



## **Initial feedback from Imtac about York Street Railway Station**

**(June 2024)**

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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](http://www.imtac.org.uk). In addition we will provide information in a range of other formats including:

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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).

## **Introduction**

Imtac members visited the newly opened York Street Railway Station on the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024. Members received a tour of the interior of the station. As work to public realm outside the station is ongoing there was no opportunity to comment on the entire development. Comments are therefore largely restricted to the station interior.

On a generic point, when publicising new infrastructure Imtac would caution about using the term fully accessible. Whilst the new station undoubtedly has improved accessibility, access barriers remain. We will highlight some of these barriers specific to the station.

A key ask from Imtac to make rail travel more inclusive and accessible is the future procurement of rolling stock that provides level access between platform and train similar to the approach taken by MerseyRail amongst others. Although outside the scope of this project, we would like to reiterate our recommendation that providing level boarding across the rail network should be a key strategic objective for both Translink and the Department to improve accessibility for people travelling by train.

Where making recommendations around improving provision the Committee uses best practice guidelines including BS 8300<sup>1</sup> and Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations<sup>2</sup>. The comments are also

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<sup>1</sup> Design of an accessible and inclusive built environment (BS 8300-1: 2008)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accessible-railway-stations-design-standards>

informed by the four principles of the Imtac New Approach paper<sup>3</sup>, in particular Principle Three - Ensuring public and private investment contributes to an accessible and inclusive society

## **Positive feedback**

York Street provides a modern spacious station with step free access (using lifts) from street to platform.

The station provides high quality toilet provision with the provision of a Changing Places Toilet, a separate accessible toilet designed beyond minimum standards and separate male and female toilets designed to high inclusive standards. The Changing Places Toilet should be registered with the Changing Places Consortium<sup>4</sup>, enabling the facility to be promoted on their website.

The station provides a good mix of seating both before and after the ticket barriers. The inclusion of perch style seating both inside and on platforms is particularly welcome. While some of the seating meets the requirement to provide backrest and armrests, feedback indicates that the height of the armrests may limit their usefulness. BS 8300 requires armrests to be provided at a height of 200mm from the surface of the seat and cover at least 80% of the depth of the seat. Seating provided at York Street should be assessed against these standards and replaced / refitted if required. Future procurement should take account of design standards for accessible seating as set out in BS 8300.

There is good provision of well-designed visual display screens inside the station. The provision at different levels is welcome. Audio announcements are not fully operational at the station yet.

Staff are available at key areas of the station.

The ticket gates are designed to ensure that paddles and operational elements such as touch pads contrast with surrounds. The wide gate and availability of staff at the barriers minimise the potential for the gates to create hazards for disabled people.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.imtac.org.uk/new-approach-travel-our-streets-and-our-places>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.changing-places.org>

Efforts have been made to use contrasting materials in the station, for example doors contrast with the surrounding walls.

## **Other feedback**

Because of the level changes, step free access from the street to the station building is provided via a lift. This leaves the potential for the station to become inaccessible if lifts are out of service. The original plans for the station included alternative ramp access. In our feedback at the time, we raised concerns<sup>5</sup> about the removal of alternative access and asked for clarification about what provision is in place for when the lifts at the station are unavailable. The Committee is still waiting for clarification about this issue.

There are good examples of signage in the station but also examples where signage is poor or absent. Toilet signage in particular needs to be improved and made more prominent. Imtac has consistently advised Translink to create consistent toilet signage across its estate and the station demonstrates why this is needed.

The absence of any signage makes locating the lifts on the far platform from the station building difficult. This needs to be rectified as a matter of urgency.

Better use could have been made of contrasting materials inside the station. For example, lift controls could contrast better with surroundings. The surface of perch seating inside the station needs to contrast better with surroundings.

Ticketing machines provided in the main atrium are not accessible to some disabled people. It is essential that staff are available to provide tickets to people. The provision of a customer support desk beside the ticket barriers is welcome, however the height of the desk is problematic for some users including wheelchair users. Staff should be encouraged to be proactive and to come onto the concourse from behind the desk

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<sup>5</sup> “As discussed the change to the original design, removing ramped external access and replacing this with stepped access has major detrimental impact on some disabled people, particularly in the event of lift failure or in the event of station evacuation. It is particularly disappointing that it appears the planning process prioritises aesthetic considerations over the health and safety of users of the station. As discussed the use of EVAC Chairs is not appropriate for some disabled people. As discussed on Thursday there is a need for clear policies and procedures on safe access and egress from the station for disabled people in the event of lift failure or the need for evacuation. More broadly there is a strong case for similar procedures in other locations across the network where lift access is provided with no alternative step free access for passengers. Imtac would welcome the opportunity to work with Translink to develop such policies.” (email from 9<sup>th</sup> November 2020)

when required. Consideration should be given to retrofitting the counter to provide a low-level section. Future station design should always provide a section of low-level counter.

The skylight in the atrium creates glare that reduces the accessibility of ticket machines further. Feedback indicates that acoustics may be problematic in this area and make hearing audio announcements difficult. Consideration should be given to measures that reduce noise levels and improve acoustics in the main atrium of area of the station.

Doors to the Changing Places Toilets require staff to provide access. Questions arise to whether sufficient staff are available to providing timely access to the facilities when required. Consideration should be given to making all accessible toilet doors automated.

Lift provision is adequate in the station, within design guidelines. However, consideration should be given to maximising lift car dimensions in future design to ensure access, egress and manoeuvrability for all users is at an optimum level.

Secure covered cycle parking is providing close to the station entrance. From an initial review there is no provision for accessible or non-standard cycles. This needs to be rectified and become a standard feature of new station design. The provision of accessible and inclusive cycle parking was part of the recommendations made by the Committee in feedback provided to Translink about plans for the redevelopment in November 2020.

Platforms are yet to be finished. It is important that consistent provision is made on both platforms including the provision of perch seating, currently available on one platform only.

Intac has consistently asked that new and redeveloped stations making provision for spending areas for assistance dogs. The Committee very much commends the decision to make provision for a spending area at Grand Central Station in Belfast. We recommend that the decision not to provide a spending area at York Street is reconsidered before the yet to be completed public realm outside the station is finalised.

## **Feedback on the tactile guidance surface**

York Street is the first station to include tactile guidance surfacing throughout. Several people with visual impairment attended the visit and gave some initial feedback.

In general, the provision of the surface was viewed as a positive addition to station facilities and will be useful for blind and partially sighted people. Feedback on the current layout included:

- Frustration that the surface did not start at the entrance, starting to the left of the carpeting at the entrance.
- Frustration that the surface stopped short of the entrances to platforms and did not continue onto the platforms themselves.
- To be effective the surface needs to be continuous from arrival at the entrance to the station onto the platforms.
- There are gaps in the provision of the surface in other places in the station, notably the surface guides people to the stairs to cross the footbridge but not the lift.
- The tactile surface doesn't contrast with the surrounding floor.
- Further discussion is required about how best to indicate changes in direction / access to wider facilities, currently a blister surface is used which some users feel is inappropriate.
- The tactile surface provides guidance to the accessible toilet but not the male and female toilets

More and specific user testing is required with blind and partially sighted people to refine the initial provision and inform provision at future stations.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the new station is a significant improvement on the access provided previously. There are examples of good practice as well as some examples where improvements are required including around signage, and lessons learned for future station development. As indicated the provision of tactile guidance surfaces is welcome but more engagement is required to refine the provision. Finally, it is important to review the station again once works on public realm and platforms are complete. This would afford an opportunity to review changes made as a result of this feedback.