



**Comments from Imtac about the targeted
consultation on the proposed Taxis Fares
Increase**

(October 2021)

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

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About Imtac

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

Imtac's aim is to ensure that Deaf people, disabled people and older 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).

Background to our comments

Before addressing the merits or otherwise of proposals to raise the current maximum fare by 7.6%, Imtac believes it is important to understand a wider context including:

- Research¹ by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which has highlighted that pre-pandemic nearly half of people living in poverty in the UK were either a Deaf or disabled person or someone who lives with a disabled person. There is evidence that the pandemic has exacerbated this situation, and the recent significant rise in the cost of living is likely to impact most on these households.
- Research both from here and GB indicate that Deaf people and disabled people rely more on taxis to undertake everyday journeys than other sections of society. A Consumer Council report² from 2017 indicates that disabled people are three times more likely to rely on taxis than non-disabled people. Statistics³ from England indicate disabled people make 55% more journeys using taxis compared to non-disabled people.
- Before COVID there was significant anecdotal evidence that access to taxi services for Deaf people, disabled people and older

¹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

² https://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/original/Taxi_Research_Report_FINAL.pdf

³

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/972438/transport-disability-and-accessibility-statistics-england-2019-to-2020.pdf

people living in Northern Ireland had worsened since changes to Regulation in 2016. The Department has undertaken a survey of Deaf people, disabled people, and older people to explore these issues, but its findings have not yet been published.

Do you agree with the proposed fare?

Our comments on the proposed fare increase acknowledge:

- The catastrophic impact of the pandemic on the taxi trade in general and on the income of drivers in particular
- The significant challenges faced by the taxi trade in recovering from the pandemic
- The immediate challenges of driver shortages and the resulting reduced access to taxis services
- The additional impact of the rising cost of living on the taxi trade
- The fact that the current maximum fare has remained the same since 2011

Intac accepts the Department has limited options to provide the support the taxi trade needs to recover from the pandemic and acknowledges that a review of the maximum fare is overdue. We also believe that the acknowledged current driver shortages and restricted services which are having a negative impact on the mobility of Deaf people, disabled people, and older people is an issue that needs to be addressed.

While recognising all the above factors the Committee has an overriding duty to represent the best interests of all Deaf people, disabled people and older people in the advice we give to Government. We cannot accept a blanket proposal that increases the cost of travel but does not acknowledge or seek to mitigate its impact on Deaf people, disabled people, older people and other people on low incomes who we know rely disproportionately on taxi services. We believe that if the current proposal is accepted without mitigation, issues and inequalities that existed prior to COVID around access to taxis will worsen as we continue to emerge from the pandemic.

Intac acknowledges the Department has obligation to support the recovery of the taxis trade. At the same time the Department has also a statutory and moral duty to ensure any action it takes does not disproportionately impact on groups in society amongst the hardest hit by the pandemic. Therefore, the Committee recommends the Department undertake a formal review of the maximum fare which

includes an equality screening exercise that sets out how the Department will mitigate the impact of rising travel costs on low-income Section 75 groups who rely more on taxi services than others in society.

During the past twelve months the Committee has revised a policy paper on taxis first published in 2008 but has not published it due to the COVID situation. The paper contains several recommendations designed to improve access to taxis for Deaf people, disabled people, and older people. These recommendations include additional support from Government for taxi drivers and operators as well as measures to assist Deaf people, disabled people, and older people with the cost of fares. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Department to share and discuss our paper and its recommendations, looking at short, medium and long term measures that will improve access to taxis for Deaf people, disabled people and older people whilst supporting the taxi trade in its recovery from the pandemic.