



Imtac Annual Report 2024

(July 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. In addition we will provide information in a range of other formats including:

- Large print
- Audio versions
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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.

Imtac's response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Status at June 2024)

Imtac recognises that for many older people and disabled people the pandemic is not over. We are committed to taking steps to ensure we minimise risks for our members and others participating in our work, including ensuring that our meetings include the option attend remotely.

Chairperson's Message – 2024 18th Report

During another year when our society faced more political and financial uncertainty, it remained clear that many continue to struggle with the cost of living and face barriers to accessing essential services including transport. Our members experience many of these issues and I am grateful for all their commitment and work over the last year.

I welcome the restoration of Government in Northern Ireland and while the length of the mandate is much reduced, we hope that Ministers will be able to make decisions that benefit all in society. I have already had correspondence with the Ministers for Infrastructure, for Communities, of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs, and of Health. I look forward to maintaining our contact with officials for our sponsor Department for Infrastructure, and of course regular engagement with Minister O'Dowd to advance key policy areas, building on our recent meeting.

I am committed to ensuring that Imtac continues to bring a coherent and influential voice to the policy table, building on the platform established with stakeholders over the years. We will continue to promote wider engagement with Deaf people, disabled people and older people to ensure their voice is heard in the development of policy and services.

As the Department for Infrastructure and Councils develop new suites of Transport Plans, it is imperative that travel, whether walking, wheeling, cycling, using public transport, or travelling by car, is made more accessible and inclusive. This is essential, not only for improving access to work, education, retail, leisure, health and other services, but also to ensure actions to meet the climate challenge are just.

We will continue to prioritise tackling of pavement parking, to improving to community and demand response transport and to equalising travel concessions. We want to see low floor accessible vehicles on all interurban routes as well as the provision for two wheelchair user spaces on buses. Finally, we see the publication of a co-designed Disability Strategy as an essential for our society.

Before I conclude I wish to thank officials for their continuing support despite the pressures they have been operating under and to assure the Minister and the Department that we will full support their efforts to contribute to a more accessible and inclusive society.

Bert Bailie

June 2024

Our Achievements 2023 / 24

Our Work Programme for 2023 / 2024¹ set out a series of tasks and priorities to influence and inform key strategies, plans, policies and projects, to support innovation in the development and implementation of services and to promote good engagement.

The programme anticipated the restoration of the Executive and Assembly and a new Programme for Government. Because restoration only occurred late in the reporting period, progress was not possible in many key areas. This included the finalisation of the proposed Disability Strategy for Northern Ireland.

All of the advice and guidance given by Imtac reflects the four key principles set out in our New Approach paper² published in 2022.

Influencing strategy, plans, policies, and projects

Ensuring a just transition to Net Zero remains a priority for the Committee. During the year we developed a comprehensive response³ to the DAERA consultation about Climate Budgets linked to the Climate Change Act and provided initial input into the development of the DfI sectoral plan.

During the year we contributed to two important reviews undertaken by DfI. Firstly, we submitted a comprehensive response⁴ to the Review of the Concessionary Fares Scheme, highlighting once again the unacceptable disparity in the treatment of disabled people compared to older people. Secondly, we provided input into the initial work undertaken into the review of community transport services.

This year saw progress in the development of a series of important transport plans that will shape future mobility provision for years to come. Imtac held early discussions with the team responsible for the Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland. We also participated in extensive engagement with the Eastern Transport Plan Team and

¹ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/imtac-work-programme-2023-2024>

² <https://www.imtac.org.uk/new-approach-travel-our-streets-and-our-places>

³ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/comments-consultation-northern-irelands-2030-2040-emissions-reduction-targets-first-three-carbon>

⁴ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/comments-imtac-about-consultation-free-and-discounted-fares-public-transport-concessionary-fares>

responded to the consultation⁵. We also responded to the consultation⁶ on the Fermanagh and Omagh Sub Regional Transport Plan, highlighting our disappointment that key issues for Deaf, disabled, and older people have been omitted.

Encouraging active travel is key to ensuring more sustainable travel in future. It is essential that active travel, including walking, wheeling and cycling, is an option for everyone. During the year we engaged with the Department as a key stakeholder in the development of an Active Travel Plan for Northern Ireland, including extensive and detailed discussion around how inclusive design will be incorporated into active travel investment. We also engaged and advised on specific schemes and around issues including provision of cycle lanes close to bus stops.

Ensuring the public realm is inclusive and accessible to everyone is a key priority for the Committee. This year we continued to engage with the Department for Communities and local councils about specific schemes including the 5Cs scheme in Belfast City Centre as well as schemes in Rathfriland⁷ and Ballycastle⁸.

Public transport is an essential component of an inclusive and accessible transport system that works for everyone. During the past year we contributed to the call for evidence from the Department for Transport around the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations. Our response highlighted the need to update and strengthen the decades old accessibility requirements for buses and coaches to ensure that more Deaf, disabled and older people can use services⁹.

We also submitted comments about the latest report linked to the All Island Rail Review¹⁰, expressing our significant disappointment that improving accessibility does not appear to be a strategic priority for a future rail network here. We held follow up meetings with the Department about addressing concerns.

⁵ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/comments-imtac-about-consultation-department-infrastructure-seeking-views-challenges-vision-and>

⁶ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/comments-imtac-about-consultation-fermanagh-and-omagh-sub-regional-transport-plan>

⁷ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/comments-imtac-about-proposals-improve-public-realm-rathfriland>

⁸ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/comments-imtac-about-proposals-improve-public-realm-ballycastle>

⁹ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/comments-imtac-about-department-transport-dft-call-evidence-review-public-service-accessibility>

¹⁰ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/comments-imtac-about-equality-impacts-all-island-strategic-rail-review-strategic-environmental>

Our work with Translink to improve public transport locally continues. During the year we provided advice around the development of the Belfast Transport Hub, now known as Grand Central Station and other infrastructure projects such as York Street train station. We also provided advice related to the continued roll out of the Ticketing Project and the role of ticket barriers in train stations in particular. Feedback was submitted on proposals to install a footbridge at Jordanstown railway station. It is disappointing, and an indication of continued challenges faced by disabled people and others, that our advice to provide lift access for the proposed footbridge has been rejected. The Committee believes that it is unacceptable for investment in new infrastructure to retain existing or build in new barriers for Deaf, disabled, older people and others.

Finally, we worked closely with the Department and local councils to promote a consistent approach to the adoption of guidelines that ensure pavement cafes do not create obstructions and hazards for pedestrians. We responded to the consultation from Belfast City Council¹¹ and worked with DfI Roads to develop formal guidance that will assist DfI staff, councils and stakeholders assess pavement café applications in relation to highway considerations.

Supporting innovation in policy and service developments

It is essential that we have relevant and accurate data and statistics about transport and Deaf, disabled, and older people. During the past year we worked with DfI Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch around changes to statistics about public transport in Northern Ireland and on a broader piece of work about monitoring transport accessibility.

We continue to work with Translink and the Department to improve the accessibility of bus and coaches. This included working on a new procurement framework and technical specifications for buses and coaches giving greater priority to accessibility standards. We also organised an event in Derry / Londonderry for Deaf and disabled people to give feedback on the design of new Foyle Metro buses. A similar event planned for Belfast didn't take place because of the lack of suitable infrastructure for the operation of dual door vehicles. It is essential that all future procurements maximise accessibility benefits

¹¹ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/comments-imtac-about-belfast-city-council-public-consultation-pavement-cafes-licensing-scheme>

and that enhancements, such as two wheelchair spaces, become the norm.

The Committee was asked to consider the provision of tactile guidance surfaces in railway stations. Following engagement with people with visual impairment, Imtac recommended the use of comprehensive guidance surfaces in new and redeveloped stations with the newly refurbished York Street Station planned to be the first station with the new surfaces.

Imtac supports the use of Disability Equality Training (DET) to embed social model¹² based thinking in people who develop policy and design and implement services. This year we worked with Transport for All¹³ to assist in delivering DET to the Translink Senior Leadership Team. Our role was to facilitate real world guided journeys on the public transport network lead by Deaf and disabled people.

We also provided input into the design of the first trial of autonomous vehicles in Northern Ireland, through a bus service planned for Belfast Harbour Estate.

We encourage the adoption of best practice in policy and service development by producing policy papers on key issues. This year the Committee produced and published a paper about the future role for the car for the mobility of disabled people and older people¹⁴. We also began work on a task looking at the role transport plays for Deaf, disabled, and older people in accessing health and social care services.

Promoting engagement

Imtac's work means it is essential to build strong relationships with others. A key priority is to involve more Deaf, disabled and older people in our work. This year we involved people in user testing and providing feedback about investment in public transport and active travel infrastructure. This included feedback sessions relating to the new Foyle Metro bus fleet and to different types of delineation between cycleways and footways.

¹² For more information on the social model of disability see <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/about-us/disability-in-london/social-model/the-social-model-of-disability-and-the-cultural-model-of-deafness/>

¹³ For information on the work of Transport for All see <https://www.transportforall.org.uk/>

¹⁴ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/policy-paper-about-future-role-car-mobility-disabled-people-and-older-people>

We continue to meet periodically with senior leaders within the Department and Translink as well as regular engagement with other officials. This is important to ensure that engagement between the Committee and people who are responsible for designing and implementing key policies and services takes place at the earliest opportunity.

We continue to work with key stakeholders including the Consumer Council and the Equality Commission. This year we took part in site visits to both local airports and ferry operators organised by the Consumer Council. We also contributed to the work of the Council relating to the Electric Vehicle Task Force. Our members participated in the work of the Equality Commission relating to their role as the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for the implementation of UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in Northern Ireland.

Finally, we continued to engage with our counterparts from the rest of the UK. The regular liaison with the Disabled Person's Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) and the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland is a vital forum for sharing information and expertise between the Committees and their sponsoring teams within the Department of Transport, Transport Scotland and Department for Infrastructure and as well as the Welsh Government.

Our plans for 2024 / 2025

The Committee has now agreed a draft Work Programme for 2024 / 25 with the Department and this will be published at a later date. We welcome the recent restoration of the Executive and Assembly and the potential that now exists to progress longstanding key issues for Deaf people, disabled people, and older people such as finalising the Disability Strategy, tackling issues created by pavement parking and improving access to taxi services.

Our work programme recognises the continuing significant pressures on Departmental budgets. The priorities of the work programme also reflect some specific issues of importance for Deaf people, disabled people and older people including:

- Ongoing impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Ongoing impacts from the cost-of-living crisis
- Ongoing impacts from climate breakdown and a transition to Net Zero

Our work programme details specific tasks and priorities. A significant and cross cutting piece of work is the task initiated in 2023/24 to “Develop a policy paper highlighting the key role access to transport should play in the modernisation of health services across Northern Ireland.” This will be a primary focus in 2024/25.

Other tasks and priorities in the work programme are grouped under the 4 key principles set out in the *Imtac New Approach* paper published in 2023 including:

Putting Deaf people, disabled people, older people and carers at the centre of every stage of decision making

We will involve broader groups of Deaf, disabled, and older people in our work and activities and encourage Government, Councils and others to consult early with these groups and individuals when developing or implementing policy or services.

Ensuring a shift in our cultures

We will seek to ensure that key Strategies and Plans including the Disability Strategy, the Programme for Government, the implementation of the Climate Change Act and the development of new transport plans and the Bolder Vision for Belfast reflect a change in cultures and approaches to ensure investment delivers change for Deaf, disabled, and older people.

We will also encourage the wider adoption of Disability Equality Training for anyone involved in the development or implementation of policy and for service providers to ensure a social model based approach becomes the norm.

Ensuring public and private investment contributes to an accessible and inclusive society

We will work with the Department, Translink, DfC, local councils and others to ensure that investment in our streets and public realm, in our stations and bus stops, in buses, coaches and trains and in active travel use the highest possible inclusive design standards to maximise benefits for Deaf, disabled, and older people.

Ensuring end to end journeys are straightforward and accessible

We work to ensure that Deaf, disabled, and older people have improved access to a range of travel options including active travel, taxis, community transport services and innovative services such as autonomous vehicles as well as the provision of appropriate and accessible information.

Our advice to the Infrastructure Minister

Imtac members welcome the recent restoration of the Assembly and formation of a new Executive. We are committed to working with Minister O'Dowd, supporting his efforts to making our travel, streets and places accessible and inclusive for everyone.

The Committee recognises the difficult budgetary circumstances faced by the new Executive including the Minister for Infrastructure. Our advice will prioritise protecting Deaf people, disabled people and older people from the impact of any reduction in the funding of services and support and this will be reflected through ongoing dialogue with the Minister and his officials. We very much welcome the recent positive dialogue with Minister O'Dowd and his commitment to engage with Imtac members on a regular basis.

It is a key principle of the advice given by Imtac that we maximise the benefits of any future investment in our services and infrastructure. Despite budget restrictions there will be opportunities in the coming year to ensure investment contributes to more accessible and inclusive transport and places. These opportunities include:

- Ensuring that developing the response to climate breakdown involves Deaf people, disabled people and older people, and that actions associated with a transition to Net Zero take account of their issues.
- Ensuring that the proposed Transport Plan for Northern Ireland, associated Transport Plans, and initiatives such the Bolder Vision for Belfast enshrine building in accessibility and inclusion as a condition of future investment.
- Ensuring that proposed Active Travel Plans and associated investment maximise opportunities for Deaf people, disabled people and older people to make more walking, wheeling and cycling journeys and reduce the potential conflict between pedestrian, cyclists and other road users.
- Ensuring Belfast Grand Central Station is an exemplar of accessible and inclusive design.
- Ensuring any bus or coach procurement in the next year maximises accessibility, specifically introducing the first buses in

Northern Ireland with two spaces that can be used by wheelchair users.

- Ensuring we maximise the accessibility of our buses and coaches by developing clear standards for the design of bus stops that recognise the differences in bus operation between rural and urban areas and Belfast (where dual door buses are in operation) and the rest of Northern Ireland.
- Ensuring that we maximise opportunities to reduce and remove clutter on footways and obstructions at crossings.

There remain key policy areas which continue to be a priority for Imtac members. Whilst recognising budgetary constraints and the limitations of a shortened mandate, the Committee would like to see progress in the following areas:

- The publication of an Executive Disability Strategy, co-designed with disabled people and our organisations.
- The identification and implementation of measures that improve access to taxi services in Northern Ireland for Deaf people, disabled people and older people.
- Progressing proposals that bans parking on pavements and across dropped kerbs in Northern Ireland.
- Equalising the travel concessions in Northern Ireland available to Deaf people, disabled people and older people.
- Bringing forward proposals to reform existing urban and rural community transport services.