

Accessible Transport Strategy Draft Action Plan 2009-2012

Consultation Response Questionnaire



Department for
**Regional
Development**

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AN ROINN

Forbartha Réigiúnaí

MÁNNYSTRIE FUR

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Consultation Response Questionnaire

Please use this form when responding to the questions on the Accessible Transport Strategy draft Action Plan 2009-2012.

We are seeking your comments and thoughts regarding your views on the ATS draft Action Plan 2009-2012. When making comments, you may continue on a separate sheet if necessary.

The consultation closes on 7th July 2009.

Please return the completed questionnaire to the below address:

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We would welcome any comments you may have on the content of the draft action plan. According to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act (2000) all information contained in your response may be subject to publication or disclosure. More information on this is contained within Annex A of this document.

Personal Information

To assist us in the collation and analysis of responses, please provide us with the following information, using block capitals:

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The Volunteer Development Agency is the centre of expertise for the development and promotion of volunteering in Northern Ireland. The Agency offers a range of products and services that provide a high quality and value for money source of information and good practice for all volunteer involving organisations regardless of their size.

The views of the members of the Volunteer Development Agency have also been included in the response. In particular, [VSB](#) and the [Community Transport Association](#) have provided valuable information in helping the Agency to respond to this consultation.

Question 1

Since the launch of the Accessible Transport Strategy in 2005 do you think the accessibility of the transport system for disabled people and older people has improved?

Yes

No

Question 2

Can you say why?

1. Rural Community Transport providers and Door to Door Transport Service provide vital assistance in helping older people and people with disabilities get to health and social appointments.
2. Transport Buddying Schemes in Belfast, Lisburn / Dunmurry and Omagh/ Dungannon areas have helped and continue to help improve the confidence of many older people to travel independently.
3. The Transport Buddy Scheme in Belfast also acts in an advisory capacity for older people who were not suitable for the scheme but require information about their transport options.

Question 3

Has the improvement in the accessibility of public transport (i.e. accessible buses, trains, Door-2-Door services etc) increased the travel opportunities for disabled people and older people?

Yes

No

Question 4

Can you say why?

Community transport provides an important complementary service to public transport in Northern Ireland. In the 'It's All About Time'¹ research, 31% of volunteer involving organisations in Northern Ireland stated that providing transport / driving was their most common volunteering activity (2007). As referenced in this consultation report, in 2005/06 the Rural Community Transport partnerships provided approximately 562,000 passenger trips to people living in rural areas (page 53). In June, the VSB volunteer driving schemes (South & East Belfast & North Down & Ards) assisted 116 clients covering 11594 miles, with a team of 33 active volunteer drivers. VSB Transport buddying has also provided extra support for 'Door to Door' users by assisting them to travel.

¹ Volunteer Development Agency (2007) 'It's All About Time.

Question 5

What are the remaining barriers to making public transport accessible for disabled people and older people?

1. Lack of awareness of travel options. Older people are often not aware of what services are available to them. Options are not being advertised effectively. No one single point of contact for transport services.
2. No link up of transport services
3. Information provided at bus/train stations is not always visible – hard to identify and bus stop timetables are often destroyed.
4. Bus routes are often changed without consultation or confirmation.
5. Cars parking on the street (Eg Shankill Road) make it difficult and sometimes impossible for older people or those with disabilities to access buses as this prevents drivers from being able to lower steps for access.
- 6 Route numbers on buses are hard to read from a distance for older people with sight difficulties.
7. Distance to walk to and from bus stops. This is a major barrier for those with mobility problems.
8. Fear of travel. This can include fear of the unknown but also concerns about falling i.e. that drivers will start to drive off before an older person has sat down or that drivers will not lower steps. Bad experiences regarding attitudes of drivers e.g. drivers wearing earphones therefore cannot hear when passengers ask questions.
9. There are not enough priority seats for older people on buses.
10. Research conducted by the Transport Buddy Scheme in Belfast showed that older people were reluctant to use the 'Door to Door' Transport Service as they had to book a day in advance. Many also reported that the service could not be booked for a specific time and this was not convenient.

11(a) More assistance needed for those trying to make transport complaints.

(b) Older people are continuing to experience difficulties in relation to public bus and rail to access services.

Question 6

How can these barriers be overcome?

1. Ref P27 & P28- A promotions campaign and production of a book/ leaflet that clearly lists all travel options available, where they operate, how to book, prices and timetables. Make one point of contact for transport options available.
2. Ref P19- Need for joint up approach across government departments, agencies and transport providers to ensure services compliment each other rather than duplicate.
3. Ref P27- Regular checks by Translink to ensure timetables are available/ visible at bus stops/stations and replaced if necessary.
4. Ref P04 & PO8- Consultation with users re: their transport needs and feedback facility to enable users to comment or make suggestions
5. Ref P13- Clear street markings in areas where cars block access to bus stops to deter offenders. Higher volume of traffic wardens in problem areas also.
6. Make route numbers on buses in larger font that is easy to read from a distance.
7. Ref P13- Improve access to public bus and rail services. Expansion of Easibus service to try to accommodate older people and people with disabilities who cannot access public transport due to lack of bus stops close to their homes. It is also important to take measures to raise awareness of the Easibus service.
8. Ref P06- Improved transport provider staff awareness is key to overcoming

older people and peoples with disabilities fears about travel. This should be delivered in a consistent manner across all providers and closely regulated to ensure that drivers and staff are adhering to rules around lowering access steps, priority seating and consideration when moving away from stops. Regular training should be provided for drivers. Anonymous inspections of driver's use of customer care.

9. Ref P24- Review the usage of priority seats and consider running promotional campaign on buses to raise awareness of needs of older passengers/use of priority seats

10. More 'Door to Door' buses and drivers would make it easier for clients to book for a specific time instead of being collected early/ late.

11(a). Providers to review their complaints policy and procedures to enable older people to voice complaints.

(b) Whilst difficulties are still begin experienced on public bus and rail services other transport services need to be supported to provide assistance eg Door to Door, Transport Buddying, Social car schemes. Volunteer buddies and volunteer drivers provide essential support to older passengers.

Question 7

The new ATS draft Action Plan includes new actions to improve the accessibility of transport, do you agree with them?

It is pleasing to see that the draft action plan has included reference to the need to develop a *community transport sector* that is underpinned by a strong volunteering ethos and best practice. A general point is the need to ensure that the employment related language *i.e. use of the word staff*, is not used when referring to volunteers. It should also ensure that action points within the strategy are clear. The Agency would recommend that P15 (A02) has a specific action point related to *volunteer management* training. It is also important that information on policy, standards and good practice in volunteer management are distributed as well as those on general accessible transport P05 (A02). The Investing In Volunteer Quality Standard (IiV) is a national standard which enables organisations to comprehensively review their volunteer management and also publicly demonstrate their commitment to

volunteering. For example, recognition for volunteer drivers is important for retention, particularly as the cost of fuel acts as a major barrier. VSB were awarded the Investing In Volunteers quality standard in June 2008 covering all of our community projects including volunteer driving schemes and volunteer buddy schemes. They believe that transport providers who involve volunteers and receive funding should be working towards this standard in order to effectively manage their volunteers and improve their services.

It is important to promote the MiDAS and PATS scheme as outlined in P15 (A03). Training such as this, is even more important, since the introduction of the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act (2007) which has introduced a new offence for prosecuting organisations for gross failures in Health & Safety which leads to death. This trainer course has a substantial cost attached. In order to make it accessible to all sizes of organisations a co-ordinated system of sharing the learning and costs should be encouraged between groups.

P06 refers to *staff* training in disability and diversity awareness. It is important that such training is extended to *volunteer* drivers and escorts, as they provide the front line service.

Older people and people with disabilities should not be seen as passive recipients of services. They should also be acknowledged as providers of services (i.e. volunteer drivers, escorts) and should also be encouraged to have a role in shaping the transport services that they use. As outlined in P08, a factual base on the transport needs of older people and disabled people is important. It is imperative that this process includes the users themselves.

Overall, any measures taken to prevent barriers to these groups using public and community transport is valued. The Agency and its membership also agree that there should be adequate provision of alternative means of transport for those who find it difficult to use public and rail network (P14) and that the development of a community transport sector that advocates a strong volunteering ethos and best practice is vital (P15).

Question 8

Are there any actions which have not been included within the draft Action Plan that you would like to see included?

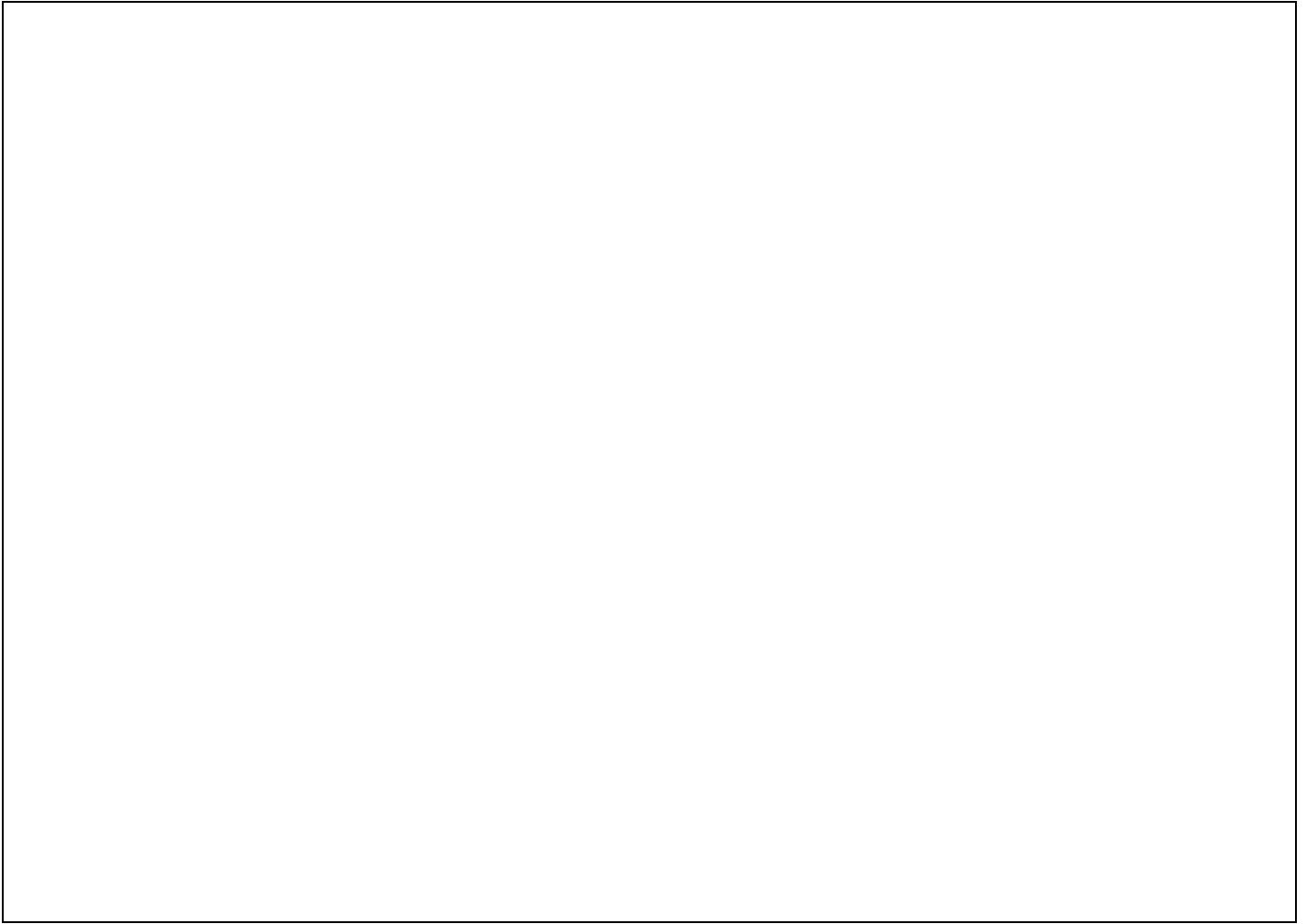
The establishment of the new *Charity Commission* in Northern Ireland will have an impact on Committee / Board matters. It is usually volunteers who sit on Committee / Boards in Northern Ireland. It is important that volunteers receive *training on the new legislation* in order to help them carry out their role effectively.

Increased Insurance costs due to being a volunteer driver and limited *expenses (fuel and wear and tear)* can be a particular barrier to volunteering for some people. It is best practice to ensure that volunteers are not left 'out of pocket' as a consequence of their volunteer work. It would be important that this strategy addresses these issues and what it proposes to do in order to mitigate for these problems.

The *new AccessNI legislation* will have a significant impact on organisations over the next year, in terms of administration time and impact on the volunteer selection process. It is important that the ensuing strategy addresses this issue, and puts measures in place to prepare community transport organisations for these changes.

Providing an evidence base for the impact of community transport on the service users as outlined in P07 / P08 is important. It is equally important to measure impact on the volunteers who are providing the frontline service and the wider community that these services are happening in. The *Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit (VIAT)* is a useful way of *quantifying impact* and can be useful in policy development, planning for volunteer involvement and in making funding applications.

Overall, the Agency and its membership are pleased to be able to respond to this consultation paper. We would be pleased to engage further with the DRD and all sectors (P18) in ensuring that volunteering continues to contribute to the success of community transport and the civic engagement of older people and people with disabilities across Northern Ireland.



Annex A

Freedom of Information Act 2000 - Confidentiality of Consultations

The Freedom of Information Act gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, the Department in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity, should be made public or be treated as confidential. If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public please include an explanation in your response.

This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

- the Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided
- the Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature
- acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office (or see web site at: www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk).