



West Belfast Partnership
218-226 Falls Road
Belfast
BT12 6AH

T: 02890809202

A Response to: Belfast Rapid Transit Consultation

Issued by: Department of Regional Development



February 2010

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The West Belfast Partnership Board welcomes the opportunity to respond to the DRD Belfast Rapid Transit Consultation. The Partnership supports the Minister for Regional Development in recognising that the provision of a rapid transit system for Belfast will not only improve the city's public transport offer and ensure that it is on a par with its European counterparts but also act as an impetus for continued regeneration efforts across the city.
- 1.2 The West Belfast Partnership Board is a coalition of interests, which seeks to involve everyone who works and lives within West Belfast in the task of generating economic, social, physical, cultural and educational development in an inclusive and accountable manner. Its aim is to improve the quality of life for West Belfast residents and to also contribute positively to the development of the city as a whole.
- 1.3 The mission of the Partnership is to "involve people who live and work in West Belfast in generating social, economic, physical and cultural development and to ensure West Belfast makes a full contribution to and benefits equitably from, developments in the city as a whole". Key areas of work include: Economic development, Housing, Planning and Environment, Health and well being, Jobs taskforce, Education & Aisling Bursaries, Neighbourhood Renewal & Strategic Regeneration.
- 1.4 The Partnership seeks to do the following:
- Lobby on behalf of West Belfast to improve employment opportunities, investment and job creation for people living here.
 - Raise awareness of the educational needs of our children, young people and adults, advocate for additional resources and provide west Belfast wide education programmes such as our Easter and summer schools.
 - Influence government policy by actively representing the views and opinions of local people and organizations on a range of environmental issues including housing, leisure and play, planning and transport.
 - Promote the development strategies and policies that work towards creating a healthier West Belfast.
 - Assist the local community sector to lobby for resources, support and recognition for the valuable work they contribute to creating a better society in West Belfast.
- 1.5 In 2007 the Department for Social Development (DSD) contracted the West Belfast Partnership to develop the Strategic Regeneration Framework and Implementation Plan (The SRF). This plan defines West Belfast's needs and priorities in driving regeneration activity and investment and identifies that there is a need to develop well connected and well designed neighbourhoods, which enhance and preserve the long term sustainability and the beauty of the natural landscape. In the context of the regeneration of the physical and environmental landscape of West Belfast, the creation of sustainable transport solutions is identified as a strategic objective to take forward this planning and design agenda. The SRF sets out a further five recommendations in relation to the promotion of travel choice, through the encouragement of walking, cycling and public transport. The development of a bus rapid transit system is identified as one of the key recommendations.

- 1.6 The SRF recognises the importance of making connections across West Belfast and indeed the wider city, through sustainable movement systems such as rapid transit provision. In 2007 DRD commissioned a consulting team consisting of Atkins and KPMG to undertake a feasibility study to examine possible routes and technology associated with the provision of rapid transit. The study concluded that a bus based rapid transit system presented the most viable option to the city. The study also built upon initial route proposals identified by the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (CITI, EWAY and WWAY rapid transit schemes) and subsequently explored in further detail, a pilot network of these three routes which would connect East Belfast, West Belfast and Titanic Quarter with and through the city centre. The proposals for a rapid transit system in greater Belfast are therefore critically important to the West Belfast population.
- 1.7 The West Belfast Partnership has to date enjoyed an excellent working relationship with the DRD Rapid Transit Division, having met on several occasions to discuss the progression of the proposals affecting West Belfast. It is our intention to continue to proactively engage with the Department and we welcome the opportunity to provide comment on the legislative context which will underpin the eventual implementation of Belfast's rapid transit system.

2.0 Response to Consultation Questions

Do you agree that the Department should have the necessary authority to implement the Rapid Transit proposals?

- 2.1 The Partnership agrees that the Department is best placed to implement rapid transit proposals for Belfast and should therefore have the required statutory footing to do so. It is felt that the development of an efficient, viable rapid transit system for our city will not only offer greater transport choices but provide a further stimulus for regeneration efforts in areas linked by the eventual system.
- 2.2 The Partnership believes that the Department should endeavour to approach the implementation of rapid transit proposals in an accountable and transparent manner. Public support and local 'buy in' will be critical to the success of this transport system and must involve a long-term commitment to genuine consultation by DRD. Suitable mechanisms to ensure ongoing engagement with the local stakeholders associated with the initial three pilot route areas are essential. The Partnership wishes to highlight that effective models of interagency partnership working are already in place across Belfast and these support structures should be capitalised upon.
- 2.3 The West Belfast Partnership facilitates a specific Housing and Environment Sub Group comprised of a range public and private sector interests, community representatives and statutory agencies. This group considers key transportation issues affecting West Belfast, alongside other important environmental issues to include housing and planning. The Partnership also maintains an excellent working relationship with the West Belfast Taxi Association and Translink, the two main public transport providers in the west of the city. This reflects a commitment by both organisations in identifying and responding to the needs of the communities they serve. The DRD Rapid Transit Division should endeavour to replicate these efforts and build upon the strong social infrastructure foundations already in place in order to engage with the communities upon which proposals will most significantly impact.
- 2.4 The Partnership would also like to take this opportunity to stress that the proposed rapid transit system must endeavour to integrate with existing public transport services in West Belfast. The West Belfast Taxi Association (WBTA) and Translink share the provision of public transport services- with the WBTA is licensed to provide a stage carriage bus service on various routes. The WBPB recognises that both organisations provide essential services to the West Belfast community, and is firm in its belief that rapid transit proposals should in no way undermine current service provision but instead seek to assist both organisations to continually improve on their performance targets.
- 2.5 Finally the Partnership believes that following on from the development of the initial three pilot routes, resources must be committed by the Department to ensure that North and South Belfast also become serviced by the rapid transit system. We wish to emphasise the need for a city-wide integrated network. Whilst we welcome the connections from east to west we have concerns that the rapid transit plans do not include the north and south of the city. We would like to see the rapid transit expanded to cover the entire city, especially major employment locations as well as leisure and residential so that there is increased access and inclusion.

Do you agree that the Department should take land acquisition powers for the implementation of the Rapid Transit system?

- 2.6 The Partnership would support the implementation of land acquisition powers but believes that the eventual identification of routes and proposed halts will have to involve rigorous assessment and extensive consultation with associated stakeholder groups and landowners. The Partnership would also want assurance from the Department that the upkeep of any acquired lands will be ensured prior to the commencement of construction work, during and after. Disruption to the local community and existing road infrastructure should also be kept to a minimum.

Do you agree that the Department should have the power to purchase, lease and dispose of goods, services and facilities for the Rapid Transit system?

- 2.7 The Partnership agree that the Department should have power to purchase, lease and dispose of goods services and facilities associates with the rapid transit system. Information surrounding the spending of public funds on services and facilities associated with the implementation of rapid transit should be made known to the general public. The allocation of this funding should not detract from existing public transport providers and should target 'front line' rapid transit services rather than unnecessary bureaucratic costs.

Do you agree that a performance-based contract should be introduced for the operation of the Rapid Transit system?

- 2.8 The West Belfast Partnership supports the introduction of a performance based contract for the operation of the rapid transit system. This will ensure that the system remains regulated and conforms to EU Regulation 1370/2007.
- 2.9 It is our view that the implementation of a performance based contract will ensure that the eventual operator is tightly monitored in their delivery of services. It will encourage the efficient and innovative delivery of services as the operator strives to meet and ideally exceed clearly defined performance indicators. This can only be viewed as a positive for the general public who will directly benefit in their use of the system.
- 2.10 The WBPB advocates that any performance based indicators / criteria used in the competitive tendering process should balance social benefits against commercial benefits. We support a shared future for Northern Ireland and believe that good relations outcomes should have increased prominence. Belfast has a fractured transport system, a result of sectarian divisions and the ongoing legacy of the conflict. We feel rapid transit has the potential to transcend traditional territorial perceptions, and enable the breakdown of travel and social patterns that reproduce segregation and social exclusion. It is our belief that any performance.
- 2.11 The Partnership would request that a stakeholder working group representing West Belfast be involved in developing the performance based contract to ensure transparency and local accountability.

Do you agree that the Department should be responsible for:

- i. specifying Rapid Transit service requirements, quality-of-service and the fare levels;***
- ii. awarding the Rapid Transit contract; and***
- iii. monitoring and reporting on Rapid Transit operator performance?***

- 2.12 The WBPB agrees that the Department should be responsible for specification of rapid transit service requirements, quality of service and fare levels. Fare levels need to demonstrate value for money and provide enough of an incentive to encourage an eventual shift in public transport usage. We would support a role for the Consumer Council in the consultation of fares but would also like to see wider engagement with the public through existing community organisations.
- 2.13 It is acceptable that the Department will award the eventual rapid transit contract and monitor operator performance, however we feel rigorous checks and balances should be in place to ensure acceptable, accountable decisions by DRD. We would again stress the need for thorough community engagement in the development of specific details associated with the eventual performance based contract, including clear benchmarks for improvement.

What are your views on the proposal to offer financial incentives to the Rapid Transit operator to grow the Rapid Transit market introduce innovation and improve services?

- 2.14 It is recognised that rapid transit within Belfast will mark the beginning of a new era in transport provision for the city. Whilst the new system is in its infancy, financial incentives should be awarded to encourage interest from potential operators.
- 2.15 The West Belfast Partnership believes that following the implementation of the first three initial pilot routes, this system should be expanded to develop into a fully integrated city wide operational service. It is recognised that it would be unrealistic for the contracted operator to have to bare the full cost of expanding and improving the system given the huge capital costs associated and the fact that the perceived benefits of the system will not only improve the quality of Belfast's public transport services but also stimulate much further reaching social and economic regeneration efforts.

Do you agree with the proposed powers to regulate passenger conduct on Rapid Transit Vehicles and in/on Rapid Transit premises?

- 2.16 The Partnership supports the proposed powers to regulate passenger conduct on board vehicles and within rapid transit premises. The enforcement of these regulations will ensure a safe, pleasant rapid transit experience for passengers.

Do you agree that the dedicated public transport corridors on which Rapid Transit operates should be strictly enforced?

- 2.17 The Partnership feels that strict enforcement of dedicated public transport corridors will be critical to the success of the rapid transit system. The very essence of the system is to provide a quality public transport service which offers improved speed, reliability, comfort and access features over existing conventional public transport services. In order to ensure speed and reliability to the consumer and appropriate circumstances in which the eventual operator can fulfil their performance based targets, a segregated route, unaffected by highway congestion must be ensured.
- 2.18 The Partnership in its assertion draws upon the existing situation surrounding the enforcement of bus priority lanes in West Belfast. These lanes which are geared towards easing the movement of Translink and black taxi services are often utilised as unofficial parking spaces and delivery 'service yards', adding significantly to the congestion problems of the area at peak travel periods. It is felt that DRD will have to commit significant resources to ensure that a robust system of enforcement is deployed and that the dedicated corridors are not abused.

- 2.19 It is felt that the Department will have to adopt a range of enforcement measures to adequately address this issue, to include static and moving enforcement cameras and the ticketing, fining and towing of illegally parked vehicles. The viability of enforcement measures must be examined in further detail.
- 2.20 We would support strict enforcement of the dedicated transport corridors but feel this should also be coupled with measures to improve overall public awareness around the many issues associated with the implementation of rapid transit, well in advance of the designation of corridors. We feel that measures to improve local knowledge and understanding of the key principals of rapid transit, to include the benefits and accessibility of it could help to change the culture of car usage and illegal parking. Information and promotional campaigns should focus on basic questions, i.e. 'how do I use rapid transit?' and a local information point prior to implementation could help with the smooth delivery of the scheme.

Do you agree with the proposed powers for the Department to install, operate and maintain off-board ticketing machines?

- 2.21 The Partnership supports the installation, operation and maintenance of off board ticketing machines and feels that it offers the opportunity to move towards increased integration of all public transport services (namely West Belfast Taxi Association, Translink and eventual rapid transit services) across the city. Extensive discussions must be undertaken on the location of stop/halt sites, where ticketing machines will be placed.

Questions on Integrated Impact Assessment

Do you have any views on the Integrated Impact Assessment Screening conclusion reached by the Department?

- 2.22 The West Belfast Partnership Board support the Department in pursuing the outcome of their Integrated Impact Assessment screening exercise which identifies that a full economic appraisal, economic impact assessment and the consideration of state aid should be undertaken as part of the screening associated with rapid transit policy proposals.

Are there any particular equality issues that need to be considered in relation to the policy proposals contained in the Detailed Policy Proposals booklet?

- 2.23 It is recognised that the nature of this consultation process relates specifically to high level policy proposals required for the implement rapid transit. Equality screening is not required at this stage but will be critical prior to the rapid transit implementation stage.

3.0 Additional Comments

- 3.1 We agree with the tenants set out in the vision for rapid transit but feel that it should also include reference to a shared future and the promotion of an accessible and inclusive city.
- 3.2 The West Belfast and Greater Shankill Jobs Taskforce report in 2002 recommended the development of a rapid transit system that would improve the connections between west Belfast and the rest of the city, thus opening up employment, investment and leisure opportunities. In the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Taskforce Strategic Review in January 2007 the Partnership recommended that rapid transit be considered as part of the physical infrastructure developments.
- 3.3 In July 2007 the West Belfast Partnership (WBP) met with DRD Minister Murphy and discussed this and other proposals. In 2008 Minister Murphy announced the feasibility study for the Westway and the Atkins report outlined options for development and stated, "The WWay has a good economic case with positive social and economic benefits for the wider Belfast City Centre area and West Belfast" (Atkins 2008: 339).
- 3.4 The West Belfast Partnership Board met consultants from the Atkins team in June 2008 to discuss their findings and the proposed routes for the west. This discussion fed into the Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) and featured in Belfast Area Partnerships discussions in terms of developing citywide connectivity.
- 3.5 In August 2008 the WBP completed a Strategic Regeneration Framework, which detailed the long term regeneration requirements for the west of the city. Improvements to infrastructure are a key feature and the Westway is a significant development that will act as a catalyst to other initiatives and have wider regeneration benefits.

Community engagement

- 3.6 In the delivery of rapid transit for west Belfast the West Belfast Partnership (WBP) would like to see robust community engagement. The success of the rapid transit in terms of uptake, community and citywide ownership will depend on the involvement of local communities the routes traversed. Rapid transit has the potential to link the most deprived communities to key employment, education, consumption sites, resources and services. Consideration needs to be given as to how rapid transit will secure support across our communities and the service perceived to belong to everyone.
- 3.7 Phased awareness-raising of rapid transit and a local information point of contact will provide a smooth delivery of the project. The WBP can support DRD with routes development through intense and targeted community engagement and advice on the effective promotion of rapid transit to the local communities.

Maximising the regeneration impact, enhancing good relations

- 3.8 The WBP agrees with the Department that rapid transit will be a catalyst and a driver for future regeneration and prosperity. In addition to the regenerative potential the WBP would like to highlight the important role rapid transit could have in terms of good relations and breaking down the segregated nature of the city and perceptions of territory. This is critical and we would like to see the Department build in good relations objectives as part of rapid transit. We believe that reconnecting Belfast is critical to its success as a cohesive and competitive city. The rapid transit system is an opportunity to alter people's mind maps that have been shared by segregation and conflict. Segregation is connected to fear and restricts mobility in Belfast. People need to be able to move around the city and access employment and leisure opportunities without compromising their safety. It is essential that the rapid transit does not exacerbate segregation and maximises its impact in those neighbourhoods which are located at the multiple interfaces across the city.
- 3.9 The Partnership would advocate for a holistic approach to transport to ensure the development of an integrated transport system that would include public realm developments and cycling and pedestrian networks. The East-West connection will enhance both residents' and visitors' ability to access our natural resources such as the Belfast Hills and the waterways and other tourist sites across the city to encourage the creation of shared destinations. We would also urge the Department to taken into consideration the wider developments, including Park-n-Rides to ensure that the rapid transit adds value to these and maximises the impact.
- 3.10 We believe that the rapid transit could become a mobile shared space and connect deprived areas back into the city. The new rapid transit has immense citywide benefits, not the least the potential for the new transport system itself to become a shared spaced that will enable residents to access employment, services and leisure opportunities across the city. This approach, transformative regeneration, embeds good relations as an outcome and fosters the development of normalised spaces within the city. We feel it will help foster social capital in areas blighted by disadvantage and segregation; provide much-needed access to jobs and opportunities and enable Béal Feirstians to move towards a more diverse and dynamic economy.

Branding

- 3.11 The branding of the new rapid transit is essential and should be inclusive and distinctive. This would encourage ownership and an inclusive city identity and brand, rather than association with a particular locale. In doing so it would foster good relations and improve connectivity and mobility across Belfast and generally help reach health, environmental and sustainability targets, such as CO2 reduction, traffic congestion and traffic accidents.

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 The West Belfast Partnership has welcomed the opportunity to respond to the Departments consultation on the legislation proposals associated with rapid transit and have subsequently provided comment on a number of key issues which we hope the Department will consider. I hope you find these comments helpful and please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further clarification.

Contact details:

Geraldine McAteer
Chief Executive Officer
218-226 Falls Road
Belfast
BT12 6AH
028 90 809 202