



imtaac



Annual Report **2019/20**

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).

About this report

Under our agreements with the Department, Imtac is required to submit an annual report to the Minister for Infrastructure. This report includes details of our achievements over the previous year and plans for the coming year. It also identifies and details key issues the Committee would advise the Minister to consider in the coming year.

Imtac's response to the COVID-19 outbreak (Status at July 2020)

As with every other organisation our work during 2020 has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. All face-to-face Imtac activities were suspended in mid-March 2020, resulting in a delay to the completion of some tasks and the cancellation of planned events. We agreed immediate actions to ensure the work of the Committee continues whilst safeguarding the health and safety of our staff and members, including making provision for home working and remote meetings. These arrangements are ongoing.

Chairperson's message

(2020 - 14th report)

This 2020 Report, my second as Chairperson, covers a period of significant change, not all of it planned. It was a pleasure to meet our new Minister for Infrastructure, Nichola Mallon, and welcome her when our Officers met her in March to present the 2019 Report. Unfortunately it was becoming clear at that stage our society would be facing the most severe crisis of a lifetime as Covid-19 took a grip across the country and indeed the world.

I thank all our members for their contributions during the past year and acknowledge the on-going support of officials from the Department and our observer organisations. Without the dedication of our secretariat, Michael Lorimer, during 2019/20 and more recently during COVID-19, Imtac would be a less effective advisory body.

Many activities from the year are worthy of highlighting including our input to the delivery of new and refurbished stations in Portrush, the North West Transport Hub and Lanyon Place as well as our broad community engagement and the Pedestrian Workshop in February. The year saw the establishment of the Accessibility Four Nations Liaison Group comprising MACS, DPTAC and ourselves together with our sponsoring departments. Following the initial meeting in Edinburgh in 2019 I was delighted to welcome the Group to Northern Ireland when Imtac hosted the second meeting in March. These meetings provide an essential forum to exchange experiences and co-operate on policy development.

With the longer-term picture uncertain the initial priority for Imtac will be to support our partners in Government, transport providers and others in responding to COVID-19. As we work together to address transport and access issues which have only been exacerbated by Covid-19, our experiences this past year with community engagement, including people with hearing impairment, have highlighted the paramount importance for early and detailed engagement with all stakeholders. Promoting this will be a key objective for me this year.

Bert Bailie

July 2020

Achievements in 2019/20

In line with its Work Programme the following priorities have influenced the work of the Committee in the past year:

- Raising awareness of and supporting the adoption and implementation of key articles of UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD)
- Involving disabled people and older people in the work of the Committee
- Developing as a Committee

The following sections outline the contribution Imtac has made in the past twelve months towards a more inclusive and accessible transport system in Northern Ireland.

Improving Accessibility

This year we continued to focus on and tackle the barriers that deny older people and disabled people access to transport services and the built environment on an equal basis to others. Highlights include:

Vehicle Design

- We have continued to work with Translink and the Department on inclusive vehicle design to improve the accessibility of buses in future procurement exercises. Although issues remain, engagement and understanding of potential barriers have improved in the last year.
- We had positive engagement with Translink about the procurement of new trains. This engagement has resulted in positive changes including improved signage for priority seating and space on trains.
- Following engagement between the Committee, the Commission for Older People, Translink and the Department, a number of changes were made to Glider vehicles to further improve accessibility.
- We developed and published a policy paper¹ designed to encourage best practice for operators of small buses.

Station Design

- We continued to work with Translink on the development of the Belfast and North West Transport Hubs.
- We undertook detailed engagement with Translink around the proposed design of the Yorkgate railway station redevelopment.
- Two site visits to the newly opened Portrush station and the partially completed North West Transport Hub were undertaken with feedback submitted to Translink after each visit.
- Building on the welcome progress made following the opening of Changing Places facilities at Lanyon Place, Portrush and the North West Hub we maintained our engagement with Translink around future toilet provision at stations.

Ticket Replacement Project

- During the past twelve months Imtac continued its positive engagement with Ticket Replacement Project Team in Translink. Whilst many of the changes will be positive for older people and disabled people, concerns persist about their impact on holders of a Half Fare SmartPass.

Commercial Bus Permit Scheme

- Our support continued to the Department to introduce measures to improve the accessibility of services delivered under the Commercial Bus Permit Scheme.
- We advised Airporter Ltd as they developed a policy setting out their commitment to making services accessible.

Concessionary / Discounted Travel

- We reviewed the application and renewal process for SmartPasses and published a report with recommendations for improvement².
- Provided support to the Department in undertaking a survey around the attitudes of older people and disabled people to the Concessionary Fares Scheme.

Public Realm

- We undertook street audits and published recommendations for proposed public realm schemes in Banbridge³ and Portaferry⁴.
- Following an evaluation of the impact of pavement café licensing on the mobility of older people and disabled people we published a report⁵ on our findings.
- We hosted a Pedestrians' Workshop in February 2020 focusing on obstructions such as pavement parking, A Boards and pavement cafes. A report⁶ on the workshop has been published on the Accessible Travel NI website (see page 7).

Parking

- Building on earlier work we undertook parking surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre to gauge the impact of restrictions created by the Primark fire and published a report⁷.

Ferry Services

- Working with the Consumer Council we participated in a site visit to the Rathlin Island Ferry Service and published a report⁸ with recommendations.
- Following a site visit to the Strangford Lough Ferry Service we developed a report with recommendations.



Access to Information

This year we continued to promote the rights of disabled people and older people to access information about travel and transport. Highlights include:

Translink

- We worked with Translink to improve and update online information about the accessibility of services including detailed information about services and facilities.
- We have had early engagement with Translink around a new project looking at using technology linked to the Translink website to improve access to services.

Accessible Travel NI website

- Following receipt of a grant from The Big Lottery we developed a new website⁹ as an online resource for anyone seeking information about the accessibility of transport and travel in Northern Ireland



Involving Older People and Disabled People

This year we continued to highlight and support the rights of disabled people and older people to be involved in the development of policies and services. Highlights include:

- We hosted a public meeting in Craigavon attended by around 40 people and issues raised have been published in a report¹⁰.
- A meeting that we arranged with the Deaf community in Derry / Londonderry was attended by around 20 people.
- Our Pedestrian Workshop¹¹ in Belfast was attended by over 50 people including disabled people and older people as well as other stakeholders.
- The Translink Accessibility Working Group, including disabled people and older people not members on Imtac, held two meetings.

Developing as a Committee

We continue to examine new ways of working as part of our commitment to delivering the best possible advice to Government. Highlights this year include:

- Our first Imtac Members' Information and Development Day looked in detail at issues around access to taxis and community transport services. Unfortunately Covid-19 curtailed a second meeting planned for March 2020.
- The development of a Language Guide to be used by Imtac members and Secretariat.
- Along with the Mobility & Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) and the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC), we established the Accessibility Four Nations Group designed to share information and discuss common issues across all the regions of the UK. Following the first meeting in Edinburgh in August 2019 initiated by MACS, Imtac hosted the second meeting of the Group in Belfast in March 2020.

Awareness Raising

We are committed to raising and promoting awareness of the rights of older people and disabled people including challenging stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices.

This year's Work Programme included a number of tasks designed to promote awareness raising including:

- Plans to promote the provision Disability Equality Training to everyone involved in the development and delivery of policies and services.
- Plans to work with Translink to better promote respect for priority seating and space on buses, coaches and trains.

Although progress was made with these tasks we were unable to complete them. Both will remain a priority for the Committee in 2020/21.

Our Plans for 2020/21

With the longer-term picture uncertain the initial priority for Imtac must be to support our partners in Government, transport providers and others in responding to COVID-19. It is especially important that in uncertain times the Committee prioritises and promotes key articles of the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD)' through its work. Of equal importance it is essential that Imtac continues to seek to further the development of an inclusive and accessible transport system.

The Committee's work plan for the coming year will include:

- Prioritising providing advice and support to its partners in Government and the transport sector in their response to dealing with COVID-19.
- Continuing to provide support and advice on a number of key infrastructure and other projects.
- Prioritising the development of key policy and research papers including the completion of work from 2019 / 2020 disrupted by COVID-19.
- Continuing to work with the Department, Translink and others to support initiatives that result in more inclusive and accessible policy and services.
- Continuing to promote broader engagement with disabled people, older people, carers and others, recognising the need to innovate where circumstances make physical meetings impossible.

Our advice to the Minister for Infrastructure

It is impossible for Imtac to ignore the current extraordinary and tragic circumstances when identifying key issues and priorities for the Department to address in the coming year. COVID-19 has impacted on every household in Northern Ireland and will continue to do so as we live with the virus for the foreseeable future.

The Committee has concerns about how COVID-19 will impact in the short-term on travel for disabled people and older people. Great care needs to be taken to ensure that short-term measures introduced quickly under the “new normal” do not make the lives of disabled people and older people more difficult. Imtac has published a statement¹² on living with COVID-19 with advice to Government around how it can ensure its response to the current crisis is inclusive. This advice to assist the Department’s response identifies that the adoption of the following principles is essential:

- Actively engaging with older people and disabled people (through Imtac and others) when planning and delivering its response.
- Ensuring Article 9¹³ of UNCRPD (Accessibility) is a key consideration when planning and delivering its response.
- Ensuring reasonable adjustments are made to reduce the impact on disabled people and older people of social / physical distancing measures introduced on transport services and in the built environment.
- Ensuring good communication of its response to make it accessible to all.

We would also support the Minister in taking this message to her Executive Ministerial counterparts to encourage adoption of these principles.

In the longer term Imtac fully supports the common desire to “build back better”, taking into account the need to address the inequality that exists within our society whilst at the same time recognising other pressing issues such as an ageing society and climate change.

Prior to COVID-19 disabled people and older people faced many more barriers to travel than others in our society. It is likely that after COVID-19 these barriers will remain or will have worsened. If we are to genuinely “build back better” the Committee believes a fresh approach is needed to addressing these barriers including a renewed commitment to developing an inclusive and accessible transport system. For this reason Imtac recommends that the Department develops a new strategic framework for inclusive transport, learning from approaches in Scotland¹⁴ and England¹⁵.

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1. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/position-paper-small-bus-design-and-accessibility
2. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/recommendations-improvements-application-and-renewal-processes-concessionary-fares
3. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/recommendations-imtac-public-realm-proposals-banbridge-town-centre
4. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/recommendations-imtac-public-realm-proposals-portaferry-town-centre
5. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/evaluating-impact-introduction-pavement-cafe-licensing-mobility-disabled-people-and
6. www.accessibletravelni.org/your-experiences/putting-people-first-report-on-the-imtac-pedestrian-workshop-held-on-5th-february-2020/
7. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/report-surveys-blue-badge-use-belfast-city-centre-undertaken-april-and-may-2019
8. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/accessibility-rathlin-island-ferry-service-findings-and-recommendations
9. www.accessibletravelni.org
10. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/report-issues-arising-imtac-public-meeting-craigavon
11. www.accessibletravelni.org/your-experiences/putting-people-first-report-on-the-imtac-pedestrian-workshop-held-on-5th-february-2020/
12. www.accessibletravelni.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Statement-from-Imtac-on-living-with-COVID-Final-Version.pdf
13. www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-9-accessibility.html
14. www.transport.gov.scot/publication/scotland-s-accessible-travel-framework-delivery-plan-for-2019-2020/
15. www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-transport-strategy



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