



Extending Door-to-Door Transport Services Across Northern Ireland

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1. Introduction

How this document is organised

1.1 This document has 4 sections.

Section 1: Provides information about this paper and gives details about who to contact to get more copies and alternative accessible formats.

Section 2: Explains why Door-to-Door transport services are being extended.

Section 3: Describes how the Department for Regional Development will go about extending these services.

Section 4: Provides information about how to respond to this consultation paper.

Purpose of this document

1.2 The purpose of this document is to:

- provide background information about why the Department for Regional Development (DRD) is extending the availability of Door-to-Door transport services across Northern Ireland and how it is going to do so;
- seek your views on the proposed way forward;
- build on the Equality Impact Assessment that was issued at the end of February by trying to ascertain how the Department can implement its proposed policy for the delivery of Door-to-Door transport.

Play your part

1.3 Let us know if there is anything we could do better, or differently.

Contacting us

1.4 If you require this document in alternative formats (for example, large print, computer disc, Braille or audiotape) please contact us, as detailed, below. If these formats do not meet your needs please contact us to discuss alternative options. The document is also available on the Departmental website:

Simply log on to www.drdni.gov.uk and follow the Consultations link. We will also be pleased to provide additional copies of this document.

1.5 You can contact us by writing to the address below or by phoning:

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2. Background

The Transport Programme for People with Disabilities (TPPD)

- 2.1 The Department's proposals to extend door-to-door transport services for people with disabilities in urban areas of Northern Ireland aligns with current transportation strategies, and will comprise an important component of the Department's Accessible Transport Strategy, which is being worked on at the moment. The door-to-door service will be administered by the Department's Transport Programme for People with Disabilities.

Regional Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002-2012

- 2.2 The Regional Transportation Strategy 2002-2012 (RTS), which was agreed by the Northern Ireland Assembly on 3rd July 2002, provides a framework for the future planning, funding and delivery of land-based transportation throughout Northern Ireland.
- 2.3 Implementation of the RTS will, over the strategy period, make a significant contribution towards the achievement of the "vision" for transportation contained in the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025 (Shaping our Future) which was to:
- "to have a modern, sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society, the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone's quality of life."*
- 2.4 The RTS confirmed DRD's commitment to the promotion of equality of opportunity and to tackling factors leading to social need and social exclusion. The RTS acknowledged that many people in Northern Ireland are unable to use, or make full use of our transportation system because of the barriers they face. These can be physical barriers that are present in the built environment or due to the design of vehicles, but they can also stem from issues such as society and individual's attitudes, the design of services and ways in which information is provided.
- 2.5 The RTS committed the Department to prepare an Accessible Transport Strategy (ATS) for Northern Ireland. The ATS will examine all forms of action that can be taken to improve access to transport for older people and people with disabilities.

Accessible Transport Strategy

- 2.6 The proposed scope, objectives and consultation arrangements for developing the Accessible Transport Strategy were contained in an “Issues Paper” which was published for public consultation in February 2004. Among other things, the ATS will confirm DRD’s vision for an accessible transport future; consolidate the Department’s strategies, policies and plans that impact on accessible transport; set out a basic timetable for achieving an accessible transport system, and; identify the actions that need to be taken to reach that point.
- 2.7 The ATS will also define a framework in the form of an Action Plan, which will guide government organisations (at all levels), voluntary organisations and transport operators to make sure they can work together to facilitate the development of an accessible transportation system.
- 2.8 The Department’s Transport Programme for People with Disabilities will be an important means for delivering the ATS.

The Transport Programme for People with Disabilities (TPPD)

- 2.9 The Department for Regional Development administers the “Transport Programme for People with Disabilities”. The Programme has been in existence since 1991 and has evolved over the years, developing a range of specialised transport services for disabled persons with a number of service operators.
- 2.10 The aims of the Programme are:
- To target social need by improving accessibility of public transport to people with disabilities who cannot avail of existing conventional services in Northern Ireland; and
 - To complement the work of existing service providers involved in programmes designed to promote social inclusion for people with reduced mobility.
- 2.11 The Programme also provides financial assistance to the Northern Ireland Transport Advisory Committee (NITAC). The role of the NITAC is to advise the Department on issues about people with disabilities and the transport system.
- 2.12 The Department carried out a review of the Programme in 2002/03. The focus of that review was on the resource funding, the needs of people with disabilities, and the Department’s powers and duties.

2.13 Following consultation with key stakeholders on the outcomes of the review the Department has formulated a way forward for this Programme. These proposals are contained in the Draft Equality Impact Assessment¹ (EQIA) on the Programme, which issued on 27th February 2004. Responses to the EQIA are due back by 21st May 2004. The EQIA confirmed the Department's intent for the future direction of the Transport Programme for People with Disabilities –

“The Department for Regional Development is committed to the development of accessible public and community transport opportunities for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland. It will strive to integrate this policy within wider strategic transport policy development and complement the work of other agencies involved in programmes designed to promote social inclusion.”

¹ The EQIA document can be found on the Internet at www.drdni.gov.uk and following the Consultations link.

3. Extending Door-to-Door Transport Services

Complementing other services

- 3.1 The RTS included a number of initiatives that would help improve the availability of accessible transport opportunities for people with disabilities. These include improvements to conventional public transport services and new flexible and demand responsive transport services in rural areas. Demand responsive transport will open up new travel opportunities for people with disabilities living in rural areas, and will complement conventional public transport services and those provided by Community Transport Partnerships. The Department has secured further resources for 2005/06 to improve rural transport.
- 3.2 Conventional public transport is becoming more accessible because new buses and trains which enter service must now meet certain accessibility standards, which enable people with disabilities to use them. Conventional public transport operates on fixed routes according to a published timetable. The bus services provided by Ulsterbus and Citybus and the rail services provided by Northern Ireland Railways are examples of conventional public transport.
- 3.3 Even when mainstream buses and trains are fully accessible (within the DDA definition) there will be a need to have dedicated transport services for people who are unable to use conventional public transport. The TPPD wishes to improve mobility for people with disabilities who may require a level of care during their journeys which the mainstream public transport system is neither expected nor able to deliver.
- 3.4 The steady expansion of accessible mainstream bus services will reduce, but not remove, the need for dedicated services for disabled people over the next decade. The new low-floor vehicles are likely to be concentrated initially on the busiest services, which reflect demographic and socio-economic factors.
- 3.5 The Department has indicated that development of “accessible transport chains” is a concept that could underpin the development of an Accessible Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland. The concept acknowledges that any journey comprises several elements, which link together to form an accessible transport chain (getting to a bus stop,

waiting, getting on and off the bus, walking to your destination or getting another transport service and so on). For the journey to be accessible, each element must be accessible and so must the links between them. For some people, door-to-door transport will help them to link with other accessible transport opportunities.

Overview of the Department's door-to-door service proposal

- 3.6 The TPPD will establish arrangements to provide door-to-door transport services for people with disabilities living in urban areas throughout Northern Ireland. The services will be used primarily by people who are unable to use conventional public transport. They will fulfil the same function as conventional town bus services by enabling people to get to and from their home to local facilities and services.
- 3.7 The Department will establish a membership scheme for people who are eligible to use these services. The services will be provided under contract by licensed transport operators. The Department will set high standards in its contracts to ensure that the service is provided with appropriate vehicles and well-trained drivers. Members of the scheme will be able to book door-to-door journeys by booking through a call centre, which will deal with reservations for all urban areas. The Department proposes to set a fare for these journeys at a rate comparable to conventional public transport services.
- 3.8 These issues are discussed in more detail under the following headings:-
- Tendering Options
 - Location of Door-to-Door services
 - Areas of Operation
 - Scheme Membership (eligibility)
 - Companion Travel
 - Fares
 - Joining Fees
 - Call Centre
 - Types of Vehicles
 - Times of Operation

4. Tendering Options

- 4.1 The Department plans to publicly tender for the provision of door-to-door services. This means that operators will have to meet a strict set of performance standards. It is likely that private operators will provide services.

QUESTION 1:

What do you think of these arrangements?

5. Location of Door-to-Door Services

- 5.1 Door-to-door services are services which take people from a specific place, for example their home, to another specific place, for example, town.
- 5.2 The Department proposes that the following urban areas (with populations of 10,000 people or more) are provided with door-to-door services:
- Coleraine and Ballymoney;
 - Larne;
 - Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus (including Greenisland due to the geographical make-up);
 - Ballymena;
 - Antrim;
 - Strabane;
 - Cookstown;
 - Bangor and Holywood;
 - Newtownards, Comber and Dundonald;
 - Enniskillen;
 - Armagh;
 - Dungannon;
 - Lisburn and Dunmurry;
 - Portadown, Lurgan and Craigavon (Craigavon Urban Area);
 - Banbridge;
 - Newry;
 - Omagh;
 - Limavady;
 - Downpatrick;
 - Ballyclare.

- 5.3 Some urban areas have been grouped together as they lie close to one another. Where an urban area is not close to any other, it will be contracted as a stand-alone service.
- 5.4 Belfast and Londonderry are not listed above as door-to-door services are already provided there. The Department intends to further develop door-to-door in both cities in 2005/06.
- 5.5 Accessible services outside of the areas listed above are supported through the Department's Rural Transport Fund.

QUESTION 2:

Do you consider the selection of areas is reasonable?

6. Scheme Membership (eligibility)

- 6.1 We think membership of the Scheme should be open to people who find conventional public transport very difficult or impossible to use. The Department recognises that many conventional public transport services are not designed to accommodate people with disabilities. We propose that door-to-door transport services be made available to the *following* groups of people living in urban areas with more than 10,000 persons:
- I. Persons in receipt of the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance;
 - II. Persons in receipt of the higher rate care component of Attendance Allowance;
 - III. Persons who are registered blind;
 - IV. Persons who have reached 80 years of age.
- 6.2 This equates to approximately 105,402 people throughout Northern Ireland's urban areas. The Department proposes to manage the membership of the Scheme itself. This means that people will complete an application form and must satisfy the eligibility criteria.

QUESTION 3:

(i) Do you agree with these proposed categories? (ii) Should any other categories be added to the list above?

7. Companion Travel

- 7.1 The Department recognises that if someone has mobility difficulties they may want to or need to be accompanied by a Companion and/or Assistant (called Companions from here on) when using the Scheme's services. The Department proposes that in such circumstances Companions will pay the same fare as the Programme Member.
- 7.2 The Department also recognises that many disabled people have non-disabled spouses, children, parents and friends, who may not be their companions but who may wish or need to travel with them. It may therefore be possible to allow other non-disabled persons (in addition to their Companion) to accompany a Scheme Member. However, the Department believes that certain factors should be considered when this happens. These are:
- That non-essential passengers should pay a higher fare than the Scheme Member, or their essential companion. The reasoning behind this is to encourage non-disabled persons to use conventional public transport services and to discourage them from taking up seats that could be used by Scheme Members;
 - Apart from essential Companions it would not be possible to guarantee non-disabled people seats until the end of the minimum booking period. That is, if seats were available when the booking line closes on the day before travel, then these could be offered to the additional non-disabled persons. This is to ensure as far as possible, that the services are dedicated for Scheme Members.

QUESTION 4:

What do you think of the arrangements for essential Companions?

QUESTION 5:

What do you think of the arrangements for non-essential Companions?

8. Fares

- 8.1 The Department believes that a standard fee should be charged for journeys taken within the town (say up to 3 miles) and an additional charge for those journeys taken outside the town (say within a five mile radius). The Department would like these fares to be similar to public transport fares. At present, however, it is unlikely that concessionary fares will be available on these services.

QUESTION 6:

Do you agree that this is an acceptable proposal?

9. Annual Fee

- 9.1 We think that people who pay to join the Scheme will be more likely to use its services. For that reason, the Department plans to charge an annual membership fee of £5. Some (not all) authorities in the rest of the United Kingdom charge an annual membership fee to using door-to-door services.

QUESTION 7:

Do you think that we should charge a fee?

10. Types of Vehicles to be Used

10.1 The Department believes it is necessary that the vehicles used to provide the door-to-door services need to be fully accessible. We are aware of the range of accessible vehicles and recommended standards and believe it is necessary that the vehicles used operate to best practice. The final specification for the vehicles and minibuses used will be developed in liaison with the Northern Ireland Transport Advisory Committee, the Department for Transport (GB) and the Department of the Environment (NI). The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) standards for small buses and public hire vehicles will be taken into consideration.

QUESTION 8:

Do you think this is a reasonable approach?

QUESTION 9:

Is there any specific type of equipment that door-to-door vehicles NEED to have?

QUESTION 10:

Is there any special type of equipment that would BE USEFUL on door-to-door vehicles?

11. Times of Operation

- 11.1 The Department thinks that door-to-door services should operate between 07:30 in the morning and 11:00 in the evening Monday through Saturday and between 08:00 in the morning and 5:00 on Sunday.
- 11.2 The Department thinks that any contracts should be split between a Daytime service and an Evening service. Details of this are set out below:
1. Daytime Work, 0730-1800 Monday-Saturday and 0800-1700 Sundays
 2. Evening Work (1800-2300) Monday-Saturday
- 11.3 The advantage of this is that any evening contract could be reviewed if services were not being used without disrupting daytime services. We think that service times should be reviewed at intervals.

QUESTION 11:

Does this seem like a reasonable approach to you?

12. Driver Standards

- 12.1 The Department will need to ensure that high quality standards are met by all people who are involved in delivering Programme services. This should mean that drivers are aware (as far as possible) of the issues facing their passengers and will help them to provide best practice standards. Training should take account of language, etiquette, assistance techniques, meeting people with disabilities, health and safety and so on. We will develop a high specification for training in liaison with the Northern Ireland Transport Advisory Committee which will apply to all: from booking assistants to drivers.

QUESTION 12:

(i) Is there any type of training that you think TPPD drivers should be required to have? (ii) What is the minimum standard of training required?

QUESTION 13:

Do you think this is an acceptable level of training?

13. Booking Arrangements

- 13.1 The Department thinks that one telephone number should take all service calls across Northern Ireland. This means that all Scheme Members need only call one number to book transport.
- 13.2 Bookings would be made at least 24 hours in advance and the Call Centre would schedule and advise service operators in each urban area of the next day's bookings.

QUESTION 14:

What do you think about this approach?

14. Areas of Operation

- 14.1 We think that services should be able to take people around the urban areas in which they live. This means that, if you live in Enniskillen, you will be able to travel to other places within Enniskillen.
- 14.2 We think that you should also be able to travel from your house to a place within a 5-mile radius of your town (of course, the return journey would also be allowed). This would be subject to a vehicle being available. Only people living in the selected urban areas will be able to use these services – the Scheme is intended to complement Rural Transport Fund services. We also think that, in some cases, you should be able to travel to outside of your urban area. For example, by arrangement you could go to another nearby town 1 day a week, or you could use the bus to go to the airport or a special ticketed event (like a concert). We also think that door-to-door services should allow people, where possible, to use accessible public transport. For example, it could drop you off at an accessible train and you could be picked up at the other end if necessary.

QUESTION 15:

Do you think that our proposals above are reasonable?

QUESTION 16:

Have you any suggestions on how door-to-door can help you to travel longer distances?

15. Consultation Arrangements

Conclusion

15.1 We are keen to know your thoughts on what we have outlined above.

- If there is anything important we have not mentioned which you think we should know, please tell us.

What to do now

15.2 Having read this document please let us know what you think. You can write to us at the addresses below:

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15.3 The Department would welcome your comments on the consultation document by **Friday 16th July 2004.**

16. What will happen next?

- 16.1 The Department will examine the responses people make to this consultation document and will try to shape the services from what we are told.
- 16.2 With the advice of relevant individuals and bodies we plan to develop vehicle and service standards with a view to delivering best practice. This will also include a complaints procedure.
- 16.3 During the period of this consultation paper we plan to investigate whether any transport operators are interested in delivering these types of services. This will be done through what is called an "Expression of Interest" advert.
- 16.4 We plan to tender operational areas from the mid-Summer onwards. We hope that services are operational by the end of 2004.
- 16.5 We will keep respondents to this consultation paper informed about our decisions.