored and addressed as resources become available.

Unregulated pavement clutter appears to be a growing problem and has the potential to greatly reduce the impact and benefits of wider investment in improved pedestrian facilities. Imtac recommends the following to address the issue:

- (1) Any future regulation of pavement cafes ensures that the access and safety for pedestrians takes precedence over the requirements of businesses.
- (2) Agencies such as DSD, BCCM, Roads Service and Imtac work together to raise awareness amongst city centre businesses of the impact of illegal pavement clutter.
- (3) That Roads Service undertake targeted enforcement to remove illegal clutter.
- (4) The good examples that are now appearing in Belfast City Centre as part of Belfast on the Move demonstrates that early engagement with disabled people ensures more inclusive design – engagement and consultation must form part of any future process.
- (5) To maintain progress the DRD should ensure that contractors and utility companies make reinstatements using specified quality product in accordance with their registrations and British Standards. Where reinstatement is incorrect, unsatisfactory or fails to meet the quality required appropriate action should be taken.

Imtac is happy to assist in any way with building on progress made to date. This includes engaging with planners and engineers as schemes are developed to ensure possible hazards are avoided, both in Belfast and in other urban centres where public realm improvements are being undertaken.