



Imtac statement on step free transport

December 2013

Imtac is committed to making information about our work accessible. Details of how to obtain information in your preferred format are included on the next page.

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
- Easy read

We will also provide information about our work in other languages if you require this.

If you would like this publication in any of the formats listed above or if you have any other information requirements please contact:

Michael Lorimer
Imtac
Enterprise House
55-59 Adelaide Street
Belfast BT2 8FE

Telephone/Textphone: 028 9072 6020

Fax: 028 9024 5500

Email: info@imtac.org.uk

About us

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.

Background

The past decade has seen tremendous improvements to the accessibility of transport services in Northern Ireland. Legislation, changes to policy and investment has seen the introduction of modern bus and rail services as well as additional services such as rural Dial-a-lift and Disability Action Transport Services (formerly Door2Door transport). From the perspective of Imtac these changes have been positive and have increased travel choice for disabled people and older people.

However the current design of transport infrastructure, vehicles and services can still make travel difficult for some older and disabled people. In particular the continued prevalence of steps on vehicles and infrastructure are a major barrier to travel. Imtac has developed this statement to affirm our position that to be truly inclusive and accessible the future transport system in Northern Ireland should be step-free.

Statement on step free transport

The Regional Transportation Strategy (2002) contained the important commitment from Government to build in accessibility for disabled people as a condition of public money being spent¹. Subsequently the Accessible Transport Strategy (2005) committed Government to ensure that best practice accessible design was followed when providing public

¹ Paragraph 7.4.12

transport infrastructure or vehicles including those used on alternative services².

In depth international research by amongst others Agneta Stahl and Philip Oxley³ has demonstrated how the absence of steps in a basic requirement in accessible transport system. The research has shown the maximum entrance step to a vehicle should be no greater than 250mm in height and ideally less than this. Steps of greater heights and further steps inside the vehicles will mean more and more passengers will have difficulties using transport services. Passengers who find steps a barrier include disabled people, older people, people with young children in buggies, people with injuries and temporary impairment and people with luggage and shopping.

The majority of buses operated by Translink are low-floor designed to minimise the step at the entrance. The benefits of low-floor buses are sometimes diminished by the absence of appropriate bus stop infrastructure. For operational reasons many Ulsterbus and Goldline services continue to use coaches with a number of steps at the entrance. Alternative access is provided on these vehicles for wheelchair users.

Different types of vehicles are used to deliver alternative services such as rural dial-a-lift and Disability Action Transport Services. Currently only one of the vehicles used to deliver these services is a low-floor small bus. All other small buses have access by a number of steps. Some services are delivered using wheelchair accessible taxis. Not only do these vehicles have stepped access but they also have restricted head height at the entrances to and within the interior of the vehicle.

Investment in the rail network has again been positive with new infrastructure and modern rolling stock. Despite these changes passengers are often confronted with a significant step onto trains from

² Policies 10 & 11

³ See for example MPV (MultiBuss) 1997-98 Westerlund & Ståhl, Taxi for All 1998-2002 Oxley & Ståhl, The Determination of Accessible Taxi Requirements, 2004 Richardson & Yelding

platforms as well as a gap between platform and train and step free access is not available at all halts.

Imtac is encouraged by the development of proposals for Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT). There is a clear recognition from policy makers that step free access is an essential component of the service for the benefit of all passengers not just disabled people and older people

Imtac acknowledges there are reasons why steps remain a significant feature on our transport network. However their prevalence mean services often do not meet basic passenger requirements. This often means that passengers including disabled people and older people have difficulty using transport services, have to make particular arrangements to travel including giving prior notice or have to be accommodated through alternative access arrangements (such as passenger lifts at the side or rear of vehicles) that are less than satisfactory. This means that often access afforded to disabled people and older people (and others including parents with prams) is not on a par with other passengers.

Most people would agree that step-free access is essential in making buildings accessible to all. Imtac believes there is no reason why the same principles should not apply to transport. In light of the recent changes of approach by DRD to developing Regional Transportation and the drawing to a close of the current Accessible Transportation Strategy and wider Government commitments around the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Imtac believes the time is now right renew the vision and plans for developing a fully inclusive and accessible transport system. Imtac believes that stepped access to transport services is incompatible with such a vision. The Committee recommends that future DRD policies be guided by the following principles:

- A fully inclusive and accessible public transport system that is one that is step free
- Progressively moving towards a fully low-floor bus fleet in Northern Ireland

- Improving bus stop infrastructure to reduce step heights onto vehicles
- New infrastructure such as Belfast Rapid Transit should be step-free in its entirety
- All current and future alternative services funded by DRD should use low-floor small buses that are compliant with DPTAC Guidelines
- Improved access to the rail network by reducing and removing stepped access at stations and onto trains
- Continued engagement with organisations of disabled people (including Imtac) when investing future in transport infrastructure, vehicles and services