

Imtac Annual Report 2014

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June 2014

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. These formats include:

- Large print
- Audio cassette or CD
- Daisy disc
- Braille
- Electronic copies on disc or via email in PDF or word
- Easy read

We will also provide information about our work in other languages if you require this.

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

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.

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.

Imtac receives support from the Department for Regional Development (DRD).

About this report

The Accessible Transport Strategy (ATS) requires Imtac to produce an annual report with details of our achievements over the previous year. We are also required to identify key issues that we would advise the Department for Regional Development (DRD) to address in the coming year and submit these to the Minister.

Chairperson's Message

This year has been another busy year for Imtac. I would like to thank all the members of Imtac for their contribution and commitment over the past twelve months. I would also like to express my gratitude to the observer organisations for their contribution over the year. Last but not least I would like to record my thanks to all the officials from DRD and other Government Departments who have supported our work during the year.

A number of our members stepped down this year. Particular thanks must go to Ann Collins and Barbara Fleming who both stood down after many years service to the Committee. I would also like to thank Des McCauley and Rosemary Patton for their contributions during their time with Imtac. It will be hard to replace their experience and expertise, however I am proud that through our recruitment policies more older and disabled people have the opportunity to directly participate in the development of key policies and services and more broadly in public life. I am sure our new members will bring their own knowledge, skills and commitment to Imtac.

As Chairperson I would like to pay tribute to the hard work of our Executive Secretary, Michael Lorimer. As with many organisations Imtac has had to work with reduced resources over the last few years. In the coming year I am determined to work with our partners in Government to identify the additional resource that would enable Imtac to be even more effective in providing guidance on developing policies and delivery of services.

Progress towards a fully accessible transport system is not straightforward with many ups and downs. This year I was personally disappointed by the purchase by Translink of 23 stepped access coaches to replace low-floor buses. On the positive side I was greatly encouraged by our visit to London to see the progress being made by Transport for London. Much of the progress made in London is a result of better engagement with disabled people and older people. I believe that Imtac by continuing to work closely with disabled people, older people, our partners in Government and with transport providers we can continue to build on the progress made to date.

G Max O'Brien

Achievements in 2013/14

In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Imtac believes that disabled people and older people must not be excluded or “disabled” from travel or transport by their age or impairment. The Committee believes that exclusion and barriers to travel are created by the design of services, infrastructure and the wider environment as well as the historical attitudes and stereotypes held by many in our society towards older people and disabled people. Through our work Imtac seeks to highlight these barriers and promote practical solutions working in partnership with policy makers, service providers and organisations of and for disabled people and older people.

The following outlines the contribution we have made in the past twelve months towards a more inclusive transport system.

1 Developing an inclusive and accessible pedestrian environment

Developing a more inclusive and accessible pedestrian environment is a key priority for Imtac given that nearly every journey we make involves using it. In the past year Imtac has undertaken the following activities to promote this priority:

- We have undertaken audits of the pedestrian environment on key pedestrian routes in Bangor, Omagh, Moira and Newry.
- We have published reports on the audits in Bangor and Omagh and held meetings with local Roads Service officials to examine the issues identified. We also held meetings with Roads Service officials in Lisburn and Derry to discuss reports previously published.
- We continued to advise DSD on public realm improvements in Belfast and other locations across Northern Ireland.
- We published a Position Paper on Pavement Cafes and gave evidence to the Social Development Committee on draft legislation to regulate their use.
- We continued to work with Roads Service on changes connected to Belfast on the Move.

2 Developing an inclusive and accessible public transport system

Imtac believes that increasing access to and the accessibility of public transport for disabled people and older people is crucial to developing a more inclusive society. Over the past year we have undertaken the following activities to promote inclusive public transport:

- We worked with Translink to refresh a bank of positive images of disabled people and older people using public transport. These images were used in a refreshed Access Guide.
- We raised concerns about the purchase of 23 coaches by Translink and met with senior Translink officials to discuss our concerns.
- We published a position paper setting out that a future inclusive and accessible public transport system is one that is step-free.
- We looked at the different approaches of Passenger Transport Executives in Great Britain towards access and inclusion. Following initial findings members of Imtac undertook a study visit to look at the approach of Transport for London in more detail.
- We worked with NISRA officials to design a survey to gather evidence about the attitudes of disabled people and older people to public transport.

3 Supporting other transport solutions

Public transport is not always the best solution for disabled people and older people. Imtac recognises the need for high quality, accessible alternatives to public transport including taxi services and some specialised services. Over the past year we have undertaken the following activities to promote better solutions:

- We assisted DoE to develop research into wheelchair accessible taxis.
- We met with the Minister of the Environment to discuss implementation of the Taxis Act

- We published a short paper highlighting the benefits of low-floor minibuses following a visit to Belfast Health Trust.

4 Developing inclusive customer service

The historical attitudes and stereotypes about disabled people and older people held by many people in society can be barriers to using transport services. It is accepted that better training for staff can help to provide better and more inclusive services for all passengers. Over the past year we have undertaken the following task to promote better solutions in this area:

- We published a report reviewing training currently given to transport staff about disabled people. We made a number of recommendations for improvement.

5 Making the connections

Transport and travel is not an activity in its own right but an essential part of accessing everyday services and activities. To achieve a fully inclusive society it is essential that transport and access are considered when designing facilities and services. During the past year Imtac contributed the following aimed at promoting the connection between transport and wider access and inclusion:

- We contributed to the work of the Inclusive Stadia Advisory Group around the development of the three regional stadia projects.
- We contributed to an OFMDFM working group on monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Disability Strategy.

Our Plans for 2014/15

Over the next twelve months Imtac will seek to further the development of an inclusive transport system by working with disabled people and older people, policy makers and transport providers. We have published a Work Programme for 2014/15 detailing tasks we propose to undertake in the next twelve months. Tasks include:

- We will conduct a survey with disabled people and older people to identify their attitudes and concerns around public transport
- We will examine evidence from Great Britain about fraud and abuse of the Blue Badge and develop a report highlighting the implications for Northern Ireland.
- We will develop a strategic issues report highlighting key issues from 7 walking audits undertaken to date in towns and cities across Northern Ireland.
- We will use the findings of the walking audits strategic issues report to influence the improvements planned under public realm schemes in two locations in Northern Ireland.
- We will work with Translink to develop a project to raise awareness amongst disabled people and older people of the availability and accessibility of improved public transport.
- We will hold a workshop involving disabled people, older people, transport providers and policy makers around improving training relating to disabled people and older people.
- We examine how accessible the current provision of information about transport is and publish a report with recommendations for improvement.
- We will work with DRD to support the development of travel training programmes.

- We will discuss with DRD how to raise awareness of the responsibilities of Blue Badge Holders.

Our advice to Government

The current Accessible Transport Strategy will come to an end in 2015. Through our work Imtac has acknowledged the significant progress made since the publication of the ATS in 2005. Improved access to vehicles and infrastructure has been complemented by progress with other issues such as the provision of information, training for transport staff and the cost of travel through the Concessionary Fares Scheme. Despite progress Imtac has argued that we are still some way off our stated aim of disabled people and older people having the same choice as others to travel when and where they want. Perhaps the best illustration of this is the ongoing requirement for disabled people to give pre-notification to use some public transport services.

Imtac believes much work still needs to be done to make our transport system accessible and inclusive for everyone. The Committee believes it is essential that Government refresh and revise the commitments made in the ATS. Our main advice to Government in the coming year is to begin the process of developing a fresh approach to accessible transport.

As part of this work Imtac is committed to work with DRD and NISRA to undertake a survey of disabled peoples' and older peoples' attitudes to public transport. The findings of this survey will be invaluable in identifying future priorities for policy and investment in the successor strategy of the ATS. In addition, based on our own extensive work over the past 10 years Imtac believes the following should be key priorities in a successor strategy to the ATS:

1. **Clearer standards** applied to and enforced in the design of services and infrastructure including the pedestrian environment (Standards for transport services should include step-free access and audio visual information across all modes).
2. **Better information** about travel opportunities to enable disabled people and older people plan journeys easily.

3. **Improved customer service levels** delivered through Disability Equality Training, designed and delivered with the involvement of disabled people and older people.
4. **Better promotion and awareness** of accessible and inclusive public transport including campaigns using all available media.
5. Building on good progress made to date, **improved engagement** with disabled people and older people by Government and others.

Imtac would like to see two specific matters progressed in the coming year. Firstly rights and equality legislation has played a significant part in ensuring disabled and older people benefit from investment by Government in transport services here. However important regulations¹ relating to bus drivers that have been in place in Great Britain since 2002 have yet to be introduced in Northern Ireland, despite repeated recommendations from Imtac. The Committee is aware that the Department for the Environment has drafted similar regulations for Northern Ireland and we would ask that DoE and DRD work together to ensure these regulations are introduced in the coming year.

Secondly many disabled people and older people in Northern Ireland benefit from the concessions offered by the Blue Badge Scheme. In recent years the Scheme in the rest of the UK has been subject to a modernisation process that Imtac believes has improved the Scheme for older and disabled people. Although proposals have been brought forward none of the changes in Great Britain have been introduced in Northern Ireland. Imtac would like the Department to progress changes in the coming year including proposals aimed at improving enforcement of abuse and misuse of the Blue Badge.

¹ The Public Service Vehicles (Conduct of Drivers, Inspectors, Conductors and Passengers) (Amendment) Regulations 2002