
Imtac Annual Report 2009



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1 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.

2 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.

3 Chairs Message

This year has been another busy and productive year for Imtac. Our members attended over 50 meetings during the year with a range of stakeholders as well as contributing to numerous papers and consultations. I would like to pay tribute to energy and commitment shown by all our members over the last year.

Imtac continues to develop strong partnerships with a range of stakeholders from Government, the transport sector, statutory agencies and of course with older people and disabled people. In particular during the last year we have worked effectively with Roads Service, Translink, local airports, the Consumer Council and Equality Commission. These partnerships are vital in ensuring that disabled people and older people are involved in decisions about the future of transport policies and services.

It is clear from our achievements that our work is leading to positive changes being made. In particular I would like to highlight our work with the Consumer Council on improving air travel for disabled people and older people, our work with Translink and our work with Roads Service around Blue Badge misuse. Each example highlights how engagement with disabled people and older people can deliver better services.

Imtac welcomes the major investment in transport services made here over the past seven years. Despite this investment many older people and disabled people tell us they are still having difficulties getting around. As a Committee we believe that many of the building blocks are in place to deliver an accessible transport network but that more needs to be done to remove all the barriers that make accessing services difficult. Engagement with disabled people and older people is a vital part of this process. Policy makers and service providers need to better understand what these barriers are by talking to disabled people and older people. Over the next year Imtac will again work hard to promote engagement and partnership with older people and disabled people as a means to deliver better services.

Frank Caddy
Chair

4 Our achievements in 2008/2009

The past year has been extremely busy for Imtac. The Committee has responded to a number of key consultations, working groups have implemented almost 90% of our Work Programme and members have attended many other meetings with key stakeholders. In this section of the report we have highlighted some of our key achievements this year.

Working with disabled people and older people

Imtac's role is to advise Government and others on transport issues that affect older people and disabled people. To do this effectively the Committee has developed strong links with disabled people and older people. These links are vital in ensuring that the issues we raise are relevant.

Becoming a Committee member is one way older people and disabled people can participate in our work. We have worked hard to ensure that our annual recruitment is open and accessible. This year we again had a positive response from older people and disabled people with many more applications than places available. Currently 80% of Imtac members are either a disabled person or older person. As a result of the recruitment process a number of other disabled people and older people have joined our working groups.

Imtac works hard to let people know about important developments in policy and services. We do this through our networks using both our website and our quarterly newsletter. The Committee also engages directly with older people and disabled people through meetings. This year we worked with organisations such as Engage with Age, the Helping Older People Project in Portadown, Belfast Healthy Cities and Disability Action's Real Network. Meetings with these groups and their members enable us to hear about issues that make using transport difficult for older people and disabled people. Many of the issues raised through our networks are raised by Imtac with Government and others. Over the next year we will again work hard to involve as many older people and disabled people as we can in our work.

Working for improved rights

Using transport was originally left out of the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. In Great Britain this was rectified with the introduction of new rights for disabled people in December 2006. Over

the past 3 years Imtac has consistently asked Government here to introduce similar changes. This year the process to introduce these changes finally began after lobbying at the Assembly by disabled people from the Omnibus Partnership. Imtac worked with the Office for First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to ensure disabled people and older people had a say in the consultation around the proposed changes. Our members also worked with the Equality Commission ensuring that disabled people were involved in drafting a Code of Practice for transport providers.

During the next year Imtac members will be involved in the process which will see the introduction of the new rights for disabled people. We will work with the Equality Commission around promoting the rights to disabled people and directly with transport providers.

Working to make public transport more accessible

Over the past number of years Imtac has developed an excellent working relationship with Translink. Our members have worked with Translink to ensure that the investment in better bus and trains delivers for disabled people and older people. A good example of this in the past was resolving issues over the non operation of automatic ramps on buses by replacing these with manually operated systems.

This year we have agreed a number of important changes with Translink which will directly benefit older and disabled passengers. Firstly we agreed a new and innovative design of bus for use in rural areas. This is the first vehicle of its kind anywhere in the UK and is the clearest illustration of how engagement with disabled people and older people can result in better services. Secondly in partnership with the Consumer Council we agreed revised signage on buses to advertise vehicles as “Easy Access” rather than “Buggy Friendly”. We also agreed revised wording around signage for priority seats requiring other passengers to give these up for disabled people and older people. Thirdly we agreed a policy document with Translink setting minimum service levels disabled people can expect here when travelling on buses and trains. When published Translink will become one of the first transport companies in the UK to set such standards. Fourthly we initiated and facilitated a number of meetings between Roads Service, Translink and others to discuss how to better enforce illegal parking on bus stops. Finally we worked with key Translink staff around providing disability training for staff ensuring that action will be taken to meet the introduction of new rights for disabled people.

Over the next year we will continue to work with Translink on a range of issues including the procurement of new trains. We will continue to involve a broad range of disabled people and older people and their organisations in our discussions.

Working to make air travel more accessible

In July 2008 new European Regulation was introduced designed to make air travel easier for disabled people, older people and others with reduced mobility. The General Consumer Council has been designated as the complaints handling body around the Regulation in Northern Ireland. Over the past year Imtac has worked in partnership with the Consumer Council to assist local airports to meet the requirements of the Regulation and to make disabled people, older people and others aware of their rights when travelling by air. We did this by working with each airport to establish actions that needed to be taken, organising site visits for disabled people and older people to each airport and advertising the new rights in our newsletter and website.

Over the next year we will continue to work with the Consumer Council and airports to improve services for disabled people and older people. We will particularly focus on providing older people and disabled people with better information about their rights and encouraging each airport to establish user groups of disabled and older passengers.

Working to make it easier to park

The Blue Badge Scheme is hugely important to disabled people and older people in Northern Ireland. Over 90,000 people here rely on the concessions offered by the Blue Badge to carry out everyday activities. Over the past number of years Imtac has developed an excellent working relationship with Roads Service Parking Enforcement Team. Imtac is also the lead partner in the Baywatch Campaign here which is a partnership of organisations representing disabled people seeking to end the abuse and misuse of accessible parking bays by non-disabled people.

This year we organised a meeting where disabled people and older people could raise issues around the Blue Badge with us and Roads Service. We agreed measures with Roads Service around enforcement of misuse of the Blue Badge by non-disabled people. This enforcement has now begun. We continued to work with Disability Action around

particular difficulties experienced by Blue Badge holders parking at hospitals. Finally the Baywatch Campaign contacted every public body in Northern Ireland asking each to review and improve parking provision for disabled people.

Over the next year we will continue to work with Roads Service around improving enforcement of Blue Badge misuse. We will work with Roads Service around access for Blue Badge Holders to pedestrian zones. Finally the Baywatch Campaign will ask disabled people and others to take part in parking survey to raise awareness of abuse of accessible parking bays and will seek to develop links with the four main supermarkets.

Working to make policy more inclusive

Northern Ireland has seen major investment in transport services in recent years. Investment in new buses and trains, better stations and facilities, improved concessionary travel, door2door transport and improved rural services all should mean better travel opportunities for disabled people and older people. However investment alone is not enough as disabled people and older people face many different barriers when accessing transport such as a lack of information, poor attitudes, the accessibility of vehicles and lack of personal confidence. The Accessible Transport Strategy identified many of these barriers and set a policy framework that should mean that the benefits to disabled people and older people of investment in transport are maximised. Over the past 4 year our members have worked hard to assist policy makers in understanding how to remove the barriers that prevent people accessing transport.

This year members developed Guidelines around effective disability training for transport providers. These guidelines were developed in conjunction with organisations of and for disabled people. The Committee looked at website provision and made recommendations around improving current provision. We held an event to highlight good practice around the accessibility of small buses and taxis inviting disabled people, older people, transport providers and policy makers to take part. We worked with Guide Dogs to highlight the benefits of providing audio visual information on buses. Finally we produced a report, after talking to relevant organisations, on how well transport policy takes account of the requirements of people with a learning disability and mental health service users.

Over the next year we will continue to encourage the development of better policy. We plan to look at issues such as travel training for disabled people and older people, transport issues for young disabled people and issues around shared use of pedestrian facilities by cyclists and other vehicles.

Making Belfast more accessible

Members of Imtac have been involved with discussions around changes to Belfast City Centre from an early stage. During this process we have consistently asked that access for disabled people and older people be a priority for the Department for Social Development in making changes to the city centre. In particular we have asked that the design of pedestrian areas meet the highest standards of accessibility, that provision is made for access for Blue Badge holders and buses to the city centre and that other services such as Shopmobility are enhanced. As time has moved on members have become concerned that these issues have not been adequately addressed in the implementation of changes.

During the past year members have worked with others such as Disability Action, Mobilise and Shopmobility Belfast. We have participated in numerous meetings with DSD including Minister Margaret Ritchie. We assisted DSD in the organisation of a workshop for disabled people and older people around issues to be included in an Access and Mobility Study for the city centre. We contacted Roads Service to raise concerns about traffic management plans in the city centre. Working with our partners we successfully persuaded DSD not to proceed with a “shared surface” in Donegall Place which would have seen pedestrians, cars, buses and bicycles all sharing the same space without kerbs. We also secured agreement from DSD to pilot the REACT system in Donegall Place as a way-finding tool for people with visual impairment.

Despite these developments there is great uncertainty around how accessible Belfast City Centre will be to disabled people and older people in future. In particular Imtac remains concerned about how easy it will be for Blue Badge holders and people who use buses to access the city centre once changes are introduced. In the coming year we will continue to work to ensure that Belfast City Centre remains open and accessible to everyone.

5 Building on progress – Issues for Government

Imtac will continue to work hard over the next year with all our partners to ensure that travel choice for disabled people and older people improves. We have agreed a Work Programme with the DRD for the coming year which is available on our website via the following link - www.imtac.org.uk/publications.php?pid=139.

Alternatively hard copies and copies in other formats are available by contacting us at our office (see Section 8).

Imtac has two issues we would like to raise with the Minister for Regional Development. The first is the need to ensure the better delivery of the policies included in the Accessible Transport Strategy in order to maximise the benefits of investment in services. Imtac members highlighted a number of ways this could be achieved in a meeting with the Minister in March. The Committee will also highlight further suggestions for improving the delivery of policy in our response to the current consultation on the next draft Action Plan of the Accessible Transport Strategy.

The second issue is around access to Belfast City Centre. Roads Service has a key role in ensuring that disabled people and older people can get in and out of the City Centre easily through the Traffic Management Plan currently under development. Imtac would ask the Minister to ensure that engagement takes place with Imtac and others before decisions are taken. We also ask that final proposals take full account of the need to provide parking for Blue Badge holders and access for public transport close by to key areas of the city centre.

6 Thanks

Intac would like to thank all those who contributed to our work over the past year. Special thanks are reserved for Tom Hoey, Bryan Myles and Geraldine Mulherne who all stood down from the Committee after a number of years as members. Thanks also to the following people who contribute to our work through our working groups: Stephen Hughes (Roads Service), Orla McCann (Disability Action), Laura Slater (RNIB), Francis Hughes (Age Sector Platform), Andrew Adams (DRD), Adele Watters (DoE), Kellie Armstrong (Community Transport Association), Claire Costello and Valentina Wright (both Translink). Thanks also to Janet Watson (DRD) for all her help with the organisation of meetings.

7 Imtac Members 2008/9

Frank Caddy	Chair
William Stewart	Vice-Chair
Elizabeth Black	
Philip Blair	
Terry Butler	
Ann Collins	Convenor Personal Mobility Group
Barbara Fleming	
Ann Gamble	
Neil Gillan	
Anita Gracey	
Tom Hoey	Convenor Public Transport Group
Etta Mann	
Henry Mayne	
Norma Moore	
Joe McCusker	
David McDonald	Convenor Information & Training Group
Geraldine Mulhern	
Andrew Murdock	
Bryan Myles	(Resigned November 2008)
Max O'Brien	
Ronnie Patterson	

More information on our members is available on our website, visit www.imtac.org.uk.

Observers

Olaf Hvattum	Age Sector Reference Group
Kevin Doherty	Disability Action
Tony O'Reilly	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Deborah Howe	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Gavin Hamilton	Mobility and Inclusion Unit (DRD)
Alan Preston	Mobility and Inclusion Unit (DRD)
Janet Watson	Mobility and Inclusion Unit (DRD)
Ryan Simpson	General Consumer Council

8 Contacting us

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