



**Comments from Imtac on the consultation on
route options for Belfast Rapid Transit**

January 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:

- Large print
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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.

Comments on the Route Options and EQIA

Imtac welcomes the opportunity to comment on the current consultation around route options for the proposed Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT) scheme. The Committee would like to thank the Rapid Transit Team for taking time to brief Imtac members on the consultation and emerging ideas around the characteristics of a future rapid transit scheme.

Imtac is broadly supportive of proposals to develop rapid transit services in Belfast. In general the Committee is supportive of the three routes identified in the consultation and the rationale for selecting these routes with some reservations. In particular reservations centre around how BRT will integrate with existing public transport services in the city and the impact of the services on existing bus services if the routes selected are progressed.

The EQIA associated with the consultation does acknowledge that the proposed routes will mean that services will stop less frequently potentially reducing access for many older people and disabled people to local services. The EQIA suggests that the Department propose to mitigate this impact by allowing local transport services to feed into the rapid transit routes – this includes local buses, taxis and door2door services. Imtac does

not feel that the information provided is sufficient to ensure that people wishing to travel locally are not disadvantaged by the development of BRT.

In addition some of the routes selected are replacing popular Metro bus routes. As more successful bus routes can cross subsidise less profitable routes Imtac is concerned that any loss of revenue resulting from BRT could damage other bus services in the Belfast area. Imtac would like clarification from the Department if this has been considered. The Committee would like the Department to include this issue in the Final EQIA and respond accordingly.

The Committee would also like to express concerns about the overall integration of BRT with bus and rail services serving Belfast. To be successful and useful for many disabled people and older people it is essential for people to be able to move easily between different modes. For disabled people it is essential walking distances between BRT and other forms of transport are acceptable and that routes are accessible and barrier free. For example BRT could provide an invaluable link for people travelling to and from Belfast to attend Belfast Metropolitan College. For many disabled people to avail of this it is vital that BRT halts are close to key public transport destinations such as the Europa Bus centre.

The consultation summary refers to the management of parking along the proposed routes with promotion of short stay parking to provide high turnover of spaces. As many disabled people access facilities through use of the blue badge scheme, the Committee has concerns that many disabled people may find it more difficult to access local facilities and businesses on or adjacent to the proposed routes. Care must be taken in the design of routes to ensure access is maintained to local services and facilities for disabled people who have no alternative but to use their car.

In summary Imtac would like the Department to provide more detail on a broader vision for public transport in Belfast and how BRT will be a part of this overall service before fully endorsing the route proposals. In particular we would like more detail on what bus services will operate in around rapid transit routes and elsewhere in the city and how rapid transit will integrate with key public transport hubs in the city.

Finally the consultation document does raise the issue of characteristics of the service. During discussions with officials members have raised some concerns about the accessibility of new technology in relation to ticketing with regard to disabled people and older people. We would like to reiterate these concerns and would ask the Department to continue to work with us during the development and design processes to ensure all aspects of service remain accessible and inclusive.