



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

Transport Bill

5 October 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Fred Cobain (Chairperson)
Miss Michelle McIlveen (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Allan Bresland
Mr Cathal Boylan
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Conall McDevitt

Witnesses:

Mr Peter Bunting	)	Northern Ireland Council of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Ms Anne Doherty	)	Belfast City Council
Mr Keith Sutherland)	
Ms Joan Devlin	)	Belfast Healthy Cities
Ms Jonna Monaghan)	
Ms Claire Higgins	)	Institute of Public Health in Ireland
Dr Jane Wilde)	
Mr JP Irvine	)	Translink
Mr Ciaran Rogan)	
Mr Michael Lorimer	)	Inclusive Mobility and Transport Committee
Mr David McDonald)	
Mrs Karen Magill	)	Federation of Passenger Transport
Mr John Smith)	
Ms Sonya McAnulla	)	Omagh District Council

Ms Kate McCullough	)	Office of the Older People’s Advocate for Northern Ireland
Mr Robert McKnight	)	Lisburn City Council
Mr David McMurray	)	Unite, the Union
Mr Aodhan O'Donnell	)	The Consumer Council
Mr Ryan Simpson)	
Ms Helen Richmond	)	Northern Ireland Local Government Association
Mr Tom Wilson	)	Freight Transport Association
Mr Stephen Wood	)	Stephen Wood Consultancy
Mr Brian White)	
Ms Astrid Stuart	)	Department for Regional Development
Mr Sean Johnston)	

The Chairperson (Mr Cobain):

Thank you all for coming to Parliament Buildings for this evidence-gathering session this evening. As you are aware, the aim of the Bill is to create an effective, efficient and sustainable transport system for us all, and members of the Committee are, obviously, very interested in that. The Bill was introduced in the Assembly on 21 June; passed its Second Stage on 29 June, and the Committee Stage began on 30 June. The Committee asked for additional time, and was given an extension until 17 December, when it will report to the Assembly. We expect that the remaining plenary sessions of the legislative process will take place during January and February next year.

The Committee has received responses to its call for evidence from 22 organisations, many of which are represented here this evening. I take the opportunity to thank you all for your submissions. We required that responses be structured to reflect the 50 clauses of the Bill, and it is proposed that we follow the same approach today. The Committee Clerk will call each organisation to respond on the clauses.

As time is limited, I ask you to keep your comments succinct and that follow-on questions are as short and to the point as possible. We do not want a repeat of what happens in the Assembly, where we get a speech from each Member before we get a question. If we get quickly to the

point, we can get through a greater number of questions in the time we have allocated this evening. I will call for responses to clause 1, and then we will go through the Bill on a clause-by-clause basis.

The Committee Clerk:

For clause 1, the following individuals have indicated that they would like to speak: Stephen Wood, from Stephen Wood Consultancy; Karen Magill, from the Federation of Passenger Transport; Belfast Healthy Cities; the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC); Translink; NITHCo; the Institute of Public Health in Ireland; Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. We will just take them in the order that they are here.

Mr Stephen Wood (Stephen Wood Consultancy):

I am a professional transport planner. Clause 1(1) states:

“The Department must secure the provision of public passenger transport services with due regard to economy, efficiency and safety of operation.”

I propose that wording should be added to the effect that the Department must prepare local public transport plans. That would offer the opportunity to integrate the specification and delivery of public transport into local transport and land use planning practice. That approach is applied currently in the South of Ireland, most recently through the Public Transport Regulation Act 2008, and in Great Britain, where the Local Transport Act 2008 also includes wording with regard to the need for a local transport plan.

Further, I believe that the Department is well aware of the need for the development of local public transport plans, as was stated in the final report on the public consultation. The Department notes the advantages of including a statutory duty to consult on local plans. However, strangely, due to the doubt about RPA, the issue of statutory provision for the Department to prepare local transport plans seems to have disappeared as we have gone forward.

Finally, I argue that the lack of a statutory requirement for transport plans, in particular, and for a clearly defined transport planning process, in general, has contributed to ongoing problems of policy slippage. For example, the balance of highway and public transport that is being implemented has slipped from the balance that was proposed under the regional transport strategy. Given further delays in the reorganisation of public administration and the need for

financial austerity, I am concerned that there is a danger that, with no statutory owner of local transport plans, those plans might not be given sufficient priority and their production may be delayed or not undertaken. That would work against the planning and delivery of an efficient and sustainable transport system, which, I think, we all agree is a prerequisite for a successful Northern Ireland.

Mrs Karen Magill (Federation of Passenger Transport):

As a representative organisation, we brought together a number of members when considering the Bill. These are the comments that they made. I will comment, in particular, on clause 1(2)(f), which permits the Department to exploit any commercial opportunities it considers appropriate in securing the provision of public transport services. Although there is strong agreement that the Department should be able to exploit any commercial opportunities, it was considered that it should do so only under certain conditions and not where there is direct competition with transport providers. It could be permissible in a specific area of activity such as advertising. However, if it happens in direct competition, the exploitation of commercial activities could cloud what is socially necessary and cause problems between operators.

Ms Joan Devlin (Belfast Healthy Cities):

In considering the Bill, as a World Health Organization healthy city that works to promote and address the social determinants of health in relation to people's well-being and quality of life, we note that public transport providers should also take account of the following: how economic the service provided for passengers and potential passengers is; how transport plays a fundamental role in providing access to jobs, services, leisure services and health appointments; and the key role that public transport has in contributing to overall quality of life, particularly that of vulnerable groups. We note, for example, the percentage of householders in Belfast who are not private car owners.

For example, a new route may improve people's access to jobs and services. In some cases, new job opportunities may become viable with a new or additional service provided in rural areas. That contributes directly to the Programme for Government aim of a fair and prosperous Northern Ireland.

A mechanism for gaining views would, therefore, support the objective of an economically sound and sustainable public transport system. We particularly ask that the Bill considers the

economic costs of public transport.

Mr David McDonald (Inclusive Mobility and Transport Committee):

We are concerned about the following words in clause 1:

“economy, efficiency and safety of operation”

The word “equality” should be included, and possibly “inclusion”, because the disparate groups that may need to use public transport need to be taken into account. The words need to be included at the beginning of the Bill. The word “equality” probably best incorporates equality of opportunity and inclusion and brings the concept of social inclusion into the transport system, which is not in the Bill.

Ms Sonya McAnulla (Omagh District Council):

On behalf of Omagh District Council, I thank you for the invitation to present evidence. Omagh District Council fully supports the main purpose of the Bill, which is to create an effective, efficient and sustainable public transport system.

The provision of public transport is a key issue for the council, particularly the deficit in public transport infrastructure in rural areas. That has resulted in a significant dependency on private cars, and in more isolated areas has adversely impacted on social inclusion and economic prosperity. Omagh District Council therefore wishes to see rural transport given priority and being adequately resourced in the reform process and in the implementation of the Bill.

Public transport is a key service to the community and to the sustainable economy of Northern Ireland. Omagh District Council is keen to promote sustainable development and hopes that the Bill will give due consideration to the economic, social and environmental factors associated with a more sustainable future. That can be achieved only by joined-up, cross-departmental and cross-agency working to ensure that public transport reform is not taken forward in isolation, but as an integral component of meeting the key economic, social and environmental objectives of the Executive.

Although value for money is important, it must be balanced against factors such as the role of public transport, connectivity and equity across the Province, and overcoming social isolation in rural areas.

Omagh District Council notes that clause 1 imposes a duty on the Department to secure the provision of public transport services in Northern Ireland, and provides the mechanism to do so through service agreements and service permits. It also notes, and welcomes, the provision in clause 1 to create an offence to operate unregulated services.

With regard to the power designated to the Department to regulate fares, and provide vehicles, ticketing machines and systems, the council is keen to ensure that the Department, in doing so, takes cognisance of the need to make public transport an attractive alternative to private transport. So, it must be an affordable, value-for-money, healthier and safer option. It must also be readily available. Therefore, accessibility and availability must be priorities. It must also be convenient. So, booking tickets and paying fares must be made easy.

Those factors are more important in rural areas, where at present it is easier to step into a private car or taxi than contemplate a number of transfers and an extended journey time due to fragmented connections between cities, towns and villages. In some rural areas, the non-availability of public transport to the nearest town or village is an obstacle to connectivity for those travelling to work, or to town for whatever reason.

As you know, local government will take the lead role for future community planning. Therefore, it is imperative that a more integrated approach to public transport is taken when planning public transport on a strategic as well as local level. There needs to be a seamless transition from strategic to local-level transport planning so that continuity and accessibility is assured across the North of Ireland.

In doing so, public confidence in the use of public transport will be increased. In the absence of an appropriate service, it is impossible to encourage or convince commuters that public transport is a good alternative to car journeys.

Omagh District Council believes that community transport has a vital and integral role to play in the development of a sustainable transport plan. Properly utilised and funded, community transport has the potential to fill the gaps and complement the existing services as well as to contribute to the local economy. For example, people from the Omagh District Council area who need to visit an acute hospital for an appointment or to visit sick relatives or friends, and who live in the outlying towns, villages or hinterland, have to journey to Enniskillen, Derry, Craigavon or

Belfast. Such a journey by bus often necessitates transfers at set points which add to the journey time, or lacks a service running to and from the hospital at the times appropriate for appointments or visiting, particularly in the evening.

We acknowledge that it is impossible to have complete coverage in rural areas, but linkages need to be explored further with rural transport partnerships in the area or other private sector providers to try to address those gaps. The council encourages the development of partnership arrangements to take forward that initiative, particularly in the rural areas.

Omagh District Council welcomes the introduction of the Transport Bill and its contents. It trusts that the Department will take into consideration the needs of the rural areas and prioritise their transport requirements. Local government is happy to work with the Department and other agencies towards the development of a strategic public transportation plan, which in turn will help inform the development of the local community plans.

Mr McDevitt:

I would like to clarify something? In your opening remarks, Ms McAnulla, you said that you wanted the Bill to give priority to rural transport. Are you asking us to legislate to give priority to rural transport over other types of public transport?

Ms McAnulla:

I mean that rural transport should be one of the priorities that should be taken into consideration. Rural transport should be high on the priority list.

Mr J P Irvine (Translink):

Good afternoon. I am the head of the legal department at Translink. We have three broad points to make on clause 1. I will try to be as succinct as I can.

I begin with a general point, relating to the entirety of clause 1. The powers taken in clause 1(2) are extensive and are no doubt considered necessary. We would like clarity on the extent of the split between the powers that the DRD is taking as our sponsor Department and those that it is taking on behalf of the agency that is due to come into place.

Roles and responsibilities in the Bill are of key importance; and clarity is also important. We

suggested in our response that an information memorandum might be produced. The Committee may want it for its own benefit, or it might seek from the Department some explanation as to how it envisages the agency working, how it views those powers and what it intends to do to make good on them.

Getting down to specifics, I ask the Committee to note clause 1(2)(d), which looks at the DRD determining:

“the general level and structure of fares for services provided under a service agreement or a service permit”.

Fares will be an important part of the Bill and of the agency. We want people to recognise that there are loss-making routes in the network. Fares are to be set by the agency, but it will be hard to sustain some of those loss-making routes if fares are set at a low level. A joined-up approach with the regulator and other stakeholders will be vital to ensure that fares are not set at a really tough level that will make a company like Translink think about whether it can continue to operate those services. That is going to have to be resolved.

One of the other stakeholders has already mentioned clause 1(2)(f), which is the power:

“to exploit any commercial opportunities which the Department considers appropriate.”

That is important for the Department, as it strives in the current climate to make as much as it can from any holdings it will take. Translink has a holding company, the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHCo), which was set up in 1967 to hold all the assets it needs to operate the network.

We hope that there will be no overlaps or conflicts between the holding company at the head of Translink and the agency regarding who owns what, and who manipulates and develops each opportunity as they come along. We have no particular objection to any of this, but we want to put our views on the record, so that the Committee for Regional Development can take account of them as it reaches its views.

One or two confusing messages have come from different sources, including the research paper that was produced for the Committee on 27 August. That paper suggested that the point of the Bill is to take control of the functions currently undertaken by NITHCo and its subsidiaries. That is probably true in one or two small respects, but, overall, NITHCo and Translink’s roles will not be diminished, and our roles will not go away. Therefore, returning to what I said at the beginning of my contribution, the clarification of roles is key. I will leave it there for now. No

doubt we will have more points to make later.

Mr Boylan:

On the issue of fares, no matter what route the Bill takes, it should be viable and not involve cherry-picking. The previous speaker is from a rural area. How would you propose, using your experience, to address the issues and ensure that there is better service delivery in rural areas?

Mr Irvine:

Cherry-picking is something that we are also a little concerned about. The devil in the detail will be confirmed once the public service contracts and agreements — which we will talk about later — are mapped out. Once we see the detail of those we will understand what routes Translink will have ownership of and responsibility for. We do not know the details of what our mandate will be yet, but Committee members need to have some of the loss-making, or less remunerative, routes at the forefront of their minds and keep their eyes on the ball with respect to those.

Mr Ciaran Rogan (Translink):

We will come to the issue of cherry-picking when we speak about the contracts for services that are covered under clause 6. However, it is an issue that is foremost in our minds, because the research paper to the Committee highlighted that regulated fares do not necessarily mean lower fares, and that, in fact, introducing competition has actually reduced services in some areas in GB. There is an overall issue about the protection of the network, which will have to be taken into account when fares are set and contracts made.

Mr Wood:

That relates to the issue I raised about the need for a comprehensive plan that includes the whole network of services. That will allow us to understand which routes are feeding others, how they link with other forms of public transport and how they interface with the cost of travel by car to town centres and car parking charges, etc. That is where the transport plan comes into its own.

Mr Boylan:

Do you agree that two of the key elements are the provision and quality of service and value for money?

Mr Wood:

Yes. If a transport plan is formulated, one will be able to calculate the value for money for the plan as a whole, understand what is contributing to what, and understand it in the round.

Mr Michael Lorimer (Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee):

Following on from what has been said; we highlighted the need for the inclusion of inclusion issues — for want of a better phrase. The concept from GB of accessibility planning was incorporated into local transport planning there, but it has not been thought of in this process. If inclusion were one of the stated priorities in the Bill, and we had to pay due regard to it, we could start to look at things like accessibility planning in our transport plans.

Mr Keith Sutherland (Belfast City Council):

I will be very brief, because the points that I want to make have been picked up by other contributors. The general issues for the council are co-ordination and the role of councils in future structures and mechanisms. The issue of co-ordination through local transport plans, which was raised Mr Wood, is of significant concern to councils because it is about maximising the value of those services for users and for the city of Belfast. In future, co-ordination will align with the additional powers for community planning and the power of well-being that the council will receive under the ongoing transformation process for councils. Those are important considerations for the council. The formal role for councils has not, at this stage, been mapped out, save for a brief consultative role that is mentioned in some of the clauses in the Transport Bill.

Mr Peter Bunting (Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions):

At the outset, I should say that I am concerned sometimes when multiple individuals make submissions that may be contrary to the submission from the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC ICTU). NIC ICTU represents 230,000 people in Northern Ireland. Those people, as well as the members of 34 affiliated organisations, are transport users. We speak as one, as a collective, but we are representative of a lot of people.

We have a major difficulty with the Transport Bill in its current form. We see no need to hive off and start dividing the public transport operation into a deregulated system. Under EU regulation 1370/2007, any public authority that chooses to continue to operate its own public transport services, either directly or through its own internal operator, or, indeed, chooses to do so

in the future, will come under this regulation. There is an exclusive right to operate; no other operator is permitted to compete. In other words, the entire operation can be allocated to Translink, as is the case currently. We favour that methodology.

In our experience, in GB and in other countries, where there are many operators on the pitch, there is less integration and more difficulties with the operation of public transport. We have difficulties with clause 1. We advocate the EU regulations being adhered to through the awarding of a direct contract to Translink, to ensure that public service contracts are transparent and consistent in the provision of an efficient and quality service, which also includes social cohesion, and, for that matter, is under democratic control. We are particularly concerned that there are undoubtedly people who wish to operate public transport services for the sole purpose of gaining profit. I am concerned that public money may be used to provide vehicles, ticketing machines, systems and other facilities for private interests to profit from public transport.

I will wait until the next section of the discussion to talk about service agreements.

Ms Claire Higgins (Institute of Public Health in Ireland):

Today, all our responses relate to clause 1. We have three key points to make. The first is to do with the relationship between transport and health and how transport systems can contribute to good health or poor health. Transport is of key importance to health, because it contributes to social interaction. It is hugely important that people can maintain links with one another, and transport has an effect on access to services such as education, employment and healthcare. It also has an influence on exercise levels. A strong public transport system can improve health by helping to create a society that is health and wealth generating. However, transport can also impact less favourably on health when it comes to air and noise quality. It can create emissions that contribute to climate change, which, as we know, in the short and long term, is not favourable to good health. Transport services can also be involved in road traffic collisions.

There has been a significant growth in non-communicable diseases in Northern Ireland, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and stroke. The institute recently conducted a piece of work from which we identified that those diseases would increase from 20% to 30% by 2020, which is quite alarming. Behind those statistics lies an obesity epidemic, with which I am sure the Committee is familiar. The institute believes that the Transport Bill can enhance opportunities for physical activity that can assist the Executive in halting the rise in those

diseases. For example, in accessing public transport, people walk or cycle for about 20 minutes on average, which constitutes two thirds of the recommended 30 minutes of physical activity each day. Therefore, a more attractive public transport system can increase physical activity.

The second point, which has been covered quite a lot today, is that transport systems are an essential element of creating a more equitable society that cares for the needs of the most vulnerable. The Transport Bill can ensure that Northern Ireland has a safe, equitable and efficient transport service for all. However, in achieving that, we must take into consideration the different needs of different users.

Low income groups are more likely to use public transport. Therefore, there must be an efficient service that is cost effective and reliable. It must also provide choice, to ensure that those groups are not further excluded from opportunities and access to services.

We are happy that there is free transport for older people, but that transport needs to be accessible so that that group can be socially connected. We have also heard today about how transport provision differs in rural and urban communities. The Transport Bill must recognise the health inequalities that exist, to ensure that the difference in health outcomes is not widened further.

My third point is that the current transport policy is heavily focused on and development-structured for the motorised vehicle, and that must be complemented with measures to support other means of travel, such as walking and cycling. Active travel is part of the sustainable transport system, which supports movement without motorised means. Greenhouse gases have increased in Northern Ireland, and 84% of our travel-to-work journeys are by private vehicle. The institute contributed to the sustainable transport inquiry held earlier this year, which highlighted the fact that we need to tackle greenhouse gas emissions and our dependency on fossil fuels by reducing our over-dependency on the private car. Therefore, the Transport Bill has a responsibility to ensure that a public transport system is efficient, attractive, affordable, and well supported, so that people can recognise that it is a real alternative to private transport.

The Committee Clerk:

That concludes discussion on clause 1(1). You will be glad to hear that none of the other clauses has as many people making as many points.

We will move on to clause 2, which Mr Peter Bunting from NIC ICTU will speak on. Belfast City Council has indicated that it wishes to speak on clauses 3, 4 and 5.

Mr Sutherland:

That is probably a mistake in our submission. We had a general comment and we were not sure which clause it applied to. We have no further comment on clauses 3 to 12. We have nothing to add until Part 6.

The Committee Clerk:

OK, thank you.

Mr Bunting:

We have a number of problems with service agreements. I have already spelt out that our experience has been that when a form of deregulation is implemented, particularly by small operators, there is a tendency to twist and move on to where they can get better takings in adherence to their contract.

The freedom of information requests that we have received over the past seven years have highlighted the fact that HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), the compliant body for non-payment of the minimum wage, has discovered that those who do not comply with the minimum wage are generally in small and medium-sized enterprises. According to HMRC, over 60% of the locations visited were not in conformity with paying the national minimum way. There is a huge difficulty with that, and we are concerned about the employment rights of people who are employed by private contractors. Apart from that, there is an instrument under the EU tendering system and procurement regulations that states that employment rights must be adhered to and licences that are in breach of that could be revoked.

We also maintain from experience that applicants for an operator's licence must be subject to a rigorous test of their professional ability, competence, financial security and other assessments commensurate with the provision of an efficient, high-quality service. The reason for that is that many people who have undertaken public service contracts have not been able to live up to them and may have gotten into financial difficulties. With that, the services have been withdrawn from the road and no one is left to provide that particular service. People from rural areas should bear

that in mind.

Mr McDevitt:

Thank you, Peter. I was curious to hear your reference to European Union regulations that could cause licences to be revoked if licensees do not pay due regard to employment law. Do you have details of those regulations?

Mr Bunting:

I can supply the Committee with the relevant clauses in the EU procurement regulations.

Mr McDevitt:

That would be helpful. Do you have any opinion on whether it would be possible to make the granting of service agreements or permits conditional on service providers complying with or behaving to a certain standard of employment law?

Mr Bunting:

There is no problem with that in accordance with EU regulations. I will send you a paper that covers all those issues. There is nothing to prevent EU procurement legislation from ensuring that those who are awarded tenders employ apprentices or, indeed, the long-term unemployed.

The Chairperson:

I reinforce what Conall said. We identified that issue to the Department already. As the Committee goes through the Bill, we will make some amendments if necessary. The minimum wage and paying people what they are entitled to is a big issue for the Committee, and we have spoken to the Department about that already.

The Committee Clerk:

We do not have indications from people that they wish to speak to clauses 3, 4 or 5, so we move to clause 6. I ask people to focus their remarks on the key points that they wish to make in relation to their written submissions, which we already have. I am conscious that we have a lot more clauses to get through, and we want to hear from everybody. I will call in the following order: Stephen Wood Consultancy, the Federation of Passenger Transport, Belfast Healthy Cities, IMTAC, Translink, Belfast City Council, NIC ICTU and Unite.

Mr Wood:

Clause 6 is entitled “Matters to which Department must have regard”. I would like the first matter to include references to the relevant local public transport plans, to provide that clarity. I will take up some of the points that some of the other witnesses mentioned. The preparation of a local transport plan would take account of relevant policy documents such as the regional development strategy, the regional transportation strategy, local development plans and so on. It would also conventionally assess any of the network options against a number of standard objectives, including economics, safety, environment, accessibility and integration with other policies, and allow a calculation of costs and benefits and hence allow transparency in decision-making. That is just to reinforce what a transport plan is about, because, until now, I had not made that point, and I do not want to be misunderstood.

With respect to “Matters to which Department must have regard”, although this may be a bit belt and braces, I propose that references to policy documents such as the Department for Regional Development’s ‘Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002-2012’ and other documents that relate to sustainable development and transport should be included. That would be entirely consistent with legislation in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, and it would embed public transport networks in land-use and transport planning.

Mrs K Magill:

In discussions about clause 6, our members had different understandings of the meaning of clause 6(1):

“In deciding whether to issue or refuse a permit or to attach conditions to a permit, the Department shall in particular have regard (where appropriate) to the following matters–

- (a) the suitability of the routes on which the service may be provided under the permit;”

They require clarification on “the suitability of the route”. Does that mean, for example, that it is suitable to carry passengers or, operationally, to provide a smaller vehicle on a route due to health and safety considerations or the type of road? We require clarification on what that means and on the criteria that might be considered.

Ms Jonna Monaghan (Belfast Healthy Cities):

We note that clause 6, “Matters to which Department must have regard”, does not include users or potential users of services. Including that category would have many benefits, such as generating trust and helping the process to be seen as open and democratic. In addition, it would generate information that might improve decision-making, which relates to the issues that have

been mentioned today. For example, installing a new route might improve access to jobs, and conversely, removing a route might make some jobs impossible to access. In addition, drastic fare increases could impact on people's ability to participate in society and to socialise with other people, particularly older and younger people, who have less access to private transport. In short, having a mechanism for gaining the views of users would support the objective of developing an economically sustainable and sound public transport system and contribute to a prosperous Northern Ireland.

Mr McDonald:

With respect to "Matters to which Department must have regard", particular regard must be paid to existing legislation and policies. In particular, all section 75 categories should be taken into account. In addition, we should look not just at the suitability of the routes on which a service is to be provided but at the suitability of the vehicles that will be provided on any given service, depending on whether the service is rural or urban or aimed at disabled people, older people or children, and so on. Some thought must be given to the type of vehicle that is provided. Although vehicles are increasingly becoming more accessible, they are not all accessible. They might be by the time the Bill is enacted, but certain vehicles suit some people more than others, so the suitability of vehicles should be included.

Beyond section 75, there are the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 transport regulations, as introduced in 2010, which we fought hard to get. Those should be included as part of the process. The accessible transport strategy should also be a major element of the Transport Bill, to indicate that disabled people and older people are being properly included.

The Chairperson:

One of the big issues driving the Committee is the accessibility of public transport. Public transport should be accessible to everyone. That is a common theme that we have. We have talked to the Department about why audio-visual aids will not be available on buses and about access to integrated ticketing for individuals and how that will apply, particularly for people who are blind. As far as we are concerned, you are pushing at an open door on all those issues. The commitment from the Committee is that we want to see public transport made accessible to everyone. We are taking on board as many of the issues that you have raised with us as we possibly can. As a Committee, we cannot understand why the issue of audio-visual aids has not

been tackled by the Department.

Mr McDonald:

It is on its way.

The Chairperson:

It has been on its way, as you know, for a number of years, yet it is still not here.

Mr McDonald:

It is not just about the accessibility of vehicles. The accessibility of services is also important.

The Chairperson:

Absolutely. There is a whole range of issues. The Committee is pushing as hard as we can to make sure that public transport is available to all.

Mr McDevitt:

David, you talked about the suitability of vehicles and the suitability of routes. Do you think that those should be given the same weight in the legislation?

Mr McDonald:

Yes. Without both, it cannot work. A while back, we had a problem with somebody claiming that their service was accessible, but, as I tried to explain, it was their vehicles that were accessible, not the service. For example, take the situation in which somebody in a wheelchair or an older person on a Zimmer frame lives at the bottom of a hill. No matter how accessible a bus is, if the bus stop is halfway up the hill, that person cannot get on the bus because they cannot get up the hill. Therefore, it is not just the vehicles that must be accessible, it is the service. We need to begin with accessible vehicles and then make the services accessible.

Mr Rogan:

I will start by endorsing the point about accessibility. When service permits are given out, due regard should be given to accessibility requirements. We have gone a long way towards improving the accessibility of the network generally in Northern Ireland, and any additional service permits should not reduce that level of accessibility. There should be a general improvement as opposed to a diminution.

I would go further and say that when service permits are being considered, another area that should be regarded is the general level of quality. Translink services and its network are bound by reasonably strict passenger's charter quality requirements. A lot of money has been invested to achieve those quality requirements, and any service permits given out should not be to the detriment of current standards. Similarly, any service permits given out should not be to the degradation of the integration of the existing network or to its scope and extent.

That picks up on the more general point of cherry-picking. When service permits are given to individual operators, specific regard should be given to any potential negative impact that that may have on other parts of the network that are, in essence, cross-subsidised by profitable parts of the network. Cherry-picking and cross-subsidy need to be taken full account of.

When it comes to having due regard for issues when giving service permits, a completely different point relates to the railways. Unfortunately, as we have seen over the summer, Northern Ireland is not beyond suffering from what could be called, in the widest sense, civil disturbances. We have seen large sections of the railway network closed down over the summer because of civil disturbance in certain areas. When service permits are given out they should take due account of the possibility of such events and should also have regard for those who are expert in dealing with such events and putting services back again.

Mr Bunting:

I will be very brief and will just make two points. We share the concerns about accessibility. It is a public service, and it should meet a public need. The other point relates to clause 6(1)(d), which states:

“the general effect which the grant of the permit would be expected to have on –
(i) other holders of permits;”.

More importantly, there is no mention of those who are currently employed, which is a vast number of people who have been there for years and have given public service, particularly at times throughout the conflict, when they serviced the public by driving their buses through all sorts of mayhem. Yet that part of the clause mentions everybody — the dog, his dinner and his wife — except the people who are currently employed. There is no reference at all to the workers currently employed.

The Committee Clerk:

I also call on the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to speak to clause 7.

The Chairperson:

You are getting a good run today, Peter.

Mr Bunting:

I always get a good run, Fred. In relation to clause 7, we have a huge difficulty with licences and the duration of them. Perfect competition does not work in economic terms within public transport. In many senses, public transport is, by its nature, monopolistic. That has been proven when people have attempted to introduce perfect competition. The difficulty that we have is that some of that needs to be more stringent. Although there may well be some degree of penalty for those who renege on their existing permit, there is a difficulty with that. If someone declares themselves bankrupt, how do they pay the penalty? You cannot get blood out of a turnip. There are difficulties with that situation, which is why we are straight on the fact that there should be one direct award for everyone.

If necessary, if there are efficiencies for auxiliary-type buses on weekends or whatever, they should do what Bus Éireann did in the Republic of Ireland and play the small private contractors on to the pitch in a subcontracted role. That utilises the livelihoods of those who are subcontracted and would give them a role in beefing up the normal services, particularly at peak times and, perhaps, in rural areas.

Mr McDonald:

Clause 7(1) states that:

“A permit shall, unless previously revoked, continue in force”.

I have a concern about the reference to the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 in subparagraph (6)(b) of clause 7, because that Order refers to someone who is diagnosed as having, or perceived as having, a mental health problem. The definition in that Order is somewhat iffy. Some people who are seen for mental health issues might not necessarily have those in the end. I have some concerns that people could jump in there too quickly.

I appreciate that it comes from a particular health Order, but it needs to be looked at, because we know well enough now that mental health problems include things like stress and depression,

and people working in today's modern society can fairly quickly become stressed and depressed. We do not want to be knocking somebody out who needs to stay in the job and who may have done a good job and could continue to do so with the right support and help. It needs to be revisited.

The Committee Clerk:

If there are no further comments, we will move on.

There has been no indication that anyone wants to speak about clauses 8 to 17; therefore, we will move on to clause 18. That clause is in Part 2 of the Bill, which deals with buses, taxis and trains. The first person to speak will be the representative from Lisburn City Council, who wants to speak about clauses 18, 19 and 20.

Mr Robert McKnight (Lisburn City Council):

I thank the Chairperson and members of the Committee for the opportunity to come along and speak to them. Lisburn City Council's issues arose from the recent consultation by the DOE on the future of bus operating licensing in Northern Ireland. The draft consultation identified that the DRD and the DOE would have different tasks, with the DRD dealing with the bus operating licences that are included in the Bill. Lisburn City Council submitted its view to the DOE on the future of bus operating licensing during the previous consultation exercise and submitted similar views to the DRD during the consultation on the Transport Bill.

Lisburn City Council supports improving road safety and supports any measures to achieve that. However, the council is concerned about cross-border licensing, and whether if someone is licensed in Northern Ireland they are OK to travel in the South. If an operator takes passengers from Northern Ireland to a destination in the South will they be covered? Similarly, will those in the South be properly covered when they enter Northern Ireland?

Another point also relates to two Departments dealing with similar issues on bus operator licensing. The council wants to ensure that there is very close co-operation and contact between the Departments in taking forward both pieces of legislation.

Finally, Lisburn City Council continues to run a community minibus service. It also supports Lagan Valley Rural Transport through funding, and that service also receives funding from the DRD. The council is keen to ensure that bus operating licensing is brought forward correctly for

those types of service.

The Committee Clerk:

Thank you very much. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions indicated an interest in those clauses, but its representative has now withdrawn his intention to speak.

The Committee will now move on to discuss clauses 21 and 22. Clause 21 amends the Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and clause 22 deals with the provision of rail services. We will not group those clauses and will take them separately. Lisburn City Council indicated that it wished to speak on clauses 21 and 22, but its representative has now withdrawn his intention to speak. I call the representative from Translink.

Mr Rogan:

Clause 21 goes some way towards modernising the Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. We ask whether there is merit in more formally including taxi regulation in public transport and transport policy generally in relation to the regulation of fares, information and quality standards. It is notable that the National Transport Authority has been set up in the Republic of Ireland, and that it will subsume the powers of the Taxi Regulator there. We contend that public transport, in its broadest sense, includes taxi provision. That is particularly so in Northern Ireland, and if we apply regulation on public transport, it should also be applied to the taxis sector.

It is interesting that similar agencies, such as Transport for London, include things, such as cycling, in their remit that are not in the remit of the agency here. We ask whether there is an opportunity to take a more holistic view of public transport, and transport generally, and extend the remit of the agency.

Clause 22 is an attempt to modernise the legislation associated with the operation of railways. That modernisation is welcome and we have no objections to it.

The Committee Clerk:

We will now move on to clauses 23 and 24. Those clauses are in Part 3 of the Bill, which relates to the Consumer Council. We have a representative from the Consumer Council who wishes to contribute.

Mr Aodhan O'Donnell (Consumer Council):

With regard to clause 23, the Consumer Council has a responsibility under the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984 to represent the interests of Northern Ireland passengers, who are the consumers of public transport services.

The Consumer Council's role in representing passengers goes beyond complaints and enquiries, and concerns passenger information, looking at fare reviews, charter monitoring, research into attitudes, and passenger behaviour. The forward work programme would provide greater openness and transparency on the breadth of work undertaken into public transport and passenger interests. It would also provide potential for greater coherence and co-operation across organisations, those that represent passengers and those from the industry, and facilitate greater integration and connection between consumers and passengers, and the providers.

The forward work programme, which would be consulted on by the Consumer Council, also covers road, rail, air and sea issues. So, there is an opportunity for greater integration across some of the issues we heard today about accessibility, facilities and service integration.

Mr Bunting:

I am commenting on many of the clauses because NICICTU put in a written submission, and I therefore feel obliged to speak about them. With regard to clauses 23 and 24, there is a view in the trade union movement that in recognising the "shared interest" between the Department and the Consumer Council, that may well pose a threat to the retention of public services as a public good. Again, this comes from past experience, with people in the Consumer Council advocating the privatisation of public transport.

Ms K Magill:

Clause 25(1) states:

"The powers conferred on an authorised person by this section are exercisable for the purpose of ascertaining whether any provisions of, or made under, this Act are being complied with."

It is imperative that authorised personnel do not include those who are from just the agency, but will include, maybe, DVA enforcement personnel and the PSNI. The other authorities that have other powers of enforcement need to be able to make sure that they can also control and monitor the operations and activities of all transport providers.

Mr Irvine:

We endorse what the Federation of Passenger Transport has said about “authorised person” to the extent that there does not yet seem to be any clarity in the Bill about who can perform the role of authorised person. Their powers stretch to stopping, searching, entering and seizing, which are quite big powers. So, it would be nice to work out, whether at this session or through the Committee’s deliberations, what sort of people can perform that role for the Department, and what qualifications they may need to have or to develop.

In clauses 25 and 26, the trigger for moving to stopping, searching, seizing, entering and doing all those things is the “reason to believe” or “reasonable cause”. That seems fine, and is probably the correct legal language on paper. However, wide powers can be abused if they are not checked, and if people are not trained properly as to who they suspect of having a bus or whatever that is not compliant with the regulations.

I want to make a broader point on Part 4, if I may. The heavy hand of criminal law seems to be on a lot of the Bill. Criminal sanctions are needed at many times and in many places to back up certain laws. However, from Translink’s point of view, the civil sanction regime, with financial penalties and behavioural commitments, may be another way to go.

Instead of having an enforcement section in clause 28 and peppered throughout the document at clauses 9 and 46 etc, we could do better for Northern Ireland if people will be asked to improve their behaviour or commit to certain undertakings instead of being given a jail term or criminal record. The Committee may be familiar with this from the water regime, which is part of the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999.

Mr McDevitt:

As regards authorised persons, do you have any sense of how this will differ from the current arrangement? At the moment, people have the power to inspect a person and their vehicle, and I presume that some of those people are officers of the Department and some are officers of other bodies. What will be different about this?

Mr Irvine:

That is the unknown for us: it is not specified.

Mr McDevitt:

What does the legislation that governs you today say?

Mr Irvine:

I cannot tell you. My colleague might be able to tell you.

Mr Rogan:

There are specifications about what the police can do, and there are regulations in respect of vehicle inspection, etc. We are concerned that this power relating to what is in essence all transport activities will be quite wide ranging. We need further clarification, or definition, because the current powers seem to be quite specific or more specific.

Mr Irvine:

We need that, particularly if new branches in the Civil Service are going to be trained in dealing with members of the public and new companies. We want the extra level of comfort that there will be sufficient guarantees and training.

Ms K Magill:

I want to address Mr McDevitt's question. The DVA enforcement authorities play the enforcement role over our industry. We have a problem with their lack of powers. In summary, they can seize a vehicle only when they take it off the road due to its unroadworthy condition. They do not have any other powers. Their powers are also limited when they stop an operator who may not be fully compliant. The powers of enforcement and seizure need to be taken forward, not only with them, but with the agency, because they are the only people who have the power to do that at this time.

There are about 18 active enforcement officers on the road, and they have to look after more than 30,000 freight, more than 10,000 taxis and more than 3,500 buses and coaches in our industry. You can imagine, therefore, how much time they get to look at some of the issues that they should be looking at.

Mr Kinahan:

Have we had any feedback on what is done on authorisation by the other countries in Europe? That would be beneficial.

Mr Bunting:

I disagree with what our colleagues in Translink have said about the enforcement issues in Part 4. We have seen how life regulation got us into severe trouble with respect to the financial institutions.

With regard to the power of enforcement, it is our view that now is an opportune time to establish a transport police unit. That would deal not only with the regulations concerning a transport operation, but, while on duty, its officers could deal with antisocial behaviour on trains and buses. It would be a huge combined effort. The unit would be professionally trained and well versed in all the regulations. It would have a whole new role, specifically to deal with transport.

The Committee Clerk:

If no one else wants to come in, we will move to Part 5. The Federation of Passenger Transport has indicated that it wants to speak on clause 32, which is on the issue of grants and capital grants.

Ms K Magill:

The Department may pay grants towards approved capital expenditure incurred or to be incurred. We want clarification on whether the capital grants will be available to all transport providers.

Mr McDonald:

Clause 32(1)(a) refers to the expenditure incurred or to be incurred in providing vehicles, and clause 32(1)(b) refers to providing, improving or developing facilities for passenger transport. We feel that paragraph (a) should be similar to paragraph (b) in providing, improving and developing vehicles for passenger transport. We are thinking along the lines of audiovisual displays on buses, for example. A bus may be accessible but it might require tweaks to make it more accessible to disabled people and older people.

Mr Bunting:

We have difficulty with public money being used for private profit. We are favourably disposed to the overall thrust. However, we would like operations to be benchmarked against other public transport entities and performances and evaluated on the normal criteria in a very open and

transparent manner. There should be a caveat in the regulations with respect to the awarding of public money.

The Committee Clerk:

The next clauses on which people have indicated that they wish to speak are clauses 33 and 34.

Ms Devlin:

I want to emphasise the significant contribution that the services referred to in clause 33 make to the most vulnerable groups, namely older people, people with disabilities, and people in rural areas who do not have access to a car. As others have said, transport services provide a vital opportunity for social interaction. It is welcome that support for those services is enshrined in the Bill. However, for the long-term well-being of service users, it is important that a minimum service is defined and that a commitment is given to providing such a level of service.

We carried out a significant piece of work on transport and older people over a two-year period. It is important to work cross-departmentally, particularly with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the service that is provided to older people and people with disabilities and their ability to attend Health Service appointments and so on. It is also important to consider both the change in demographics of Northern Ireland, namely the ageing population, and in the family structure.

Mr McDonald:

We have concerns that clause 33 is a wee bit in the past in the way in which it is written and conceived. We feel that it should be more about general inclusion than services that are exclusively or mainly for people with impairments or disabled people. The idea, by and large, is for as much public transport as possible to be inclusively accessible to as many disabled people as possible; the accessible transport strategy should lead to that.

There will always be a need for particular services, such as door-to-door services. The idea is not to minimise the need for such services but reduce the number of people who need to use them to those who definitely cannot use other public transport services. Public transport services should be so inclusive that as many disabled people and older people as possible can use them. We are concerned about the phrase “wholly or mainly” because it should be about inclusion rather than exclusion.

As regards clause 34, I come back to the issue that we raised about the accessibility of vehicles and services. Vehicles might be accessible, but services might not necessarily be accessible if a bus cannot stop in certain places. We need to look at the possibility of buses being able to stop between bus stops. That already happens in rural areas where there are no bus stops. However, it may also be required in some areas in larger towns and urban environments to enable as many disabled people as possible to use the service.

Mr Lorimer:

To follow on from what David has said, there is concern about the specific wording of the legislation and the fact that the Department could be tying itself into a specific type of service rather than opening up the opportunity to operate wider, more flexible, services targeted at social inclusion.

A report on the impact on services of accessibility planning was published in GB recently. The type of people who are affected by transport and social exclusion include: those without cars; those on low incomes; those living in isolated housing estates or in deprived areas where it is not profitable to run bus services; those with disabilities; older people; children and young people; and those living in remote, rural, isolated communities. Therefore, we are talking about large sections of the community that the wording of the legislation could, potentially, leave out. We are not arguing that we should not provide services for older people and disabled people; we think that the legislation should be flexible to allow different types of services and not exclusively those for disabled people and older people or people in rural areas. There needs to be greater flexibility. I can send a copy of that report to the Committee, because it contains good examples of more inclusive services based on community need rather than on the needs of specific groups in society.

Mr Ryan Simpson (Consumer Council):

With regard to clauses 33 and 44, a lot of what we were going to say has already been covered, but I will add our voice. The Consumer Council supports the provision for the Department to fund specialist services for people with a disability as part of the overall public transport network. Research that the Consumer Council has undertaken with young people across Northern Ireland has highlighted that lack of public transport in rural areas has a major impact on the ability of many young people, older people and people with a disability, to access services such as

healthcare, education and employment. We are keen to present that to the Committee at a later date. The Consumer Council is of the view that ensuring that the Department has the ability to provide grant funding for services that are not commercially viable will allow for the provision of socially necessary routes in the future.

Ms Kate McCullough (Office of the Older People’s Advocate for Northern Ireland):

In relation to clause 33(1), we have an issue with what is efficient and economic and what is vital for an older person; and, who decides the outcome if the decision is outweighed by cost. How will the issue be decided? We found that, throughout the Bill, a lot of the wording seemed to have been made up at the last minute. Therefore, the wording needs to be tightened up.

Mr Wood:

In respect of public transport planning and provision of networks, it is well understood that one cannot provide public transport without an ongoing subsidy. Good public transport costs money. It is not simply about having to pay out for individual groups or areas. A worthy public transport in Northern Ireland will require ongoing subsidy.

The Committee Clerk:

Thank you very much. We will now move on to Part 6, which covers general clauses. A representative from Belfast City Council has indicated that he wishes to speak.

Mr Sutherland:

In the earlier consultation, there was reference to local planning and the potential for planning agreements to contribute to the funding of public transport. There is still a link to that in the explanatory and financial memorandum under the heading “Financial Effects of the Bill”. Is the Committee still considering that for inclusion, or should it be more overt in the Bill, so that it is clearer that it is something that will be taken forward in respect of a way of funding public transport in relation to new development and short-term provision for services to test viability?

The Committee Clerk:

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions has expressed a wish to speak about clause 38 and clause 42.

Mr Bunting:

May I include clause 43 as well, so that I can deal with them all at once?

NICICTU favours the granting of powers to the Department for the acquisition and disposal of land. That is, of course, premised, and it is probably envisaged as well, on the fact that the legislation will be used as an aid to enhance the public transport system in the following ways: bus priority measures; park and ride facilities; passenger facilities; and bus stops and shelters. Those are the acquisitions that we see taking place; in other words, they provide added value to public transport.

We welcome the fact that clause 42(1) makes the conduct of persons at bus stations equal to that of passengers alighting at railway stations. We also want to remind the Committee about the need for transport police to implement that power.

Clause 43 deals with shared transport facilities. Apart from the fact that we see that there is a degree of anarchy around the place, we have a huge difficulty with that clause. As far as we are concerned, these are public facilities that are paid for by public money for the public. We are a bit unclear about this: it could be construed that the legislation gives carte-blanche to private licensed operators, some of whom may not even come from Northern Ireland, but from the Republic, from across the water or from Europe, to use public-paid-for facilities for private gain with no obligation to contribute to the upkeep of those facilities.

Clause 43 is deficient because it does not specify that, if “Bunting Buses”, for example, uses Great Victoria Street, and its drivers use the drivers’ canteen or the maintenance facilities, there is an obligation on me to pay for the upkeep of those facilities, unless that is going to be included in a contract, as opposed to Translink, which may be the majority holder. We need to include that so the clause is a bit clearer, unless I am misinterpreting it, which I doubt.

We are talking about a whole range of issues. Does clause 43 refer just to the public lobby of a station and its boarding areas, or does it mean the entire bus depot, the canteen facilities, the office accommodation and the maintenance and engineering services? All of those are paid for with public money. We have a difficulty with the clarity of clause 43.

Mr Rogan:

My colleague JP Irvine will talk about clause 43. I want to make a relatively brief and seemingly mundane point about clause 42. Like Peter Bunting, we welcome the extension of the by-laws

from railway services and facilities specifically to bus services and facilities. We are particularly keen that the definition of “facilities” in the legislation and the regulations that will follow is sufficiently broad to include all land owned or used by public transport. We say that because fly-tipping littering is a huge issue for us and incurs huge costs for public transport service providers. We want it within our powers that, under by-laws, we will be able to prosecute offenders.

Mr Irvine:

I want to pick up on clause 43, and particularly the power of the Minister to direct any places to be shared transport facilities. We believe that the clause needs to be looked at carefully. It seems that in the debates in the House some of the language has slipped a little bit. It has gone from being “any transport facilities” to “any place”. We do not think that the entire bus depot, toilets, back office or places in which we keep confidential financial data are up for grabs. We think that the definition should be narrower. We will need to have another conversation on how narrow that should be, but it should certainly be narrower than that which includes the entire bus depot and different facilities.

On that point, we note that regulations will be coming down the track, which will probably give a little more detail to what is meant by any transport facilities. We are the registered owner of the land and much of the properties that will be used, albeit granted Peter’s point that they were paid for with public money, and we would love to have advance sight of some of those regulations and try to shape them. We ask the Committee to appreciate the sensitivities when it is directing that part of someone’s property will be used for x, y or z.

The key point for Translink in this section and in others is that we do not want any of the changes to impact on our commercial freedom or curtail our operational capabilities to deliver the service in the best interests of customers.

Mrs K Magill:

As Peter said, the shared transport facilities are for use by the public. Any new arrangements for those facilities must, therefore, ensure equality of use and access for passengers. It really should not come down to whichever transport provider is providing the service. All passengers should be able to avail themselves of the shared transport facilities.

I want to return to something that Mr Bunting said in reference to the regulations. The matter

is not that open-ended. Clause 43(2) states:

“Regulations may make provision enabling the Department to direct that any place used by P for the provision of services under a service agreement”.

There may be some comfort there for Mr Bunting that it will not be a case of private operators coming from here, there and everywhere being able to just drive in and use the facilities.

The Chairperson:

Karen, will you clarify what you are referring to when you say “any place”?

Mrs K Magill:

Clause 43(2) states:

“Regulations may make provision enabling the Department to direct that any place used by P for the provision of services under a service agreement”.

Therefore, “any place” is anywhere that the new agency directs as a shared transport facility. Obviously, we are not sure exactly what places, but any place that it does designate as a shared facility for the provision of any service should be under a service agreement.

Mr Simpson:

With regard to clause 43, as those facilities were developed using public funds, the public should be able to avail themselves of the facilities regardless of what operator is providing the service that they happen to be using. Improving customer experience, safety and comfort is important to encourage greater use of public transport overall. Sharing facilities would allow for more joined-up services across different operators, to the benefit of passengers.

Ms Helen Richmond (Northern Ireland Local Government Association):

Northern Ireland Local Government Association members support the need for a statutory requirement to develop local transport plans that conform with relevant regional policy, including the regional development strategy and regional transport plans, to ensure a joined-up approach across the region.

Our members consider the need for that statutory duty to be even more important given the delays and uncertainties of: moving to the 11-council model; the introduction of a community planning duty; and the transfer of planning functions, including area planning, to councils. We would also welcome consideration of a provision to allow transport plans to cover more than one council area, to build on where local councils already work well together and may do so in future,

in the interest of improvement and efficiency.

We also consider that there is a requirement for a statutory duty for meaningful consultation with councils on the local transport plans. Local knowledge is critical to ensuring that plans can address the diverse needs of users.

The Committee Clerk:

Thank you very much. Hansard will produce a transcript in a couple of days, which will be sent to everyone who participated. We ask you to look at that, and go back to Hansard if you wish to make corrections.

I have a note of those who said that they will provide the Committee with information; it would be greatly appreciated if you sent that in. If, on looking at the Hansard report, you think of factual information that may be useful to the Committee, Hansard cannot put that into the transcript, but please submit that to the Committee with a cover note and we will consider it as part of the evidence.

The Chairperson:

Thank you all for coming this evening. On behalf of the Committee, thank you for your expertise, which helps us greatly. We are always trying to reach out to individuals and communities, to engage with them in the best way possible. Therefore, rather than have the formal Committee-style structure, we felt that this was a better approach. For me and, I hope, the Committee, it has been a rewarding evening. The transcript of this evening's events will be circulated, and, when finalised, will feed into the Committee's report to the Assembly in December.

Finally, I thank the Assembly's external liaison unit for assisting with the event, the staff from the Official Report for transcribing the event, Assembly broadcasting for providing the recording service and the catering and support staff for all their help. Thank you very much, and safe journey home.