



**Comments from Imtac on the consultation on
Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland**

March 2012

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Making our information accessible

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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:

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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.

Comments on the consultation

Imtac welcomes the opportunity to comment on the consultation on Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland. Broadly the Committee supports and welcomes the vision and rationale for promoting active travel in Northern Ireland outlined in the consultation. It is clear that there are significant benefits for society and individuals in increasing the numbers of journeys made through walking and cycling.

The Committee is less certain about how future plans will benefit older people and disabled people. The consultation indicates that the measures will enhance mobility of older people and disabled people¹. However Imtac has found little evidence in the document and the supporting material, including the Equality Impact screening, of (a) barriers that make active travel difficult for disabled people and older people and (b) how the programmes outlined in the documents will benefit older people and disabled people.

There is evidence to suggest that disabled people and older people face additional barriers to making journeys as compared to others in our society. Although impairment can often limit the distance people can travel, these difficulties are often compounded by the nature and design of the built environment². Imtac has been gathering local evidence of the barriers that prevent disabled people and older people making more journeys as pedestrian. As part of our work with DSD around the

¹ Page 9 paragraph 2.7

² For a excellent summary of these issues Sections 2 & 3 of Inclusive Mobility: a Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure published by DfT in 2002

Streets Ahead Project Imtac, AECOM and Disability Action undertook a audit of key walking routes from public transport infrastructure into the city centre³. The subsequent report uncovered numerous examples of barriers that would make using these routes extremely difficult for many disabled and older people. Issues identified included poor design and provision of pedestrian and crossing facilities, poor maintenance of existing facilities, unnecessary and often illegal clutter on pavements as well as problems caused by illegal or inconsiderate parking.

Imtac is currently finalising a broader report looking at barriers in the pedestrian environment based on the experiences of disabled people and older people and the audit of other locations in Northern Ireland. All the evidence to date suggests that for many disabled people the pedestrian environment is a hostile place and that the additional barriers they experience limits broader travel and access to key services and locations to a greater extent than others in our society.

The Committee recommends the final Active Travel Strategy in Northern Ireland contain explicit reference to the specific and additional barriers faced by disabled people and older people to making journeys as pedestrians.

With regard to the programmes outlined in the consultation Imtac is unsure how these will benefit disabled people and older people. The supplementary information indicates that disabled people and older people will benefit from schemes because of adherence to Roads Service Policy and Procedure Guides. Imtac would expect adherence to existing standards as the minimum requirement of any new programme or infrastructure project. However it is our experience that often meeting minimum requirements can be problematic and many additional barriers often arise only when infrastructure is in place (for example issues around maintenance, clutter, illegal parking). The Committee believes that the final active travel plan needs to contain stronger commitments to ensure disabled people and older people benefit from future programmes.

Imtac recommends that the final Active Travel Strategy contain a specific commitment to ensure that all future programmes will be inclusive and acknowledge in particular the requirements of older people and disabled people.

³ Belfast Streets Ahead Quality Walking Corridor Review April 2010
AECOM

The Committee welcomes the Departments commitment to working with others and recognition the need for a cross-sectoral approach in developing active travel in Northern Ireland. We are disappointed that the voice of disabled people and older people has not been heard to date in developing proposals. If the Department share our vision for an inclusive Active Travel Strategy it is essential that Imtac and others are more involved in the process.

Imtac recommends that the Active Travel Strategy recognise Imtac as a source of support, advice and expertise with regard to older people and disabled people and commits more broadly to work with older people disabled people and their organisations.

We are keen to work with the Department and others to ensure that disabled people and older people benefit from the programmes detailed in the consultation paper. Whilst our response has focused primarily on walking we are particularly keen to discuss how existing and future programmes can be made more inclusive, encouraging older people and disabled people to take part in cycling for instance.

There are other areas of active travel where requirements of different users may conflict. For example the laudable aim to increase the number of journeys made to school by cycle may result in increased pavement cycling in these areas. Work undertaken by Guide Dogs⁴ indicates this can be a barrier for some disabled people making journeys as a pedestrian. Similarly the equality screening document indicates that local demonstration schemes may include pedestrianisation. Experiences from places such as Belfast and Coleraine⁵ show that pedestrianisation can create barriers for disabled people and older people by increasing walking distances and reducing access for car users.

It is essential in these cases that programmes balance the needs of both users through dialogue and discussion. Imtac has recently led discussions between Sustrans, cycling organisations and key disability

⁴ TNS-Bmrb “The impact of share surface streets and shared use pedestrian/cycle paths on the mobility and independence of blind and partially sighted people” March 2010

⁵ For a summary of issues see “Access & Mobility Study for Belfast City Centre” (Arup) and the EQIA on “Restricted Zone Access Permits” (Roads Service)

organisations aimed at minimising potential areas of conflict between cyclists and pedestrians. **We recommend the same approach be replicated in a developing a future Active Travel Strategy.**

Conclusion

Intac welcomes the opportunity to respond to the current consultation. We share the vision that more people in Northern Ireland should have the opportunity to make journeys by walking or cycling. We would however like more reassurance that these opportunities will be available to everyone and would ask to meet with officials in the Department to discuss the recommendations we have made.