



Imtac Annual Report 2023

(July 2023)

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Making our information accessible

As an organisation of and for disabled people and older people Imtac recognises that the way information is provided can be a barrier to accessing services and participation in public life. We are committed to providing information about our work in formats that best suit the needs of individuals.

All our documents are available in hard copy in 14pt type size as standard. We also provide word and pdf versions of our documents on our website – www.imtac.org.uk. In addition we will provide information in a range of other formats including:

- Large print
- Audio versions
- Braille
- Electronic copies
- Easy read
- Information about our work in other languages

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

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About Imtac

The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (Imtac) is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including carers and key transport professionals. Its role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of Deaf people, disabled people and older people.

The aim of Imtac is to ensure that Deaf people, disabled people and older people have the same opportunities as everyone else to travel when and where they want.

Imtac receives support from the Department for Infrastructure (herein after referred to as the Department).

About this report

Under our agreements with the Department, Imtac is required to submit an annual report to the Minister for Infrastructure. This report includes details of our achievements over the previous year and plans for the coming year. It also identifies and details key issues the Committee would advise the Minister to consider in the coming year. In the circumstances where there is no Minister for Infrastructure in post our report will be submitted to the Permanent Secretary at the Department.

Imtac's response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Status at June 2023)

Like many organisations we suspended all face-to-face activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring the work of the Committee continued whilst safeguarding the health and safety of our staff and members. During the past year we have restarted face to face meetings again whilst ensuring that members still have the option attend remotely if they require or prefer this. We recognise that for many older people and disabled people the pandemic is not over and we are committed to taking steps to ensure we minimise risks for our members and others participating in our work.

Chairperson's Message – 2023 17th Report

As I sat down to prepare this Foreword to our Annual Report, I reflected on my message last year. At that point we looked forward to positively engaging with a new minister to tackle the urgent difficulties that had arisen as we emerged from the pandemic coupled with the growing cost of living crisis. Looking back, I would not have believed we would still be dealing with the deficit of political leadership and stability in this jurisdiction or be planning for the punitive budget cuts being imposed on Departments.

In 2023/24 Imtac engaged with officials from the Department, from Translink, from Department for Communities and from Councils and with others to discuss future transport plans, accessibility of buses and coaches and of stations and transport hubs. We developed papers providing advice on taxi policy, public realm investment and demand responsive transport as well as rebooting our arrangements for engagement with Deaf people, disabled people and older people.

This year we also formally published our New Approach paper, setting out the four principles that frame our advice to Government and others. We will continue to use and promote the New Approach in all aspects of our work in the future.

Access to transport is vital to the full participation of everyone in our society. Reduced budgets and services will inevitably lead to increased inequality and a regression in the progress made over the last decade. Cuts will also increase dependency on cars and make achieving Climate Change targets impossible. It is essential that we continue to work

together with the Department and others to seek to minimise the impact of impending budget cuts on the lives of older people and disabled people.

It is important that I acknowledge our Committee members, observers and others who have selflessly provided of their time, wisdom and insights on lived experience in order to support our work which has been correlated and presented through the quiet but thorough dedication of our Executive Secretary. Our thanks also go to our Sponsor Team whose input and support through difficult times is invaluable.

Our Achievements 2022 / 23

Our Work Programme for 2022 / 23¹ set out three key priorities:

- Ensuring we have a recovery plan from the pandemic that benefits everyone in society
- Ensuring the response to climate change means a just transition to Net Zero
- Ensuring we prioritise the rights of Deaf people, disabled people, older people and carers when responding to the cost-of-living crisis

The programme anticipated a new Assembly mandate, Executive and Programme for Government. Unfortunately, the ongoing political situation has limited progress in many areas, including addressing our three key priorities.

Influencing strategy, plans, policies and projects

Despite difficulties we did make progress in the past year in several areas including:

- Initial discussions with the Department about Imtac priorities for inclusion in planned new transport plans including the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP)
- Participation in Department for Transport Review of Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) which will establish design standards for future buses and coaches
- Pre consultation discussions with the Department about proposals to change the Concessionary Fares Scheme in Northern Ireland
- Continued discussions with Translink and the Department around the development of a new procurement framework which gives greater priority to accessibility when purchasing new buses and coaches
- Continued input to the design of new stations and station refurbishments including the Belfast Transport Hub, Yorkgate, Lurgan, Seahill, University and Dhu Varren
- Continued input to the design of proposed public realm schemes including Banbridge, Glengormley and Belfast 5Cs

¹ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/imtac-work-programme-2022-2023>

The political situation meant that some key priorities for the Committee were not advanced including:

- Finalising a new Disability Strategy for Northern Ireland
- improving access to taxis
- Progressing policy and legislative changes to tackle the impact of pavement parking

Supporting innovation in policy and service developments

During the past year the Committee has produced a number of policy papers designed to promote innovation, good policy making and service development including:

- Publication of “A New Approach to Travel, Our Streets and Our Places” which sets out 4 principles we believe must be adopted to ensure future investment in travel and our built environment benefits everyone
- Publication of a revised policy paper on improving access to taxis in Northern Ireland
- Publication of a paper looking at lessons learned from investment in public realm schemes across Northern Ireland
- Publication of a report into surveys of Blue Badge usage in Belfast City Centre, designed to inform Bolder Vision for Belfast
- Developing a policy paper supporting the greater use of Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services in Northern Ireland

We also supported others to innovate including:

- Participating in initial discussions with Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) to identify potential improvements to the collection of data around transport and accessibility
- Jointly hosting a workshop with Wheels for Wellbeing, attended by the Department, Translink and Belfast City Council, designed to promote cycling as an inclusive mode of travel for all
- Hosting a seminar about our New Approach paper attended by 9 out of 11 local councils

Promoting engagement

With the pandemic related restrictions of the previous two years relaxed we wanted to restart face to face engagement with Deaf people, disabled people and older people. Our focus was on practical

opportunities for people to give their views on investment made to improve our transport and streets. Working with Translink, we organised an event in Coleraine where disabled people and older people were able to travel and give their views on various bus and coach designs. We plan to hold more of these events.

We also promoted engagement through our working groups and our participation in several external fora. This year our Translink Accessibility Working Group and People, Streets and Places Workings Group continued to meet virtually. We also played an active role in the following fora:

- The Accessibility 4 Nations Group, bringing together our colleagues from the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee and officials from the Westminster and the devolved administrations
- The Strategic Design Group chaired jointly by DfI Planning and the Ministerial Advisory Group, looking at placemaking
- A new Disability Forum to inform the work of the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for the implementation of the UNCRPD in Northern Ireland

Our Plans for 2023 / 24

We have agreed a Work Programme with the Department for 2023 / 24. The Work Programme acknowledges the significant financial pressures faced across Government Departments in Northern Ireland and calls for steps to be taken to ensure mitigations are in place to reduce the impact of any spending reductions on Deaf people, disabled people and older people. Our Work Programme also highlights the urgent need for the restoration of Government in Northern Ireland.

The priorities for the Work Programme mirror the four key principles outlined in our New Approach paper. These principles are:

1. Putting Deaf people, disabled people, older people and carers at the centre of every stage of decision making
2. Ensuring a shift in our cultures
3. Ensuring public and private investment contributes to an accessible and inclusive society
4. Ensuring end to end journeys are straightforward and accessible

Our advice will also be informed by the social model of disability and the rights and obligations outlined in the Articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Our Work Programme for the coming year includes:

- Ensuring key strategies including the Disability Strategy and Climate Action Plans maximise opportunities to improve accessibility and inclusion
- Ensuring that key plans and policies, including proposals around a Bolder Vision for Belfast, maximise opportunities to improve accessibility and inclusion
- Ensuring that key projects such as the development of the Belfast Transport Hub maximise opportunities to improve accessibility and inclusion
- Supporting innovation in policy and service developments including a lessons learned paper on recent bus and coach purchases
- Producing a policy paper on how a just transition to Net Zero can protect disabled people who rely completely on private cars / vehicles
- Examining the importance transport plays in proposals to modernise access to our Health Services

- Involve more Deaf people, disabled people and older people in practical activities to test improvements to transport and our streets and highlight ongoing barriers

We hope to develop other engagement activities to involve more Deaf people, disabled people and older people in our work but this may be limited by the budgetary pressures across Government.

Our advice to the Minister of Infrastructure (Department)

At the time of writing Government across Northern Ireland, including the Department for Infrastructure, faces significant and immediate budgetary challenges. Imtac recognises the scale of difficulties faced by Government in meeting these challenges and the major negative impact spending constraints could have on access to everyday services.

Given the very difficult circumstances our advice must prioritise making all efforts to minimise the impact of spending reductions on the mobility of Deaf people, disabled people and older people. Central to achieving this is ongoing engagement and dialogue with Imtac and others. In making decisions about spending it is essential that Government, including the Department, pay due regard to their statutory equality duties and to obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

At a time when public finances are under pressure it is vital that investment in our infrastructure benefits everyone in society. Despite the current difficulties, it is essential that the principles highlighted in Imtac's New Approach paper are fully considered by the Department through the development of strategy, plans and projects and direct investment in services. This includes any new investment in vehicles and stations. Early and ongoing engagement with Imtac is essential to delivering the change needed.

Four further policy areas remain a particular priority for Imtac, reflecting what other Deaf people, disabled people and older people have told us. Whilst we acknowledge a lack of Government creates difficulties for the Department, our advice prioritises a focus on making progress in the following areas:

1. Identifying and implementing measures that improve access to taxi services for Deaf people, disabled people and older people in Northern Ireland
2. Identifying and implementing measures that tackle the difficulties created for Deaf people, disabled people, older people and others by parking on pavements and across dropped kerbs
3. Ensuring that Bolder Vision for Belfast delivers on a commitment to create a city that is accessible to all

4. Ensuring that Climate Action Plans recognise issues for Deaf people, disabled people and older people and ensure a just transition to Net Zero.