



Comments from Imtac on the revised Equality Scheme for the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company

September 2012

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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. In addition we will provide information in a range of other formats. These formats include:

- Large print
- Audio cassette or CD
- Daisy disc
- Braille
- Electronic copies on disc or via email in PDF or word
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If you would like this publication in any of the formats listed above or if you have any other information requirements please contact:

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About Imtac

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

Our aim 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 Regional Development.

General Comments

Imtac welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Revised Equality Scheme for the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (Nithc). The Committee would like to commend the organisation for the swift and positive response to our request for the consultation papers in alternative formats.

On a general matter whilst Imtac welcomes the recognition given in the consultation paper to the positive engagement between our committee and Translink it needs to be made clear that our remit includes both disabled people and older people. Unless we indicate otherwise our comments in response to the revised Equality Scheme relate to both the age and disability categories.

Imtac also acknowledges that many positive steps have been taken over the past decade to improve access to Translink services for both older people and disabled people. However our main criticism of the consultation paper is that the Audit of Inequalities, Action Plan and action measures are an opportunity to address remaining issues not an opportunity to promote what is being done.

Comments on the Audit of Inequalities

The audit of inequalities needs to be strengthened to reflect the on-going difficulties faced by disabled people and older people accessing public transport services. Available data such as the NISALD survey and uptake and usage of Smartpasses for both older people and disabled people indicates that disabled people in particular are still less likely to use public transport than other sections of society. This is despite the clear improvements and investments in services over the past decade.

The reasons for on-going difficulties are varied and complex. However since 2005 the DRD has produced a succession of Action Plans linked to the Accessible Transport Strategy (ATS). The ATS and related action plans has identified a number of consistent barriers that are preventing older people and disabled people making full use of the transport system including continuing issues with physical access, access to appropriate information, the attitudes of others including staff providing transport services and the cost of travel.

Imtac recommends that the final audit of inequalities recognise that many disabled people and older people continue to face difficulties accessing public transport and that the Action Plan should seek to reduce these difficulties through clearly targeted action measures.

Comments on the Action Plan and measures

As with audit of inequalities Imtac recommends that the Action Plan and measures be strengthened in relation to disabled people and older people with targeted measures that will address the specific barriers experienced by both groups. To assist Nithc Imtac would like to make the following suggestions.

In relation to physical access the requirement for some older people and disabled people to give 24 hours' notice to travel is in itself a strong indicator of inequality and recognition that we have some way to go before we have an inclusive public transport system. Imtac would like the action plan to have a commitment to work with our committee and

others to identify ways that we can reduce the need for passengers to give 24 hours' notice for travel.

Many bus and train stations here have been improved and now provide excellent levels of accessibility. However for many people with a visual impairment the absence of audio announcements at bus stations makes this service difficult to access. Imtac would like the Action Plan to include a measure which commits Nithc to introduce measures that provide passengers with audible information about services at all main bus stations here.

Being able to access information is an essential part of using transport services. Translink has made significant improvements in providing information about the accessibility of services (through the Access Guide) and making information about services more inclusive (through the provision of alternative formats). Imtac would like action plan to contain two measures that build on the progress made to date. Firstly we would like the action plan to commit to reviewing the Access Guide (in conjunction with Imtac) on an annual basis to ensure that information is accurate. Secondly we would like a measure that seeks to raise awareness amongst older people and disabled people of the availability of Translink information in a variety of formats. Imtac would be happy to work with the organisation to develop and implement this action.

In relation to the cost of travel the uptake and usage of concessionary travel by disabled people is very low. Through our own work we are told that many disabled people are unaware of the concessions. We would like the action plan to contain a measure that seeks to raise awareness amongst disabled people and their organisations of the availability of free and half-fare concessions on public transport. Imtac would be happy to assist Nithc develop and implement this action.

Finally in relation to attitudes Imtac has three suggestions. The first relates to the use of positive images of disabled people and older people using Translink services as an action to challenge attitudes of the wider public. The second is the inclusion of action that seeks to influence passenger behaviour in relation to respecting priority seats on bus and

trains, perhaps this could involve a poster campaign on buses and trains. Finally we would like an action included that commits Translink to work with Imtac and others to identify training for staff which improve the service provided to older people and disabled people. Imtac would be happy to help to develop and implement actions in relation to all of the above.

Conclusion

Imtac would like to thank Nithc for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the revised Equality Scheme. We hope our comments are useful. We would welcome the opportunity to provide further information to Nithc on any of the issues we have raised.