

FORWARD

West Belfast Taxi Association has been providing public transport for the last forty years. From humble beginnings, from the need to provide public transport, it has grown to the present day provision of service. It is recognised by all those that have access to the service as a vital and sustainable mode of transport.

While there is always room for improvement the current service, under a Road Service Operators Licence, for which each Association member pays £78.00 annually, has all the characteristics of rapid transport which delivers customer orientated transit efficiently and cost effectively. This currently is without any subsidy.

The West Belfast Taxi Association has and continues to provide sustainable employment opportunities. Currently 225 self employed taxi drivers supplying seven routes in West Belfast and one route to North Belfast giving accessible public transport provision to over one third of the population of the Greater Belfast area. In addition to this we provide full time employment for twenty administrative and operational support staff.

West Belfast Taxi Association has further short term and long term strategic plans to enhance the current service provision. This also includes an innovative approach on vehicle types. Our services are flexible, customer focused and cost effective. With the requirement of subsidies, costs to public can be maintained at an acceptable level.

The West Belfast Taxi Association is a “can do” organisation and is willing to engage in public /private or partnership arrangements in relation to Rapid Transport needs.

RESPONDENT'S DETAILS

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I am responding on behalf of an Organisation

Questions on Detailed Policy Proposals

Question 1 (page15)

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

NO

COMMENTS

Unless the implementation takes into full consideration the affects that Rapid Transport could have if not integrated with current public transport provision in West and North Belfast.

Question 2 (page 16)

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

YES

COMMENTS

This should be done immediately to rectify the inadequacies of the current infrastructure. However, there is no point in the acquisition of land unless steps are taken to address planning developments in densely populated areas which already lack the ability to support vehicle traffic flow.

Question 3 (page 16)

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?

NO

COMMENTS

The purchase or lease of vehicles is, at this stage, too early. The type of vehicle required needs to be defined, bearing in mind the population of the greater Belfast area. Currently usage of public transport is approximately 30%. This needs to increase dramatically. It will only increase if the system is flexible, frequent and cost effective and enforcement/priority increased.

Question 4 (page 17)

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

YES

COMMENTS

When the system has been formally decided upon.

Question 5 (page 18)

Do you agree that the Department should be responsible for

Specifying Rapid Transit service requirements, quality-of-service and fare levels;

Awarding the Rapid Transit contract; and

Monitoring and reporting on rapid operator performance?

YES

COMMENTS

Question 6 (page 18)

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?

Financial incentives should be given to all public transport providers, especially those who are innovative and improve services. Rapid Transport integration with other modes of public transport is essential.

Question 7 (page 20)

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

YES

COMMENTS

These powers should include protection for all essential service providers.

Question 8 (page 21)

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

YES

COMMENTS

This should be done immediately. The current differential in relation to parking violations and moving violations needs to be governed by one body with total responsibility. Better enforcement will increase public transport usage.

Question 9 (page 21)

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

YES

COMMENTS

These need to be integrated with all modes for public transport. Similarities already exist for a devised system.

PLEASE MAKE SURE ANY FURTHER COMMENTS ON THE DETAILED POLICY PROPOSALS HERE, ENSURING THAT YOU CLEARLY REFER TO ANY RELEVANT QUESTIONS OR RESPONSES SUBMITTED ABOVE.

Paragraph 4.13 states that “it is also proposed that the current statutory regime by which the DOE awards individual “route licence” will be dis-applied to the operation of Rapid Transit routes.

This gives rise to what impact this could or should have on other public transport providers, particularly with main groups relevant to the section 75 categories.

This element in paragraph 4.13 did not warrant a specific question, however in policy proposals presentations and on two separate occasions this was explored further and never properly defined yet it forms part of the proposed Rapid Transport legislation.

QUESTIONS ON INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

IN CONSIDERING THESE QUESTIONS, YOU SHOULD BEAR IN MIND THAT IT IS PROPOSED THAT A FURTHER INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCREENING EXERCISE WILL BE UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE OF THE RAPID TRANSIT PROJECT.

QUESTION 1

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

YES

COMMENTS

Transparency warrants that screening should not be undertaken by the department. An acceptable advisory body to protect the interest of all should be appointed,

QUESTION 2

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

YES

COMMENTS

Consultation with the general public and specific stakeholder groups is an important aspect of the impact assessment process. The full impact of proposed and Rapid Transport legislation needs to be explained to all.

COMMENTS ON EQUALITY SCREENING

A further eqia is required prior to any proposed legislation. This should also include routes for Rapid Transport with respective proposed breakdown of costs based on proposed budget.