



**Report into the impact of the Accessible Transport
Strategy in improving access to transport for people
with a learning disability**

June 2010

This document 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.

1 Introduction

About us

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 Imtac receives support from the Department for Regional Development (DRD).

Background to this report

- 1.4 The Department for Regional Development (DRD) has asked Imtac to develop this report to form part of DRD's contribution to the Cross Departmental Learning Disability Action Plan. The purpose of the report is to ascertain the impact on people with a learning disability of the policies and actions contained in the Accessible Transport Strategy (ATS). From this Imtac is to assess how accessible services supported by DRD are to people with a learning disability. In particular the report will look at the provision and accessibility of travel information, training for staff involved in providing transport and personal safety and confidence issues for people using transport.

About people with a learning disability

- 1.5 A learning disability is caused by the way the brain develops. There are many different types and most develop before a baby is born, during birth or because of a serious illness in early childhood. A learning disability usually has a significant impact on a person's life. People with a learning disability find it harder than other people to learn, understand and communicate. Some people with profound and multiple learning disabilities need full time help with every aspect of their lives. It is estimated that there are 33,000 people with a learning disability in Northern Ireland.

How this report is structured

1.6 In order to make the assessment Imtac had to look at a number of different issues:

- Firstly we had to establish what where the key barriers that made using transport difficult for people with a learning disability. We did this by looking at existing research and information already available and by talking to people with a learning disability and their organisations.
- Secondly we had to establish whether the policies and actions contained in the Accessible Transport Strategy addressed the barriers that made using transport difficult for people with a learning disability.
- Finally we had to make an assessment on whether policies and actions contained in the ATS have been successful in improving access to transport services for people with a learning disability. We did this by looking at information available about the ATS, by talking to people with a learning disability and their organisations, talking to officials in DRD and by talking to people who provide transport services funded by the DRD.

The importance of transport

1.7 Access to transport has a major impact on the lives and life choices of disabled people including people with a learning disability. Transport is essential for equal access to education, employment, health services, social events and leisure pursuits. The lack of suitable, accessible transport is a major contributor to the social exclusion of disabled people including people with a learning disability. It is not the intention of this report to provide a detailed analysis into the link between transport and social exclusion for disabled people. However it should be noted that improving access to transport must play a major role in any action plan seeking to improve the life choices of people with a learning disability.

1.8 When Imtac talks about accessible transport we mean more than just being able to get on and off transport, although this is important. For

transport to be accessible it must go where people want to go, at a reasonable cost and in reasonable time. For transport to be accessible people need to know about it, feel safe and comfortable when using it, be able to afford it and be able to get on and off it with ease.

2 Barriers to using transport for people with a learning disability

Existing research and Information

- 2.1 Several studies have highlighted that much of the research to date around access to transport and disabled people has focused on making transport physically accessible. Whilst important this does not address other barriers (such as information about services or the attitudes of transport staff towards disabled people) that may make transport difficult to use for people with a learning disability. The issue was first raised by I Lavery, J Knox and E Slevin in the paper “Learning Disabled People – the forgotten passengers” (1997)¹. A report by the National Autistic Society in 2003 (Autism: Rights in Reality by Broach et al) summed up the issue by stating “less visible access issues are being ignored as providers focus on making transport accessible for people with physical disabilities.”
- 2.2 There have been a number of local and national studies undertaken which are useful in helping build a picture of transport issues for people with a learning disability. The Adults with learning disability survey (2004) highlights that only 1% of those surveyed used their own vehicle to travel. This survey and Labour Force Surveys in Great Britain highlight that the predominant modes of travel for adults with a learning disability are by taxi, by car as a passenger, by bus or on foot. The Labour Force Survey (2005) highlighted that 21.1% of people with a learning disability surveyed used a bus to travel. However it should be noted that bus in this context includes private transport and transport provided by statutory services. The Adults with learning disability survey (2004) suggests that the majority of bus trips undertaken by people with a learning disability were on the “special bus”. A report by Morris, “That Kind of Life?: social exclusion and young people with high levels of support needs” (2002), highlights that young disabled people are very reliant on parents and carers for transport.

¹ Paper can be downloaded from the following link
<http://etcproceedings.org/paper/learning-disabled-people-the-forgotten-passengers>

- 2.3 Confidence has been highlighted by a number of studies as a key barrier to travel for many disabled people. Research has shown that disabled people require greater certainty than non-disabled people that all aspects of a journey be accessible. The National Travel Survey (2002-2004) undertaken by the Department for Transport in GB suggests that disabled people are twice as likely as non-disabled people to have journeys planned for them. Confidence has been highlighted as an issue particularly important to people with a learning disability. A number of studies have highlighted the value of travel training as a tool to enable people to “learn” new and/or difficult routes and negotiate links in the travel chain. Studies include Lavery et al “Learning disabled people – the forgotten passengers” (1997), Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions “Social Exclusion and the provision and availability of public transport” (2000) and the Social Inclusion Unit report “Making the Connections; Final report on transport and social inclusion” (2003). The Adults with a learning disability survey (2004) highlights that 71% of people surveyed had not undertaken any kind of travel training.
- 2.4 Studies have also highlighted the inaccessibility of information as a barrier to disabled people accessing transport. Making the Connections (2003) identified people with learning disabilities as being particularly disadvantaged by inaccessible information about transport services. The importance of accessible information for people with a learning disability was identified as a key issue by DRD during the development of the Accessible Transport Strategy.
- 2.5 Safety and security whilst out and about are a key issue for disabled people. Research shows that disabled people feel particularly vulnerable when using public transport and travelling in general. Other studies show that people with a learning disability are particularly vulnerable to crime and have concerns about using public transport. A Mencap survey has highlighted that one in four respondents had been bullied on a bus. Work undertaken on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation indicates that staff attitudes can help people feel safer on public transport. A Department for Health study in GB found that 15% of people with learning disabilities found transport staff unhelpful.

- 2.6 During the development of the Accessible Transport Strategy in Northern Ireland DRD organized a number of focus groups involving people with learning disabilities. Issues raised in these meetings were recorded in Developing an Accessible Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland – Report on Initial Public Consultation Responses and were factored in to the final Strategy published in April 2005.
- 2.7 The meetings with people with learning disabilities and their carers highlighted a lack of understanding of the needs of people with a learning disability when using transport from both transport providers and the general public as a key difficulty. There was strong support for disability awareness training for transport staff. There was also support for travel training for people with a learning disability starting from a young age. Information was a key issue with the need for better signage and easy to use timetables highlighted. Finally handling money was raised as an issue for some people with a learning disability. People welcomed the half-fare concession on public transport but felt there should be free travel as well as a concession for carers/essential companions.
- 2.8 Equal Lives: Review of Policy and Services for People with a Learning Disability in Northern Ireland was published in September 2005. The report identified the lack of suitable transport as one of the key barriers that prevents people with a learning disability participating as full members of society. The report highlighted a number of transport issues including the need for more accessible public transport, the high cost of taxis, the lack of services for rural areas and the high cost of vehicle adaptations. The report strongly supported making travel training more widely available to enable independent travel by people with a learning disability and recommended that the DRD ensure that the requirements of people with a learning disability be incorporated into the outcomes of the Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS).

Discussions with key groups

- 2.9 To further inform this report Imtac sought further information from people with a learning disability and their organisations. We talked to:
- Mencap

- The Tell it like it is Group (North Down)
- The Now Project
- Autism NI

2.10 Mencap raised the following issues.

- As many people with a learning disability do not drive better public transport is a necessity
- As people with a learning disability can find it difficult to use public transport more investment was needed in accessible bus, trains and infrastructure
- Help with the cost of transport is needed and people with a learning disability should be able to get free travel on public transport as well as help with other transport such as taxis
- Concessions should be available to people who support people with a learning disability travelling on public transport
- Information about transport is seen as inaccessible to people with a learning disability
- Staff attitudes on public transport are a problem for people with learning disabilities - training should be provided to enable staff to provide a better service
- Travel training is essential but not widely available - if someone wants travel training they should be able to get it and not just for employment

- In Northern Ireland transport in rural areas is particularly problematic for people with a learning disability due to the availability of transport services

2.11 The Tell it Like it is Group in North Down raised the following issues:

- Taxis can be an easy way to get about but they are expensive
- New buses and trains are good but staff can sometimes be unhelpful – they need training
- People with learning disabilities should have free travel on public transport
- There is not a lot of transport available in places outside Bangor - this makes it hard to take part in lots of things

2.12 The Now Project raised the following issues:

- Availability and uptake of Independent Travel Training is poor and ad hoc
- Support and commitment from family, carers and support networks to encourage and maintain newly acquired skills is low – provision of awareness training for support networks may turn this around
- Generally, on an individual one to one basis, local public transport providers (bus drivers/taxi drivers etc) have been very supportive of the Independent Travel Training Programme provided by NOW

- For true inclusion people with disabilities should pay their way – but as concessionary fares are available e.g. better use of Smart Passes should be implemented – many people are not aware of them and are therefore losing out
- Increased awareness of the commitment of public transport providers to providing safe and reliable services which would reassure parents and carers and may increase uptake of Independent Travel Training
- Learning Disability Awareness Training for on the ground staff in public transport and taxi services
- Provision of alternative formats for transport information

2.13 Autism NI raised the following issues:

- The term learning disability is no longer inclusive of people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Generic disability awareness training does not cover issues around people with ASD – specific training is required
- Transport staff need to be more aware of people with ASD particularly when bus or trains are delayed or cancelled
- There needs to be better visual and audio information at stations
- There needs to be specific travel information for people with ASD – an information booklet for instance
- Concessionary fares for essential companions is important

- Travel training for people with ASD is very specialised and not widely available

Summary of findings

2.14 The analysis of existing research and our own work has identified the following as key barriers to getting around easily for people with a learning disability:

- 1 People with a learning disability are less likely to own a car than others in society and are therefore often dependent on public transport, statutory transport and others for mobility
- 2 The lack of suitable transport is a major contributor to social exclusion experienced by people with a learning disability. This recognises that sometimes transport is not available (for example in rural areas) but also that where transport is available it is not accessible to people with a learning disability for a variety of reasons. People with a learning disability face a number of barriers to travelling independently. These barriers are not necessarily about physical access. Additional barriers to independent travel experienced by people with a learning disability include:
 - The attitudes of transport staff towards disabled people
 - The lack of information about transport and the inaccessible design of available information about services
 - Confidence and fears about using transport amongst users, parents and carers
 - The cost of travel
- 3 Priority has been given by policy makers and transport providers in the past to removing physical barriers

- 4 People with a learning disability in rural areas of Northern Ireland face particular difficulties accessing transport because of availability of services

3 The Accessible Transport Strategy

The structure of the ATS

- 3.1 The ATS was published in 2005 after extensive research into and consultation with disabled people and older people around the barriers that make using transport difficult. The vision for the Accessible Transport Strategy is:

“To have an accessible transport system that enables older people and people with disabilities to participate more fully in society, enjoy greater independence and experience a better quality of life.”

- 3.2 The ATS is structured key themes or strategic objectives based around issues raised with DRD during the development of the ATS. Each strategic objective has associated policies and actions. These policies and actions seek to address gaps in the current provision of services and ensure that barriers for disabled people are not built into services in future.

Analysis of the content of the ATS

- 3.3 A simple analysis of the ATS indicates that the approach taken by DRD has been successful in identifying the key barriers that make accessing transport difficult for disabled people in general. The Strategy, through effective consultation and research during it's development, has also identified specific barriers that affect people with a learning disability highlighted previously in this report.

3.4 The following are the seven Strategic Objectives of the ATS:

SO1. To manage effectively the transition to a fully accessible transport network in partnership with key stakeholders to maximise the benefits for older people and people with disabilities;

SO2. Ensure that Disability Discrimination Act requirements are met and affordable adjustments are made so that accessibility for people with disabilities is a condition of public money being spent on all new public transport investment;

SO3. To develop, in partnership with key stakeholders, an integrated, fully accessible public transport system which will enable older people and people with disabilities to travel by bus, train, taxi, private and community transport services in safety and in comfort and move easily between these modes;

SO4. To enable older people and people with disabilities to travel safely using cars and other means of private transport;

SO5. To address attitudinal and psychological barriers that prevent or discourage older people or people with disabilities from using transport services and facilities that are available to them;

SO6. To ensure that information in a range of formats is available for all public transport services, including the full range of accessible services supported by the Department, to enable people to plan and make these journeys easily; and

SO7. To provide help with travel costs to enable older people and people with disabilities to use the transport services available to them.

A number of the strategic objectives (SO5, SO6 and SO7) directly address barriers identified as being important to people with a learning disability.

- 3.5 Further analysis of policies contained within the Strategy illustrates an understanding of other barriers relevant to people with a learning disability and a more detailed understanding of barriers identified in the strategic objectives. These include

Policy 6 – “Provide appropriate, accredited, disability awareness and diversity training for staff involved in work that impacts on the accessibility of the transport system for older people and people with disabilities.”

Policy 24 – “Raise awareness amongst transport providers and the general public of the needs of older people and people with disabilities when using transport.”

Policy 25 – “Promote independent mobility by raising awareness among older people and people with disabilities about the accessible transport opportunities available to them and provide help and support to address the concerns they may have about using these services.”

Policy 27 – “Adopt best practice in the design of all information produced about transportation policies, initiatives and other guidance material and disseminate guidance about good practice in information design to transport providers.”

Policy 28 – “Ensure that all information provided about transport services that are financially supported by Government is made available in formats that are appropriate to the particular needs of older people and people with disabilities.”

Policy 29 – “Ensure that information systems are out in place to support the development of accessible transport chains.”

Policy 30 – “Provide a range of travel concessions for older people and people with disabilities through the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fare Scheme.”

- 3.6 Actions related to the policies of the ATS in the first and subsequent action plan have again clearly recognised the importance of barriers identified previously in this report and are relevant to people with a learning disability. These include:

Policy6 Action 2 – “Disability awareness and diversity training will be provided for all staff involved in the design or delivery of transport services or facilities provided for older people and people with disabilities.”

Policy25 Action 1 – “Develop a cross-sectoral approach to make “travel training” programmes more widely available for people with learning disabilities.”

Policy 25 Action 2 – “Conduct an information campaign about accessible transport opportunities aimed at older people and people with disabilities and their representative organisations.”

Policy 27 Action 2 – “Examine the practicalities of introducing audio and visual announcements of travel information on buses.”

Policy 29 Action 2 – “Produce an accessible guide to using the transport system for people with learning disabilities.”

Policy 30 Action 1 – “ Review the operation of the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme.”

Policy 30 Action 2 – “Explore the possibility of piloting of a taxi card scheme.”

- 3.7 Other policies and actions contained in the ATS address issues around physical access to transport and infrastructure, ensuring disabled people find it easy to travel by car, better co-ordination between Government Departments and transport providers and better consultation with disabled people and older people. Whilst not directly targeted at people with a learning disability many people with a learning disability will benefit from these measures. For example Policy 32 Action 1 of the ATS requires DEL to “Raise awareness of the range of measures provided by the Department of Employment and Learning in the Access to Work Programme”. Access to Work aims to overcome the barriers that make difficult for many disabled people to enter employment by providing practical assistance including help with any additional travel cost incurred by the disabled person. The Programme whilst broadly targeting disabled people does benefit many people with a learning disability.
- 3.8 The ATS has been developed in the context of existing policy, programmes and expenditure levels as identified in the Regional Transportation Strategy 2002. The ATS cannot therefore in itself increase the resources available for rural services for instance. The ATS can, however, influence the development of the Rural Transport Fund to ensure that services provided are accessible to disabled people including people with a learning disability.
- 3.9 Based on the issues identified in the first section of this report an analysis of the ATS indicates that at the policy level the DRD has set out a clear understanding of the barriers that make using transport difficult for people with a learning disability. The detail of the ATS also highlights a considerable number of measures which if implemented would improve access to transport services for people with a learning disability. Imtac believes that the DRD are unique in developing such a strategic approach to addressing issues for disabled people and older people and the Department deserve credit for this approach.

4 Assessing the impact of the ATS on people with a learning disability

4.1 Having demonstrated that the ATS has identified both the barriers that make access to transport difficult for people with a learning disability and also included measures to address these barriers, we were tasked with assessing how successful the Strategy has been since its publication in 2005. We made this assessment using a number of methods:

- We looked at the two reports published by DRD since 2005 recording progress around the ATS
- We talked to officials from the Mobility & Inclusion Unit and Ports and Public Transport Division in DRD
- We talked to the providers of transport services about the impact of the ATS on the way they provided services – people we talked to included Translink, the Community Transport Association, Door2Door providers in Belfast and Derry and Shopmobility providers
- We talked again to organisations representing people with a learning disability about their perceptions of the impact of the ATS
- We used evidence gathered previously in developing this report and from the wider work of Imtac

4.2 In making our assessment we have focused on the key barriers identified in the first section of this report and the key Strategic Objectives, policies and actions of the ATS identified in the second section of the report.

Improving physical access and availability of transport

4.3 It was agreed by all participants to the report that there had been improvements made to the services available to people with a learning disability and the accessibility of these services. All the transport providers recorded that people with a learning disability are

users of their services. Organisations representing people with a learning disability acknowledged that existing public transport services had improved greatly since the publication of the ATS. The organisations also acknowledged that new additional services such as door2door were seen as a positive and had meant greater travel choice for some people with a learning disability. Organisations did report, however, that other difficulties were limiting the benefits of improvements to transport services. These difficulties included a lack of information about services, the inaccessible design of information available about services, the attitudes of transport staff/members of the public towards people with a learning disability and the lack of availability of services such as travel training to help people access transport services.

Addressing the attitudes of transport staff

- 4.4 Staff training was identified as a major issue by people with a learning disability and their organisations. Training for transport staff was recognised as important in the ATS and a policy and actions are included in the Strategy to ensure those funded by DRD provide appropriate disability training for their staff. Our work with people with a learning disability and their organisations identified that any training provided must deal specifically with issues relevant to people with a learning disability. For example training should equip transport staff with an understanding that some people with a learning disability may have difficulty with communication and that patience and understanding can help make journeys easier.
- 4.5 Looking at the evidence including ATS reports published since 2005 provided by DRD Imtac feels that the policies and actions relating to training have not been fully progressed. In particular our findings indicate that policy 6 and related actions have not been fully progressed.
- 4.6 This is supported by feedback from the transport providers themselves. Translink has made progress with regard to training for staff. For example the organisation has recently rolled out disability awareness training for Metro and Ulsterbus staff. Translink acknowledge that the key drivers for these changes has been the introduction of Disability Discrimination (Transport Vehicles)

Regulations and their engagement with disabled people through Imtac and other organisations rather than the policies of the ATS.

- 4.7 In the case of rural community transport MIDAS training is required for drivers of vehicles as a condition of funding. Whilst this training contains elements of training around disabled people, the Community Transport Association acknowledge it is not a disability awareness or Disability Equality Training course and that it did not cover issues specifically relating to people with a learning disability.
- 4.8 With regard to door2door services operators are required to train staff in disability awareness as a condition of tender. The tender has a paragraph on what this training should involve which Imtac would consider to contain too little detail to be adequate in addressing the issues for disabled people and people with a learning disability in particular. Operators of door2door services have again used MIDAS as the basis of their training and the previous comments about the inadequacy of this training apply again. MIDAS is not disability awareness or Disability Equality Training.
- 4.9 Whilst all the operators acknowledged the limitations of training provided for staff with regard to people with a learning disability it should be noted there was a willingness on the part of all operators to do more to improve services for people with a learning disability. Better information about what training should include is required to enable operators to do this. Better information is available – both Imtac and our GB counterparts DPTAC have produced guidance for developing good and inclusive disability training. Many organisations of and for people with a learning disability provide learning disability awareness training and have extensive expertise in this area.
- 4.10 Continuing difficulties with staff attitudes were highlighted by organisations that represented people with a learning disability. Examples of poor staff attitude were given – the effect of these incidents was that people often stopped using services. Organisations also provided positive feedback about individual members of staff but felt that until a level of consistency was achieved across all staff and providers people with a learning disability, their parents and carers would lack confidence in the

services available. This lack of confidence will limit the usefulness and accessibility of services to people with a learning disability.

Provision of accessible information

- 4.11 Our report has highlighted the importance of travel information and the way it is provided in making services accessible to people with a learning disability. The ATS clearly recognised information is a key issue in making transport accessible. The ATS identifies information as a strategic objective and seeks through policies and actions to both provide better information about services and provide that information in a way that is accessible to disabled people. The ATS makes clear that providing accessible information will be a requirement of being funded by government.
- 4.12 Looking at the evidence including ATS reports published since 2005 provided by DRD Imtac feels that some of policies and actions relating to information have not been progressed fully. In particular this applies to Policies 25 and 27 and related actions. There have, however, been two positive developments around information provision directly attributable to the ATS. The first is the production of the Travel Safe Guide for people with a learning disability in 2006 and the second is the production of the subsequent ATS consultations as well as other consultations such as Public Transport Reform in an easy read format.
- 4.13 Our interviews with all transport providers highlighted that no requirements around information have been placed on them by DRD. Progress has been made around providing accessible information through working with Imtac. However all transport providers acknowledged that they did not consider the requirements of people with a learning disability when providing information about their services. The DRD has a direct role in the promotion of services such as door2door and the Concessionary Fares Scheme. It is clear from our wider work with the Department and service providers that the ATS measures around accessible information are not being implemented by the Department and service providers, both generally with regard to disabled people and specifically with regard to people with a learning disability. Once again all transport providers

expressed a willingness to improve the accessibility of information that they provide to people with a learning disability but stated the need for information and support on how to do this.

- 4.14 Feedback from organisations representing people with a learning disability confirms that not enough is being done to make information about transport services accessible to people with a learning disability. The example was given of the difficulties caused for people with a learning disability by the design of timetable information. There was recognition from these organisations that the information needs of people with a learning disability are varied and sometimes complex. However the difficulties should not be used as an excuse for not doing anything. There was positive feedback about both Travel Safe and the easy read consultation documents but it was felt that as isolated examples their usefulness was limited. It was also made clear that easy read, whilst useful, was not accessible to all people with a learning disability.
- 4.15 As well as making information accessible the ATS also seeks to promote more broadly the services that are available to older people and disabled people. The Strategy contains a number of policies and actions designed to do this – see policies 24 and 25 of the ATS. Imtac can find only limited evidence of these measures in the ATS being progressed. Feedback from organisations representing people with a learning disability seems to back this up with organisations highlighting the lack of any information available about services. The organisations concerned reported that people with a learning disability, their parents and carers were often unaware of travel options and travel benefits available to them. Often the organisations concerned are the only source of information available about services. The low level of awareness of the half-fare smartpass was cited as an example. It is clear from talking to people with a learning disability and their organisations that a lack of accessible information about services remains a barrier to people accessing transport.
- 4.16 There is guidance available which could help improve the accessibility of transport information to people with a learning disability. One example is “Am I making myself clear?” published by Mencap. There is also a good deal of expertise amongst

organisations of and for people with a learning disability who can work directly with providers and officials to improve information.

Confidence and fears about using transport amongst users, parents and carers

- 4.17 One of the key areas identified by our research around tackling the barriers to independent travel for people with a learning disability is addressing personal barriers about using transport through travel training programmes. It is clear from our work that travel training can reduce dependency and assist people with a learning disability to participate in a range of everyday activities. Travel training programmes already exist in Northern Ireland but tend to focus on specific areas such as accessing employment and training. The ATS recognised the importance of travel training and sought through an action to broaden the availability and benefits of travel training through a “Cross-sectoral approach” led by DRD.
- 4.18 Looking at the evidence including ATS reports published since 2005 provided by DRD Imtac feels that this action relating to travel training has not been progressed. We sought feedback when compiling this report from organisations that currently provide travel training as well as other organisations that represent people with a learning disability. There is broad consensus that although the provision of such services is often complex and resource intensive they are essential to enable people with a learning disability to participate fully in everyday life. There is agreement that there are simply not enough places available for travel training courses and there is a need for more varied travel training to improve access to employment and training and also everyday activities. All organisations surveyed felt that the low availability of travel training for people with a learning disability severely limited access to transport services (public transport in particular) available, increased dependency on others and contributed to limiting the participation of people with a learning disability in public life. All the organisations felt that a cross-sectoral

approach aimed at increasing the availability of travel training was imperative (policy 25, action1). To date organisations feel the ATS has not helped to deliver this.

4.20 Since 2005 the Department has funded two travel training initiatives. The first was organised by the Omnibus Partnership and involved disabled people mentoring and supporting other disabled people to use travel opportunities in North Down. The second was organised by VSB and provided Buddy's to travel with older people on buses initially in North Belfast to help build the confidence of individuals to travel independently. The VSB project has since become a service to encourage and support older people to use door2door transport in various areas of Northern Ireland. Neither of these projects is targeted at people with a learning disability although people with a learning disability participated in the Omnibus project. When asked about the VSB project organisations of and for people with a learning disability felt the project would do little to increase the independence of people with a learning disability as it is restricted to a segregated door2door service.

4.21 Feedback from the organisations representing people with a learning disability also stressed the importance of reassuring the parents or carers of people with a learning disability. The attitudes of parents and carers can be a major barrier to people with a learning disability travelling independently. Tackling barriers around safety on transport, attitudes of drivers, information and the provision of travelling training courses will help provide the reassurance required by parents and carers of people with a learning disability.

The cost of travel

4.22 The cost of travel was highlighted by our research and the ATS as a barrier to travel. The Concessionary Fares Scheme was identified as the main way this barrier should be addressed. The ATS committed to reviewing the Scheme and look at extending concessions to taxis

through a taxicard scheme. Since publication of the ATS a review of the scheme has taken place. However there has been no progress around looking at establishing a taxicard scheme and the action has been removed from the draft Action Plan covering the period 2009-2012.

- 4.23 Feedback from organisations representing people with a learning disability and people with a learning disability themselves indicated that the review of the Concessionary Fares Scheme has done little to address barriers around the cost of travel. Support remains for an extension of free travel on public transport for people with a learning disability and a need to offer a concession to essential companions who travel with people with a learning disability. There is also support for the eligibility criteria for the smartpass to be broadened to include more people with a learning disability as many people with a learning disability are not known to Social Services – figures from Bamford indicate that around 16,000 people with a learning disability are known to Social Services. In Great Britain there is no such requirement for people with a learning disability to be known to Social Services to qualify for concessionary fares. There was overwhelming support for assistance for people who rely on more expensive forms of transport such as taxis and disappointment that actions around taxicard had been dropped from the ATS. Feedback indicated that door2door had made transport more affordable to people living in towns but often people still found taxis the easiest, most reliable and safest way to travel. Developments connected to assisted travel in rural areas were announced after the interviews so people could not give their views about this development.

Other issues

- 4.24 As well as addressing barriers to travel the ATS also clearly recognises the importance of working with disabled people (including people with a learning disability) and their organisations in developing solutions. Policy 4 of the ATS commits DRD to “Consult with older people and people with disabilities and their representative organisations at an early stage in the development of new transport policies and projects and on the detailed implementation of access features incorporated in new transport infrastructure.” The experience of Imtac and the organisations we talked to when

developing this report indicates that this policy is not always followed. The concern is that when this happens opportunities are missed to address difficulties identified by this report.

- 4.25 Access to transport in rural areas remains a particular challenge to people with a learning disability living in these areas. Two positive developments have taken place recently in rural transport – the introduction of Dial-a-lift demand responsive transport and Assisted Travel Scheme which reduces the cost of fares on these services. The ATS has impacted on the development of these programmes but given their recent introduction it is not possible to assess their impact on people with a learning disability.
- 4.26 One final issue raised by the participants in this report is the key role transport plays in reducing dependency and increasing the independence of people with a learning disability. Transport therefore should be a key priority for not just DRD but all Government Departments and agencies and that there should be more cross sectoral work in improving access to transport. Whilst the ATS did envisage cross departmental work participants felt that ambitions were too modest and progress too slow.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 In reporting findings around the impact of the ATS we believe there are both positives and negatives to be taken from progress to date. On the positive side the ATS clearly shows that the Department has a firm understanding of the barriers that make travel difficult for disabled people in general but also specific barriers for people with a learning disability. Over the past five years there has also been substantial investment in services which has increased the travel options available to people with a learning disability. This includes better and more accessible public transport and alternative services such as door2door and rural dial-a-lift. On the negative side key policies and actions from the ATS that specifically relate to barriers that make travel difficult for people with a learning disability have not been progressed into practical outcomes. This has significantly

reduced the impact and benefits of the wider investment in transport services.

5.2 In moving forward Imtac recommends that the DRD and service providers refresh their approach to developing policies and services to take more account of the ATS and barriers to travel experienced by people with a learning disability. In particular the DRD and others should:

1. As a priority progress Policy25 Action 1 of the ATS “Develop a cross-sectoral approach to make “travel training” programmes more widely available for people with learning disabilities.”
2. Progress Policy 27 of ATS – “Adopt best practice in the design of all information produced about transportation policies, initiatives and other guidance material and disseminate guidance about good practice in information design to transport providers” and Policy 28 ATS – “Ensure that all information provided about transport services that are financially supported by Government is made available in formats that are appropriate to the particular needs of older people and people with disabilities.” In practice transport providers and officials with responsibilities for key programmes must provide evidence of specific steps taken to make information about services accessible to a people with a learning disability. For example this could include looking at the design of timetable information.
3. Progress policy 6 of the ATS - “Provide appropriate, accredited, disability awareness and diversity training for staff involved in work that impacts on the accessibility of the transport system for older people and people with disabilities.” In practice transport providers and officials with responsibilities for key programmes must be required to provide evidence of specific steps taken to ensure that disability training provided to staff

has taken account of the needs of people with a learning disability.

4. Progress Policy 25 of the ATS – “Promote independent mobility by raising awareness among older people and people with disabilities about the accessible transport opportunities available to them and provide help and support to address the concerns they may have about using these services.” This should include a campaign in line with Policy 25 action 2 of the ATS to promote accessible transport opportunities to disabled people including promotion of the half-fare smartpass.
 5. Progress Policy 30 Action 2 from the ATS 2005 – “Explore the possibility of piloting of a taxi card scheme.”
 6. Review eligibility criteria for people with a learning disability under the current Concessionary Fares Scheme. Recommendations should be brought forward to bring more people with a learning disability under the Scheme.
 7. Engage with people with a learning disability and their organisations when making any of the above changes and other improvements that affect the accessibility of the transport system
- 5.3 Imtac would welcome the opportunity to provide any additional support required by the DRD and operators to progress the actions identified.

6 Contacting us

- 6.1 You can contact us about any aspect of this report or request it in alternative format at:

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
Website:	www.imtac.org.uk