

7<sup>th</sup> July 2009

## **RESPONSE TO THE ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT STRATEGY DRAFT ACTION PLAN 2009–2012**

The ATS has now completed the draft Action Plan for 2009-2012, and lists all of the actions to be undertaken to improve the accessibility of transport systems during this period.

During this period public consultation meetings have been planned across N.I. for all interested parties to attend. These consultation meetings provide the opportunity to assess the current issues in urban and rural areas for those using existing transport providers and also to identify any particular barriers for older people, disabled people and others with reduced mobility. The ATS pro-active approach in encouraging disabled and older people to take part in the consultation process is to be welcomed. The end result of engaging with older people and disabled people will hopefully be to help break down the barriers that are currently experienced by these users, through incorporating their views into the development of any future transport infrastructure.

The development of rural community transport partnerships and their door-to-door service has had a considerable effect in many rural areas. They have provided a valuable lifeline in rural areas for older and disabled people where previously no provider was available. These bodies have worked in conjunction with local Health Trusts to enhance services in these remote rural areas. These services must remain affordable and sustainable. Hence it is important that funding for such services should continue to be provided by the DRD for the foreseeable future.

The introduction of accessible buses by Translink has also had a positive impact for disabled and older people enabling them to access day to day public transport in their areas. Translink's commitment to disability awareness and equality training for all frontline staff is welcomed. This can only improve the service already provided - attitudes can often provide as significant a barrier to accessing a service as physical obstacles. The planned review of the impact of transport policies on people with learning difficulties and mental health service users, will enhance understanding of the needs of these users and assist in the development of a more user friendly service which they can access.

Accessing healthcare services is a priority issue among the more marginalised in society. It should not be deemed the sole responsibility of Health & Social Care Transport, it is an issue for all Departments. Hence the Action Plan should have closer links with the DHSSPS strategy for Health & Social Care Transport. This would help place transport for users in a wider context and assist in delivering the strategic objectives outlined in this plan, in the most effective and efficient way.

The following specific comments should be considered

~ P03 A05 - Further detail would be helpful with respect to who and how new members would be recruited annually to represent older people and people with disabilities to Imtac;

~ P04 A01 & A02 - The "Ongoing" and "Achieved" Outcomes linked to consulting with older people and people with disabilities and their representative organizations in relation to transport policies, projects, vehicle design and service co-ordination is non-committal and lacking in detail;

~ P06 A01 & A02 - Whilst a commitment is made to provide disability and equality/diversity awareness training to all DRD Staff no commitment is made to facilitate this with other community transport providers and this should be included;

~ P12 A01 - Although reference is made to improving the walking network, no linkages are made to improving the utilization of these networks through working in partnership with physical activity programmes and walk leader initiatives supported by Health & Social Care Organizations and local authorities;

~ P15 A01-A03 - In referencing support for the operation of Rural Community Transport Partnerships, it would be useful if an ongoing financial commitment could be made to enhance their long-term sustainability;

~ P18 A01 & A02 - Whilst, as noted in the Draft Action Plan, it is important to encourage an intersectoral partnership approach to the delivery of accessible transport services, a key indicator of success in this area would be increased affordability of accessible transport services available to older people and people with disabilities, and this should be referenced as a measurable outcome;

~ P25 A07 - In expanding the pilot buddying scheme to areas outside Belfast, utilization of existing volunteer opportunities should be made by linking with Health & Social Care Volunteer Co-ordinators and locally based Volunteer Centres;

~ P27 A02 & A03 - Although the introduction of audio and visual mechanisms in communicating transport information is welcomed, this could be enhanced through translating and disseminating all available information in a variety of

languages to address the new and emerging needs of Black & Minority Ethnic and Migrant Worker Communities.

I trust you will find these comments helpful

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