



## **Imtac statement on shared surface streets**

**October 2009**

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## **Introduction**

- 1     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.
- 2     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.
- 3     Imtac receives support from the Department for Regional Development (DRD).

## **Background**

- 4     Over the past number of years Imtac has become aware of the emergence of shared surface schemes and the research undertaken that highlights the dangers of such schemes to many disabled people and older people. More recently Imtac has dealt with a number of proposals for the introduction of shared surface schemes in Northern Ireland including Belfast and Derry/Londonderry city centres.
- 5     Imtac has decided to develop this statement on shared surfaces because of our concerns over the safety of these schemes and because of the growing number of proposals for schemes here. In developing this statement we have replicated and reinforced a similar statement developed by the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC)<sup>1</sup>. DPTAC is a statutory advisor to the United Kingdom Government on access to transport for disabled people and works with Imtac and Government in Northern Ireland on devolved transport issues.

## **Statement on shared surfaces**

- 6     Imtac believes that any public investment in Northern Ireland must take account of accessibility for disabled people and older people. In

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<sup>1</sup> Copies of the DPTAC statement are available online at [www.dptac.gov.uk/pubs/sharedsurfaces/index.htm](http://www.dptac.gov.uk/pubs/sharedsurfaces/index.htm)

relation to transport, accessibility for disabled people and older people should be part of mainstream activities. This is line with DRD policy outlined in the Regional Transportation Strategy (2002) and Accessible Transport Strategy (2005).

- 7 The Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006 places a Disability Equality Duty on every public body in Northern Ireland which requires government here to use their influence over the built and pedestrian environment to promote equality for disabled people. Disability equality must be addressed within government policies and decision making and the involvement of disabled people in the decision making process is a key requirement of the duty.
- 8 With the above in mind, we are concerned about the development of the growing number of proposals for shared surface streets in Northern Ireland where the kerbed demarcation between pedestrians and vehicles has been removed.
- 9 In depth research by Guide Dogs<sup>2</sup> has demonstrated that such shared surfaces can seriously undermine the safety, confidence and independence of blind and partially sighted people. Research on home zone design commissioned by DPTAC highlighted similar concerns about shared surfaces in residential areas<sup>3</sup>. We note too that other disability organisations share the concerns of Guide Dogs and that in 2007 a Joint Statement on the importance of inclusive streetscapes was endorsed by over twenty disability organisations from across the UK representing people with physical, sensory and learning disabilities. Those organisations have more recently signed a further joint statement calling for a moratorium on shared surface streets but to date no moratorium has been introduced.
- 10 Our impression therefore is that the views of disabled people and older people are not being given sufficient weight and that by implementing shared space schemes by means of shared surface designs, Government Departments are restricting the safe

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the work of Guide Dogs visit [www.guidedogs.org.uk/sharedstreets](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/sharedstreets)

<sup>3</sup> Visit [www.dptac.gov.uk/pubs/pm/homezones/index.htm](http://www.dptac.gov.uk/pubs/pm/homezones/index.htm)

independent mobility of many disabled people. This could mean that the Government Departments involved are not fulfilling their Disability Duties.

- 11 We would emphasise that we fully support the principle of giving increased priority to pedestrians over motor vehicles in and around our towns and cities. However, it is vital that the interests of all pedestrians are accommodated where changes are made. Imtac therefore expects Government Departments here to engage with disabled people and older people and their representative organisations in the development of streetscape schemes in line with their obligations under the Disability Duties.
- 12 In practice, we believe this means that provision for pedestrians is supplemented where necessary by accessible pedestrian routes separate from areas also used by vehicles in order to promote personal security for young, older and disabled pedestrians. It also means that unless and until there is an alternative delineator which through research is demonstrated to be effective, kerbed footways and formalised pedestrian crossing points with appropriate dropped kerbs and tactile paving, should normally be retained.
- 13 However, we believe there are other advantages in retaining the use of kerbs:
  - Kerbs assist bus operations and are essential to complement the use of low floor buses by facilitating level access at stops
  - Kerbs promote road safety - the rules in the Highway Code for crossing the road begin “Stop just before you get to the kerb, where you can see if anything is coming. Do not get too close to the traffic.” This is fundamental to the Green Cross Code taught to children.
  - Government advice on traffic management emphasises that the traditional distinction between the carriageway and the footway may be important both visually and historically, and cautions against the adoption of a single wall-to-wall surfacing. (DfT Traffic Advisory Leaflet 1/96)
  - Kerbs assist with positive drainage systems and these are better able to cope with exceptional rainfall and protect pedestrians than flush surface drainage systems

- Kerbs promote security and deter vehicles from mounting footways

14 We understand that the Department for Transport has commissioned research on the matter and intends to issue guidance following this research. In the meantime, Imtac calls on Government Departments in Northern Ireland to be aware of their duties under the Disability Discrimination Order. We would ask them not to create town centres, High Streets and residential areas with shared surfaces that discriminate against blind and partially sighted and other disabled people, effectively excluding them from the street environment. Until there is an acceptable alternative delineator, we would urge the retention of kerbed footways with dropped kerbs at appropriate crossing points as an essential element of streetscape in shared surface areas.

## **Contacting us**

15 You can contact us about any aspect of this document at:

Imtac  
Enterprise House  
55-59 Adelaide Street  
Belfast  
BT2 8FE

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Telephone: | 028 9072 6020  |
| Textphone: | 028 9072 6016  |
| Fax:       | 028 9024 5500  |
| Email:     | <a href="mailto:info@imtac.org.uk">info@imtac.org.uk</a> |
| Website:   | <a href="http://www.imtac.org.uk">www.imtac.org.uk</a>   |