

The logo for imtac features the word "imtac" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font. A yellow arrow starts from the bottom of the letter 'i' and points to the right, ending under the letter 'c'. To the left of the text is a solid yellow vertical rectangle.

imtac

Annual Report

2022

About Imtac

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

The aim of Imtac 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 (herein after 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 pandemic (Status at June 2022)

Like many organisations we suspended all face-to-face activities over the past two years in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring the work of the Committee continued whilst safeguarding the health and safety of our staff and members. Everyone hopes that the worst impacts of the pandemic are now behind us and with this in mind we intend to return to more "normal" ways of working including face to face meetings which will include the option for people to attend remotely.

Chairperson's Message 2022 16th Report

Society has been slowly emerging from the grasp of the Covid pandemic and this time last year when I presented our Annual Report it was hoped that we would be returning to more normal times for all our communities. Unfortunately, that hasn't come to pass as we plunge into a cost of living crisis which, while impacting on us all, is a particular issue for many who are already experiencing difficulties with access and mobility and find themselves as or even more isolated than they were before Covid.

Our report this year highlights many positives as we engaged with the Department and others even though face to face engagement has not been practicable. Our continued engagement with Nichola Mallon, former Infrastructure Minister, saw the launch of the "Think Before You Park" Road Safety Campaign, the public consultation around dealing with the problems caused by pavement parking and initiation of discussions to ensure that all vehicles procured in future for public transport services are fully accessible to all. We provided significant input into work of the Disability Strategy Co-Design Working Group. I must commend June Best, our Vice-Chairperson, for her commitment and her leadership in Co-Chairing, the Group.

We look forward to presenting this Annual Report to and actively engaging with the new Infrastructure Minister to discuss our New Approach paper setting four key principles we believe should inform and influence in any intervention aimed at improving travel, our streets and places, and to build on the sterling progress made by the Department and others over the past number of years. We are of course alert to the difficulties the pandemic and cost of living crises have caused in managing budgets, but I would reiterate Imtac's commitment to widening our engagement activity and ensuring that society's progress through the current crises provides for inclusion and accessibility for everyone.

Finally, I must recognise the support and input from our members, observers and others who, despite the inherent difficulties of virtual communications, have provided us with the comment and insights that shape our advice and recommendations. However, this would not happen without the dedication of our Executive Secretary, Michael Lorimer. My thanks go also to our current Departmental Sponsor team who took over and adapted to the role early in this reporting period.

Bert Bailie
June 2022

Our Achievements 2021/22

Our priorities for our work during the past year have been to support the response to and the recovery from the pandemic, seeking to ensure that both prioritised accessibility and inclusion for all.

Supporting the pandemic response and recovery

We were pleased to be included in the pre-consultation by the Executive Office about the development of a COVID Recovery Plan. During this process we raised concerns about the lack of recognition of the impact of COVID on Deaf people, disabled people, older people and carers and the failure of the draft plan to include actions to address this impact. We were disappointed that the final Plan failed to correct these gaps.

Influencing strategy, policy and projects

The most significant commitment this year for the Committee was our participation in the Co-Design Group charged with assisting the Department for Communities (DfC) develop a new Disability Strategy. As Co-Chair our representative provided leadership in numerous meetings and other engagements with Ministers, DfC officials and other Departments.

We were an active stakeholder in the further development of plans for a Bolder Vision for Belfast City Centre. We supported Belfast City Council in hosting workshops with Deaf people, disabled people and older people about proposals and submitted a detailed response to the consultation¹.

We contributed to consultations around proposals for route options for BRT Phase 2², proposed taxi fares increases³ and the development of a new Roads Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland.

During the year we held several meetings with Minister Mallon. Discussions included our proposals to enhance the accessibility requirements of the Public Service Agreement between the Department and Translink. As a result of these discussions a working group was established to advise on future vehicle procurement frameworks.

We responded to several consultations during the year including proposals from the Department of Finance to change the Building Regulations to require Changing Places facilities in certain new buildings in future⁴. Imtac was happy to support these proposals and congratulate Christine McClements, Michaela Hollywood and others in working to secure this important change.

We engaged with Translink about projects to refurbish stations. This year we provided feedback on proposals for Bangor, Lurgan, Ballymena and Cullybackey stations. The Committee particularly commends the proposed inclusion of Changing Places facilities at the first three stations listed above.

Encouraging active travel (walk, wheel and cycle) is an increasing policy priority. This year we have seen an increase in requests for advice around active travel projects including routes connected with the Belfast Transport Hub and wider plans connected to the Belfast Cycling Network Plan. We have also advised on plans to trial schemes looking at options for segregation between cyclists and pedestrians.

We continue to provide advice about proposals for public realm schemes across Northern Ireland. This year schemes included Belfast Streets Ahead and a proposal for Maghera town centre.

Supporting innovation in policy and service developments

Working with other organisations we approached Minister Mallon to discuss options to tackle issues created by pavement parking. As a result of these discussions, we worked with the Department to develop and run a “Think Before You Park” public awareness campaign. The campaign was followed by a public consultation seeking the views of the public on three options to tackle pavement parking⁵.

We continued to work with the Department and Translink to improve the accessibility of buses and coaches. This year we provided feedback on the design of low-floor coaches and zero emission buses for use in Belfast and Derry / Londonderry. We also participated in a group looking maximising accessibility in the future procurement framework for bus and coaches.

This year also saw the overdue removal of notice requirements placed on some disabled people using buses and coaches outside of Belfast. We worked with Translink prior to the implementation of the new arrangements, including information and promotion of the changes. It is disappointing and unsatisfactory that accessibility at many buses stops remains a problem, meaning that pre-notice and planning is still required on many services.

We worked with Translink around a trial of digital timetable information at buses stops in various locations across Northern Ireland. As part of this work, we arranged site visits and provided formal feedback on the three different systems used as part of the trial.

Following several queries from local councils we produced a policy statement⁶ on the growing use of “colourful crossings”. The paper highlights the negative impact of these crossings on some disabled people and recommends that plans to install these crossings are stopped.

We contributed to the Office for Statistics Regulation review of transport accessibility statistics and were pleased that our input was reflected in their recommendations.

Promoting engagement

Our plans for engagement with wider groups of Deaf people, disabled people, older people and carers were again curtailed by the restrictions placed on us by the pandemic. We were able to have some direct engagement with people at site visits held outdoors but for the most part we were restricted to remote engagement. Remote engagement included:

- An event held in conjunction with DAERA and Guide Dogs NI to inform people who use assistance dogs about post Brexit travel arrangements
- A workshop seeking the views of people about research into the Review of the Reference Wheelchair undertaken by the Department for Transport
- Two workshops seeking a broad range of views on our proposals for “A new approach to travel, our streets and places”

A major highlight this year was the first Disabled People’s Parliament which was held in the Assembly Chamber in Parliament Buildings in December. The Imtac Secretariat played a leading role in the organisation of the event and several current and past Imtac members spoke at the Parliament. We were proud to take part in such a powerful and innovative event and will continue to support similar activities in the future.

We also promoted engagement through our working groups and our participation in several external fora. This year our Translink Accessibility Working Group and People, Streets and Places Workings Group met regularly. We played an active role in the following fora:

- The Accessibility 4 Nations Group, bringing together our colleagues from the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee and officials from the Westminster and the devolved administrations

- The Department for Infrastructure’s Walking and Cycling Forum
- The Strategic Design Group chaired jointly by DfI Planning and the Ministerial Advisory Group, looking at placemaking
- A new Disability Forum to inform the work of the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for the implementation of the UNCRPD in Northern Ireland

For the first time this year we also participated in a successful engagement meeting with the Senior Civil Service Group in the Department. We hope to build on this engagement in the future.

Looking to the future

Perhaps the most important project the Committee worked on this year was to examine the changes in current approaches required to ensure that future investment in travel, streets and places maximises accessibility and inclusion. Taking account of key challenges including emerging from the pandemic, climate change and the cost-of-living crisis we have developed our paper, “A New Approach to travel, our streets and places” identifying four key principles we see as essential building blocks for successful outcomes in the future.



Our Plans for 2022/23

It is our fervent hope that the worst impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic are now behind us. The focus of our Work Programme⁷ will shift to three priorities:

- Ensuring there is a recovery plan from the pandemic that benefits everyone in society
- Ensuring the response to climate change delivers a just transition to Net Zero
- Ensuring Deaf people, disabled people, older people and carers when are not overlooked when responding to the cost-of-living crisis

Our advice will be informed by the principles set out in the New Approach paper developed by the Committee in the last year as well as the social model of disability and the rights and obligations of UNCRPD.

Our Work Programme for the coming year includes:

- Ensuring key strategies including any new Programme for Government and the Disability Strategy maximise opportunities to improve accessibility and inclusion
- Ensuring that key plans and policies, including proposals to refresh the suite of Transport Plans for Northern Ireland, maximise opportunities to improve accessibility and inclusion
- Ensuring that key projects such as BRT Phase 2 maximise opportunities to improve accessibility and inclusion
- Supporting innovation in policy and service developments including improving the collection of data and statistics around transport and accessibility
- Producing papers on lessons learned from investment in public realm schemes and the potential benefits of Demand Responsive Transport services
- Restarting and rejuvenating our engagement to involve more Deaf people, disabled people, older people and carers in our work
- Undertaking specific engagement to highlight the impact of street works, the benefits of Disability Equality Training and to develop our relationships with local councils

Our advice for the Minister for Infrastructure

As we emerge from the pandemic, society faces significant further challenges including how we recover from the impact of the pandemic, how we respond to climate change and how we deal with the immediate issues created by the cost-of-living crisis. For Imtac the challenge also represents an opportunity to change past approaches, ensuring we don't simply return to policies and practices that have failed to deliver the change required.

For the past year Imtac has been considering what a new approach would look like. We have developed a paper setting four key principles we believe will inform and influence in any intervention aimed at improving travel, our streets and places for everyone in society. Although the immediate political situation remains uncertain, we believe the new mandate offers the best opportunity to change direction and look at new approaches.

We would welcome a meeting with the new Minister for Infrastructure to discuss our proposals for:

- Putting Deaf people, disabled people, and older people at the centre of every stage of decision making
- Ensuring a shift in our cultures both in relation to how decisions around accessibility and inclusion are made and how we design travel, streets and places to prioritise people over the movement of vehicles
- Ensuring public and private investment contributes to an accessible and inclusive society through the adoption of inclusive design standards
- Ensuring end to end journeys are straightforward and accessible through changes to existing services and adopting new innovative approaches

In addition, the Committee would encourage further progress on initiatives started by the previous Minister, including:

- Progressing the preferred option to tackle issues created by parking on pavements
- Implementing the proposed changes to the Concessionary Fares Scheme extending the current half fare to a free concession

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1. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/comments-imtac-bolder-vision-reimagining-our-city-centre-consultation
2. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/comments-imtac-about-belfast-rapid-transit-phase-2-route-options-public-consultation
3. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/comments-imtac-about-targeted-consultation-proposed-taxis-fares-increase
4. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/comments-imtac-about-consultation-proposals-amendment-technical-booklet-guidance-part-r
5. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/comments-imtac-about-department-infrastructure-inconsiderate-parking-options-paper
6. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/imtac-statement-use-colourful-crossings
7. www.imtac.org.uk/publications/imtac-work-programme-2022-2023



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