



Intac submission into the Committee for Regional
Development Inquiry into Sustainable Transport

September 2009

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Introduction

- 1 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.
- 2 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.
- 3 Imtac receives support from the Department for Regional Development.
- 4 Imtac welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry on sustainable transport. Given other projects such as the review of the Regional Transport Strategy, Public Transport Reform and Local Government reform it is important that we all consider the future direction of transport policy.

Defining the issues

- 5 Any future transport policy must be sustainable in that it meets the needs of all the people of Northern Ireland. Debate to date around sustainable transport has tended to focus on key environmental and economic drivers. This has been reflected in the priorities of the Regional Transport Strategy and subsequent transport plans. Clearly economic factors are crucial to the general prosperity of everyone in society. Given the reality of climate change environmental issues must be given a much greater priority than in the past. However for Imtac the key issue is how a future sustainable transport policy can contribute to a fairer society and reduce inequality by increasing accessibility.
- 6 Travel is a necessity in the modern world – it enables access to employment, education and training opportunities, to health services and to a social life. For travel to be accessible people need to be

able to get where they want to go at a reasonable cost, in reasonable time and with reasonable ease. For too many, including many disabled people and older people, the design of the current transport system does not work. Poor access to transport has major negative impact on the life chances of many in our society.

- 7 Research has clearly demonstrated the links between social exclusion and transport¹. It is clear from this research that the unsustainable transport policies of the past 50 years that has made car use easy and convenient has also increased inequality in society. The car has revolutionised mobility for many in this time. As a society we travel further and more often than ever, most of us have choices about how and where we can live and work. Planning policies have adapted to suit car use and travel patterns. Everyday services and activities have been centralised and concentrated and people have to travel further and longer to access them. Long term rises in car usage has been mirrored by and reduction in usage of public transport with a reduction in provision of, and rise in costs of, services. All these developments make travel much more difficult for people without access to a car than for those who have and contributes greatly to inequality in our society.
- 8 Research clearly shows the link between poor access to a car and inequality for both individuals and entire communities. Impacts include:
 - Reduced access to work and employment
 - Reduced access to training and learning
 - Reduced access to healthcare
 - Reduced access to healthy/cheap food

¹ A good summary of research into this area is provided by “Making the connections: Final report on transport and social exclusion 2003” published by the Social Exclusion Unit

- Reduced access to social, cultural and sporting activities
- 9 Research has also identified the barriers that prevent people from travelling. These include:
- Poor availability of suitable transport
 - Poor accessibility of transport
 - The cost of transport
 - The location of services and activities
 - Personal safety, security and the attitudes of others
 - Low travel horizons and a lack of information
- 10 Substantial numbers of people in Northern Ireland have no access to a car. The most recent census figures indicate that 25% of households across Northern Ireland have no access to car. In parts of Northern Ireland, including parts of Belfast, this figure rises to above 50%. Statistics also show that access to a car reduces drastically as people get older.
- 11 Work undertaken during the development of the Accessible Transport Strategy (ATS)² here clearly establishes that disabled people and older people are particularly affected by the design of an unsustainable transport system. The ATS also identified many of barriers listed above as the key barriers to travel for disabled people and older people.

Progress to date

- 12 Over the past decade policy here has begun to recognise the importance of transport in reducing social inclusion. It has done so without fully understanding the extent or the complexity of the difficulties involved or giving it the priority required. Part of the reason

² Accessible Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland – DRD 2005

for this is that transport policy alone cannot guarantee people access to key services. Tackling social issues around transport requires a multi-agency approach including those who design and deliver services. Transport services as a whole are fragmented, still delivered by numerous agencies including the education, social service and health sector with little thought to how services join up. Land use planning policies still make access to services much more difficult for those without a car. Finally the sort of flexible transport solutions required to make the transport system more accessible have been limited by a lack of understanding and expertise as well as issues such as an outdated regulatory framework.

- 13 Despite the weaknesses there have been major improvements since the publication of the Regional Transportation Strategy in 2002 mainly with regard to the substantial investment in frontline services. In terms of physical accessibility the past 10 years has revolutionised our bus and rail services. It is not beyond the realms of possibility that our public transport network will meet current accessibility standards by 2012. However there has been no significant change to the level of services (other than frequency) in the same period. Given that there are other barriers to access apart from physical access mainstream public transport remains out of reach for many (we have the Olympic swimming pool - someone needs to put in the water!).
- 14 More money than ever has been invested in alternative services aimed at improving access to transport for amongst others older people and disabled people. These services include door2door, rural transport, concessionary fares and Shopmobility. Door2door is a vital service, providing a safety net for many with no other travel option. However Imtac is increasingly concerned about the unrealistic role envisaged for the service by policy makers – it is far from being the solution to the travel needs of disabled people and older people. Door2door is a rationed service based on a first come first served basis. Because of demand trips cannot be guaranteed

therefore using it to travel to for instance to work or education is nearly impossible. Other restrictions limit its use for health appointments.

- 15 As a parallel transport service it is difficult to integrate door2door with mainstream public transport. From an economic perspective it remains an expensive and inefficient way to organise transport. Northern Ireland introduced this type of service at a later date than many other areas of the United Kingdom. When we were introducing door2door many UK local authorities were looking at this type of service in light of broader improvements to public transport recognising the social and economic benefits of encouraging those that can to use mainstream public transport or providing more targeted flexible services. Whilst door2door is a valuable service it is not the foundation for a future sustainable transport policy.
- 16 People in rural areas without access to a car find travel particularly difficult. The RTS indicated that resources would be directed to looking at a series of demand responsive transport pilots. To date progress has been modest culminating in the pilot of Dial-a-lift services by three Rural Community Transport Partnerships in the past year. Dial-a-lift uses a similar model to that of urban door2door and runs largely in parallel to rather integrated with mainstream public transport. Whilst the service is a welcome development Imtac has doubts about how the model that is currently being used can be part of a longer term sustainable transport policy. Research has previously been undertaken to look at rural transport need in Northern Ireland and the type and level of services that may be achievable here.³
- 17 Concessionary Fares is the other key programme around social inclusion where significant investment has taken place. All older

³“ Regional Transportation Strategy – Issues of Rural Transport Need” prepared for DRD by TAS Partnership

people over 60 have free travel on public transport, as do some disabled people. Other disabled people have half-fare concessions. The cost of travel is a key barrier for people accessing transport. In this regard concessionary fares make a contribution to reducing this barrier. However to avail of the concession people must be able to access the public transport. Statistics show that over 50% of older people do not use the concession, only around 10% of eligible disabled people take up the half-fare concession⁴. Figures obtained by Imtac indicate that only around 20% of pass holders use their pass once a week or more⁵. All the statistics indicate that many older people and disabled people cannot avail of the concessions available because of other issues around accessing public transport. This limits the impact of the programme in reducing social exclusion.

Challenges for the future

- 18 Whilst many disabled people and older people still find travel too difficult investment made here in the past 10 years has provided a very solid foundation for moving forward. However if we are to move things forward and maximise the opportunity presented by investment then approaches must change. The current Review of the RDS, RTS, Public Transport and Local Government reform all mean that we have a unique opportunity to do this.
- 19 The priority for Imtac in developing a future sustainable transport policy is reducing social exclusion. However many of the measures we advocate will make using public transport more attractive for others and will meet both economic and environmental priorities as well. Imtac sees the following as priorities:
 - Improving access to public transport

⁴ Policy Review of the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme – DRD Jan 2007

⁵ Figures pre-date the extension to people aged between 60-64

- Supporting people to travel
 - Making travel safer
 - Making travel more affordable
 - Reducing the need to travel
- 20 Physical access to public transport has improved hugely over the past 10 years. The focus in the next 10 years should be making it easier people to get access to these services. Debate on this topic has tended to focus on how we can encourage people move from cars to public transport and measures to achieve this include faster, more frequent services, bus priority measures and better park and ride facilities. However a sustainable transport policy should also consider how access to public transport services can be improved for individuals and communities who have traditionally found access difficult. One way of doing this is to increase the public transport network to include more flexible localised services in areas with poor public transport provision. Flexible services then link to key public transport routes whilst improving access to local services. Rural areas are particularly affected but some urban areas including many communities in Belfast have poor access to public transport.
- 21 There are a number of examples of this approach from across the UK. In Manchester for example Local Link is a service for communities with poor public transport provision. The service is door-to-door and open to everyone living in the area. It provides access to local facilities but also links to key public transport facilities nearby such as bus corridors, railway stations and tram halt. This enables people from the local area to link into the wider transport system. Hampshire County Council has looked at a number of flexible transport options for rural communities. Cango is a flexible bus service that services villages around towns such as Andover. The service runs at set times but people can phone in advance to arrange a pick up from an agreed point or in cases where people

can't reach the route the bus will divert to pick up passengers. Once in the town the bus stops at key local facilities such as the hospital, supermarket and wider public transport links.

- 22 Flexible services represent an opportunity to maximise the wider investment in bus and rail services by ensuring that more people have access to services. These services also represent a more efficient, integrated and inclusive way of travel than traditional door-to-door services. Even with improved services some disabled people will still require the traditional door-to-door services but demand for this service should reduce significantly.
- 23 As well as improved access to services much more needs to be done in future to support and encourage people to travel more. Better and more accessible information about transport is a vital component of this. Individual support may also be required. With regard to disabled people there are numerous examples of travel training programmes designed to help build people's confidence to use public transport. Other initiatives that can encourage people to use services include better training for staff providing services. Despite many of these issues being recognised by the ATS to date little has been done to progress actions in these areas.
- 24 Again there are examples from Great Britain of initiatives aimed at supporting people to use public transport. For example Merseytravel has created a number of travel centres across Liverpool where people can access information and advice about travel. Travel centres are not only available in the city centre but have also been targeted at areas of deprivation in the city recognising the link between transport and social exclusion. After a review of London Dial-a-Ride Transport for London decided to increase funding for programmes designed to give disabled people the confidence to use public transport. By using a small amount of investment TfL hope to maximise substantial investment made in accessible public transport as well as reducing demand on an overstretched Dial-a-ride service.

- 25 Much work has been done here in recent years improving safety and security on public transport and around stations. This work needs to continue with priority given to providing safe and accessible pedestrian routes to and from stops and stations. Road Safety programmes must also focus on reducing the impact of traffic on communities which will again make it safer for people wanting to use public transport.
- 26 Improving access to public transport should improve access to the concessionary fares scheme. Opportunities to extend the scheme to include free travel for eligible disabled people should be explored. However thought should also be given to other measures aimed at reducing the cost of travel. In some parts of the UK local authorities offer travel vouchers to people who cannot access public transport. Travel vouchers can be used to help pay the cost of local taxi services for instance⁶. Wider measures to look at reducing the cost of public transport should be looked at including integrated ticketing for all services - an Oyster Card for Northern Ireland?
- 27 Complementing all the measures listed above in developing a sustainable transport policy we must also focus on reducing the need to travel. Reducing the need to travel requires a cross departmental approach as transport policy alone cannot change how services are delivered. The following are key to reducing the need to travel:
- Proactive land use planning policies that promote sustainable development
 - Prioritising town centres and local centres for the location of shops, leisure facilities and offices

⁶ For information on travel vouchers in Greater Manchester visit http://www.gmpte.com/journey_planning/tickets_travel_vouchers.cfm?submenuheader=1

- Greater emphasis on accessibility when planning the delivery of public services
 - Exploring more outreach, home and virtual delivery of services
- 28 Whilst Imtac supports measures to develop sustainable transport including encouraging a shift from car use to use of public transport, walking or cycling there needs to be recognition that this represents a greater challenge for many disabled people and older people. Many disabled people and older people currently rely on the car for mobility and even with improvements to the wider transport system this is likely to continue into the future. When Government is considering future measures to curb use of the private car consideration must be made of those disabled people and older people who have no other choice but to use a car.
- 29 It is clear to Imtac that developing a sustainable transport policy will require a change in approach by Government as a whole here. Firstly as well as traditional economic and environmental debates around transport we must add a greater social element to transport planning. Accessibility for people who have difficulty accessing transport must be built in to future sustainable transport planning. Secondly planning must become more sophisticated and detailed in the future perhaps looking at the Local Transport Planning model used in GB. Finally other Government Departments must give a greater emphasis to transport when planning, designing and delivering services. We must also look at using existing transport resources more efficiently including those currently provided by health, education and social services.
- 30 On a final point the current and future financial situation means that investment by Government will be much more limited than in previous years. Not only does this mean that we must use existing resources more wisely, it means we must also look at current services and assess whether they represent an efficient use of a limited resource.

This will mean difficult choices for both Government but also key stakeholders such as Imtac. For example with the introduction of accessible public transport and more flexible services would we have to change the eligibility of schemes like door2door and the Blue Badge to ensure only those that need it most can access them. With regard to concessionary fares can we afford to pay for peoples travel to and from work every day or do we have to look at measures such as means testing or a 9.30am start time to ensure the concession is targeted at people that need it most.

Conclusion

- 31 Imtac welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Regional Development Committee inquiry into sustainable transport. We recognise the importance of developing more sustainable travel in our society reducing dependency on the car and encouraging greater use of sustainable modes of travel such as public transport, walking and cycling. However we must also make improving accessibility for people and communities who find travel difficult a key priority in any future sustainable transport plan.

Contact us

- 32 If you have a query about this document or would like it in another format you can contact us at:

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