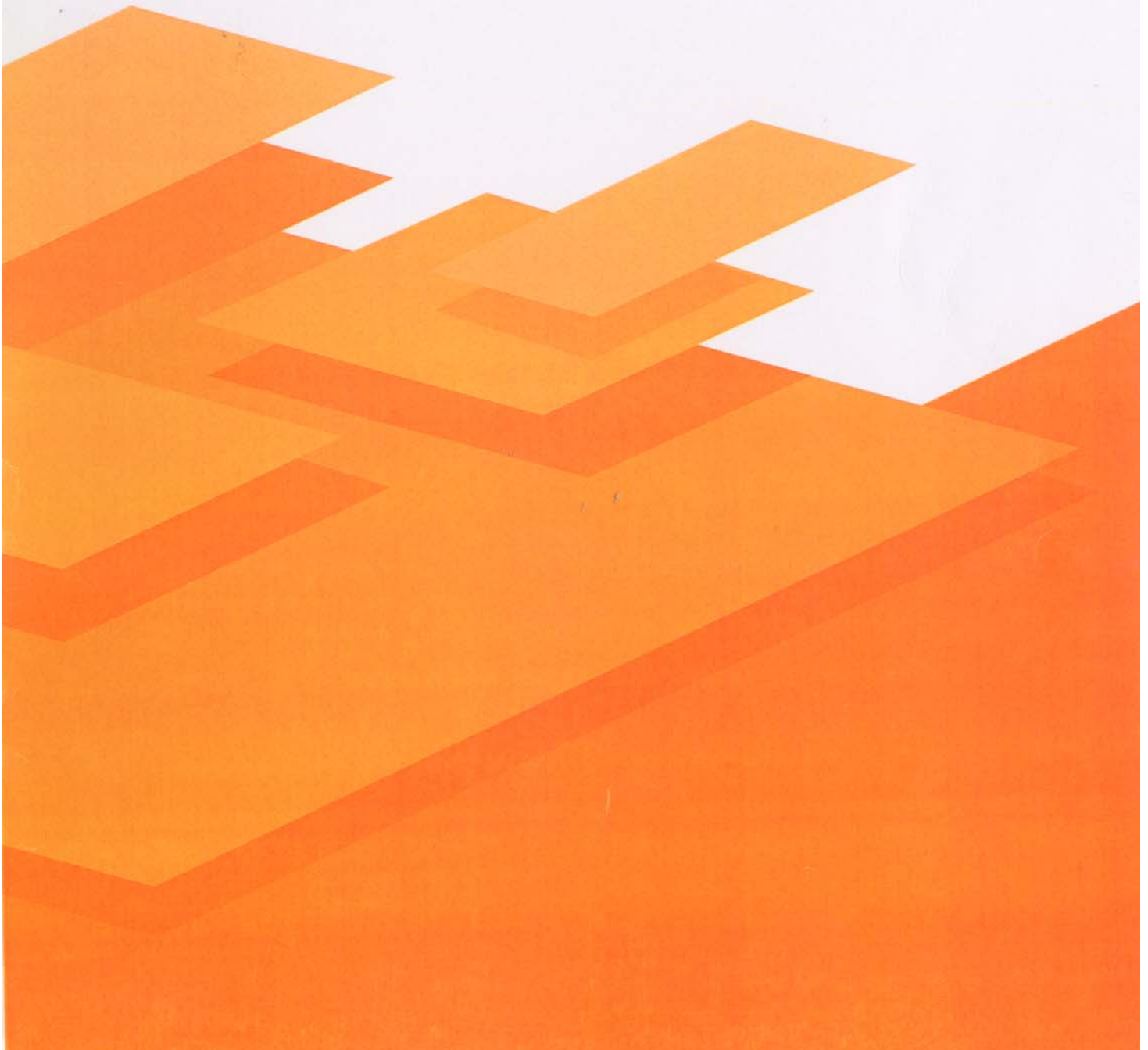


# **Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan**

**Report of Working Conference**

10 February 2003



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## Executive Summary

The working conference held on 10 February 2003 in the Europa Hotel, Belfast, to discuss the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 was attended by over 200 delegates. These delegates represented a wide range of sectors including local councils, business, academic institutions, community and environmental groups, transport interest groups and government departments and statutory agencies.

Angela Smith MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, gave the opening address which was followed by presentations from the Department for Regional Development's transport consultants Atkins.

The key principles underlying the BMTP process were outlined during these presentations including reference to the proposed schemes and priorities under the headings of:

- walking and cycling;
- public transport;
- roads; and
- demand management.

Delegates had been given the opportunity to examine the details proposed under these headings, having received the conference papers in advance. The workshops in the morning examined the thrust of the Department's Draft Preferred Strategy under the four aforementioned themes. Delegates were asked to comment on the acceptability of the key principles underlying the Draft Preferred Strategy. By contrast the afternoon workshops were specific to one of seven sectors in the metropolitan area (Belfast city centre, Carrickfergus, Newtownabbey, North and West Belfast, Lisburn, Castlereagh and North Down) and looked at specific proposals for each sector. A further workshop of key stakeholders examined Belfast Metropolitan Area-wide issues and all proposals within the Emerging Plan 2015. Following the afternoon workshops an open forum discussion was held where delegates were given the opportunity to put questions to a panel.

Overall, most delegates agreed with the underlying principles and thrust of the Draft Preferred Strategy and the areas of focus for the Emerging Plan. Some said however that the details of each scheme need to be carefully examined and in some cases revisited if the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan is to succeed. Many urged the Department to proceed with finalising the Plan as a matter of urgency while some called for more vision and ambition.

A summary of points raised at the conference is given below.

### • **Walking and Cycling**

Delegates were at times split on the value and benefits of walking and cycling from a transportation point of view. Some asked if the number of trips made on foot or by bicycle would be substantial enough to make a difference. Others believed that a choice should always be available and emphasised the benefits of an integrated transport system with extensive modal choice. Some pro-walking and pro-cycling representatives were disappointed at what they see as a low level approach to walking and cycling in both the Draft Preferred Strategy and the Emerging Plan. Other delegates believed that the Draft Preferred Strategy and the Emerging Plan placed sufficient emphasis on these modes.

- **Public Transport**

In general, delegates agreed with the overall package of proposals to enhance public transport but some stressed the importance of amendments to specific elements.

- **The Railway Network**

Proposed improvements in the railway network in the metropolitan area were by and large welcomed by delegates. Some delegates did however query the improvements in terms of feasibility and deliverability. Reference was made in this respect to the poor rolling stock and infrastructure with questions asked on the logistics of increasing rail frequencies by up to 50 per cent on some lines. Others were concerned about the specifications of planned new rolling stock saying that, in their opinion, the trains and the infrastructure will be unable to accommodate more passengers.

- **Quality Bus Corridor Network**

The introduction of a Quality Bus Corridor network was welcomed provided that the network is comprehensive and high quality and that it operates a frequent, flexible and affordable service. An enhanced bus network was seen as fundamental to the public transport proposals and as a necessary and worthwhile investment.

- **Rapid Transit**

The Emerging Plan envisages a standard rapid transit system being introduced in the metropolitan area. This system will include guided bus technology and dedicated rapid transit routes. Rapid transit was seen by delegates as a positive step forward. However some were not satisfied with the proposed for a 'standard' system and suggested that a more enhanced system, if not a light rail network, is what the metropolitan area actually needs.

- **Park and Ride**

The concept of park and ride was welcomed, however specific details and locations were queried. The most notable of these are the proposed sites at Kennedy Way, Fortwilliam, Cairnshill and Tillysburn. Critics said that the proposed locations for these sites are not strategic and that traffic problems and congestion levels occur much earlier along these transport corridors. For the most part the Department was encouraged to proceed with the principle of park and ride with some delegates asking that the locations for many of the sites be reconsidered, especially those which are designed to tackle strategic traffic.

- **Roads**

Delegates welcomed the planned improvements to the strategic roads including road widening and junction improvements. With the exception of one proposal, delegates were also satisfied with the proposed approach to the local road network.

- **Strategic Highway Network**

Improvements to the strategic road network were said to be essential, especially for the movement of freight and longer distance traffic around the metropolitan area. There was recognition of the negative and cumulative effects strategic congestion has on local roads and the possible benefits associated therefore with making improvements to strategic roads. It was also highlighted that improvements to the main network will create a better environment for the planned bus network. These two improvements are needed at the same time, it was stressed.

Caution was expressed nonetheless at the message the Department would be sending by investing in roads infrastructure as a priority. It was emphasised by some delegates that today's society is a car-based one, that a lot of people value their car and young people aspire to owning one. They stressed that if this is going to change investment in road improvements might detract from efforts reduce car usage.

On many occasions it was stressed that while road improvements are needed to enable strategic roads to function effectively, these should be introduced in conjunction with a concerted public transport investment programme and an education awareness campaign.

- **Local Road Schemes**

In general there was support for the local road network improvements with the exception of the completion of the inner ring road. This, by contrast, received virtually no support in the workshops which discussed it and was met with vehement opposition from a few delegates. Comments made about this proposal referred to the potential detrimental effects that the scheme could have, particularly on the surrounding inner city communities.

- **Demand Management**

The main demand management measure contained in the Emerging Plan centres on parking controls to discourage commuters from parking in central Belfast. This was welcomed by many delegates but criticised by others. As a measure for Belfast city centre alone this proposal was queried, particularly by delegates representing the business, retail and tourism sectors in Belfast city centre who emphasised the need to sustain a healthy and economically viable city centre with a strong retail and business sector. Some delegates believed a more comprehensive programme of parking restraint throughout all urban centres would be more effective in tackling congestion.

The fact that congestion charging is not being considered within the Plan period caused disappointment for some delegates. Mention was made of the lack of vision and the pro-car message that this sends to the public. Those who expressed their views on this subject urged the Department to look at what other cities and metropolitan areas are doing and closely monitor the outcomes of the London congestion charging scheme.

- **Plan Vision**

Some delegates called for a more visionary and ambitious Strategy and Plan. They urged the Department to adopt a bolder stance and to seek to construct a transportation system for the metropolitan area that would inspire and lead the way. Some said the public needs to see innovation and showpieces if substantial changes in travel attitudes are to occur. Early introduction of a light rail system was mentioned as one way of achieving the success and changes needed.

The Department was asked by these delegates to design a plan that will send clear and strong transportation messages to everyone in the metropolitan area. Some asked the Department to concentrate its focus on a few key proposals rather than dilute the effectiveness of the overall Plan.

- **Funding and Affordability**

Most delegates broadly supported the thrust of the Draft Preferred Strategy and the principles underlying the proposals within the Emerging Plan but the feasibility of the package from a funding perspective was queried at times. Some delegates stressed the imperative for government to ensure that sufficient funding is made available to fully implement the Plan as quickly as possible.

- **Targets**

Some delegates were critical that targets had been omitted from the information presented to them. They highlighted the need in the preparation of any plan to set targets and to then put in place mechanisms to achieve these targets. Without targets, some delegates believe the Plan will not be focused and as a result the proposals may not achieve as much as they could.

- **Phasing and Implementation**

Questions were asked about the Department's views on phasing of the schemes and proposals within the Emerging Plan. While accepting that the proposals would be implemented within the life of the Plan (up to 2015) some delegates found it difficult to accept that the Department had not provided some information on phasing and implementation.

In this respect the Department was urged to proceed as a matter of urgency with, for example, strategic road improvements and the new Quality Bus Corridor network at the same time. They stressed the importance of this simultaneous approach arguing that the introduction of a Quality Bus Corridor network on already congested roads would not work.

## 1. Introduction

The Department for Regional Development and its consultants Atkins are currently preparing the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan. When completed, the Plan will cover the six Council areas of Belfast, Lisburn, Castlereagh, Carrickfergus, North Down and Newtownabbey and will deliver a phased implementation programme of transport schemes and measures up to 2015 set within a 2025 strategy.

The Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMTP) is being developed building upon the principles set out in the Regional Transportation Strategy 2012 and the Regional Development Strategy 2025.

Before moving on to finalising the BMTP, the Department sought conference delegates' views both on the thrust of the Draft Preferred Strategy and the priorities that have been identified as part of the Emerging Plan. The views expressed by delegates will be important in helping shape the final form of the BMTP, which the Department intends to publish later this year.

This report is an account of the working conference which was independently chaired and facilitated by Community Technical Aid. The feedback from the conference is in five sections. Section 2 outlines the background to the conference. Section 3 is an account of the information presented at the conference by Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Angela Smith MP and Atkins. Sections 4 and 5 summarise the main issues arising in the morning and afternoon workshops on the thrust of the Draft Preferred Strategy and the priorities within the Emerging Plan respectively, and Section 6 highlights the main questions and answers discussed in the open forum session in the afternoon.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 The Plan Development Process

The development of the BMTP is part of an integrated planning process for Northern Ireland and the Belfast Metropolitan Area. The Plan is guided by European, UK and regional policy as well as a range of policy statements, the Regional Development Strategy 2025 (RDS) and the Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) 2012. It is being prepared alongside the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 which will contain land use proposals for the metropolitan area.

The Department is developing the BMTP according to the GOMMMS (Guidance on the Methodology for Multi-Modal Studies) approach. This is an 'objective-led' approach which identifies transport-related problems and defines objectives before moving on to the development of solutions to achieve the objectives.

The range of transport problems identified earlier in the BMTP preparation process included among other things:

- the level of traffic congestion and impact of traffic in the metropolitan area;
- the limitations of current public transport provision;
- limited integration between modes; and
- limited provision for walking and cycling.

The main problem is seen as increasing car dependency because of forces which include: changing demographics; economic and car ownership trends; challenges to public transport; changes in travel attitudes and patterns; and increasing rather than reducing social exclusion.

The objectives for BMTP were devised with guidance from the over-arching (national) objectives used in the RTS (environment, safety, economy, accessibility and integration) by the Spatial Planning Guidance provided in the R.DS and by the Guiding Principles established by BMAP.

The core objectives for BMTP were thus finalised as being:

- protecting the Belfast Metropolitan Area's natural and built environments;
- improving health, safety and security in the Belfast Metropolitan Area;
- supporting sustainable economic growth in the Belfast Metropolitan Area;
- improving access to regional gateways and tourist locations in and around the Belfast Metropolitan Area;
- promotion of a more inclusive society in the Belfast Metropolitan Area;
- supporting the revitalisation of Belfast Metropolitan Area's urban areas; and
- improving integration between transport modes, land use and other government policies.

## **2.2 Management of the BMTP Development Process**

The preparation of the BMTP has been undertaken by a dedicated team in the Department for Regional Development (DRD) in conjunction with consultants Atkins. The project itself is managed by a three tier system. The Project Working Group undertakes the day-to-day running of the project. This Group is made up of representatives from DRD, Atkins and Translink. Its work is overseen by a BMTP Steering Group with representatives from the six councils in the BMTP area, DRD, the Department of the Environment (DoE), the Department for Social Development (DSD), Translink and the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHCo). A Project Board oversees the entire project and has representatives at a senior level from DRD, DoE, Translink and NITHCo.

The consultation element of the BMTP process is managed by DRD and Atkins. This has included a number of consultation meetings with elected representatives, a Key Stakeholder Group and 20 Reference Groups throughout the consultation period over the last two years.

The working conference forms another important element of the consultation on the thrust of the Draft Preferred Strategy and the priorities that have been identified as part of the Emerging Plan.

### **3. Conference Format**

#### **3.1 Conference Programme**

Colm Bradley (Director, Community Technical Aid) opened the conference with an introduction to the day's proceedings and highlighted the need to get feedback from delegates on the thrust of the Draft Preferred Strategy 2025 and the priorities for the Emerging Plan 2015.

This was followed by an address from Angela Smith MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, who has responsibility for the Department for Regional Development.

Key presentations were delivered by Dr Alan Brett and Tony Meehan of Atkins on the BMTP process and specifically on the contents of the Draft Preferred Strategy and the Emerging Plan.

Delegates then moved into workshop sessions which addressed a number of questions about the Draft Preferred Strategy. The workshop sessions in the afternoon by contrast examined specific priorities and proposals within the Emerging Plan, with each workshop looking at different geographic sectors within the Belfast Metropolitan Area.

An open forum question and answer session was held at the end of the conference. This enabled delegates to make comments and ask questions of a panel comprised of representatives from the BMTP and BMAP Teams, Atkins, Translink and DR.D.

The conference chair closed the conference by thanking all delegates and facilitators for their input and by focusing everyone's minds on the next steps and the implementation of a transportation plan for the Belfast Metropolitan Area that will tackle the problems that have been experienced for many years.

#### **3.2 Opening Presentations**

##### **3.2.1 Ministerial Address-Angela Smith MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State**

The Minister began by welcoming delegates to the conference and reminding everyone of their personal responsibility when using roads, particularly in light of the rising death toll from road traffic accidents across the region since the beginning of 2003.

She referred to the role that the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan can play in contributing to road safety given plans for the improvement of transport links and the strategic road network.

In terms of the role of the BMTP, the Minister explained that the Plan offers the opportunity to tackle the transportation issues in the metropolitan area with vision and imagination and with a degree of urgency given the level of problems experienced in the region's transportation network.

The Minister went on to outline the relationship between BMTP and BMAP, how the two processes complement one another and how each seeks support on sustainable patterns of development and movement with future generations relying on both Plans to devise the solutions to current problems and challenges.

Recognising the importance of everyone playing their part (councils, business, community and voluntary sector and trade unions), the Minister acknowledged the benefit of rooting the Strategy and Plan in the community. Without this, she said, a less effective top down approach would result. She mentioned that the dynamism in communities must be recognised and that the metropolitan area must be planned for accordingly

The Minister said the future prosperity of the region must be examined in terms of enriching its quality of life, its capacity to maintain and sustain the integrity of its environment and its ability to overcome social exclusion.

In terms of inward investment, the location of industrial, commercial and public institutions, access to jobs and services, management of urban growth and suburban sprawl and the provision of safe sustainable environments, the Minister said that all have one common requirement - "the need for a modern, efficient and sustainable transportation infrastructure."

She asked delegates to use their time at the conference to focus on the key features of the Emerging Plan for 2015: a step change in the quality of public transport provision (investment in rail and bus); an ambitious Quality Bus Corridor network: commencement of a rapid transit network: a ring of park and ride sites; implementation of the strategic highway improvements and traffic management measures; city centre focused parking restraint; walking and cycling improvements; and a concerted effort to change travel attitudes through awareness campaigns and travel plans.

The Minister specifically asked delegates to focus on strategic issues and to temporarily set aside their local needs because of the importance of getting the strategic framework right first.

She went on to applaud the work already done by Peter Robinson, MP, former Minister for Regional Development, on the Regional Transportation Strategy. She also paid tribute to the Northern Ireland Assembly and its Regional Development Committee for the way in which it endorsed the RTS.

The Minister outlined the follow-through, in financial terms, on the RTS and how the December 2002 budget allocated an additional £135 million over the next three years in support of the RTS. She explained how in addition to this it is assumed that a number of major road schemes will be advanced under Public Private Partnership arrangements and that rapid transit could be advanced under similar arrangements.

Other financial gains were listed including £40 million for the bus replacement programme and £40 million towards the modernisation of the core of the railway network.

She suggested that everyone should try leaving their cars at home from time to time and use public transport instead. Higher patronage and usage, she stressed, is the only way to secure the future development of public transport.

The Minister ended her address by urging everyone to take responsibility for changing their travel attitudes and by not thinking that the Transport Plan is for someone else:

*"Don't make plans for public transport so that someone e/se can use 'it If public transport is to be successful we have to use it".*

### **3.2.2 The Draft Preferred Strategy - Dr Alan Brett, Atkins**

Dr Alan Brett is Atkins' project director for the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan project and specialises in transport forecasting and modelling. In his presentation he outlined the background to the development of the BMTP explaining how the RDS 2025 provides the longer term vision and how the RTS 2012 provides the framework for transport and delivery up to 2012.

Dr Brett outlined how the RTS provides guidance on funding with £3.5 billion of expenditure for Northern Ireland as a whole and £1.4 billion specifically for the Belfast Metropolitan Area.

He explained how the BMTP is one of three regional transport plans that will deliver the RTS vision with the other two covering the Regional Strategic Transportation Network and the rest of the area outside of the Belfast Metropolitan Area.

The relationship between BMTP and BMAP was outlined. The former, he said, provides the transportation solutions that support the planning decisions to be contained in the latter.

Dr Brett said that while the Plan is focused on delivery of transport up until 2015 a longer term vision is needed which will enable the Department to ensure that the schemes proposed in the Plan period are building blocks towards a clear vision for the future.

The Plan, he explained, will be implemented quite quickly over the next ten years if the funding is in place.

The number of alternative strategies appraised for the BMTP area were mentioned, particularly in terms of how these strategies will deliver on the over-arching national objectives. Out of this appraisal process the preferred Strategy was chosen, he explained.

From this Draft Preferred Strategy he explained how the priorities (such as Quality Bus Corridors and park and ride sites) for an Emerging Plan were chosen.

Dr Brett concluded by outlining the key features of the Draft Preferred Strategy under the four headings of walking and cycling, public transport, the highway network and demand management. Walking and cycling, he said, are considered important transport modes which for shorter journeys provide an alternative to the car and can be useful for accessing other public transport facilities. Importantly as modes they help communities "reclaim the streets" particularly when specific walking and cycling routes are put in place in conjunction with traffic calming measures and schemes which seek to divert traffic from the local network.

Public transport, he said, is to benefit from major investment with further enhancement of the rail network; an extensive Quality Bus Corridor network which will serve all main transport corridors; rapid transit routes in corridors not served by rail with the possibility of transferring to a light rail system in the future: and development of both strategic and local park and ride sites.

In terms of the highway network, Dr Brett explained how significant improvements are needed if bottlenecks are to be removed and traffic is to be diverted from local roads onto strategic roads allowing them to function as they were originally intended to.

Under demand management measures he said that city centre congestion needs to be managed by parking restraint (and congestion charging in the longer term) and especially by changing the public's attitude to travel and public transportation.

### **3.2.3 The Emerging Plan 2015 - Tony Meehan, Atkins**

Tony Meehan from Atkins has many years' experience in transport planning. He has led the Atkins Project Team and supported the Department in developing the BMTP.

In his presentation Mr Meehan built upon what had been said by Dr Brett by examining the four themes and specifically what is proposed for delivery within the schemes in the Emerging Plan. Under walking and cycling significant improvements on the local network will take place in conjunction with traffic calming and traffic management schemes. He highlighted that current cycling trips equate to only 1% of work trips in the BMA whereas in Europe it can range from 10% to 20%. This shows that much potential exists here but that there is a need to realise that walking and cycling routes focused on the main urban centres with increased pedestrianisation and improved access to public transport

Proposals for public transport were examined under a further four subheadings. Mr Meehan said that building on the commitment already given to rail, the Plan would maximise and capitalise on that investment through improved station facilities, new stations at west Lisburn, the City Airport and Gamble Street, relocated stations at Great Victoria Street and Jordanstown and increased rail frequencies by 50 per cent on some routes.

Quality Bus Corridors, he explained, are a fundamental element of the Strategy and a priority for delivery within the Plan. As such they will form the backbone of the public transport system with 15 routes identified in the Belfast Metropolitan Area which will have modern accessible buses, improved bus stops, real time passenger information, increased service frequencies and bus priority measures to make the Quality Bus Corridors work especially along congested corridors.

A network of rapid transit routes has been identified in the Plan including: EWay in the Newtownards corridor (as a pilot scheme); Westway in West Belfast; Super Route in the Downpatrick corridor; and a dedicated Harbour Estate and City Airport route.

Mr Meehan referred to the fact that initially the rapid transit schemes would be based on guided bus technologies but eventually the system could be upgraded to a light rail network if this is deemed feasible and fundable.

A ring of proposed park and ride sites is identified in the Plan in each of the metropolitan transport corridors which will be linked to Quality Bus Corridors, rapid transit and rail. These, he said, will need to have safe parking, high quality waiting facilities and integration with other parts of the public transport network.

Other elements of public transport proposals in the Plan include improvement in local bus services and an enhancement of demand-responsive rural transport services.

The highway network comprises strategic roads and local roads. Strategic roads, Mr Meehan said, need to cater for long distance movement of freight and passengers linking areas of regional importance and supporting economic prosperity. This will include, it is proposed, selective road widening and junction improvements, widening the A2 at Greenisland, the Sydenham Bypass and the M2, improving the Sandyknowes Junction and widening the M1 Westlink. All of these strategic road schemes will be supported by route management strategies throughout the entire network with reconfigured junctions, improved crossing facilities and better signage and lighting.

The local road network improvements by contrast, centre on traffic calming in built-up areas which will reclaim the streets for walking and cycling, completion of the southern section of the inner ring road and transport links associated with major developments outlined in the R.DS and to be brought to fruition by the BMAP process.

Mr Meehan explained how proposed demand management measures are necessary to supplement and support the effective operation of other elements of the Plan. He outlined the role for intelligent transport systems including real time information and integrated ticketing, variable message signage which will provide better information to drivers, improved traffic control systems for incident detection, as well as tools to support enforcement.

He stressed that demand management is fundamental to the success of the Emerging Plan - for example the positive effect that the proposal to constrain city centre parking will have in reducing long stay commuter parking figures and the positive impact that travel awareness campaigns can have on making the public aware of the travel choices available to them.

In conclusion Mr Meehan said that while the Belfast Metropolitan Area does not have the traffic problems that exist in other regions. There are still problems. He emphasised that an opportunity now exists to develop a modern, integrated transport system before the problems become overwhelming, but there is also a need to ensure that the Plan is practical, realistic and affordable.

## 4. Draft Preferred Strategy 2025

There were nine workshop sessions in the morning. Each examined the thrust of the Draft Preferred Strategy under four themes:

- public transport;
- the strategic highway network;
- the local road network, incorporating walking and cycling, and
- the need for demand management.

Overall there was broad agreement on the thrust of the Draft Preferred Strategy but with a degree of fine tuning of each of the four themes called for.

A summary of the issues raised throughout all nine workshops is followed by comments specific to each of the four aforementioned themes and other issues raised.

### 4.1 Summary of Issues

In terms of public transport many delegates welcomed the Department's proposals for enhancement of the public transport system (and some said it was long overdue).

More radical action was however called for with some delegates suggesting that the proposals were "tame" in nature. More innovative measures were said to be needed which will stimulate the interest of the public of the Belfast Metropolitan Area and result in higher shifts from the car to public transport. Particular mention was made of light rail and its ability to deliver. The planned investment in the highway network was generally welcomed with a lot of support for prioritising the movement of strategic traffic and freight in a bid to free up the local road network and the associated neighbourhoods and to support and nurture the economic prosperity of the metropolitan area.

An important subsidiary element to these comments is that the local road network should not be significantly enhanced or improved as this would encourage more car users. Delegates stressed that the focus should be on improvements to the strategic highway network.

Local road improvements and walking and cycling measures were cautiously welcomed. Some queried the low key approach to walking and cycling within the Strategy, others did not necessarily see the commuter benefits from enhanced walking and cycling opportunities.

There was a qualified welcome for traffic calming schemes especially those within local neighbourhoods and communities. The design and nature of traffic calming schemes were queried in terms of the negative effects that can result.

Demand management measures were broadly supported but were said to need enhancement. This was seen as especially important with regard to the number of parking spaces in Belfast city centre and how they have increased considerably in number in recent years. Some delegates said to reduce the number available, others urged caution over the possible negative impacts this could have on business life and the retail sustainability of the city.

Overall the thrust of the proposed measures was welcomed with an emphasis on the need to effectively integrate all of these with the new public transport, road and walking and cycling measures. Delegates urged the Department to move forward as a matter of urgency.

## **4.2 Public Transport**

Delegates were asked for their overall views on the presented long-term approach for improving public transport in the Belfast Metropolitan Area. In general they agreed with the principle of enhancing public transport but stressed the importance of alterations to specific elements within the public transport proposals.

The debate in all of the nine workshops was dominated by discussion on the Strategy's proposals for public transport. This is a reflection of the weight and emphasis placed within the Strategy on public transport.

The range of comments and issues raised under this theme are further categorised and subdivided under the subheadings of rail, Quality Bus Corridors, park and ride and rapid transit.

Whilst there was widespread welcome for the public transport proposals within the Draft Preferred Strategy, some did say however that the Department needs to be more visionary and ambitious and implement these schemes in a holistic way with careful phasing plans. It was sometimes suggested that Quality Bus Corridors should be of a higher quality than proposed and that the position of park and ride sites is reconsidered. Rapid transit as proposed, while a positive way forward, was said by some to be misleading and not rapid at all. It was further proposed by others that incentives should be introduced to encourage greater use of public transport and subsidies made available to routes which would not be commercially viable otherwise.

In counterbalance to the more positive statements about public transport, some delegates referred to and were critical of the emphasis in the Draft Preferred Strategy on commuters and their movement around the metropolitan area. A few delegates in one workshop queried the Department's consideration of other sections of the community - older people, people not in employment and people in socially excluded areas - and their ability to travel around and across sectors in the metropolitan area. They asked if the Draft Preferred Strategy really addressed their needs. There were also concerns over how affordable this Strategy is, realistically where the funding will come from and if this issue had been factored into the modelling process.

### **4.2.1 Rail**

Whilst recognising the merit of increasing rail frequencies, some concern was expressed at the discrepancies in the planned approach with only some lines getting frequencies increased by 50 per cent and planned new rolling stock and the standard of rail infrastructure seemingly unable to accommodate higher numbers of passengers. There was a degree of concern over the merits of providing Quality Bus Corridors and/or rapid transit routes parallel to train lines and whether this would be a duplication of services. Delegates also queried how the Strategy would encourage more freight off the road and onto rail, especially the freight linking into port facilities.

Better and more parking facilities at train stations was urged particularly if commuters are to be encouraged to use trains rather than cars. Some suggested providing new halts and stations to ensure easier access to the rail network.

Equally, walking and cycling routes to train stations were called for as was an integrated train and bus ticketing system, making the shift affordable and attractive to users.

### **4.2.2 Quality Bus Corridors**

The proposed introduction of an extensive Quality Bus Corridor network was welcomed overall but with important caveats. Delegates believe that the details of the Quality Bus Corridor network need to be thoroughly examined. Some had queries over the practicalities involved in constructing bus routes along carriageways and roads which are already operating at full

capacity. The phasing and implementation of Quality Bus Corridor schemes was also said to be crucial and the Department was urged to consider this carefully.

Some delegates asked if Quality Bus Corridor routes are comprehensive enough in terms of penetration, demographics, social inclusion and targeting social need. Others queried if there are enough buses to meet the needs of this quality bus service.

There was universal support for a high quality, flexible Quality Bus Corridor which will have a prominent profile. This is important, it is believed, for members of the public to see the impact of the new bus network and to be encouraged to use it.

The Key Stakeholder Group was particularly concerned about the Quality Bus Corridor network's focus on the radial and orbital routes with no inner city orbital route to enable passengers to travel across quadrants in the city. Bus linkages across the metropolitan area were seen as crucial especially from a targeting social need perspective and accessing employment locations which are not on direct orbital or radial routes. It was further suggested that there should be minibus links from orbital and radial routes to services such as hospitals, schools and shops and into local communities to create easier access.

The issue of duplication of services was again raised with delegates querying the Department's wisdom in proposing Quality Bus Corridors alongside rail lines. It was also said that the Quality Bus Corridor proposals are not adventurous or comprehensive enough and that the Department should look to other cities to see how Quality Bus Corridors have been designed.

Overall a Quality Bus Corridor network was generally welcomed as an important way forward but delegates urged the Department to be more innovative in its approach to design, quality, coverage and road re-allocation and to structure the implementation and phasing of the network in such a way as to cause minimum disruption and maximum availability to passengers at appropriate times. It was stressed that Quality Bus Corridors will only be successful in areas where they are enforced and where insensitive and careless parking is properly tackled.

#### **4.2.3 Park and Ride**

The principle of park and ride sites was accepted but very often delegates queried the location of the proposed sites. While this was ultimately a conversation for the afternoon discussion on the Emerging Plan, delegates insisted that the logic behind the Department's thinking on park and ride is fundamentally flawed.

The location of what the conference papers referred to as "strategic" park and ride sites was questioned. Delegates often said that the proposed locations for these sites are not strategically placed and in many cases being too close to Belfast city will not adequately tackle the congestion problems.

Many comments related to the fact that the congestion caused by strategic traffic occurs and builds up much earlier along the main routes into the city and that this congestion therefore needs to be tackled at an earlier stage on these routes.

Delegates did recognise the importance and value of park and ride sites but asked that their locations be considered from the point of view of traffic flows and congestion hot spots. They also urged that the facilities at these new park and ride sites be high quality, safe and secure and serviced by value for money, high frequency bus and rapid transit services. It was stressed that the cumulative cost of parking and riding should not be higher than driving.

#### **4.2.4 Rapid Transit**

The definition of rapid transit as presented in the conference papers was criticised. Delegates were mostly in favour of the metropolitan area getting at least an enhanced rapid transit system if not a light rail system. The proposed standard rapid transit system was seen as being conservative and equating merely to an enhanced bus service with guided technology on part of the routes. Some delegates believed this to be short-sighted and not truly definable as rapid transit.

More funding and a sincere investigation of the light rail option was called for from the point of view of tackling congestion, having fewer detrimental impacts on the environment and ensuring that the Belfast Metropolitan Area leads the way in transportation innovation.

#### **4.3 The Strategic Highway Network**

Delegates were asked for their views on the long-term approach for the strategic highway network as presented in the papers. For the most part delegates welcomed the proposed improvements to the strategic highways and the Department's emphasis on this element of the transportation network. Some did nonetheless stress the need for an integrated approach and urged caution over too much emphasis on road improvements.

Improvements to the strategic highway network were said to be essential to enable road-based traffic, especially freight, to move more freely. Delegates believe that the critical problems on main roads need to be tackled before public transport is improved given the difficulty that buses, for example, would have using an already congested road network. They therefore welcomed the planned improvements to strategic roads including road widening and junction improvements. The fact that work on some strategic road schemes has already started was mentioned and that this is both welcome and necessary. Consultation with communities was however urged to ensure that these road schemes - which can often be controversial - are acceptable to the community. Hopes were expressed that strategic road improvements would be both sustainable and targeted and that they would not need revisiting in 10-15 years.

Many delegates recognised that strategic traffic and the bottlenecks created at peak journey times is one of the biggest problems the metropolitan area faces. They referred to the ripple effect this has on local roads which are often clogged up and adversely affecting local neighbourhoods and communities. Mention was therefore made of the need to give priority to strategic traffic over local traffic in the early stages of implementation of the Plan.

Counter arguments and caution were expressed nonetheless over the dangers of investing in road improvements as a first step given the 'pro-car' message that this could send. Some delegates said it might be even more difficult as a result to encourage the public to get out of their cars. A better way forward, it was suggested, would be to simultaneously prioritise Quality Bus Corridors and highway improvements.

Specific mention was made of particular roads in the metropolitan area. These include the intersection of the Westlink and the M2 which was said to be in need of special attention. Delegates said that this important interchange should have greater status. Some delegates were unclear about the nature of improvements proposed for the Outer Ring road system.

One criticism of the Department's proposals for the highway network was that there appears to be a definitive and quite restrictive network of strategic roads with no mechanisms to manage traffic movements, that is, how to keep non-strategic traffic off the strategic network and vice versa.

It was also said the Department has not adequately considered the destination of traffic which goes through Belfast city centre in terms of the traffic actually destined for Belfast city centre and wanting to park there and the traffic going elsewhere.

A definition of strategic traffic was called for with delegates querying whether this means high value export and freight traffic or high occupancy commuter traffic.

The absence of any reference to the Port of Lame was criticised as this is seen as part of the strategic network given its regional gateway status. Furthermore it was suggested that links between the Belfast Metropolitan Area and the rest of Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the UK should be shown as strategic routes in the final Strategy.

The need for widening the M1 from Sprucefield through to Belfast was mentioned as was the inclusion of a dedicated lane for public transport in this widening scheme.

The strategic road improvements, it was said, will inevitably result in the encouragement of more local traffic onto these roads. The resultant congestion problems will need to be tackled and some delegates believed that congestion charging should have been introduced within the Plan period. It was also highlighted that land use proposals and major development schemes will have impacts on the transportation infrastructure and road infrastructure in particular. Developers' financial contributions to upgrading the road infrastructure was suggested as an element of this debate with suggestions made that this should be factored into the Department's thinking on strategic road improvements.

There was a call for better integration between new commercial and housing developments and roads developments. Developers often have to contribute to road improvement schemes but it was suggested that the Planning Service should also carefully monitor the impact of new developments on the surrounding strategic network.

Some representatives in the Key Stakeholder Group were critical of the definition of strategic roads saying that the conference papers implied that there is greater importance attached to longer distance traffic when this should not be the case. Some caution was urged in undertaking more road building and road improvements given the evidence from other regions that more road building leads to more congestion.

On balance throughout the nine workshops delegates mainly agreed with the principle of improving the strategic road network. The reasons given were the need to transport freight quickly, increase economic competitiveness in the Belfast Metropolitan Area and move large numbers of people around particularly if high occupancy vehicle lanes and segregated lanes for buses are introduced.

#### **4.4 The Local Road Network incorporating Walking and Cycling**

In response to the question on the proposed approach to the local road network (and walking and cycling in particular) many delegates said that they were satisfied for the most part. Others however did ask for more emphasis on walking and cycling, some urged caution over traffic management schemes and there was strong opposition to the completion of the inner ring road from those delegates who discussed it.

At times several delegates were critical of what they perceived to be the low importance attached to walking and cycling proposals in the Draft Preferred Strategy.

Delegates were occasionally split on the value and benefit of cycling in terms of commuting trips and the real impact on traffic levels. Some believe it is important to provide a choice of travel modes and that this should include walking and cycling. Others said that as a recreational activity cycling is acceptable but as a means of commuting they did not believe cycling trips would ever be significant enough to make a difference. There was an equal number of arguments on both sides.

The safety issues of walking and cycling were queried with references made to the need to ensure segregation of cycling lanes to provide safe conditions for cyclists. Similarly, the

importance of a continuous and comprehensive walking and cycling network throughout the Belfast Metropolitan Area was stressed. High quality and dedicated cycle lanes are needed, as opposed to shared use schemes for walkers and cyclists on pavements which, it was said, are not attractive to either set of users. One solution offered was the widening of pavements to accommodate segregated walking and cycling routes which has the dual purpose of reducing the capacity of the roads and thereby positively impacting on traffic speeds.

On a positive note some reference was made to how the theme of walking and cycling underpins the entire Draft Preferred Strategy in that the overall emphasis focuses on reducing the impact of the car and therefore improving the environment for walking and cycling generally.

Delegates would have preferred more detail however on walking and cycling and asked why they were presented with detailed information on proposed cycling routes in the morning presentation and not in the conference papers.

It was said that schools and employers should be doing more to encourage walking and cycling. Safe Routes to School, they suggested, should feature in the Draft Preferred Strategy.

In conjunction with the Department's plans for improved and dedicated walking and cycling routes, new facilities should be provided at bus and rail stations, in shopping areas and places of work especially in Belfast city centre which, it was said, has poor provision for cyclists.

Delegates said that the budget for walking and cycling should be increased. Walking in particular was highlighted to be in need of a vision, in combination with improved air quality and the provision of safer environments in cities and towns.

A final point on walking and cycling related to the need for investment in a "hearts and minds" campaign which would challenge traditional perceptions of cycling and enable the public to see the benefits of cycling as a mode of transport and one which should be accommodated and respected on our roads.

Improvements to the local road network, including traffic calming and management measures, were welcomed. It was said however that local schemes in residential areas have to be acceptable to the local community and should not detract from residential amenity and enjoyment. Reference was made on occasion to the need to "reclaim the streets" for local people. Consideration should therefore be given, it was said, to consulting with residents before introducing local traffic schemes.

The design of traffic calming schemes was highlighted as being one issue of concern both in terms of the type of traffic calming used (such as road humps) and the location of these schemes. From a disabled person's perspective and in terms of user friendliness, it was said that road humps are unsuitable and badly designed. Specific reference was also made to the transportation of patients to hospital and the difficulties associated with ambulances travelling over road humps.

There was a lot of discussion in a number of workshops on the Draft Preferred Strategy's reference to completion of the southern section of the inner ring road. Representatives of community groups and community forums voiced strong opposition to this proposal and went as far as saying that the Department had been misguided in its decision to consider this proposal again. The fact that this important issue had been relegated to a brief reference under local road improvements in the conference papers was also queried and viewed by a few delegates with some suspicion.

Severance, pollution and environmental problems were all highlighted as being the impact of any inner ring road completion scheme. Community representatives in particular said they do not want to suffer the ill effects that they believe will result from this.

#### 4.5 The Need for Demand Management

Views on proposed demand management measures were generally positive. There was some disappointment however that congestion charging would not be introduced before 2015 and there were mixed views on the proposed introduction of parking restraint measures particularly in Belfast city centre.

Delegates discussed the range of demand management measures that are proposed in the Draft Preferred Strategy which include parking controls to discourage commuters from travelling into central Belfast and congestion charging in the longer term, ie beyond 2015.

Many delegates expressed disappointment that congestion charging would not be introduced before 2015. Reference was made to the short-sightedness of the Draft Preferred Strategy in this respect with delegates saying that the Belfast Metropolitan Area needs a more rigorous policy on the issue than "let's wait and see."

The proposals to restrain parking in Belfast city centre were also met with some criticism. Concerns were expressed over the displacement of cars to the streets and residential areas outside the city centre and the detrimental effects this would have on people living there. Residents parking schemes were offered as one solution. However, it was mentioned that the legislation on this issue is not straightforward and the costs involved can also be prohibitive. Some delegates urged caution on the city centre parking restraint from the point of view of the potential harm to the retail life of the city. In addition, delegates asked if private car parks will be affected by this proposal and if so, how.

Delegates said they could agree with the proposed demand management measures but only if they are supported by a simultaneous programme of incentives such as mileage allowances for car pooling, employers' green travel plans and most importantly, a range of public transport alternatives being made available. This was commonly referred to as providing "the carrot as well as the stick." Phasing and implementation was therefore said to be vital.

Demand management, some said, has been understated in the Draft Preferred Strategy with delegates critical of the current ease of driving into and parking in Belfast city centre.

Government offices (with substantial car parking spaces at their buildings) were mentioned as contributing to this problem. Representatives from private development companies did mention however that in today's commercial climate clients expect car parking with office developments and may even specify this as being more important than air conditioning and a quality environment. This mindset, it was said, must change or be forced to change before the Department considers removing car parking spaces from the city centre and expecting everyone to change their views accordingly.

There was some confusion and queries over the logic behind parking restraint purely in Belfast city centre and not in other urban centres. Without a comprehensive system of parking restraint throughout the metropolitan area, many warned that the problems would never be solved and that out-of-town centres will thrive, especially in retail terms, as a result of what was considered to be a misguided policy.

On the subject of equality it was also mentioned that women, people with lower incomes and unemployed people will potentially suffer most from the introduction of restrictive parking measures in Belfast city centre. This was seen as a problem given that many senior government employees who earn higher salaries often have free car parking spaces. Those less fortunate, it was argued, will suffer from the disproportionate parking measures proposed. Congestion charging would at least result in everyone having to pay a charge.

One suggestion offered was the introduction of a city centre policy on the issues of all-day parking restraint and parking for shoppers. Some reference was made to the merits of examining other cities, such as Barcelona, which it was said is a good example of changing travel attitudes among the public.

It was said that if a difference is to be made in the Belfast Metropolitan Area, penalties must be levied on car users yet information and facilities must be provided for commuters to enable them to see the choices and alternatives available to them.

Current parking restraint and enforcement were criticised with some delegates saying that urban clearways and yellow lines are often not observed. They had difficulties therefore envisaging how new and stricter policies would be more effective.

Some reference was made to the need to specify which users can and cannot get into and park within the central areas under the proposed scheme. It was suggested that deliveries should be made earlier or later in the day and should not be allowed to block roads at peak times.

Classification of car users should be introduced, it was said, so that differentiation can be made between those needing to access the city centre, including disabled users, and other people.

#### **4.6 Other Issues**

One issue which received some attention related to the inter-connectivity of the city to the rest of the BMTP area and the connections within the city itself. The Odyssey Complex, for example, was said to be isolated and segregated from the rest of Belfast city centre and that it and other such places should be considered by the Department in the preparation of the Plan.

The user-friendliness of the proposed transportation schemes within the Strategy was queried, especially from a disabled user's perspective. Mention was often made by some delegates of the need to specify the factors that have been considered and the provisions that have been made to take account of disabled users of both public and private transport.

From an equality perspective one delegate asked whether the Department was robust in its consultation methodology, saying that women and young people, if asked, might give different answers to these questions than delegates at a male-dominated transport conference.

Another fundamental issue centred on the need for comprehensive community consultation before the Draft Preferred Strategy (or Plan) is progressed.

Safety and its importance, it was stressed, should underpin the entire Strategy and it was said that if this is already part of the Department's thinking it is not apparent from the proposals as presented. Further to this the impact of traffic, especially congestion, on air pollution was stressed and the need therefore to ensure the proposals in the Strategy do not make pollution any worse.

Boucher Road in Belfast was cited in one workshop as an example of land use planning which would not be allowed anywhere else in the UK given its lack of public transport service provision plus acres of free car parking space. This type of land use decision, it was said, only seeks to undermine the city centre.

The role of taxis was raised on a number of occasions. It was said that black taxis provide a valuable transport service around Belfast and as a result should be recognised within the Strategy.

Two separate and very different issues were raised on occasion which challenged the Department's approach and aspirations. The first relates to targets. Queries were raised as to why the Department did not include targets before beginning to construct a Strategy and Plan.

The logic and ultimate success of the Strategy and Plan as a result of this decision were questioned. The second issue related to funding and affordability with frequent questioning of the fundability of the Strategy and its level of ambition. Critics believed that the Draft Preferred Strategy and therefore the Plan, are not financially visionary. They asked that this fundamental issue be revisited before the Department progresses with the preparation of the BMTP.

The issue of integrating land use and transport routes was discussed in a number of workshops. Some said that recent housing developments made access to public transport modes difficult, and in the future new residential areas should be linked to bus routes, train stations or have good walkways and cycle paths.

## 5. Emerging Plan 2015

### 5.1 Summary of Issues

The majority of comments made during the afternoon workshops related to specific schemes and proposals within the Emerging Plan for the geographical corridor each was discussing. As such these are reported in the following sections under the relevant headings.

Nonetheless, some common issues were raised during all of the nine sessions. These included a criticism of the Department's emphasis on walking and cycling with delegates often saying that there is insufficient detail on the walking and cycling proposals as proposed.

In terms of public transport, whilst most proposals were for the most part welcomed, delegates were critical of what they termed as the 'tame' nature of proposals saying: enhanced rapid transit if not light rail is needed; the Quality Bus Corridor network should be more innovative and hard-hitting in its approach; that railway enhancements are welcomed but that their impact is questionable and that park and ride sites are for the most part in the wrong locations.

Overall specific public transport proposals were questioned. Delegates in some workshops (notably Castlereagh, Carrickfergus and North Down) could not see the merit and logic used in the Department's proposals. A "duplication of services" was mentioned on several occasions with frequent references made to the need for more radical action and vision.

Some delegates went as far as saying that this Plan has something for everyone, especially in public transport terms and maybe this is not the best way forward. Perhaps, they said, the Department should be bolder in its approach and opt for the light rail option.

Strategic highway improvements were overall welcomed with some minor adjustments said to be needed.

Completion of the inner ring road, by contrast, received virtually no support in the workshops which discussed it and was met with vehement opposition from a few delegates especially in terms of the envisaged community severance and city destruction that will result.

The introduction of local demand management measures were acceptable to delegates representing many of the geographical sectors. Several delegates in the Belfast city centre workshops however queried these proposals. They said that parking restraint proposals would have negative impacts on the city centre especially from a retailing point of view and would have detrimental effects on inner city communities as commuters would be displaced to streets in inner city residential areas.

Practical issues such as phasing, implementation and timing of schemes were also queried across the workshop sessions. Omitting such information from the conference papers was seen as a failing on the Department's part as this information, it was said, is crucial to the effectiveness of the consultation.

## 5.2 City Centre

There were two workshops examining the specific proposals for the city centre due to high level of interest in this sector. In both workshops delegates were presented with a list of proposals and asked for their views. There were mixed responses to the walking and cycling proposals and public transport proposals were welcomed but rail station and park and ride site locations were queried. Whilst constructive and positive about the proposals for the city centre, many delegates did nonetheless express concerns over the proposed completion of the inner ring road and the city centre parking restraint proposals. On occasion several delegates said these two proposals are unacceptable and that the Department had been misguided in its methodology and approach by including them.

### 5.2.1 Walking and Cycling

References to the inclusion of proposals for walking and cycling were welcomed however criticism was levelled at the Department for its lack of detail on specific walking and cycling schemes in Belfast city centre. Overall it was believed that a low key and almost 'unimportant' view of these two modes had been taken by the Department in preparation of the Emerging Plan.

Conversely there was some debate on the merit of including walking and cycling as viable and realistic methods of making commuter journeys. There were mixed views on both sides of this argument. In terms of raising the profile and usage figures for walking and cycling routes, it was stressed that employers should be encouraged to lead the way and that awareness campaigns need to be introduced immediately to bring about a sea change in attitudes among the public. As well as this, improved facilities including safe bicycle parking and the introduction of buses which can carry bicycles were said to be needed. While it was recognised that walking and cycling is one of the main planks of the Emerging Plan, it was said that there is not currently enough detail on the proposal and that this should be expanded upon. Some delegates queried, for example, the reason for showing proposed cycle networks across the Belfast Metropolitan Area during the morning presentation and yet omitting this detail from the conference papers.

Walking proposals and possible pedestrianisation schemes received significant attention in the two workshops. Delegates said that pedestrian facilities within the city centre at present are poor and need dramatic improvements. Pedestrian accessibility overall is an issue, it was said, as is the need for pedestrian access to other modes of transport and thus integration between all modes. It was said, for example, that there is a need for walk and ride and cycle and ride facilities, not just park and ride.

The city centre environment for walking is in need of substantial improvements and delegates mentioned how this should occur in a holistic way with improved streetscapes, attractive and safer environments and allocation of space to the walker, away from the bus and the car.

Critics highlighted how the Emerging Plan defines very little for walking in the city centre and how cognisance should be taken of the Public Realm Strategy. This Strategy, it was stressed, contains crucial information on the city in terms of making public spaces and open areas more attractive for walkers with the inclusion of squares and boulevards underpinned by the concept of 'reclaiming space' for pedestrians and recognising the public realm role of the city.

The pedestrian coverage needed throughout the city centre was stressed with reference made to how it is not just about getting from A to B but getting around the city centre too. Laganside walkways were quoted as good examples of creating the right environment for pedestrians. However it was said that there is not enough happening for the pedestrian in these areas. It was stressed that the central area of the city centre has thousands of people moving around it daily and their walking environment is urgently in need of improvement.

When informed that the Department may consider it premature to formulate walking proposals in detail until major land use schemes and redevelopment proposals are known, delegates expressed concern.

This debate concluded with delegates saying that the proposed inner ring road completion is actually contradicting the walking and cycling proposals for the city centre given the detrimental impacts that this road scheme could have on the environment for walkers and cyclists.

### **5.2.2 Public Transport**

Public transport was seen as the backbone of the Emerging Plan's proposals for the city centre. In particular buses were seen as being given the greatest emphasis. Delegates did query the Department's thinking on allocation of so much expenditure on buses in the city without providing information on quantities and how effective such a bus-based system could therefore be. They were particularly interested in road allocation and said that they could not see how the proposals will work. Again the logic of a Quality Bus Corridor network operating alongside railways was queried. Delegates said that the need for a rapid transit system is obvious but that evidence would suggest that a standard rapid transit system as proposed is not going to be effective. They stressed the need for a light rail system in the city and suggested that the terminology "rapid transit" as used in the conference papers is misleading as it is nothing more than a high quality bus system. One delegate urged the Department to "set its sights higher" and if necessary, increase rates to pay for the new light rail system.

The Quality Bus Corridor network in the city centre should be both inbound and outbound, it was said, and bus priority measures at traffic lights should also be introduced. However, a note of caution was urged on this in terms of the effect it has on car speeds and longer journey times for cars as a result.

Delegates said any new bus service for the city centre must operate on a high speed, high quality, "stop and pick up" basis. Also the pricing policy for new bus services must be carefully considered and set at limits which are affordable and attractive to current and potential users. Some delegates did say however that cheaper bus fares are probably neither feasible nor economically viable.

In addition to a Quality Bus Corridor network some delegates suggested that a free bus service should be introduced which will operate around the city centre. The Portland, Oregon bus trail was quoted as a good example of such a service. It was said that such a service could be funded by both the public and private sectors as this could prove to be an attractive service for both employers and visitors and would help boost the city's economy. Manchester's free inner city bus service was cited as another good example.

The role of existing and proposed new or relocated rail and bus stations in the city was discussed at length. Delegates were especially interested in the proposed bus and rail transport nodes for the city centre and asked how the Department envisaged their role over the Plan period.

In terms of proposed rail improvements, especially increasing rail frequencies by 50 per cent, some delegates queried the feasibility of this, given that the rolling stock and the infrastructure that would be required for this does not exist, in their view. They asked what these changes and increases would actually entail.

The proposed location for some park and ride sites in the city was occasionally criticised. Delegates said that the location of these park and ride sites is critical to the success of the public transport proposals and the entire system will not work if the park and ride sites are too close to the city centre. The view often expressed was that these sites should be located much earlier along arterial routes going into the city. Also park and ride sites should be serviced by high quality, high speed, frequent and reliable services with buses every five to ten minutes and trains every ten to fifteen minutes.

Some delegates in one of the city centre workshops queried the exact location of the proposed park and ride site for the outskirts of the city centre asking if it is going to be located on Boucher Road. The Kennedy Way park and ride site was criticised as being in the wrong location.

It was said that taxis only get a passing reference in the Emerging Plan and where they are mentioned the Department has restricted their definition to public hire taxis only. This was seen by a few delegates as being short-sighted. They said that the role played by private taxis in moving people, especially visitors, around the city should not be overlooked.

Other comments relating to public transport were also made. These included the fact that the current public transport system is often not used by the public because they fear for their personal safety.

The social need elements of the public transport proposals were also queried. Delegates mentioned that commuters are well catered for by the city centre proposals in the Emerging Plan but that other sections of the community are not. The Department should also look at non-commuter, recreational and retail trips and not limit its focus solely on the transportation needs of commuters around the city.

The funding required for the city centre public transport proposals was queried. Some delegates asked if the finance required would come from capital funds and ongoing subsidies. There was a degree of concern over this issue while recognising and welcoming the additional funding for the Belfast Metropolitan Area allocated by the Regional Transportation Strategy.

Overall delegates in both workshops said that they were supportive of the ideals underlying the public transport proposals for the city centre but said that "the devil is in the detail."

### **5.2.3 Road Network**

The discussion on the proposed changes and improvements to the road network was dominated in both workshops by a heated debate on the inner ring road. Many delegates expressed opposition to the proposed completion of the southern section of the inner ring road saying that although the Department is proposing the scheme will help to make the city centre more attractive, it will, in the opinion of delegates and members of inner city communities, result in segregation, severance and more congestion and pollution in inner city streets.

Many delegates were surprised to see the inner ring road scheme even being proposed again and queried the Department's logic in doing this in light of previous research (carried out by DTZ Pbeda) showing that the proposal would not be financially viable or cost effective. Those against the scheme said that studies elsewhere show that similar schemes in effect lead to the generation of more traffic and more car journeys. The community in the Markets, it was said, would suffer most from the scheme in terms of severance and decimation. Delegates also mentioned that traffic would become very congested along Cromac Street if the scheme proceeds. Referring to the three proposed sections of the inner ring road (M I, Gasworks and lower Ravenhill Road), delegates asked if all three sections have to proceed, suggesting that the Gasworks phase will destroy the community in the Markets.

Some delegates queried the logic and reasoning behind the change in thinking on the classification of the inner ring road scheme, that is being regarded as a local access road and no longer as a strategic road scheme. This was viewed with some suspicion by delegates with several comments made that it was unacceptable.

Furthermore some delegates asked if the Department had modelled the need for the completed inner ring road in terms of the allocation of road space to different modes and if TSN issues had been taken account of in the modelling process. A note of caution was also expressed on the practicalities of modelling and the difficulties of applying models and results to reality.

Counter arguments to the negative comments on the inner ring road proposal recognised that the proposal could free up space for development in the city centre, especially non-commercial development. In the Department's defence it was also stressed that the inner ring road is not seen as a 'Westlink' type proposal and that the scheme could involve a boulevard-type design with cycle lanes helping to take traffic to the city centre and not through it. These arguments were still rejected and reference was made to the fact that there are no easy solutions as alternatives to the inner ring road proposal do not currently exist. One delegate said that an either/or scenario should not have been presented in the Emerging Plan and that a number of solutions should have been tabled for discussion.

There was some debate over whether the Emerging Plan is concerned with moving cars or tackling the economics of the city. The latter point, some said, seems to be the case particularly in terms of justification for the inner ring road scheme.

On a final note it was stressed that although the inner ring road would require significant investment it seemed that the problem of congestion in the city centre would still exist and delegates queried if this could be eliminated through congestion charging or the creation of an 'inner box' in the city centre where charging would apply.

#### **5.2.4 Demand Management**

The parking restraint measures proposed for the city centre were debated at length. There were mixed views across the two workshops. Some delegates said that the changes will free up much needed space within the city centre and lead to the creation of a vibrant and people-focused city centre with more brownfield development opportunities as a percentage of car parking spaces are removed and built upon.

Others were negative, warning that such a restrictive car parking policy for the city centre could result in inner city streets and those streets further outside the city effectively becoming car parks.

Some said that it is difficult to comment on the issue of parking restraint without knowing current parking figures and what the proposals would result in. Encouraging the public to accept this restrictive policy was said to be an ambitious step and one that would require high quality public transport alternatives to be in place first.

The biggest criticism of the proposed parking restraint came from the pro-retail lobby who warned that the life and sustainability of the city centre could be seriously harmed and undermined by the proposals. The Emerging Plan in this respect was said to be contradictory in that it promotes economic competitiveness of the Belfast Metropolitan Area while being anti-competitive in its city centre policies. On this point delegates asked why other urban centres in the Belfast Metropolitan Area are not being given the same treatment.

As a solution to this problem it was suggested that a differentiation should be made between types of user in the Belfast Metropolitan Area with essential users, including disabled people, benefiting from unrestricted access to the city centre.

The Department was urged by delegates to remember that the commuter is the problem for the city centre and not the shopper. Overall the Department was urged not to be hasty in its decision to ban parking from the city centre. Delegates warned of the negative spin-off effects this could have on employment figures and reminded the Department of the targeting social need issues involved in such a policy, given that many inner city communities rely on the city centre for jobs. Increased prosperity for the city centre as a result of the parking proposals was said to be questionable. Delegates said the city's prosperity was likely to decrease given that Belfast spends comparatively less per capita than cities in other regions.

Short-term car parking spaces were also said to be needed in the city centre. The macro economics of future parking in the city centre need to be examined, it was said, with the use of multiple occupancy vehicular access to the city centre offered as one way forward.

Other comments related to the proposed decriminalisation of parking offences with questions asked about future arrangements if the Police Service of Northern Ireland no longer polices parking. When informed of the Department's commissioned research into how parking offences will be dealt, with delegates stressed that this information is required as a matter of some urgency given the problems faced in the city.

### **5.2.5 Other Issues**

The rights and needs of disabled people were highlighted with commentators saying that the Department's references to the needs of disabled people in the city centre and meeting these needs is implied and not explicit.

Shopmobility users are not mentioned in the Emerging Plan, and yet the needs of people with disabilities, especially when shopping, are crucial.

It was stressed that the needs of disabled people and their experiences of public transport should be explicitly referred to in the Emerging Plan. The impact of pedestrianisation schemes on disabled people was also said to need some consideration given the difficulties that can be experienced by wheelchair users on the cobblestone and other pavium surfaces often used in such schemes.

It was said that the Emerging Plan made no provision for powered two-wheelers and that this form of transport should be allowed to use bus lanes and that secure car parking facilities should be provided for them in the city centre.

Some delegates asked what definition of the city centre is being used and urged the Department to consider the changing nature and boundary of the city, especially with new developments such as Titanic Quarter.

The quality of the evening environment in the city centre was said to need urgent attention and that the Emerging Plan has a key role to play in terms of ensuring that a safe and attractive city centre environment is provided for walking and cycling after 5.00 pm.

There was widespread criticism of the lack of reference in the Emerging Plan to the inner city communities in Belfast and how the proposals will actually provide them with very little over the Plan period: "Inner city communities have been the cornerstone of the city for over 30 years. They have come through enough and now they will suffer more as a result of these proposals." Representatives from inner city communities said they believe the Plan contains little for them and that the strength of feeling among these communities (especially in terms of residents' parking and the inner ring road proposals) is very high.

A few delegates in these two workshops mentioned that the Plan has something for everyone and that the Department is diluting the effectiveness of the proposals as a result.

On a final note there was some query over how and by whom the Emerging Plan and its proposals for the city centre would be monitored and evaluated.

## 5.3 Carrickfergus

When asked for their views on the listed proposals for Carrickfergus delegates said that the main issues centred on the urgent need to upgrade the A2 between Seapark and the University of Ulster, Jordanstown, the safety of people walking and cycling and the potential use of park and ride schemes to alleviate congestion. While many delegates welcomed the balance of the proposals in the Plan others were disappointed saying that they lack imagination and foresight.

### 5.3.1 Walking and Cycling

Generally delegates were in favour of upgrading cycle paths and walkways to encourage people out of their cars. However they raised a number of concerns about safety and the quality of the necessary infrastructure.

It was stressed that quality is as much an issue for cycle routes infrastructure as it is for public transport. One delegate commented that a white line on a footpath such as the one along the A2 foreshore cycle route scheme does not constitute a quality cycle network. The cycle path is neither safe nor complete, it was said. It was suggested therefore that cyclists should be separated from pedestrians and from other road users.

Delegates welcomed the proposal to link Carrickfergus to the strategic cycle network as an integral component of the Emerging Plan. A number of routes were suggested for inclusion in the network including the disused railway from Greenisland to Monkstown and on to Mallusk. There are also a number of public rights of way, it was said, running perpendicular to the coast of Carrickfergus in council ownership which could be used for cycle paths. They link to school routes and could be included in a Safe Routes to School policy which could also reduce peak time congestion.

A number of delegates considered that signage around Carrickfergus could be improved especially in relation to historic information and places of interest. It was said the development of a cycle path from Whitehead to Whiteabbey similar to that in North Down from Holywood to Bangor would provide a boost for cycling, walking, tourism and leisure. It was suggested that this path could then link into urban hubs and other places of interest.

### 5.3.2 Public Transport

Most of the debate on public transport centred on the relocation of Jordanstown station and the expansion of park and ride services. However on the issue of increased rail service frequencies, it was said, that there is a limit to the number of trains that can use the single track into Central Station in Belfast. This ultimately limits the scope for improved public transport in the Plan as buses will be slowed down on congested roads if trains cannot significantly increase their numbers of passenger journeys.

There was widespread opposition to the proposed relocation of Jordanstown Station, a proposal only supported by the University of Ulster at Jordanstown. Councillors in the workshop said that they had received numerous letters of objection from local people when this proposal was first mooted. Delegates queried the reasons for relocating the station and asked if it was to make access to the University campus easier for students, to accommodate a park and ride facility or for some other reason. It was said that the proposed location for the station and the existing station appeared to be equi-distant from the main university building so the disruption and disadvantage to local people especially school children was seemingly for no benefit. Delegates did acknowledge that the existing situation is dangerous and suggested a number of ways to improve safety. These included reinstating the towpath parallel to the railway line as far as the University and widening the footpath along the Jordanstown Road to accommodate the large numbers of students who walk here.

There was concern that by trying to solve Belfast's traffic problems the situation in other places would deteriorate. For example improved facilities at Carrickfergus Station would encourage more cars into Victoria Street which is very narrow and into the park and ride which is nearing saturation point.

While there was general acknowledgement on the need for expanded park and ride facilities, delegates expressed disappointment that such a simple type of public transport service was not more widely developed. It was said that as the facility at Carrickfergus station is nearing capacity, although land is available at Trooperslane, land is equally available at Clipperstown and Greenistand Stations to accommodate park and ride. Delegates stressed that successful park and ride schemes are dependent on high quality, secure, well-lit environments covered by CCTV. It was also suggested that commuters should be offered incentives to use them such as subsidised fares or occasional cheap parking in Belfast city centre in return for weekly or monthly park and ride.

Delegates were divided on the suggestion for park and ride at Jordanstown Station. Some considered that this could be one reason for relocating the station to an area where parking is available but others argued that Jordanstown is beyond the bottleneck and people would not be encouraged to use park and ride there. It was suggested that the park and ride scheme could be developed on land at Jordanstown School (for children with auditory or visual impairment) and again it was argued that park and ride is unnecessary in Jordanstown as a significant number of people live within walking distance of the station and would not use a park and ride facility.

The workshop discussed the possible location of a park and ride facility at Fortwilliam. It was generally considered that it is not a viable proposal as it is too far beyond the bottlenecks on the A8 and A2 and too close to the city centre. A number of people agreed that an efficient and cheap bus service into the city centre may encourage people to use a park and ride facility at Fortwilliam as many people now park at Templepatrick and take the Airport Bus to Belfast as it is cheaper than all-day parking in the city centre.

The idea of park and walk was suggested in relation to Safe Routes to School. Delegates mentioned that it does not require car parks, merely an agreed location to leave children with "meeters and greeters" up to half a mile from the school. The children are then safely escorted to school on foot. This type of scheme is widespread in Australia.

The workshop welcomed the proposals for a Quality Bus Corridor on the A2 but stressed that this is unrealistic and currently not possible. Delegates said that the congestion on the A2 is so severe that improving the bus service as part of the Quality Bus Corridor network would not improve public transport on the A2. It was also said that even if the A2 is widened to four lanes a Quality Bus Corridor would still not be a viable option as the road could not sustain the flow of traffic with one lane dedicated to buses only.

On a more positive note delegates requested that an orbital Quality Bus Corridor be created to link Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey to employment opportunities at Mallusk.

Delegates suggested extending the current Busybus network which is commonly perceived to be a shopper's service, to include journeys to the train station and strategic bus stops before 9.30 am. Many of the housing estates in Carrickfergus, it was said, have been designed in a way that restricts bus access and links to the railway stations. Busybus services could provide the valuable link necessary to facilitate commuter access to other modes of transport.

Delegates said the local bus network in Carrickfergus is centred on the bus depot which is located beside the train station at Victoria Street. This street is narrow and has poor access on to Albert Road which is the route to other parts of the town. The narrow roads, poor visibility and high level of on-street parking in this area restrict bus movement. There was a call therefore to give buses priority at the Victoria Street-Albert Road junction, or to find an alternative route out of the bus station, perhaps through the site of the former St. Nicholas' school.

### 5.3.3 Road Network

Discussion on the traffic problems on the A2 dominated the debate on improvements to the road network. It was agreed that delays caused by congestion between Seapark and the University cause distress and frustration. The impacts were acknowledged as widespread and severe. Examples were given of public transport delays, hindered access to schools and delays for ambulances trying to Whiteabbey Hospital. It was said that the two mile journey on this stretch of the A2 can take up to 50 minutes at peak time in the morning (from before 7.30 am until after 9.30 am). It was estimated that 30,000 cars use the A2 every morning. Even if the Plan doubles the frequency of train journeys from 1,000 to 2,000 it does not replace need for immediate and urgent improvements to the A2 to tackle the carrying capacity issues.

While delegates welcomed that the A2 has been recognised as a strategic route and is listed as one of the four priority schemes for the entire Belfast area, there were perceived impediments to improvements between Seapark and the University. These included the need for a public inquiry and strong opposition from people whose gardens would need to be vested, the amount of underground service cabling (such as gas, electricity, water and telephone) and the number of new houses which have been built along this section of the road in recent years. It was said that the original plan to widen the road dates back to the 1970s. Delegates asked if there is enough space available now for a road conforming to today's higher standards.

Remedial work to alleviate some of the immediate problems was suggested. This included a footbridge over the A2 at Belfast High School to remove the need for a school crossing patrol and the provision of a roundabout at the junction of Greenisland-Station Road and the A2 Shore Road. Other delegates however thought that traffic moves more quickly through junctions with lights as already exist than around a roundabout. It was further suggested that there needs to be a managed junction on the A2 Shore Road at the entrance of the University especially for traffic from Carrickfergus turning right into the University campus and that in the future the possibility of a high occupancy vehicle lane should be investigated.

Delegates highlighted the need to include the B90 in any plans to improve the road network around Carrickfergus. It was suggested that if the A2 is going to be widened then a compulsory one-way system should be put into operation on the A2 and the B90 for the duration of the work. It was also acknowledged that the B90 suffers from congestion at Monkstown, a situation which is set to worsen if white land along the B90 is released for housing developments in the near future. A number of delegates voiced concerns, however, that if the junction at Monkstown is improved the congestion problems will be pushed further down the Monkstown Road or on to the Doagh Road. The possibility of widening the B90 to three lanes to help alleviate peak hour congestion was put forward as a possible traffic management solution.

Some reference was made to the strategic road network from Carrickfergus to Belfast in terms of the Department considering the possibility of a motorway on the foreshore at Carrickfergus and to unify the speed limit on the dual carriageway at Trooperslane to 40 miles per hour.

A number of suggestions were put forward for improvements to the local road network in Carrickfergus. These included junction improvements from Woodburn Road, North Road, Upper Station Road, Greenisland and Trooperslane on the B90 and ensuring developers do not create 'rat runs' through new housing developments and using traffic calming as a traffic management measure. It was requested that any new traffic calming is accompanied by adequate signage and that care is taken to ensure the traffic problems are not forced on to other roads. A further suggestion for managing the traffic in Carrickfergus was to remove on-street parking particularly on Ellis Street, Woodburn Road and the North Road to ease movement into and out of the town centre.

#### **5.3.4 Demand Management**

Many of the delegates were concerned that introducing better parking controls in Carrickfergus would mean more parking fees. It was said that local people would rather drive to the Abbeycentre where there is free parking than shop in Carrickfergus and pay for parking. As 25 per cent of retail units in Carrickfergus are currently vacant it was said that the issue of parking must be dealt with sensitively.

It was suggested that the High Street could be pedestrianised. This, it was said, could encourage people to visit more shops. As High Street currently suffers from double parking on both lanes it was agreed that it would benefit from a degree of parking measures.

Delegates welcomed the idea of accurate travel information and hoped it would encourage greater use of public transport. It was suggested that tickets for journeys involving two buses, or bus and train should only require one ticket and that local bus service times should be linked to train times.

## 5.4 Newtownabbey

Delegates in the Newtownabbey workshop were generally in favour of and positive about the proposals listed for the Newtownabbey corridor. They did however identify a number of issues which would require further analysis or a change in policy. The main discussions centred on the safety of people walking and cycling; the introduction of park and ride to assist traffic flow into Belfast and ways of addressing the congestion at the Sandyknowes junction.

### 5.4.1 Walking and Cycling

The majority of delegates agreed that more could be done to encourage walking and cycling. However a number of issues were raised which highlighted possible barriers to the growth of these transport modes. The main concern centred on the safety of people when walking and cycling. Some people stated that segregated cycle paths are not considered to be safe as cyclists and walkers are often too isolated. Craigavon was cited as an example of how not to plan cycle paths. It was also stressed that cycle paths should be properly designed and not merely a white line on an existing footpath. The existing cycle paths, especially on O'Neill's Road and A2 Shore Road stop at junctions and roundabouts resulting in fragmented journeys for cyclists. Furthermore the cycle path on Carnmoney Hill does not lead anywhere, it was said. There was a call therefore to fully integrate cycle paths and walkways with surrounding land uses particularly on orbital routes through Newtownabbey. It was suggested that this could also encourage vital links between Mallusk and areas such as Rathcoole and Monkstown helping to provide job opportunities for excluded communities. However the question was asked as to how the cycle paths could safely traverse the Sandyknowes Roundabout.

There was acknowledgement that cycling is important for school children but that cycle paths must ensure their safety through Safe Routes to School policies as well as safe routes to other facilities such as parks.

Delegates discussed the growth in the use of cycle lanes and footpaths by people with disabilities using scooters or motorised wheelchairs. Explanation was provided of the current development and extension of existing Shopmobility schemes into the "recreation market" so any new paths proposed must be aware of the needs of people using motorised wheelchairs.

It was said that there are already eight and a half miles of cycle paths in the Newtownabbey Borough Council area and that this should be more fully integrated into a new cycle network. This could be achieved by linking new housing developments to shops and schools and by integrating cycle paths into new roads and public transport developments for example by providing secure bike parks at train stations.

There was general agreement on new cycle paths and how they should follow main routes to encourage commuter use and that they should also be fully segregated from the road above the kerb line. A few delegates queried how realistic it is to expect people to use bicycles as an alternative to the car and that cycling should be viewed as recreational and not functional.

### 5.4.2 Public Transport

It was agreed that Newtownabbey is well serviced by railways and that better use could be made of the existing lines. It was suggested that Mossley West should be opened as a railway halt as soon as possible.

There was considerable debate about park and ride and general agreement that there needs to be a facility provided as soon as possible. Some delegates suggested that a park and ride facility should be located at Sandyknowes or Corr's Corner rather than at Fortwilliam. It was agreed that commuters will have passed through the bottlenecks by the time they reach Fortwilliam and therefore would not be encouraged to park and ride into the city centre from there.

The comment was made that neither of the proposed park and ride facilities is in Newtownabbey and that some of the most severe congestion is especially at Sandyknowes and on the A2 at Jordanstown.

Many considered that commuters from the direction of Ballyclare would not be encouraged to use a facility at Templepatrick as they join the M2 at Sandyknowes rather than at Templepatrick. Others suggested that a park and ride facility should be provided at Jordanstown.

It was suggested that park and ride facilities at Fortwilliam could potentially service shorter stay journeys such as shopping trips or business meetings rather than as an alternative to all day parking in the city centre.

Everyone agreed that public transport improvements need to be in place before park and ride schemes and parking restrictions in Belfast are put into operation. Connecting buses, it was said, must be frequent and reliable. There was concern, however, over the possible de-regularisation of this public transport mode as service providers would possibly be profit driven and would potentially cut services in out of peak hour periods. It was said that this would affect people in rural areas and socially excluded communities more than commuters and the problem needs to be addressed.

On the issue of Quality Bus Corridors many delegates said that as a proposal they are not the solution to gridlock and that they need to be linked into effective park and ride schemes. It was also acknowledged that as Quality Bus Corridors follow strategic routes into Belfast they often do not reach the commuters who should be using public transport. It was stressed that to make Quality Bus Corridors effective there must be linkage to feeder routes and better co-ordination of land use developments and transport planning. It was suggested that this is a question of social inclusion and not merely congestion management as links have to be made between people and employment opportunities.

This debate progressed to the direction of the routes proposed throughout Newtownabbey. It appeared that the axis for movement was concentrated on north-south. However it was stressed that Newtownabbey needs orbital routes linking the east and west of the Borough to increase access to employment and to improve links to Lame via the A8 and especially for heavy goods vehicles travelling to Belfast and Mallusk. The suggested orbital Quality Bus Corridor route through Newtownabbey should link the Shore Road at Carrickfergus, the B90 past Greenisland, Monkstown and Mallusk.

Although delegates welcomed the idea of Quality Bus Corridors it was suggested that the Plan should promote the provision of a tram network. Trams are recognised as being efficient and effective as proved by recent developments in cities such as Manchester. The ideal route to introduce trams, it was said, is the Antrim Road linking Belfast to Glengormley. The plea was made therefore that the Plan be more progressive and forward thinking on this issue.

On a final note on public transport, delegates mentioned that taxis operate as a viable alternative to buses. Often they provide a link between housing estates without bus services and facilities such as the Abbeycentre. Delegates said the Plan should recognise the service taxis provide.

### **5.4.3 Road Network**

Everyone in the workshop agreed that Newtownabbey experiences bottlenecks and congestion at peak times especially at Sandyknowes, on the A2 between Greenisland and Jordanstown and on the A8 at Corr's Corner. The concern was that proposed road improvements on the M2 and A8 would not encourage people to use public transport and that it would merely alleviate the congestion and perhaps encourage higher volumes of traffic. It was stressed therefore that any road improvements should be balanced by public transport improvements.

Delegates queried the likelihood of the improvements to the Sand/knowes Junction and the widening of the M2. They stressed that these proposals should be definite and not just possibilities. Delegates said that the Plan should acknowledge the A8 as a recognised strategic route linking Belfast to the regional gateway at the Port of Lame.

There was some concern over the management of the strategic road network and the need to ensure that traffic on the A2, B90 and A3 is not pushed onto smaller roads such as the Strand Road in a bid to avoid congestion. It was also said that feeder routes need to have adequate access onto strategic routes or the whole network and the Quality Bus Corridors would ultimately fail.

In summary, the workshop supported the proposals for the road network. The main concern was the legacy of planning decisions, which, it was thought, are made in isolation from roads considerations. It was acknowledged, for example, that the Church Road now suffers from an over-developed retail core on a road network that cannot sustain the level of traffic generated by the Abbeycentre and its surroundings.

#### **5.4.4 Demand Management**

Delegates agreed that better travel information would help people to plan their journeys more efficiently and thereby help to avoid congestion. It was suggested that Newtownabbey would benefit from more meaningful signs to differentiate it from other areas.

#### **5.4.5 Other Issues**

A number of other issues were raised during the workshop. For example, there was concern over the use of private Finance for the provision of public transport. Commercially-run services, it was said, will not be socially inclusive and people in rural areas could be particularly disadvantaged. Another issue raised was the status of the final Transport Plan. It was acknowledged that on the positive side it could ultimately be a powerful bargaining and financial leverage tool.

## 5.5 North and West Belfast

Delegates were mainly in favour of the proposals for the North and West Belfast corridor but queried the feasibility of walking and cycling within interface areas, the need for the Plan to acknowledge the role of black taxis as an important transport service and the importance of implementing the Westway rapid transit scheme. Overall they were very positive about the schemes proposed to improve and enhance transport services within North and West Belfast.

### 5.5.1 Walking and Cycling

Safety issues associated with the implementation of walking and cycling networks were considered to be a key issue. The condition of the existing road network was perceived by delegates to be inadequate for walking and cycling. Delegates said that opening up walking routes to places of natural or scenic interest around the city and the provision of facilities including benches to allow people to stop and rest should be encouraged throughout the Plan area.

In summary, it was suggested that encouraging children to walk and cycle to school and other places of recreation would help to achieve the desired modal shift away from the private car. Delegates also said that addressing the issue of walking and cycling within interface areas requires special attention. The promotion of cycling within local housing estates was welcomed but delegates expressed concern that the implementation of cycle paths linking these housing areas would not be practical.

Delegates accepted in principle the proposed schemes identified as priorities within the Emerging Plan including the establishment of a quality cycle network and the provision of improved pedestrian and cycling facilities within North and West Belfast but stressed that more details should be provided.

### 5.5.2 Public Transport

Delegates agreed that improvements to public transport facilities have to be linked to employment opportunities.

The proposal to provide a rapid transit route linking the developments at Springvale with Belfast city centre (Westway) was welcomed by all delegates. One delegate commented that it is important that the Westway proposal serves a number of developments in West Belfast as well as the local communities and not just Springvale. It was said that Westway should be implemented once the EWay pilot rapid transit is implemented. Some delegates were not satisfied with the proposed standard rapid transit schemes and said that the Plan should have at least encouraged the implementation of enhanced rapid transit schemes.

Delegates were positive about the proposal to provide an orbital Quality Bus Corridor that will link the North and West corridor with other parts of Belfast without passing through the city centre. Many delegates perceive this orbital route to be important in terms of accessing employment opportunities and services in other areas. They said that it is not a necessity that the orbital route gets a Quality Bus Corridor but it is important that it is linked with other dedicated Quality Bus Corridors. In order to encourage the use of an orbital Quality Bus Corridor it was suggested that the bus service could be subsidised until it is more fully co-ordinated with other newly established routes and transport modes.

Some delegates highlighted that given the interface areas within North and West Belfast the implementation of the proposed orbital route may not be achievable primarily because of the 'fear factor' associated with travelling through particular neighbourhoods or housing estates.

Proposals to improve bus services along the Springfield Road, Shankill Road and Crumlin Road as part of the Belfast Metropolitan Area-wide Quality Bus Corridor network were supported by

the majority of delegates. Delegates questioned whether there would be enough buses available to ensure high frequencies along these routes and emphasised the importance of implementing enforcement and ensuring that the Quality Bus Corridor network is implemented on routes into and out of the city centre. In summary, delegates stressed that an effective Quality Bus Corridor should have a high frequency and continuous service, conform to a strict timetable and have unimpeded access along main transport corridors.

Delegates were concerned at the lack of information on black taxis services and some questioned whether the Plan referred to all taxi services or only black taxis. Some said that this service should be tax-regulated and be fully integrated into the existing public transport network. Others queried where the profits from the black taxis should go and if they should be re-invested in the improvement of public transport services. In addition, delegates suggested that if black taxis are fully integrated they could be employed by Health and Social Services Boards as transport for older people, people with disabilities and school children. It was said that Health Boards currently spend approximately £250,000 per year on taxi hire and some of this could be directed towards the use of black taxis.

Delegates acknowledged the role that black taxis play and their popularity within North and West Belfast. They were described by delegates as accessible and flexible modes of transport. It was said if black taxis are to continue to provide a high level of service they should benefit from the bus priority measures proposed for the Quality Bus Corridor network.

### **5.5.3 Road Network**

Discussions were focused on proposed traffic calming measures on the local road network in terms of reducing traffic speeds. There was a strong demand from local community groups for traffic calming measures to be implemented. It was suggested that schemes should be based on a fixed priority rating with immediate action directed towards roads where there have been a number of serious accidents. The majority of delegates did however accept that some roads would not be suitable for traffic calming measures.

Delegates made reference to some proposals that aim to improve the strategic road network and claimed that the Department should be aware of the potential negative impact of these schemes on local road networks and communities.

The junction of the Whiterock and Springfield Roads, while not strategic, was said to need major improvement.

### **5.5.4 Demand Management**

Delegates were supportive of the many management schemes proposed to improve public transport provision. They said that travel information is very important to enable people to understand the travel choices available. They did express concerns that real time information may be effective in communicating where there is traffic congestion but that there is a risk that people will use local road networks to avoid possible delays. For the proposed Quality Bus Corridor network to be effective the implementation of enforcement policies is crucial, they said.

### **5.5.5 Other Issues**

A number of other issues were raised during the workshop including the need to co-ordinate and integrate all modes of transport in the Plan including routes, fares and facilities. It was also said that the Plan should facilitate access to the Belfast Hills as an important element as well as dealing with commuter traffic.

## 5.6 Lisburn

The Lisburn workshop was in general supportive of the proposals listed under walking and cycling, public transport, the road network and demand management. In particular there was broad support for improving rail service frequencies and widening the M I to include a bus lane and high occupancy vehicle lane. Delegates were also in favour of a new road link from M I to Knockmore to support possible major development in West Lisburn. The workshop was opposed however to siting a park and ride site at Kennedy Way and recommended Sprucefield as a more realistic alternative.

### 5.6.1 Walking and Cycling

Delegates believed the establishment of a quality cycle network linked to the main strategic cycle network was important in the Lisburn corridor, but there was some disagreement as to whether or not the infrastructure for such a network should be established before the culture change that is needed. Several delegates supported the reallocation of road space to provide better cycling infrastructure in the near future.

Delegates suggested that cycling routes needed to be better integrated and linked to other transport modes and that cycling to school should be heavily promoted.

There was also some discussion on the need to achieve a balance of quality traffic flow and pedestrian safety in Lisburn city centre. At present, traffic is competing with pedestrians in the centre of Lisburn especially in areas such as Bachelors' Walk.

### 5.6.2 Public Transport

Delegates welcomed many of the public transport proposals such as improved rail frequencies and Quality Bus Corridors but were concerned that the two services would be competing against one another rather than complementing each other. It was suggested that with the increased rail frequencies, there should be scope to improve and introduce park and ride facilities along the corridor allowing interchanges to cater for multi-modal journeys, be it part car, cycle, train, bus or walking trips.

The workshop was very much opposed to the proposal to locate a new park and ride site at Kennedy Way off the M I. This scheme was described as a "non-starter", as it is already a bottleneck area and the park and ride would make things worse. Delegates agreed that Sprucefield or even Moira would be a more suitable site.

Delegates generally supported the proposal for a Quality Bus Corridor along the Malone Road, Lisburn Road and Falls Road but questioned the practicalities of the scheme when faced with a lack of road space along parts of the route such as the Lisburn Road. There was also a call for a dedicated Quality Bus Corridor and high occupancy vehicle lane on the M I if widened from Sprucefield to Belfast in the future. Such a scheme, it was said, would have to be implemented as a total package to avoid potential bottlenecks. Regarding the orbital Quality Bus Corridor proposal, some delegates were cautious and highlighted the need for further research to assess demand for such a service.

Delegates were much in favour of improving local bus services focused on Lisburn, linking services to strategic routes. The workshop was also in support of demand responsive public transport, acknowledging the difficulty of accessing public transport in rural areas. There was a call to utilise smaller buses on rural routes and for new services to link up with the Rural Rover service.

### 5.6.3 Road Network

Delegates supported the proposal to widen the MI as far as Sprucefield, on the condition that a dedicated bus and high occupancy vehicle lane is provided. Grade separation at York Street was

also considered to be a good idea, as was a new road link between the M1 and Knockmore to support possible major development in West Lisburn. One delegate believed a new feeder road from North Lisburn back to the motorway would help traffic flows.

The workshop agreed that traffic calming measures are vital for residential areas. One delegate added that traffic calming is also required on some rural routes, with the Lisburn to Hannahstown Road given as an example. Delegates also called for residents-only parking in areas of the Lisburn corridor but stressed that the success of stopping all-day parking would depend on strong enforcement. One delegate suggested that Lisburn city centre would benefit from a new one-way traffic system.

#### **5.6.4 Demand Management**

There was agreement that public transport would be improved with better information at bus and rail stations, and the delivery of an intelligent transport system for the Lisburn corridor in general was seen as being very important. Enforcement in the Lisburn corridor was referred to as a key issue and it was believed cameras would be needed to reduce problems such as unauthorised parking. Delegates emphasised that a demand management strategy should be put in place at an early stage in the Lisburn corridor.

#### **5.6.5 Other Issues**

There was some general debate in the workshop concerning cars in Lisburn city centre and the effect they have on the vitality and environment of the city. Several delegates want car parking to be free to help boost the economy whereas other delegates believed this to be short-sighted and instead want the Department to concentrate on getting people - not cars - into Lisburn city centre.

## 5.7 Castlereagh

In principle the majority of schemes proposed for the Castlereagh corridor were welcomed but some delegates referred to past transportation experiences and expressed concern that these proposals may not be implemented properly due to limited funding and a lack of commitment. The discussion at times focused on the proposed park and ride schemes with delegates saying that these schemes alone are not the solution to the transport problems. There were mixed views on the other public transport schemes proposed for the corridor and general support for the proposed road network schemes which focus on route management strategies and traffic management measures.

### 5.7.1 Walking and Cycling

Delegates were critical of existing cycling and walking facilities within the Castlereagh corridor claiming that they are unsafe and fragmented. They described the Saintfield Road as a 'nightmare for cyclists' and welcomed the proposal for the establishment of a quality cycle network linked to the main strategic cycle network.

They referred to walking proposals and said that the footpath network must be integrated to enable safe and easy access to all services and facilities. They urged careful consideration in terms of the design and materials used for a future footpath network to ensure that it is suitable for wheelchair users and people with pushchairs.

Delegates mentioned that Safe Routes to School schemes have been successful in Scotland and the potential to introduce these schemes here should be explored. Delegates agreed that the Plan should be more active in promoting and encouraging 'school trains' whereby children walk in numbers to school and are supervised by adults.

Delegates mentioned that the EWay rapid transit scheme is currently proposed to have a combined walking and cycling network and its implementation is to be encouraged.

### 5.7.2 Public Transport

Public transport proposals for the Castlereagh Corridor were said to be important. The existing Quality Bus Corridor along the A24 Ormeau Road was criticised and described by delegates as an "ineffective half-baked" scheme. Delegates supported the further implementation of Quality Bus Corridors along the Newtownards Road, Castlereagh' Road and the Cregagh Road but expressed concern that this proposed Quality Bus Corridor network will only extend as far as Dundonald and will not serve the Carryduff area which they believe is an integral part of the metropolitan area.

Delegates did acknowledge the potential of the proposed Quality Bus Corridor network but said that unless effective management measures are put in place with stricter enforcement controls and priority traffic lights it will never be successful.

Several delegates highlighted the need to think more laterally about future provision of bus services saying that it is important that the Plan addresses local movements that are not based on the radial route concept. This issue was related to proposals to develop more employment opportunities in the Purdysbum area as expected to be outlined in the forthcoming draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan. Improving access to these employment locations would, in their opinion, need to be addressed by the Plan.

Delegates made reference to the number of dedicated school buses operating within Belfast. The school run was seen by the majority of delegates to contribute to the congestion levels experienced on the road network and it was suggested that if school opening and closing hours were more flexible, levels of congestion could be significantly reduced.

Delegates described the two rapid transit schemes proposed for the Castlereagh corridor as 'important parts of the transportation jigsaw'. Delegates noted that standard rapid transit schemes proposed in the Plan are inadequate and believe that the way forward would be to encourage the implementation of a more advanced scheme from the outset.

There was extensive debate on the proposed rapid transit route linking Dundonald with Belfast City Centre (EWay scheme). Some delegates hinted at the need for a similar rapid transit scheme to address the transport issues in Carryduff and the surrounding area towards Saintfield. They said that cars are approaching these areas from Kilkeel, Newcastle, and Downpatrick, and it was suggested that a tram type system should be considered as a priority to ease congestion and encourage people to use public transport.

Delegates made reference to the proposed rapid transit route in the Downpatrick corridor between Cairnshill and Belfast City Centre (Super Route). There was general acceptance of this scheme and delegates understood that it has the potential to be modified depending on the implementation of the pilot EWay Scheme.

Delegates agreed that all new public transport facilities should be accessible for people with disabilities and that stricter enforcement controls are required to ensure that access to these facilities is not restricted by road users.

Reference was made to private hire taxis which, it was said, offer an invaluable service to everyone including people with disabilities. It was suggested that allowing taxis to use bus lanes would therefore positively impact on traffic movements within the city.

The majority of delegates criticised the park and ride scheme at Cairnshill proposed to run in conjunction with the Super Route rapid transit scheme. This was perceived as not providing an effective solution to the existing transport problems. One delegate queried the proposed location of the Dundonald park and ride site needed for the EWay scheme and asked if the site would have a detrimental effect on the neighbouring area.

Concern was expressed that the Plan needs to promote services that would transport people to other parts of the city such as Queen's University, Stormont Estate and the Gasworks - all of which are said to be major employment locations.

Delegates expressed concern over the amount of land that would be required within the green belt area to implement the park and ride scheme proposed for Dundonald. There were also concerns that this particular scheme would create localised congestion in the early morning and evening when commuters travel to and from the facility.

Reference was made to the location of the proposed park and ride scheme at Cairnshill. It was suggested that this scheme would be more successful if implemented on the outskirts of Carryduff. Here, they said, it would cater for the huge volumes of commuter traffic travelling towards the city from other areas. For this scheme to work, delegates stressed, it would need to be linked to an effective Quality Bus Corridor or rapid transit system.

### **5.7.3 Road Network**

Discussions on the road network focused on route management strategies and traffic management measures proposed within the Castlereagh corridor. Delegates made reference to the Quality Bus Corridor concept saying that to make bus travel more attractive it is important the Plan promotes the reallocation of road space.

Delegates said that improvements considered for the Outer Ring road and approaches to this network must take account of the movements of strategic traffic. Delegates requested clarification on the difference between strategic and less strategic traffic movements.

It was mentioned that in Castlereagh there are both southern and eastern approaches coming into the city centre. The strategic network highlights the Outer Ring road as comprising the A24 and A20, both of which have also been identified as Quality Bus Corridor networks. Delegates urged caution to ensure that there would not be any conflict between proposals for Quality Bus Corridors and strategic highway networks.

Concerns were expressed about the safety on the Saintfield Road with regard to speeding traffic. Increasing developments and accesses onto this road network, it was said, will exacerbate these problems. Delegates agreed that road safety has to be a key element of any route management strategy.

There was general agreement that the connection from the proposed Cairnshill park and ride site towards the Outer Ring road and Shaws Bridge is an important strategic link and one that has been omitted from the Plan.

One delegate suggested that making the Ormeau Road and Ravenhill Road a one-way system would facilitate the implementation of proposed Quality Bus Corridors .

Another delegate asked if the traffic calming measure proposed for the A20 Newtownards Road would include Dundonald village.

#### **5.7.4 Demand Management**

Delegates welcomed proposals to introduce better parking controls and provide better travel information to support public transport provision in the Castlereagh corridor.

Enforcement was perceived to be a fundamental aspect of the Plan and essential if schemes such as Quality Bus Corridors are to succeed. The need for education campaigns to increase awareness was also mentioned by delegates as a key element of effective management. Delegates discussed the need for the Plan to promote resident parking schemes particularly within inner city communities most affected by commuter parking.

Introducing high occupancy vehicle lanes along key corridors was perceived as an effective method of reducing traffic volumes particularly along the Saintfield Road.

#### **5.7.5 Other Issues**

Delegates made reference to existing community transport schemes and said that there is potential for these to be better utilised to benefit all members of the community.

The issue of transportation and its integration with land use planning was discussed and delegates asked that BMAP ensures that infrastructure is put in place before additional developments are permitted.

## 5.8 North Down

The North Down workshop was in general critical of the proposals put forward in the Emerging Plan for the North Down Corridor. Delegates remarked that the Plan does not contain enough proposals for the commuters of North Down. Most of the proposals were said to focus on the future needs of East Belfast rather than addressing existing deficiencies in the North Down Corridor. The Plan was seen to be a series of car alleviation measures for Belfast and an "engineering number-crunching exercise rather than an innovative transport plan for the North Down area".

### 5.8.1 Walking and Cycling

There was some discussion on the impracticalities of cycling from Bangor to Belfast with one delegate arguing that given the lack of cycling interest on the route it perhaps should not be a priority for funding. It was suggested that the coastal path could be upgraded instead to provide an alternative cycle route to Belfast, but in general the majority of the workshop agreed a dedicated, continuous cycle lane would be best located along the main Bangor to Belfast road. It was noted however that given the increasing tourist potential for cycling, the economic benefit of the coastal path could be significant some time in the future.

One participant recommended cycling initiatives should also be focused on Tillysburn, Sydenham and the Holywood Road areas due to their large population catchments. Health and safety concerns were also voiced and it was stressed that people, especially children, need to be educated about cycling along main routes.

There was some initial confusion as to what signed walking routes and pedestrian priority would mean for Bangor, but delegates agreed to support the measure in principle, adding that any improvements would be welcome. Caution was urged however that in improving pedestrian facilities, traffic flows should not be allowed to worsen to the extent that the vitality of the town centre is adversely affected. Delegates also mentioned that it may be prudent to re-examine at the one-way traffic system in Bangor as there are major difficulties with it at present. One delegate also wanted an improved walking environment to be proposed for the Holywood area.

### 5.8.2 Public Transport

Delegates agreed with the proposal to increase rail service frequencies by up to 50 per cent but added that the capacity of trains should also increase. Several delegates suggested that there should be flexibility in the size of train being used at different times of the day. One delegate said that the stretch of line between Bangor and Belfast should not be constrained by resources because it has excellent potential for income generation.

Delegates discussed the need for an extensive park and ride facility in Bangor to encourage more commuters to use the heavy rail service. The car park in Dufferin Avenue was suggested as a prime location for a dedicated multi-storey car park with direct links into the station. Several delegates urged caution on achieving a good balance of encouraging park and ride and at the same time safeguarding the economy and infrastructure of Bangor town centre from more congestion and all-day parking in prime retail areas.

Delegates believed that to make the railway line economically viable several park and ride sites will have to be provided along the line at various stages to encourage people, but there seems to be a lack of co-ordination between key players and stakeholders as to how this might happen. Delegates emphasised that to encourage the modal shift to the railway, schemes such as a new, large park and ride sites in Bangor need to be happening now to operate in tandem with the new rolling stock. More co-ordination on such a scheme was seen as being vital to the success of the line.

Delegates agreed that the idea of a rapid transit route linking Belfast City Airport to the city centre via the Harbour Estate was too vague and nothing more than a 'pipe dream'. Delegates did not see the logic of a rapid transit system that would only run for two or three miles stopping every couple of hundred metres. They believed that it would be a direct contradiction trying to operate a rapid transit route 100 metres from the railway line and would be "illogical at best." Several delegates thought that resources were being spread too thinly in the North Down corridor and that most of the resources should be concentrated on ensuring rapid transit goes the whole way to Bangor along the rail corridor on a five foot three gauge. It could then, it was said, be marketed as a comprehensive rapid transit route. One participant expressed the view that a scheme should be considered to bring the EWay Scheme out to Newtownards to provide Bangor commuters with a choice of modes. Delegates agreed that if a rapid transit route was to be developed, it would be sensible to co-locate a station with a new station at the City Airport.

Delegates were strongly opposed to the proposal to locate a park and ride site at Tillysburn, saying that it would be in the wrong position and questioning who it would actually serve. Furthermore, delegates believed all of the proposed park and ride sites are too close to the city and would still cause congestion. Regarding the North Down site, one delegate said "if you get as far as Tillysburn, you may as well just drive on into Belfast." The point was reiterated that there should be a concentrated effort to establish park and ride facilities at Bangor, not Tillysburn. Another delegate questioned the cost-benefit analysis of locating the park and ride site at Tillysburn compared to other sites in terms of the number of extra traffic accidents and increased congestion it will cause.

Delegates did not accept the proposals for a Quality Bus Corridor route from Bangor to Hollywood. It was said that the thinking behind the Quality Bus Corridor is flawed as it assumes bus priority measures are needed from Hollywood to Belfast due to congestion problems.

Another delegate questioned why money is being invested in bus services which will compete with trains when the A2 is already critically short of space.

Delegates questioned why preparations for the proposed new rail halt at the City Airport had not been carried out during the upgrade of the recent road and rail infrastructure in the area.

There was agreement with the proposal to improve the frequency and quality of local bus services in the town. They are seen as being critical to getting Belfast commuters into Bangor's town centre without using cars. Delegates referred to the potential of demand-responsive rural transport, saying that it could have a positive impact on shopping in Bangor and would also help to reduce social exclusion. They also urged that more Easibuses should be introduced in Bangor to help people with children and people with disabilities.

### **5.8.3 Road Network**

Delegates were opposed to widening the A2 Sydenham Bypass from four lanes to six lanes saying that the underlying problem would not be solved. Several delegates urged that money earmarked for the road widening scheme be used instead to properly implement one of the other proposals in the North Down corridor. The multi-storey park and ride site in Bangor was mentioned as a possibility.

### **5.8.4 Other Issues**

Delegates were keen to see targets (including minimum service standards) for the North Down proposals. There was agreement that to bring about real change in the North Down corridor, two of the main priorities must be to address the existing transport deficiencies and then to vastly improve co-ordination between government departments on land use issues connected to transportation in the corridor.

## 5.9 Key Stakeholder Group

The Key Stakeholder Group was asked to concentrate its discussion on some of the more strategic measures proposed in the Emerging Plan including rapid transit schemes, major road schemes and proposals for the rail system. The Group was concerned about many of the Emerging Plan priorities and discussion centred around the implementation of the proposed Quality Bus Corridor network and the importance of securing funding and having alternative options. Many agreed that it is important to have a plan that will not only resolve transport problems but will deliver benefits to the entire Belfast Metropolitan Area.

### 5.9.1 Rapid Transit Schemes

There were mixed views on the rapid transit schemes proposed for the Belfast Metropolitan Area. Delegates sought clarification on some of the proposed schemes. The majority of delegates opposed the introduction of standard rapid transit and said that if light rail is the best method then this should be included in the Plan. Some delegates were however opposed to the light rail schemes and supported the introduction of enhanced rapid transit, which they perceived to be a more flexible and cleaner method of public transport.

Rapid transit proposals were perceived by delegates as schemes that would serve to transport people from park and ride facilities into the city centre. The schemes were criticised and delegates said that inner city communities would not benefit from this facility because there would be fewer stops along the dedicated routes. Delegates claimed that the proposed rapid transit scheme along the Shore Road would only improve accessibility to other residential areas if additional stations were introduced along the route.

Delegates discussed the cost associated with the implementation of rapid transit schemes. They acknowledged that whilst the rapid transit facilities would be well used during peak hours, they expressed concern that they would not be used during off peak times. Delegates said that other schemes would be more cost effective and could deliver equally significant benefits to the Belfast Metropolitan Area.

Proposals to provide a rapid transit route linking Dundonald with Belfast city centre (EWay) and another in the Downpatrick corridor between Cairnshill and Belfast city centre (Super Route) were queried by delegates. The majority said that whilst these schemes have the potential to attract private sector funding they would exacerbate urban sprawl. Delegates urged a degree of caution and claimed that such out-of-town developments might conflict with government policies that seek to regenerate brownfield sites within the inner city. Some delegates suggested that areas of potential economic regeneration such as the Harbour Estate would be a better location for such a rapid transit scheme.

Delegates made reference to city centre trading and said that the introduction of a rapid transit scheme into the city centre would create a more vibrant city. They said that people need to be inspired by an innovative and creative transportation scheme and have confidence that it will be implemented within the city.

### 5.9.2 Quality Bus Corridor Network

The proposed Quality Bus Corridor network was supported by the Key Stakeholder Group but it did criticise the current corridor along the Ormeau Road describing it as ineffective. Delegates generally agreed that the implementation of Quality Bus Corridors should take priority along key roads and should be properly implemented with the necessary technology in place such as priority lighting and enforcement controls. Some delegates were doubtful about the proposal to introduce a Quality Bus Corridor from Carrickfergus and said that the Department has in the past had reservations about this scheme. Frustration was also expressed about the proposed schemes for the Upper Newtownards Road and the Falls Road, which according to delegates should have already been implemented.

Delegates highlighted the need for the Plan to encourage the early installation of 'real' Quality Bus Corridors along a few routes to allow people to see the benefits of these schemes stressing the need for the public to have confidence in the Quality Bus Corridor network and its ability to deliver an efficient transportation system.

### **5.9.3 Major Road Schemes**

There was a lot of discussion on the need to address the issue of freight and one delegate stressed the need for the Plan to promote the introduction of dedicated freight vehicle lanes. This, it was believed, would improve access into ports. Delegates also asked if any thought had been given to allow priority freight vehicles to use dedicated bus lanes. Delegates had mixed views on this. Some said that the Plan should consider allowing freight vehicles to use dedicated bus lanes on the strategic road network particularly along the Westlink between Stockman's Lane and Broadway and others believed that freight should only use the strategic highway network if the Plan allowed them to access Quality Bus Corridors, otherwise freight traffic would be brought onto the local road network and would contribute to congestion problems.

Reference was made to the proposal to alleviate the bottleneck on the A2 by widening it at Greenisland from two lanes to four. Delegates said that this proposal was a land use planning issue and expressed concern that planners had allowed continued development along the existing road. It was said that a large amount of land vesting and substantial and costly civil engineering work would be required to make this an achievable scheme.

Delegates said that the idea of an inner ring road was initially proposed as a scheme that would improve the walking and cycling environment within the city centre. They referred to the southern approach into the city from Queen's University and highlighted that the proposed scheme would make it extremely difficult to walk to and access the city centre. One delegate stated that the 'displacement theory' of traffic management has been discredited. Many delegates believed that whilst the inner ring road scheme would restrict access along certain inner city roads, traffic would simply be forced onto other road networks. This was not perceived to be a solution to inner city traffic problems.

Delegates said that in order for the proposed Quality Bus Corridor network to be properly implemented the Plan would need to consider the reallocation of road space to facilitate the frequent movement of buses. Delegates said that this could be easily achieved and expressed frustration at Roads Service and its seeming reluctance to penalise car drivers by taking road space away from them.

### **5.9.4 Proposals for Rail Schemes**

Delegates discussed the proposals identified in the Emerging Plan as priority schemes needed to improve the rail system. They argued that the Plan should place an increased emphasis on implementing schemes that would further enhance the rail system. This was perceived by delegates to be the most sustainable transportation mode.

Delegates referred to the current railway line operating from Belfast to Bangor. They said that the Plan should encourage the further development of this line rather than introducing other schemes within close proximity. The importance of increasing the frequency along the Belfast to Bangor railway line to ensure additional capacity was identified as a priority for the North Down corridor.

The majority of delegates supported the proposals to build new stations at Gamble Street and Belfast City Airport. It is believed that the Gamble Street scheme has the potential to stimulate development and regeneration in the immediate areas that are currently suffering from an economic point of view. The proposal to introduce a new rail terminal at Belfast City Airport was identified by delegates as having the potential to serve busy routes and by making it more accessible for commuters would stimulate economic development in the area. Delegates

described it as "a link in the chain" and they stressed the need for the Plan to encourage the introduction of feeder services to enable people throughout Belfast to access the Airport

#### **5.9.5 Demand Management**

The majority of delegates welcomed the many schemes proposed for central Belfast and said that the implementation and management of many of the proposals identified as priorities within the Emerging Plan are largely dependent on resources being made available for enforcement controls.

Some delegates expressed concern that proposed local traffic management measures especially with regard to parking were unclear. They suggested that the inner city zone should be extended towards the proposed park and ride facilities to limit commuter travel beyond the proposed park and ride facilities at Cairnshill, Kennedy Way or Millmount and parking in inner city residential areas.

#### **5.9.6 Other Issues**

Delegates expressed disappointment at the lack of information provided within the Emerging Plan about the level of funding available for some of the schemes proposed. Many were sceptical that the funding required to implement the schemes would not be made available and under-investment in transport throughout the Plan area would continue to be a problem.

The Key Stakeholder Group referred to local journeys and said they should form an integral part of the Plan. The need to factor into the Plan information about the cost of both promotional work and "social engineering" was emphasised by delegates. It was suggested that funding should be set aside to develop and implement educational programmes aimed at changing travel attitudes that would target key groups and businesses within society.

Phasing was another issue discussed by delegates. They suggested that if the Plan provided information about the proposed phasing of schemes it would enable them as stakeholders to closely monitor the progress of the Plan.

## 6. Open Forum Discussion

A range of questions was asked and comments expressed in the open forum session in the afternoon. Answering the questions was a panel of five: Paul Sweeney (Chair, BMTP Project Board), Ted Hesketh (Managing Director, Translink), Pat Quinn (DoE Planning Service), Tom McCourt (BMTP Project Leader), and Tony Meehan (Atkins).

The session was chaired by Colm Bradley (Director, Community Technical Aid) who encouraged delegates to group comments and questions around common themes. The main comments and questions raised with the panel responses are outlined below. These are grouped under the following headings:

- funding and deliverability of the Emerging Plan;
- baseline targets;
- enforcement and parking regulation;
- personal safety of public transport users;
- relocation of train stations; and
- relationship between BMTP and BMAP.

### **Funding and Deliverability of the Emerging Plan**

Some delegates were sceptical about funding and asked for assurances that funding would be available to assist with the successful implementation of proposed schemes. They asked whether there is an alternative or a 'Plan B'.

With regard to the phasing and prioritising of schemes delegates made reference to the North Down corridor noting that numerous schemes are proposed. They asked if there was scope within the Emerging Plan to prioritise and phase the delivery of schemes within corridors.

Delegates said that the EWay rapid transit proposal should be implemented immediately.

Paul Sweeney addressed the comments made regarding funding and deliverability of the Emerging Plan. He said that government funding cycles cover a three year period and highlighted the fact that in the recent budget, transportation did relatively well. He did acknowledge that there have been decades of under investment in transportation within the Belfast Metropolitan Area and said that the funding allocated would serve to "stop the rot" and create an element of optimism. He also said that if the current level of funding could be sustained then it may be easier to attract other funding sources to aid improvements within the transportation system.

He went on to explain that the deliverability and phasing of all proposed schemes are subject to affordability and economic appraisals. He described the EWay proposal as a flagship project and one that could be delivered through a Public Private Partnership. However, he did outline how a budget of £1.5 million over the next three years has been made available for the EWay proposal but that it is still subject to detailed analysis: "A great deal of work has still to be done to convince the private sector that this aspect of rapid transit is a viable and achievable scheme."

He finished by saying that the scheme is likely to be implemented no sooner than 2008-2009 given the work still involved.

### **Baseline Targets**

Some delegates said that they believe the Strategy fails the definition of a strategy in that, in their opinion, it does not appear to be shaped at the outset by objectives or targets. Many asked what assurances could be given in the absence of targets and queried if anything would actually be achieved on the ground.

Another delegate identified gaps within the Plan over the issue of quantification figures. Reference was made specifically to parking restraint and bus priority. It was believed that targets must be set to enable the Plan to be effectively monitored, assessed and reviewed and baseline figures should be outlined to enable shortfalls in service provision to be identified and addressed.

In response, Tony Meehan said that the role of objectives is fundamental in preparing the Emerging Plan and many are not easily quantifiable. He highlighted that many of the targets (reducing emissions, carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxide levels, decreasing the number of accidents, increasing public transport use whilst maintaining an efficient transport system for general road users) are outlined in the Regional Transportation Strategy and it is the role of the Emerging Plan to deliver these targets.

### **Enforcement and Parking Regulation**

Delegates expressed concern that the Emerging Plan does not acknowledge the potential impact that some of the proposed demand management schemes would have on inner city communities. Reference was made to the issue of parking restrictions within the city centre and one delegate asked who would monitor commuter parking in inner city areas. It was emphasised that a lot of work is required in this area because almost all inner city communities currently suffer the negative effects associated with commuter parking.

Other delegates questioned the point of having designated Quality Bus Corridors if cars and other vehicles are allowed to park there. Delegates asked if more could be done in terms of liaising with the Police Service of Northern Ireland to implement enforcement controls within these bus lanes.

Tom McCourt addressed the issue of parking in inner city areas. He recognised that commuter parking (ie a lack of residents parking schemes) is a problem in inner city communities and said that the police do not currently have the resources to tackle this issue. He also said that the Department is in the process of preparing the necessary primary legislation that will enable mechanisms to be put in place to introduce new enforcement measures. A feasibility study preparing a case for decriminalising parking offences is currently being prepared and the Department hopes that this will help deter commuters from parking in inner city areas and prevent people from parking in dedicated bus lanes or obstructing proper transport movements.

### **Personal Safety of Public Transport Users**

One delegate raised concerns that the Emerging Plan does not consider the personal safety of public transport users and claimed that this has deterred people from using such services over the years. The panel was asked if the Emerging Plan proposes to take account of these concerns in an attempt to make the system more attractive in the future.

Ted Hesketh responded to the question on personal safety and emphasised that Translink has always taken this issue seriously and is continuing to ensure that measures are put in place to increase safety of public transport users. He said that Translink made a submission to the Policing Board highlighting that Northern Ireland is the only region in the United Kingdom that does not have some form of transport policing and that this is needed.

### **Relocation of Train Stations**

Some delegates questioned proposals within the Emerging Plan to relocate Great Victoria Street Station and said that there is little opportunity to site the station nearer Donegal) Square and to move it further from the city centre would be unacceptable. Another delegate asked what criteria are used to determine the relocation of stations and if any assessment is made of potential problems that may arise as a result and emphasised that the relocation of the station at Jordanstown should not disadvantage current users.

Ted Hesketh addressed the issue of relocating stations. He believed that the Great Victoria Street Station should never have been closed and in his opinion the case for relocating it would need to be very convincing to be supported. He remarked that the proposal to relocate the station is linked to a potential route for a light rail rapid transit system.

Mr Hesketh said that the main criterion that determines the relocation of stations is the availability of land in what tends to be predominantly built up areas. He commented that the relocation of the station at Jordanstown would improve safety especially for students attending the University nearby and he assured delegates that Northern Ireland Railways would not consider moving too far away from its existing market.

### **Relationship Between BMTP and BMAP**

There was discussion on the relationship between BMTP and BMAP. Delegates sought clarity as to which Plan would take the lead and they also asked who would be responsible for the implementation of each Plan. Concern was expressed that house building (as part of the BMAP process) would continue without necessary infrastructure being in place and this would in turn contribute to congestion on the road network.

Delegates made reference to the Carrickfergus area and the severe congestion experienced which creates unacceptable journey times. They asked for assurances from the panel that the upgrading of roads within the Plan area would occur and that current delays encountered travelling to hospitals and other key services would not be exacerbated by additional housing developments.

Tom McCourt stressed that the RDS policies have set out clear guidelines for the BMAP Team to adhere to. The thrust of these policies is to integrate land use planning and transportation and to ensure that new developments maximise existing road infrastructure. New transport infrastructure will be located to ensure access to future potential developments or to allow additional developments to take place.

Paul Sweeney outlined the arrangements set up to ensure full co-ordination between the various players in the BMTP and BMAP processes. He said that representatives from DRD, DoE, the BMTP Team and NITHCo make up the Regional Transportation Strategy Steering Group which he jointly chairs with the chief executive of Roads Service. In addition he also said that an advisory group comprising representatives from the private sector, trade unions and the voluntary and community sector would be set up to give advice to the Steering Group.

Mr Sweeney ended by stressing that the Steering Group has been asked to oversee the implementation of the RTS and the three transport plans stemming from it. The Steering Group he said, is accountable to the political process and open to public scrutiny.

## Appendix 1 - List of Delegates

Richard Agus	-	Kirk McClure Norton
Jim Aiken	-	Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company
Richard Aiken	-	Department for Regional Development
Howard Anderson	-	British Motorcyclists Federation
Harry Armstrong	-	Department for Regional Development
David Ashby	-	Lisburn Road Community Forum
Mark Atkinson	-	Institution of Civil Engineers
Damien Bannon	-	Translink
CllrJ Beattie	-	Castlereagh Borough Council
Graeme Beckett	-	Department for Regional Development
Alderman Roy Beggs Jr	-	Carrickfergus Borough Council
Roy Beggs MLA	-	Northern Ireland Assembly
Ray Bentley	-	Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company
Richard Black	-	Historic Monuments Council
Lucinda Blakiston Houston	-	Council for Nature Conservation in the Countryside
Alan Brett	-	Atkins
Hilary Brown	-	Lisburn Road Community Forum
Colin Brown	-	Department for Regional Development
Peter Bunting	-	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Frank Caddy	-	Transport Advisory Committee
Robin Cameron	-	Belfast Metropolitan Residents' Group
Cllr E J Campbell	-	Lisburn City Council
Chris Campbell	-	Freight Transport Association Limited
Jim Campbell	-	Department for Regional Development
Jim Canning	-	Nortel Networks
Jack Cargo	-	Department for Regional Development
Jim Carlisle	-	
Norman Chambers	-	Department for Regional Development
Bernard Clarke	-	Translink
Frank Clegg	-	Translink
Ann Collins	-	Shopmobility
Pippa Cookson	-	Greater Belfast Community Network
Christine Cosgrove	-	Dundonald Greenbelt Association
Tom Courtney	-	Invest Northern Ireland
Renee Crawford	-	Lenadoon Environmental Forum
Victoria Creasy	-	Belfast Healthy Cities Project
Cllr Irene Cree	-	North Down Borough Council
Leslie Cree	-	North Down Borough Council
Alderman Janet Crilly	-	Newtownabbey Borough Council
Judith Cross	-	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
David Currie	-	Newtownabbey Borough Council
N Davidson	-	Lisburn City Council
Nic Deeny	-	Westfield
Cllr Stewart Dickson	-	Carrickfergus Borough Council
CllrWJ Dillon	-	Lisburn City Council
Gerry Doherty	-	South Belfast Partnership
Karen Donegan	-	Transport Research Institute (Northern Ireland)
Joe Drew	-	Department for Regional Development
Neil Dunlop	-	Department of the Environment
Stephen Dunlop	-	
R Ellison	-	Department for Regional Development

Lisa Fagan	-	Friends of the Earth (Northern Ireland)
Cllr Stephen Farry	-	North Down Borough Council
Douglas Ferguson	-	Transport Research Institute
Mark Finlay	-	Institute of Directors
John Fisher	-	IBEC/CBI Transport Committee
Donna Finlay	-	Planning Service
James Fitzpatrick	-	Irish News
Margaret Flanagan	-	Department for Social Development
Barbara Fleming	-	Disability Action
Peter Fleming	-	Invest Northern Ireland
Seamus Flynn	-	Markets Development Association
Jon Fox	-	Atkins
Scan Foy	-	Atkins
F Frazer	-	Department for Regional Development
A H Freedman	-	Bangor Road Safety Committee
Lydia Gamble	-	Castlereagh Enterprise Limited
Billy Gamble	-	Department for Regional Development
Cllr W M Gardiner-Watson	-	Lisburn City Council
Aileen Gault	-	Department for Regional Development
Tom Gillen	-	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Billy Gilpin	-	Translink
Alderman Paul Girvan	-	Newtownabbey Borough Council
Michael Goodman	-	Lower Ormeau Community Forum
Roy Gordon	-	Department for Regional Development
Andrew Haley	-	The Paul Hogarth Company
Ian Hamill	-	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Cllr Nigel Hamilton	-	Newtownabbey District Partnership
Richard Hamilton	-	Department for Regional Development
Gavin Hamilton	-	Atkins
Jim Hanna	-	Belfast City Council
Cllr Brian Hanvey	-	Castlereagh Borough Council
Sam Harris	-	Snodden Construction Limited
Andrew Hay	-	Castlereagh Borough Council
Ted Hesketh	-	Translink
Prof Julian Hine	-	University of Ulster
Roger Holland	-	Department for Regional Development
Jeremy Hooper	-	Atkins
Alan Houston	-	Department for Regional Development
Ian Humes	-	Department for Regional Development
John Irvine	-	Department for Regional Development
Alan Jeffers	-	Lisburn Development Limited
Joanne Jennings	-	Belfast City Centre Management
Alan Kane	-	United Hospitals Trust
Brian Kee	-	Police Service of Northern Ireland
John Kee	-	Department for Regional Development
Joseph Kelly	-	New Lodge Housing Forum
Gregor Kerr	-	
Raymond King	-	Disabled Drivers Association Northern Ireland
Paul King	-	Department for Regional Development
Gordon Latimer	-	Northern Ireland Fire Brigade
Dr Irvine Lavery	-	Translink
Claire Linney	-	Belfast City Council
Michael Lorimer	-	Disability Action
Chris Lundy	-	Belfast City Airport
John Macintyre	-	Carrickfergus Borough Council

Deidre Mackle	-	Department for Regional Development
John Magowan	-	Department for Regional Development
Sian Mawhinney	-	Belfast International Airport Limited
Brian Maxwell	-	Department for Regional Development
Henry McArdle	-	Department for Social Development
Colm McCann	-	Northern Ireland Walking Forum
Tom McClelland	-	Northern Ireland Cycling Initiative
Frank McClintock	-	Ambulance Service
Colin McClintock	-	Lisburn City Council
Tom McCourt	-	Department for Regional Development
Paul McCullough	-	Belfast City Council
Desi McDonnell	-	Department for Regional Development
Adrian McDowell	-	North Down Public Transport Users Group
Liam McEvoy	-	Atkins
Alan McFarland MLA	-	Northern Ireland Assembly
John McFerran	-	Helen's Bay and District Ratepayers' Association
Brendan McGuigan	-	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Dr Malcolm McKibbin	-	Department for Regional Development
John McKinley	-	Department for Regional Development
Cllr Patricia McKinney	-	Carrickfergus Borough Council
Dr John McPeake	-	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Ian McQuiston	-	Historic Buildings Council
John McQuitty	-	Department for Regional Development
Tony Meehan	-	Atkins
Pat Milliken	-	Omnibus Partnership
John Moore	-	Belfast Metropolitan Residents' Group
George Morrison	-	Mid Spring Residents' Group
Brian Mullan	-	Lower Antrim Road Regeneration Initiative
Gerry Mullan	-	Translink
Declan Murphy	-	Department for Regional Development
Bryan Myles	-	Community Transport Association
Sean Neeson MLA	-	Northern Ireland Assembly
Julie Nesbit	-	Atkins
Cllr Robin Newton	-	Belfast City Council
Hubert Nicholl	-	Northern Ireland Assembly
Pamela O'Donnell	-	West Belfast Partnership
Denis O'Hagan	-	Department for Regional Development
Noreen O'Loughlin	-	Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce
Philip O'Neill	-	Translink
Catriona O'Rourke	-	Construction Employers Federation
David Orr	-	Department for Regional Development
Michael Parkinson	-	Department for Regional Development
Steven Patterson	-	Sustrans
Leslie Patterson	-	Department for Regional Development
Sophie Picamol	-	Urban 2 Programme
Stephen Pollock	-	Department for Regional Development
William Poole	-	Confederation of British Industry (Northern Ireland)
Cllr E C Poots	-	Lisburn City Council
David Porter	-	
Eric Porter	-	Kirk McClure Morton
Gerry Potts	-	Castlereagh Lifestyle Forum
Alan Preston	-	Department for Regional Development
Susan Quail	-	Laganside Corporation
Pat Quinn	-	Department of the Environment
Steven Quinn	-	Department for Regional Development

Rajesh Rana	-	Transport 2000
Ian Raphael	-	Department for Regional Development
Cllr G Rice	-	Castlereagh Borough Council
Phil Richards	-	Atkins
Paul Roberts	-	New Lodge Forum
Cllr Ken Robinson	-	Newtownabbey Borough Council
Trevor Robinson	-	Department for Regional Development
Mark Robinson MLA	-	Northern Ireland Assembly
Nick Rogers	-	North Down Borough Council
Les Ross	-	Lisburn City Council
Graeme Salmon	-	Department for Regional Development
Ian Sinclair	-	Ulster Unionist Party
Cllr Marion Smith	-	North Down Borough Council
Prof B Smith	-	Council for Nature Conservation in the Countryside
Prof Austin Smyth	-	Transport Research Institute (Northern Ireland)
Joan Smyth	-	Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company
Dr Conor Smyth	-	Translink
Nigel Smyth	-	Confederation of British Industry (Northern Ireland)
Rev Martin Smyth MP	-	Northern Ireland Assembly
Brian Snodden	-	Snodden Construction Limited
Jamie Spenser	-	Atkins
Roy Spiers	-	Department for Regional Development
Des Stephens	-	Department for Regional Development
Keith Sutherland	-	Belfast City Council
Paul Sweeney	-	Department for Regional Development
Colin Sykes	-	
Jim Thompson	-	Department of the Environment
John Thompson	-	North Down Borough Council
Harry Todd	-	Donegall Pass Community Forum
Sam Todd	-	Translink
Elvira Tulip	-	Drumbeg and District Residents' Association
Brenda Turnbull	-	Newtownabbey Borough Council
Alan Walker	-	General Consumer Council
Mervyn Watley	-	University of Ulster
Adele Watters	-	Department of the Environment
Peter Weir	-	
Cllr Gwen Wilson	-	Carrickfergus Borough Council
Stephen Wood	-	Department for Regional Development
Derek Young	-	Historic Buildings Council

## **Appendix 2 - Conference Facilitators**

<b>Colm Bradley</b>	-	<b>Community Technical Aid</b>
<b>Lee Campbell</b>	-	<b>School of Environmental Planning, QUB</b>
<b>Lisa Copeland</b>	-	<b>Community Technical Aid</b>
<b>Gareth Harper</b>	-	<b>Rural Community Network</b>
<b>Rosaleen Heaney</b>	-	<b>Community Technical Aid</b>
<b>Simon Kelly</b>	-	<b>Community Technical Aid</b>
<b>Paul McClean</b>	-	<b>School of Environmental Planning, QUB</b>
<b>Malachy McEldowney</b>	-	<b>School of Environmental Planning, QUB</b>
<b>Catharine McWhirter</b>	-	<b>Community Technical Aid</b>
<b>Tony Macauley</b>	-	<b>Independent Consultant</b>
<b>Brendan Murtagh</b>	-	<b>School of Environmental Planning, QUB</b>
<b>Ken Sterrett</b>	-	<b>School of Environmental Planning, QUB</b>
<b>Diane Thompson</b>	-	<b>School of Environmental Planning, QUB</b>