



## Valuing Pedestrian Journeys

Lessons learned from “walking audits” undertaken by Imtac in town and city centres in Northern Ireland



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Imtac is committed to make information about our work accessible. Details of how we can do this and how to contact us 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](http://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  
Titanic Suites  
10-18 Adelaide Street  
Belfast BT2 8FE

Telephone/Textphone: 028 9072 6020  
Fax: 028 9024 5500  
Email: [info@imtac.org.uk](mailto:info@imtac.org.uk)

## **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**

Almost every journey we take involves using the pedestrian environment. In 2012 Imtac published a report<sup>1</sup> highlighting the barriers experienced by older people and disabled people using the pedestrian environment. Based on feedback from disabled and older people the report illustrated how unnecessary barriers make even simple journeys difficult. These difficulties make broader travel, including using public transport, more difficult for disabled and older people and have a major impact on undertaking day-to-day activities.

Following the publication of the 2012 report Imtac has undertaken a series of “walking audits” in locations across Northern Ireland. The purpose of this report is to look at lessons learned from these audits.

## **Overview of the walking audits**

To date Imtac has conducted seven walking audits in towns and cities across Northern Ireland. The locations audited included Belfast, Bangor, Lisburn, Derry, Omagh, Moira and Newry<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [Highlighting barriers in the pedestrian environment - Report into issues, good practice and recommendations](#) (Imtac 2012)

<sup>2</sup> For copies of all the reports visit <http://www.imtac.org.uk/publications.php>

Each audit is an assessment of how accessible the pedestrian environment is in each of the locations as measured against accepted design standards<sup>3</sup>. The audits looked at the main streets in each location with a particular emphasis on routes to and from public transport. A report was compiled for each audit with photographs to illustrate observed examples of both good practice and poor provision. Following the publication of each report Imtac held meetings with local Roads Service officials to discuss the findings and identify potential actions.

In each location examples of good provision was found. Many of the locations audited have benefitted from major public realm and environmental improvement schemes as well as other improvements undertaken by Transport NI. There is no doubt that in many cases these changes have been carried out to a high standard and have improved the pedestrian environment for everyone including older people and disabled people.

However in all the locations audited there were also many examples of poor provision and unnecessary barriers. The barriers identified by each audit mirror many of the issues disabled and older people told us about in compiling the 2012 report. Each audit report contains details of issues in each location. However the following are examples of the common barriers identified in every audit location:

- Poor quality pavements and uneven walking surfaces
- Clutter on the pavement including street furniture, advertising boards, bins and shop displays
- Problems caused by parking on pavements and across crossings
- The absence of essential infrastructure for an accessible pedestrian environment including an absence of crossing opportunities, dropped kerbs and tactile paving
- New infrastructure not complying with design standards

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<sup>3</sup> For the most comprehensive guidance see [Inclusive Mobility \(Department for Transport 2005\)](#)

## **Analysis of lessons learned from the walking audits**

This purpose of this report is to look a broader lessons learned from the walking audits rather than dwell on specific issues identified by the individual reports. Based on an analysis of the seven reports Imtac has identified a number of key issues that must be addressed to tackle barriers in the pedestrian environment. Imtac is acutely aware that our audits only looked at streets in the central area of each of the towns and cities audited. The Committee acknowledges that all the barriers and issues we have identified also exist in residential and others areas away from the city and town centres.

It is an accepted principle in transport planning that design of schemes should follow a road user's hierarchy<sup>4</sup>. The user hierarchy should mean that the requirements of pedestrians are considered before that of all other road users. Imtac notes and welcomes the recognition of the primacy of pedestrians in the roads users hierarchy in the recently published draft Bicycle Strategy. However the numerous issues identified in the seven audit reports illustrate to Imtac that the requirements of pedestrians are not always been given sufficient priority in Northern Ireland. Indeed it could be argued that the evidence gathered from each of the audits suggests pedestrians are often given less priority than the requirements of businesses and other road users. Based on the work we have undertaken to date and the road users hierarchy there is a compelling case for **pedestrians to be given a greater priority in Northern Ireland transport planning and policy.**

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<sup>4</sup> The principle of a road users hierarchy is explained in Manual for Streets (DfT 2007)



**Picture 1: An example of low pedestrian priority from Moira, where planters and shop displays dominate the footpaths.**



**Picture 2: A pavement cafe in Belfast city centre obstructs the a recently improved pedestrian crossing.**

The seven audit reports have identified significant examples from our town and city centres where the pedestrian infrastructure is dated and does not, in our opinion, offer an acceptable, safe and accessible environment for all our citizens. Imtac recognises that, given the extent of pedestrian infrastructure in Northern Ireland and the challenging financial climate, addressing all the barriers in the pedestrian environment will be extremely difficult. However based on the work we have undertaken to date we believe there is compelling case for increased levels of investment in making our pedestrian environment accessible to all.



**Picture 3: An example of old infrastructure, a controlled crossing in the heart of Newry City Centre without even basic tactile paving**



**Picture 4: Incorrect use of tactile paving at a busy traffic island in Bangor creates a confusing and potentially dangerous junction for people with a visual impairment.**

In every location we have audited, obstructions on the pavement and crossings are a major issue. The profusion of clutter such as pavement cafes, random placement of bins, advertising boards and shop displays creates a hostile and hazardous pedestrian environment for many pedestrians and more particularly disabled people, older people and parents with prams. Inconsiderate parking on pavements and at crossings by drivers adds to the series of obstructions encountered by pedestrians. Based on feedback we have received, disabled and older people pedestrians are often forced onto the road by pavement obstructions. Imtac believes this situation should not be tolerated in any modern, inclusive society. Based on the evidence contained in our reports the Committee believes urgent action is required **to reclaim pavements for pedestrians.**





**Picture 5: A-boards are a major problem in many of our towns and cities. Here in Derry large boards block pavements.**



**Picture 6: A car parked on the pavement in Omagh leaves no room for pedestrians, forcing people onto the road.**

The seven audit reports have identified how in public realm and environmental improvement schemes, general upgrading of infrastructure by Transport NI and others associated with new development offer opportunities to make huge improvements to the pedestrian environment. Our reports show that in many cases areas of our towns and city centres have been improved by such investment. However our reports also show that too often design standards, particularly those relating to accessibility, are not always adhered to. Examples from the audits include incorrect use of tactile paving, incorrect installation of controlled crossings and poor installation of dropped kerbs. From Imtac's perspective it is an unacceptable waste of scarce resources not to **ensure that all investment in the pedestrian environment adheres to accepted inclusive design standards.**



**Picture 7: The benefits of wide, raised crossings in Newry city centre are lessened by clutter and the limited use of tactile paving.**



**Picture 8: The benefits of an improved controlled pedestrian crossing in Derry are reduced by locating the control box too far from the tactile paving.**

As part of our pedestrian audits Imtac has met with officials from Roads Service to discuss the findings of each audit and potential resolution of issues identified. Imtac has also been involved in consultation around major public realm / traffic management schemes such as Belfast Streets Ahead and Belfast on the Move. The Committee has also worked with organisations such as RNIB and Guide Dogs to raise awareness amongst Roads Service officials of barriers encountered by disabled and older people in the pedestrian environment and the importance of inclusive design.

Our work in Belfast is of particular value and interest. Imtac has been involved in two audits of the City Centre. The first identified numerous major issues with the pedestrian environment on key routes in the City. Following the publication of the report Imtac worked with key stakeholders including Roads Service and Belfast City Centre Management to identify potential solutions. Some issues were resolved quickly under general maintenance; however significant issues were factored in to changes made as part of the Belfast on the Move project. A second audit of Belfast City Centre recognises the significant progress that has been made. During

the whole process Imtac attending meetings of Roads Service's City Centre Change Working Group. Imtac has also fostered good working relationships with the DSD Belfast City Centre Regeneration Team and is considered a key stakeholder in the Streets Ahead project. Imtac believes that the progress acknowledged by the second audit report in Belfast is evidence that **meaningful engagement with disabled people and older people works.**



**Pictures 9 & 10: Changes made as part of Belfast on the Move have improved provision for pedestrians in the city centre.**

Perhaps an overarching lesson learned from the walking audits undertaken by Imtac is that as a society we need to do more to respect pedestrians and value journeys undertaken by them. Issues identified by the audits including the profusion of unnecessary clutter on pavements, inconsiderate parking by drivers, poor maintenance of pavements and poor application of standards are all symptomatic of this broader issue. In many ways this is similar to society's attitude to cycling. A key aim of the DRD draft Bicycle Strategy is to create a "cycling culture" through attitudinal change. Imtac believes our audits illustrates that a similar **attitudinal change is required in Northern Ireland to give greater value and respect to pedestrians and pedestrian journeys.**



**Picture 11: Bow Street in Lisburn prior to public realm works does not represent a good example of pedestrian friendly design.**



**Picture 12: A great illustration of attitudes to pedestrians from another town in Northern Ireland. Great work to improve pavements but no room for pedestrians to use them.**

## **Bringing about change – our recommendations**

Imtac acknowledges that DRD has already published an Active Travel Strategy with the aim of increasing cycling and pedestrian journeys by making it is easier to walk and cycle. Since the publication of the Active Travel Strategy increased policy priority has been given to cycling. The creation of the Cycling Unit and the development of a draft Bicycle Strategy illustrates how Government can do more to promote the needs of vulnerable road users and create a fairer roads hierarchy. However the increased priority given to cycling has not been reciprocated when it comes to pedestrians. **Given the Active Travel Strategy does not prioritise between cyclists and pedestrians Imtac recommends that pedestrians be afforded the same policy priority as cyclists and a “Pedestrians Strategy” be developed providing a clear commitment to changing attitudes towards pedestrian journeys and developing a policy framework for investment in better pedestrian infrastructure. The name and remit of the Cycling Unit should also be extended to explicitly recognise pedestrians.**

Obstructions on the pavements and at crossings are symptomatic of the lack of respect shown for pedestrian journeys. Many of these obstructions are currently illegal, however it appears to Imtac that practices such as parking on pavements, the use of advertising boards, pavement cafes and shop displays on the pavement have become to a degree an accepted norm in our society. Because of this, attempts to tackle of these activities by using enforcement of current legislation have proved to be unpopular, politically difficult and ultimately unsuccessful. **Despite the challenges Imtac recommends that all efforts be made to challenge existing attitudes and reduce the impact of obstructions to pedestrians including:**

- **Effective of regulation of pavement cafes that ensures that access for pedestrians is protected through effective enforcement**
- **The introduction of a regulatory framework, similar to Pavement Cafés, for advertising boards designed to**

**minimise their impact on pedestrians through effective enforcement**

- **Drawing from lessons elsewhere targeted campaigns and enforcement to tackle pavement parking and parking across crossings<sup>5</sup>**
- **Educational “pedestrian respect initiatives” involving a range of stakeholders including organisations of and for disabled and older people, Councils, Transport NI, town centre management and retailers<sup>6</sup>**

It is essential in a period of limited resources that any investment in improving pedestrian infrastructure is maximised. Imtac is aware that current legislation requires Transport NI and any other agency (including public realm improvements funded by DSD) carrying out works on the road to have regard to the requirements of disabled people<sup>7</sup>. The Committee is also aware that Transport NI and DSD contracts already contain conditions requiring compliance with design standards. It is disappointing and frustrating to Imtac members that our audit reports have highlighted examples where design standards, particularly those relating to disabled people, have not been adhered to where money has been invested in new infrastructure. **Imtac recommends action is taken to ensure that inclusive design standards are better adhered to around any new investment in pedestrian infrastructure including:**

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<sup>5</sup> Local Authorities in Great Britain such as Brighton have begun to take targeted measures around pavement parking (see <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/parking-and-travel/parking/pavement-and-grass-verge-parking>). Living Streets has also produced a policy paper on pavement parking that highlights good practice by other local authorities including Exeter and Worcester City Councils (see <http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/what-is-living-streets%E2%80%99-policy-on-pavement-parking>).

<sup>6</sup> A good example is a Belfast City Centre Management / Transport NI initiative designed to encourage commercial premises to minimize the period bins are left on pavements. If after due warning bins are not taken in Transport NI remove them. Businesses then must pay a release fee to have the bins returned.

<sup>7</sup> Article 127 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993



- **Stricter auditing of design and construction of new pedestrian infrastructure and new developments to ensure work is to accepted standard**
- **Training / education to develop awareness of inclusive design for officials involved in the provision of pedestrian infrastructure<sup>8</sup>**
- **A requirement for Transport NI to “sign off” any new provision of pedestrian infrastructure before it is “adopted”**

Too often, in our experience, major public realm schemes and other major improvements rely too heavily on formal and general consultations. These processes usually involve stakeholder meetings and a formal consultation document which generally contain broad design details and do not allow specific and detailed discussion of inclusive design issues. Whilst statutory consultation is an important process, Imtac believes there is a strong case for all agencies involved in major projects that seek to improve pedestrian infrastructure to be more proactive in involving disabled and older people at an early design stage. We believe that the work we have undertaken with both DSD and Transport NI in Belfast is evidence that a more specific engagement with disabled people and older people works and provides a template for other major projects. Proactive engagement also helps Government Departments meet their statutory equality duties and more broadly is a positive act in relation to obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

**Imtac recommends that all the agencies involved in improvements to the pedestrian infrastructure look at ways to be more proactive about engagement with disabled and older people recognising:**

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<sup>8</sup> The work undertaken by Guide Dogs, RNIB and Imtac with Roads Service could provide a template for this type of initiative. As part of this initiative a number of information sessions were held for Eastern Division officials which highlighted some of the barriers experienced by disabled people in the pedestrian environment.

- **Imtac is a resource to Government in Northern Ireland and should be used to give strategic advice on the application of design standards in major schemes**
- **Other organisations of and for disabled and older people are best placed to give specific local advice around the detail of specific schemes**