



**Comments from Imtac about the Department  
for Infrastructure “Inconsiderate Parking –  
Options Paper” consultation  
(March 2022)**

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## **Making our information accessible**

As an organisation of and for disabled people and older people Imtac recognises that the way information is provided can be a barrier to accessing services and participation in public life. We are committed to providing information about our work in formats that best suit the needs of individuals.

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](http://www.imtac.org.uk). In addition we will provide information in a range of other formats including:

- Large print
- Audio versions
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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).

## **Introduction**

Imtac welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department's Options Paper on Inconsiderate Pavement Parking. We wish to record our thanks to the Minister for taking action on the issues raised by Imtac and like-minded organisations. We also wish to commend officials from the Department for work on the Think Before You Park advertising campaign (which ran prior to the launch of the current consultation) and for developing the current consultation paper.

## **Current context**

In 2021 the Department for Infrastructure published "Planning for the Future of Transport – Time for Change."<sup>1</sup> The document sets out the changes needed to support the Department's priorities over the next 10 to 15 years, recognising the important societal issues that need to be addressed and the significant challenges created by climate change.

Central to the change envisaged is a shift to a sustainable transport hierarchy where we prioritise the movement of people over vehicles, providing, first and foremost, for walking and wheeling. Planning for the Future of Transport is the culmination of a process that has recognised that designing society around easy access to a car has had major negative implications for our environment and has significantly

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/planning-for-the-future-of-transport-time-for-change.pdf>

contributed to inequality in our society, with those without or with limited access to cars excluded from many day-to-day activities<sup>2</sup>.

Our current approach to pavement parking in Northern Ireland reflects outdated thinking around prioritising vehicle movement over the movement of people. Imtac recognises that some issues with pavement parking are created by residential streets that were not designed for the current levels of car ownership. The Committee recognises that resolving these problems will be a long-term process including encouraging a shift from car ownership to other modes of travel. However, there are many, many other examples of pavement parking where the current legalisation and associated limited powers of enforcement, does not deter and indeed encourages footways to be used for the convenience of vehicles at the expense of people walking and wheeling.

The current approach has significant real-world impacts on individuals and entire communities. Often these impacts are on people with no or limited access to private transport, contributing to inequality between sections of our society. In the simplest terms obstructions on the footway created by pavement parking makes doing everyday things extremely difficult for people impacted. It puts people walking and wheeling at risk and erodes the confidence of many people in undertaking what should be straightforward journeys.

From a government / roads authority perspective pavement parking damages footways, generating maintenance and public liability claim costs. It stops people accessing services and public transport. In short it undermines most if not all the key outcomes contained in Programme for Government and associated policy documents and negates much of the value society receives from investment in infrastructure.

Imtac notes that other parts of these islands are already considering or have made changes to their approach to tackling pavement parking. If the current policy statements from the Department are to have any credibility it is clear to our members that maintaining the current approach to pavement parking is not an option and change is required.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/---emp\\_policy/---invest/documents/publication/wcms\\_asist\\_8210.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_policy/---invest/documents/publication/wcms_asist_8210.pdf)

## Consideration of Options

Imtac recognises that none of the options for change are straightforward and that for each option there are likely to be exemptions where pavement parking is still permitted. One positive Northern Ireland does have in relation to many other parts of the United Kingdom is a well-established decriminalised parking enforcement regime with the associated potential for increased enforcement to be self-financing.

### *Option 1 – Introduce individual bans using the Department’s existing powers*

Whilst it is probably the most readily available tool to tackle pavement parking, using Traffic Regulation Orders is the least preferred option for the Committee. Our rationale for this is based on concerns about how schemes would be selected and the fear that this may result in a piecemeal approach with a limited number of schemes and current problems potentially displaced to other nearby streets. Members also have concerns that schemes may be subject to lengthy delays or even prevented by large numbers of objections from people who currently enjoy the privilege of parking on the footway without penalty or charge.

### *Option 2 - introduce an outright ban on pavement parking (with exemptions)*

An outright ban on pavement parking is the most challenging but potentially the most transformative of all the three options presented. From an Imtac perspective it is the only option that sends a clear message that priorities have genuinely changed, and the sustainable transport hierarchy will be implemented. Although the consultation suggests that exemptions may be a possibility, the Committee recognises exemptions will be an inevitability given the design of some of our streets, the level of car ownership and the need to maintain emergency service access.

The major drawback of this option is the likely timeframes involved. The passage of legislation, followed by the significant work required identifying exemptions and then implementation may mean that no tangible changes may be made for 5 to 10 years. The fact that Scotland is ahead of Northern Ireland in introducing this option provides the opportunity to learn and benefit from experiences there.

*Option 3 – introduce powers that would allow the Department’s Traffic Attendants to enforce against vehicles found to be parked on the pavement and causing an obstruction*

It is likely that this option could be introduced more quickly than an outright ban. However, the Committee has significant reservations about the subjective nature of defining “causing an obstruction” and has concerns this would lead to the same confusion and patchy enforcement that currently exists. For this reason, the Committee does not see this option as a long-term solution.

### **Parking across dropped kerbs**

The consultation asks for feedback on addressing parking across dropped kerbs. Imtac is clear that this is anti-social behaviour, blocking essential access for many disabled people and older people and negating the benefits of public investment in infrastructure.

The consultation also specifically notes that most dropped kerb facilities are found at junctions and parking within 15m of a junction is an offence under existing regulations. As parking on corners restricts visibility for all road users and creates a road safety hazard, we consider this adds more reason to extending the Department’s Traffic Attendants’ existing powers to enforce the offence of parking within 15m of a junction if the corner has not been marked on the ground with double yellow lines.

Again, Scotland is ahead of Northern Ireland in dealing with this issue and the opportunity taken to learn and benefit from experiences there. Consideration could also be given to considering whether the issue of enforcing parking infringements at dropped kerbs could be advanced separately to general pavement parking legislation

### **Recommendations**

Based on current Departmental policy and the lived experiences of Deaf people, disabled people and older people Imtac recommends that consultation option 2 – an outright ban (with exemptions) on pavement parking be prioritised. For the Committee legislating for an outright ban sends an unambiguous message about a sustainable transport hierarchy that will prioritise people walking and wheeling. We also believe that ultimately this is the only option that can deliver the type of transformative change in behaviours envisaged by the Department’s “Planning for the Future of Transport” document.

The major concern with the preferred option of the Committee is the timeframe involved in implementation. We are realistic in recognising the scale of the challenges involved. For this reason, we would be keen to have further discussions with the Department about potential interim measures, including experimental schemes in certain towns and cities where there are identified problems associated with pavement parking and / or the possible use of both option 1 and 3 outlined in the paper, which could be introduced to begin to tackle issues whilst the process of an outright ban is progressed.

The Committee recommends that the Department introduces changes that ensure that parking across dropped kerbs can be enforced, given the essential nature of the infrastructure in making the pedestrian environment accessible to disabled people, older people, and others. We would further recommend that options be explored that will ensure a faster introduction of these changes compared with legislating for an outright ban on pavement parking.

A key issue for the successful implementation of any change is messaging to the public and the management of expectations. For those currently impacted by pavement parking it is important not to overestimate the pace of likely changes. For car users it is important not to oversell the impact of the changes involved, for example making clear that an outright ban will include many areas where there will be exemptions from restrictions. The Committee also recommends that a public campaign highlighting the impact of pavement parking continue as legislation is introduced, building on the recent "Think before you park" campaign.