

Please find below the Community Transport Association's (CTA) response to the Inquiry into Sustainable Transport. Our response is brief but takes into account the considerations of the providers and passengers of the Community transport network across Northern Ireland.

Community Transport Association

CTA provides advice support and learning for community organisations providing affordable, accessible and alternative transport solutions for people who are unable to access conventional forms of public transport. CTA are committed to ensuring people have access to the services they need through appropriate transport solutions. We support the community in their endeavours to meet local need.

Sustainable transport is a key to the development of community and business success across Northern Ireland. Transport provides 20% of the Northern Irish economic turnover which is unsupported by the education system. Many people refuse to use public transport preferring the private car option. CTA has submitted this response to the Inquiry into Sustainable Transport to help the Committee for Regional Development make decision regarding the future of Sustainable Transport in Northern Ireland.

Integrated sustainable transport

CTA supports the improvements that have been made to public transport system through the Regional Transportation Strategy and the Accessible Transportation Strategy actions. While accessibility has improved there still remain a number of actions which need to be completed. CTA would support further strengthening of the ATS to ensure policies and procedures are robustly maintained in order to improve transport solutions for our whole society. The welcomed OFMDFM code to remove the exemptions to provide transport for people with disabilities from private coach providers is a progressive and inclusive step forward. CTA hopes the future review of taxi legislation will encourage more accessible considerations for that industry. CTA supports an inclusive transport strategy which permits all residents to access our public transport system. CTA however are opposed to segregated transport such as the Door-to-Door services provided through the Transport Programme for People with Disabilities. CTA hopes the programme will not be seen as a solution to the transport problems for people living in urban areas. Every Northern Irish resident should be able to use our public transport system. CTA hopes the Door-to-Door programme is an interim attempt to meeting need until such times as the mainstream public transport system improves. Door-to-Door may help to meet immediate need but in the long term older people and people with disabilities should be able to access mainstream transport rather than being segregated off into 'disabled only' transport.

Support for services providing access to public transport routes

Community transport provides a solution for people who are unable to access conventional public transport. Often distance from bus stop or train station is the main factor which detracts from using the public transport system. Community transport can be used to provide the link. CTA would like to see a strengthening of the CT sector to ensure the community use this alternative service to help bridge the gap or overcome their problem of using public transport. In order to do this there needs to be an easier, joined up ticketing system; Community Transport needs to be able to access bus depots to ensure people with disabilities and older people can more easily access public transport (at present Translink have refused access) and there needs to be a commitment that support from funds like the Rural Transport Fund will continue post 2012. The Rural Community Transport network which currently provides in excess of 618,000 passenger trips per year is due to end March 2012. There is no guarantee that the Rural Transport Fund will continue post March 2012. By ending this fund the Government will return to a time when older people and people with disabilities living in rural areas will be rurally isolated, social excluded and deprived of the opportunity to access services. There needs to be clarification and confirmation of the future of alternative transport solutions from DRD.

At present there is no general fund to support urban community transport providers. The TPPD fund is used to pay for the Door-to-Door contract in urban areas and nothing else. Not everyone can access TPPD funded Door-to-Door transport as their criteria is extremely limited. More people in urban areas could access public transport if an urban community transport grant was made available. The community could develop its own solutions to enable local people to access mainstream routes. In many other areas across the UK the support for urban community transport organisations has seen an increase in passenger numbers on mainstream public transport routes. The community transport provides a link service to enable people to get to the main routes. Urban community transport has been devastated over the last 5 years to the lack of investment. While this has saved the government money it has seen an increase in isolation and polarisation in some urban communities across Northern Ireland. Community transport through little investment will not only improve commuter numbers but will help build community development and integration.

Make using public transport easier

CTA supports the development of more opportunities to make use of public transport easier. This includes further development and increase of part and ride facilities, tax effective purchasing of tickets (buy tickets through employers the cost of which is deducted from the gross rather than net salary at source), online ticket purchasing with self printed tickets as an acceptable format on buses/trains, review of bus corridors into main cities, fully accessible fleet of buses and trains by 2020, the development of integrated public transport timetables with local services such as GP surgeries, post offices, banks etc. More marketing of public transport options to ensure everyone has ease of access to timetables, routes etc. Ensure all transport providers provide communications in accessible formats. As part of job

seekers or employment programmes provision of travel training and access to route planning software linked to the public transport system be made available at job centres, libraries, schools, post offices, banks, bus and train depots etc.

Review of Public Transport

It is time for Northern Ireland to review the public transport system, who delivers it and if the mix of deliverers is appropriate for Northern Ireland. Until the public transport network is openly tendered then we will remain within the constraints of a system installed many decades ago. The procurement system needs to take into account alternative transport providers including private companies, taxi firms and community transport – which provides not-for-profit transport solutions but is excluded from procurement because of tendering conditions – conditions that the Civil Service refuse to review. The Northern Ireland public procurement system needs to take into account how the community can deliver services and remove the self imposed restrictions preventing the community and charitable organisations from applying to provide solutions. The Government needs to take into consideration how it will invest in charitable and non-profit-making, community led solutions as well as investing in private companies.

RPA and the impact of decentralised transport

CTA has concerns of the effects of RPA and potential denigration of transport services should those services be transferred to Councils as part of their new responsibilities. While localism is important CTA has already seen the effects of decentralisation in Scotland. The effect of not 'ring fencing' transport monies has seen the closure of over 40 Community Transport organisations. The effect of this has only caused disruption, increased isolation and social exclusion especially in rural areas across Scotland. Northern Ireland has created an improving transport system which needs centralised policy and management to enable stable control and investment in an area of growing demand. CTA supports the development of a Northern Ireland Public Transport Executive which would include public representatives on its Public Transport Authority. This system would control all policy and procurement of public transport for all government departments within Northern Ireland but retain a local identity through the inclusion of the Authority representatives.

Inter Departmental approach to ensure efficiency and effective transport

Sustainable transport in Northern Ireland requires Inter-Departmental agreement and cross departmental funding arrangements. There remains a Public transport system operated in isolation from Health transport and separately again from Education transport. Too much money is being invested in a transport system where joined up government department thinking does not exist. The Community and in particular CTA have had a frustrating experience whereby our members can provide transport solutions however as we are pigeon holed as 'belonging' within the responsibilities of one government Dept, namely DRD, we are unable to provide or meet the needs

of the Community for Health and Education (both being outside the remit of DRD and DRD supported transport is not permitted to be used to meet the needs of those Depts). Funding streams from other Depts are closed to many community transport providers. The NI Assembly needs to create a clear transport policy taking into consideration all public transport requirements (general transport, Health, Education etc). Only then will public money be used effectively to not only meet need but do it in an efficient manner.

Education and the link to the Transport industry

There needs to be a review of transport and the link from education to the industry. Due to age limits on driving licenses there is no natural career progression from school into transport. If transport provides over 20% of NI 'PLC' turnover then why is there a lack of investment in providing a link from education to the transport industry? Research completed by Go Skills revealed over 30% of career drivers has low levels of essential skills (reading, writing and ICT skills). This raises concerns as the number of drivers on our roads who are illiterate is rising. 30% of all career drivers may not be able to understand legal, health and safety and driving guidelines. The Northern Ireland government needs to accept transport is a major factor of life in this region. Education needs to deliver opportunities for people to gain appropriate qualifications to enter the transport workforce.

Educating tomorrow's commuters

Many people use public transport to go to school and then stop. Once they enter the workforce they change to using a private car. There needs to be an improved public awareness campaign directing more people to continue to use public transport after childhood. All too often the PR campaigns highlight intercity travel. Many people who convert to private car use are based in rural areas. The Government needs to better understand why rural commuters do not use public transport and overcome those issues. Using rural commuters and rural scenarios in PR campaigns may do more to reduce the apprehension and negative image of public transport use. Teaching school leavers more about public transport options may help retain their patronage after they leave school.

Educating school children on the environmental benefits and cost savings may help to encourage tomorrow's commuters to maintain their use of the public transport system.

Educating the public on the continued use of public transport should be encouraged whenever possible. There are many opportunities at various key life events where other Government Departments can help to promote the use of public transport (maternity hospital outpatient times linked to the public transport network timetable – time tables provided with appointments, school run – parents provided with alternative public transport options for the school run – or public transport provides new routes to reduce school run congestion).