

Imtac Annual Report 2018

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October 2018

About Imtac

Imtac is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including key transport professionals. The role of the Committee is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.

Imtac's 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 Infrastructure (hereafter referred to as the Department).

About this report

Under agreements with the Department Imtac is required to produce an annual report with details of its achievements over the previous year. The Committee is also required to identify key issues that it believes the Department should address in 2018/19.

Chairperson's message

This is the 12th Imtac Annual Report and my final report as chairperson. I have thoroughly enjoyed my two terms in office over the past six years. I believe I leave the Committee in a strong, representative position with positive working partnerships with the Department for Infrastructure and other stakeholders including Translink. I was particularly pleased that during the last twelve months two issues were resolved that should assist the Committee's work in the future. Firstly Imtac was able to launch a new website during the year. Secondly the Committee now has access to a communication system including a new induction loop system that will make it easier for members and others to participate at meetings in future. Both developments would have been impossible without the help of the Department and I would like to record my thanks to Moira Doherty and her Departmental officials for all their support throughout the year.

One of my key priorities during my time as Chairperson has been to involve more disabled people and older people in the work of the Committee. In recent years we have started to hold public outreach meetings across Northern Ireland. I am particularly pleased that this year a meeting was held in Coleraine, attended by over 50 people. This type of event is invaluable to the work of Imtac and I hope this type of initiative is continued in the future.

Despite the absence of a fully working Executive it has been another busy year for the Committee. Members played an active role in the development of the new BRT/Glider service for Belfast, advising on the design of the proposed halts for the system and the ticketing arrangements. I was particularly pleased the Department took the decision to make a reasonable adjustment, allowing Half-Fare Smartpass holders to travel free on Glider. This decision was taken following testing involving Imtac members.

The Committee also made a significant contribution to plans for new public transport infrastructure including proposals for new Transport Hubs in Belfast and the North West and the redevelopment of both Portrush and Central railway stations. Imtac's input has ensured each station will in future include a Changing Places facility, demonstrating that despite other problems public investment in infrastructure can be used to contribute to a more equal society. These improvements illustrate

the positive partnership that has developed between the Department, Translink and Imtac.

I would like to thank all Imtac members who have served during my time in office for their unstinting contribution and their dedicated commitment. I would also like to record my sincere gratitude to the Imtac Observers from our partnership organisations for their contribution over the years, supporting the Committee and its Secretariat to deliver its annual work programme.

My last task is to attempt to thank the Imtac Executive Secretary, Michael Lorimer. Having worked with Michael for over twelve years I am delighted to say we have never had a disagreement (other than which is the best football team in Liverpool). Michael's knowledge and ability has served disabled people and older people well, working better from outside rather than inside "the system." As stated above this has been busy year for Imtac particularly with detailed work on Glider. On behalf of the Committee I want to thank Michael for the support, hard work and expertise he has given over the last twelve months. Finally, I wish Michael and his family best wishes, good health and success for the future.

Many challenges still exist in society and with transport, in particular, for older people and disabled people. I firmly believe that Imtac and its members are best placed to advise about how best to remove the remaining barriers to travel and transport. I am proud to have represented the organisation as Chairperson and I am confident Imtac will continue

G Max O'Brien

September 2018

Achievements in 2017/18

The following outlines the contribution Imtac has made in the past twelve months towards a more inclusive and accessible transport system

1 Improving accessibility

Over the past twelve months Imtac has made significant contributions to the development of the proposed Belfast and North West Transport Hubs. The provision of Changing Places facilities is one key commitment made for the inclusive design of both facilities.

The Committee also made a significant contribution to the proposals to refurbish Portrush and Central railway stations. Both facilities will also include Changing Places facilities.

Members contributed to the development of the proposed BRT/Glider service. This included advice on the design of proposed halts and advice on ticketing, staff training and marketing of the service. As a result of members input to the ticketing project the Department has decided that Half-fare Smartpass holders will travel free on Glider services.

Following many complaints from wheelchair users about the availability of wheelchair accessible taxis, the Committee held a number of meetings with officials from the Department. Although the absence of a Minister limits options, potential solutions to current difficulties are still being explored.

Over the year the Committee also contributed to the review of the current Bus Stop Design Guide and drafted a paper designed to measure and improve information about the accessibility of bus and train stations.

2 Improving personal mobility

At the beginning of the year Imtac assisted the Department with a review of the renewal process for Blue Badge holders. This included organising and facilitating a workshop and other meetings with stakeholders.

The Committee also undertook a survey examining the accessibility of off-street car parks in Belfast City Centre. A report highlighting the findings has been published.

Imtac continues to contribute to the development of public realm schemes across Northern Ireland. This year the Committee provided input and advice to schemes planned for Portrush, Derry, Lisburn, Strabane and Belfast.

With cycling now given a greater policy focus Imtac is keen to ensure that more disabled people and older people enjoy the benefits of cycling and that potential conflict between cyclists and pedestrians is reduced. This year the Committee responded to the consultation on the proposed Belfast Bicycle Network, held a positive meeting with cyclists and their organisations and began work on a policy paper about cycling.

During the year the Committee continued to try to influence the implementation of Pavement Café Licensing through meetings and engagement with local councils and DfI Roads. Unfortunately significant differences remain between Imtac's preferred approach and that proposed by the agencies involved in licensing. The Committee has begun an evaluation of the impact of licensing. This includes an audit of pavement café provision and compliance in a number of locations across Northern Ireland.

3 Access to information

With support from the Department of Finance Imtac was able to launch a new website (www.imtac.org.uk) this year to support and promote the work of the Committee.

The Committee undertook an assessment of information provided on the NI Direct website about transport for older people and disabled people. A report with findings and recommendations has now been published.

4 Encouraging participation in public life

During the year Imtac worked with Translink to develop plans for an Accessibility Working Group. Imtac plans to establish the group in the coming year.

5 Statistics and data collection

To inform the work of the Taxi Forum Imtac worked with Departmental and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) officials to develop a survey about the experiences of older people and disabled people using taxis. The survey will be held over the next year.

Our plans for 2018/19

Over the next twelve months Imtac will seek the further development of an inclusive transport system by engaging and listening to disabled people and older people as well as working with and advising policy makers and transport providers. Imtac has published a Work Programme agreed with the Department for 2018/19 detailing tasks that will be undertaken in the next twelve months. This is available on our website (www.imtac.org.uk/publications/imtac-work-programme-201819).

Imtac will:

- Provide advice to support the Programme for Government Delivery Plans.
- Provide detailed advice on major public transport infrastructure projects.
- Provide detailed advice on vehicle design for Translink and other operators.
- Provide detailed advice on measures to improve walking and cycling developed by DfI and the Department for Communities.
- Participate in the work of the Strategic Design Group which seeks to promote inclusive place making in Northern Ireland.
- Provide advice and support around the implementation of Graduated Driver Licensing.
- Provide detailed advice on revisions to the content of the NI Direct website and Travel Safe Guide.
- Advise Translink on the redesign of its website.
- Provide detailed advice to Translink on staff training for the Glider service.
- Provide support and advice to Translink to promote better respect for priority wheelchair user spaces on services.
- Extend engagement events including more public meetings and develop trials of Give the Bus a Go/Meet the Manager days with Translink.
- Hold specific engagement events with Deaf people and people with hearing loss.
- Assist the Department to undertake a survey of the experiences of older people and disabled people using taxis.

- Assist the Department to develop surveys looking at the experiences of older people and disabled people using community transport and public transport services.
- Develop a research proposal on the contribution made by the Health Trusts' Wheelchair Service to the mobility of disabled people and older people.
- Complete reports into the accessibility of railway and bus stations and the impact of pavement café licensing.
- Work with Translink to establish an Accessibility Working Group
- Complete the review of the current Memorandum of Understanding between Imtac and the Department.

Our advice to the Department for Infrastructure

Imtac welcomes the positive approach to inclusion and accessibility adopted by the Department during the past twelve months. Despite difficulties created by the absence of a Government the Department has sought to ensure that investment it makes in infrastructure maximises benefits for older people and disabled people. The planned inclusion of Changing Places facilities at four Translink stations is a clear demonstration of this positive approach. **In the coming year the Committee will continue to support and encourage the Department to make further positive changes when investing in infrastructure, including in the areas detailed below.**

The Department makes significant, ongoing investment in vehicles used to deliver public transport and other services. Imtac members were involved in the design of the new Glider vehicles. The Committee's input helped to ensure vehicle design included the easy access and flexible interior space essential for a range of users. The approach taken to the Glider project should be the template for any future vehicle procurements where public money is being used. **Imtac recommends that Translink and other transport providers be required to consult formally with the Committee about any future vehicle purchase and clearly demonstrate how the views of Imtac have been incorporated in final vehicle designs.**

Audio visual next stop information systems have been successfully introduced on Metro bus services in Belfast and are key feature on board the new Glider vehicles. Given legislation has now been introduced in Great Britain requiring operators to introduce these systems on local bus services, **Imtac recommends that proposals be brought forward to extend its provision to Ulsterbus, Goldline and Foyle Metro services.**

Wheelchair users in particular encounter specific barriers to accessing transport services including public transport, taxis and community transport funded by the Department. These barriers include restrictions on the number of wheelchair users that can travel on-board vehicles, restrictions on the size of wheelchairs that can travel on-board vehicles, restrictive pre-booking requirements that only apply to wheelchair users and restrictions on the availability of some forms of transport.

During 2018/19 Imtac would ask the Department to work with the Committee to examine ways to improve access to transport for wheelchair users. Better vehicle design/requirements should be considered to improve access to community transport services and services operated by commercial operators. Future vehicle purchases by Translink should give full consideration to providing two spaces accessible for wheelchair users, similar to vehicles recently introduced by Reading Buses. Finally as measures that will improve the availability of wheelchair accessible taxis throughout Northern Ireland remain a major priority for the Committee, it asks the Department to continue to work with Imtac to seek a solution.

The roll out of Translink's Future Ticketing Project will continue in 2018/19. Whilst the changes will undoubtedly lead to improvements for many passengers Imtac still has concerns about how the project will impact on Half-Fare Concessionary Smartpass holders, who will still be required to pay for travel using cash. **The Department and Translink should continue engagement with Imtac with a view to resolving these concerns.**

A safe and accessible pedestrian environment is a vital component of an inclusive transport system as well as encouraging active and sustainable travel. Imtac welcomes and encourages ongoing investment which improves safe and accessible infrastructure for both pedestrians and cyclists. However the licensing of pavement cafes remains source of contention between Imtac and the agencies involved in regulation. Although the Committee supports regulation, it cannot support the light touch regulation, proposed by amongst others DfI Roads which will see pavement widths in many areas reduced below the minimum safe and accessible levels indicated by inclusive design guidelines. Imtac is clear in its view that the Department and others must ensure that Northern Ireland has an equitable licensing system that allows everyone to enjoy pavement cafes whilst at the same time protecting the rights of disabled people, older people and others to access a built environment free of obstacles and hazards. **The Committee would welcome further meaningful engagement with the Department and other parties with a view to resolving current difficulties.**

