

**INTEGRATED TRANSPORT STAKEHOLDER GROUP (ITSG)
MINUTES OF THE 7th MEETING
Thursday 17 April 2008, The Mount Business Centre, BELFAST.**

Present:

Conor Murphy MP MLA	Minister for Regional Development; Chair
Bert Bailie	Institute of Highways and Transportation
Lisa Fagan	Friends of the Earth
Eleanor Gill	General Consumer Council
Professor Julian Hine	University of Ulster
Michael Lorimer	Independent Mobility Transport Advisory Committee
Catherine Mason	Group Chief Executive, NITHCo
Seamus McAleavey	Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
Tom McClelland	Cycling Forum
Eamonn O'Donnell	NW Taxi Proprietors
Philip O'Neill	Translink
Tony O'Reilly	Equality Commission
Geoffrey Perrin	Institution of Civil Engineers
Ryan Simpson	General Consumer Council
Sean Smyth	Irish Congress of Trade Unions – UNITE
Eamonn Sweeney	Construction Employers Federation
Tom Wilson	Confederation of British Industry and Freight Transport Association Ltd

In attendance:

Stephen McGlade	Special Advisor,
Doreen Brown	Deputy Secretary, Department for Regional Development (DRD)
David Carson	Director, Public Transport Performance Division, DRD
Paul Priestly	Permanent Secretary, DRD
Mike Thompson	Director, Regional Planning and Transportation Division, DRD
Brian White	Director, Ports and Public Transport Division, DRD
John White	Director of Strategic Network Development, Roads Service, DRD

Apologies:

Eddie Burns	The Automobile Association
Peter Bunting	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Mark Dunn	Northern Ireland Local Government Association
Frank Hewitt	Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Brian Kee	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Karen Magill	NI Independent Coach Operators Association
Carla McCambridge	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Catherine McCambridge	Northern Ireland Local Government Association
Bryan Myles	Community Transport Association
Rajesh Rana	Transport 2000
Helen Roulston	Institute of Directors
Prof Austin Smyth	Transport Research Institute

ITSG Secretariat:

Gregor Kerr
Kathleen O'Neill
Louise Fitzpatrick

1 Opening Remarks

Minister Murphy welcomed members to the seventh meeting of ITSG.

2 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the sixth meeting were agreed. There were no matters arising.

3 Apologies

Apologies were received as noted.

4 Budget and Investment Strategy – Implications for Transport

John White (Roads Service) and David Carson (Public Transport Performance Division) gave a presentation on the implications of the Budget and ISNI for Roads Service and Public Transport respectively.

Following the presentations, Minister Murphy invited comment and questions from

the group.

Sean Smyth asked if the provision of rest areas for drivers had been considered when planning major road schemes. He said that more enforcement officers were required to protect the haulage industry from those operating outside the law. John White said that recommendations on the provision of rest areas would be presented to the Roads Service Board in the near future and that rest areas would also be considered as part of the detailed design process for schemes such as the A5. Tom Wilson said that legislation on operator licensing giving more powers to the Department of Environment would pass before the Assembly later this year and that the number of enforcement officers would be doubled. Mr Wilson also said that European Union regulations require regular breaks for drivers and that rest areas were a necessity.

Mr Smyth also asked the Minister what the current position for the Rathlin Island Ferry was. Minister Murphy replied that an announcement would be made by 25 April.

Eamonn O'Donnell said that the taxi industry was a major provider of public transport but that it did not appear to have been included. He said that new taxi regulations would present a cost to the industry and that the Door-2-Door scheme introduced by DRD had impacted on taxi firms, particularly those operating wheelchair accessible taxis which were more expensive to purchase, insure and operate. Mr O'Donnell asked whether the concessionary fare scheme could be extended to include taxis, possibly through a taxi voucher scheme, and whether taxi operators could be offered fuel duty rebate. Mr Smyth said that he was aware of incidences of drivers working in excess of 100 hours in a week and that regulation of taxi drivers, similar to that for bus and freight drivers, was required. Michael Lorimer said that taxis were an important means of transport for older people and disabled people. Minister Murphy said that he had met with taxi providers in Belfast and was aware of the issues raised; driver licensing, however, was a matter for DOE. Mr Carson said that consideration was being given to the issue of fuel duty rebate for taxi operators.

Mr Lorimer said that, by maximising the effectiveness of investment, the Accessible Transport Strategy had improved transport for older people and people with disabilities. He particularly welcomed the extension of the Concessionary Fare Scheme. Mr Lorimer said, however, that more needed to be done to ensure the implementation of the ATS in the areas of driver training and information. Minister Murphy acknowledged that point. Mike Thompson said that, through the recent review of the ATS, the Department understood the issue.

Bert Bailie noted that the level of funding for roads structural maintenance was lower than that required to maintain the network fully and pointed out that structural maintenance projects also benefit walking and cycling. Eamonn Sweeney said that the construction industry was facing a downturn and that the level of investment outside the PPP projects was disappointing, particularly over the next 2 years.

John White said that the allocation for structural maintenance was higher than the initial allocations in previous years and that, as in previous years, additional funds could be allocated to structural maintenance during the year. Mr White also said that there would be a considerable lead in time for construction projects to allow for statutory processes. Mr Bailie said that the stop-go nature of funding for structural maintenance made it difficult to plan and caused problems for the industry. Minister Murphy said that he had met with quarry owners to discuss the long-term planning problem that in-year reallocations presented and that the Executive had agreed to declare capital underspends as early in-year as possible rather than waiting for the December monitoring round.

Mr Sweeney noted that ISNI included £400million to come from realisation of assets and asked if this was achievable. Mr Priestly said that the £400million identified in ISNI had been built into Departmental budgets and was a realistic figure. The Capital Assets Realisation Team was working to identify additional assets that could be realised during the ISNI period.

Lisa Fagan said that the Regional Transportation Strategy suggested a balance of spending of 63:37 highways:public transport. The balance from the Budget and ISNI was 81:19. Minister Murphy said that investment in infrastructure was a central pillar of the Executive programme. The levels of investment agreed by the Executive included high levels of investment in public transport, including rail. Minister Murphy said that the region had a dispersed settlement pattern and that, while he was a firm believer in rail, many areas had no rail provision. The road network carried most of the region's public transport and all of the freight. No new roads were planned the improvements to the existing roads were required to underpin development of the economy, particularly in the west of the region. Minister Murphy added that the major review of the Regional Transportation Strategy would include consideration of climate issues which had not previously been addressed.

Eleanor Gill said that the public tended to concentrate on the negative and that a strategy was required to communicate what the Department had achieved, such as the significant number of bus corridors. The Department needed to show the public that it was providing value for money and to set out its vision for the future.

Minister Murphy thanked the group for their comments.

5 Rapid Transit for the Belfast Metropolitan Area

Mike Thompson (Regional Planning and Transportation Division) gave a presentation on the consultants report on Rapid Transit.

Minister Murphy emphasised that no decision had yet been taken and asked the group for their views on Rapid Transit for Belfast.

Seamus McAleavey said that the numbers pointed to a Bus-Rapid Transit (BRT) rather than Light-Rail (LRT). While Mr McAleavey believed that the public would

understand the value for money issue, they were, however, expecting LRT and any BRT would have to match a LRT in providing a fast, reliable, dependable service and have a “wow” factor to encourage motorists out of their cars. Mr Lorimer and Mr O'Reilly said that whatever system was chosen, all aspects, including ticketing systems, audio-visual systems and integration with other modes, should be fully accessible for all users. Minister Murphy said that he had had discussions with other cities which had introduced Rapid Transit and was aware that, whatever system was chosen, it would need to be a high-quality system with high levels of priority providing a dependable service. Rapid Transit for Belfast would not be LUAS-2; Dublin was a different city with a different population, dynamic and levels of available investment.

Sean Smyth said that Rapid Transit should be kept in the public realm and should be operated by Translink. Some funding should be set aside to encourage the use of public transport. Minister Murphy said that Rapid Transit would have to be promoted properly to succeed.

Tom McClelland and Ms Fagan said that the Comber Greenway should be protected and the Upper Newtownards Road used instead. Mr Thompson said that the proposal was to return a public transport corridor to its original route but that the Department would work closely with Sustrans during the detailed design to see how walking and cycling could be accommodated beside the Rapid Transit route.

Mr McClelland said that car constraint would be required to encourage motorists to use public transport. Minister Murphy said that the Department was moving in the direction of car constraint and that a range of measures, including better enforcement of car parks and car parking and residents parking areas, would make journeying to the city centre by car less attractive but that a high quality public transport alternative had to be provided.

Geoffrey Perrin and Mr Bailie asked about route selection for Rapid Transit and whether it would be possible to fit Rapid Transit through the city centre. Minister Murphy said that this would be a pilot network which could be extended to other parts of the city. He said that there was a unique opportunity with Titanic Quarter to build-in public transport from the start. Mr Priestly said developer contributions from Titanic Quarter would contribute significantly to the affordability of that route. Mr Thompson said that giving that priority to Rapid Transit would cause some pain for car users but that there was sufficient road space in the city centre to accommodate both.

Prof Julian Hine asked if longer routes had been considered to include a larger population. Mr Thompson said that the consultants had been asked to consider the needs of the city.

Action Point: Secretariat to provide Prof Hines with report on CD-ROM

Minister Murphy thanked the group for their views. A further meeting would be

arranged later in the year.

6 Next Meeting

The next meeting of ITSG will take place later in the year on a date to be arranged by the Secretariat.

Gregor Kerr

Regional Planning and Transportation Division

April 2008