



**Report into issues arising from Imtac public meeting  
in Craigavon**

**(February 2020)**

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Michael Lorimer  
Imtac  
Titanic Suites  
10-18 Adelaide Street  
Belfast BT2 8FE

Telephone/Textphone: 028 9072 6020

Email: [info@imtac.org.uk](mailto:info@imtac.org.uk)

## **About Imtac**

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

The aim of the Committee 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).

## **Background**

Imtac held a public meeting in Brownlow Community Hub, Craigavon, on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019. Around 40 people attended the meeting including disabled people, older people and some of their representative organisations as well as transport providers. People attending came from across the Mid Ulster region including the Craigavon and Cookstown areas.

After welcomes from the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson and a short presentation from the Secretary of Imtac, the bulk of the meeting involved discussion by attendees on what they saw to be the key issues in transport and travel. This report summarises the issues raised at the meeting.

## **Structure of the discussions**

The meeting involved a series of round table discussions. Each table was given the same topic guide and asked to select a person to take notes and provide feedback. The topic guide contained three general questions on travel and transport:

- (1) What currently works well?
- (2) What currently doesn't work well?
- (3) What improvements are needed?

Participants were asked to relate each question to the different modes of transport, the pedestrian environment, how easy it is to access information and how involved people felt in the design and delivery of services.

## **Feedback on what currently works well**

### *Public transport*

Participants praised rail services. In particular conductors on trains and staff at stations were seen as excellent and helpful, providing assistance when required. The provision of audio information on board trains was also seen as a positive. Recent infrastructure developments including the new Banbridge Bus Station were seen as a positive development. A number of people reported positive feedback around using the Translink App for journey planning.

### *Community transport*

Many attendees used local community transport services and felt these services were vital and a lifeline for many of the older people and disabled people in the area. Staff and volunteer drivers involved in community transport were praised. The facility to use a SmartPass on community transport through the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme was also welcomed.

## **Feedback on what currently doesn't work well**

### *Public Transport*

There was significant feedback from each table on various issues with public transport services. These issues can be summarised in four areas; (1) issues with service levels, (2) issues with infrastructure and

vehicles, (3) issues with staff and assistance and (4) issues with connectivity.

- (1) Many people felt that bus service frequency and operational hours in their area are inadequate. This was particularly an issue for people living in rural communities.
- (2) Attendees had issues with the accessibility of public transport infrastructure and vehicles. Buses and coaches with a number of steps were seen as inaccessible for many older people and disabled people and for wheelchair users in particular. For many people in rural areas getting to the nearest bus stop is difficult or impossible and the lack of bus shelters in many places deters people from using bus services. The lack of audio and visual next stop information systems on buses makes travel more difficult for some disabled people.

Accessibility at some bus and railway stations is also problematic. The need for more seating was highlighted. Toilet provision at stations can be a problem with accessible toilets locked. Although trains are seen as more accessible participants highlighted that the step up on to the train and the gap between train and platform can be a problem at some stations. Bus stations are often closed with no staff to provide assistance.

- (3) Issues were raised about staff and the assistance they provide, included bus drivers not always being helpful including moving off before people are seated. The lack of staff at some stations/halts is also seen as a barrier to travel. The attitudes of other passengers were highlighted with difficulties getting a seat at peak times and on busy school services.
- (4) Connectivity between bus and rail services and between public transport and other services was seen as an issue.

### *Community transport*

In relation to community transport frustrations were expressed about these services including a lack of flexibility, the need to book in advance, the reliability of the service and the lack of evening and weekend services. The variation in service levels provided by different community transport operators was also highlighted as well as restrictive eligibility criteria for DATS in some areas.

### *Taxis*

Taxi issues were raised at most tables. The small number of wheelchair accessible taxis that are available was a recurring issue. Those services that are available are unreliable, expensive and difficult to get. Most people felt that all taxis are too expensive for regular use. Drivers' attitudes were highlighted as a problem for some. People living in rural areas highlighted the lack of taxi services. Taxis are often involved in delivering school contracts during the daytime limiting general availability.

### *Pedestrian issues*

Participants at each table raised many issues with the pedestrian environment. In rural areas frequently there is no footway and walking is very difficult because of traffic. The quality of existing footways was a concern with uneven surfaces and poor maintenance being raised as issues. Icy conditions can make pedestrian journeys very difficult. Parking and cycling on footways was raised as an issue. Concerns were expressed about the lack of pedestrian crossings and dropped kerbs. Clutter on pavements was highlighted with A Boards and pavement cafes in particular causing problems.

### *Blue Badge and parking issues*

Most tables commented on the Blue Badge Scheme. The consensus was that there are not enough accessible parking bays and that abuse of these bays is a consistent problem, particularly in privately operated car

parks. Some people commented on the application process for the Blue Badge suggesting the form was too long and complex.

### *Access to information*

The majority of participants were not comfortable using the internet to access information. Many found websites and the Translink journey planner in particular difficult to use. While many people preferred printed information small type size was a consistent problem.

### *Involvement and engagement*

When asked if people feel involved in the development and delivery of services all the tables responded negatively. Some people had not heard of Imtac before the meeting and queried whether people from Mid Ulster were represented on the Committee.

## **Feedback on the improvements that are required**

### *Public transport*

The suggestions for improvement of public transport included better bus service provision across the area including better linkages by bus to train stations in Craigavon in particular. Better and more seating at stations, halts and bus stops was recommended as was more accessible buses and audio visual information on all buses. Better training is needed for all drivers and station staff. Free travel should be extended to all groups of disabled people.

### *Public transport/community transport*

There should be better rural transport services.

### *Taxis*

Better training for taxi drivers is required. Action needed to make more accessible taxis available.

### *Blue Badge and parking issues*

There should be more accessible parking bays and these should be better enforced than currently. Applying for the Blue Badge should be made easier.

### *Involvement and engagement*

People from Mid Ulster should be represented on Imtac.

### **Conclusion**

Imtac would like to thank everyone who took part in the public meeting in Craigavon. Although there were some issues particular to the area, most of the issues raised by attendees are similar to issues raised at the series of public meetings Imtac has held over the past 2 years. The key issues discussed such as improving the accessibility of infrastructure and vehicles, the service levels and assistance provided, access to information on services and promoting the involvement of disabled people and older people in policy and service developments are central to the advice Imtac provides to Government and others. In particular improving access to adequate transport services for rural communities remains a key priority for the Committee.

To further highlight the issues raised at the meeting Imtac will publish this report on its website and circulate it to the key policy makers and service providers.