



**Community
Transport
Association**

Community Transport Association

**Accessible Transport Strategy 2025
Consultation**

20 November 2015

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About the CTA

The CTA (Community Transport Association) is a national membership association which leads and supports community transport to be successful and sustainable in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

It provides leadership by promoting community transport and influencing the development of better strategy, policy, regulations and investment at all levels of government.

It provides support by advocating high standards of practice and providing advice, information, training and hands-on support that helps operators work to these standards.

Community transport enables people to live independently, participate in their community and to access education, employment, health and other services. It uses and adapts conventional vehicles to do exceptional things – always for a social purpose and community benefit, but never for a profit.

Using everything from mopeds to minibuses, typical services include: voluntary car schemes, community bus services, school transport, hospital transport, dial-a-ride, wheels to work and group hire services.

Community transport is responsive, accessible and flexible.

“ *We want to see community transport thriving across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, enabling people to live independently, participate in their community and to access education, employment, health and other services.* ” **Our Community Transport Vision**

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Introduction

CTA have consulted with our members and stakeholders in Northern Ireland and included their comments in our response.

We are unable to respond using the document provided because as our members have stated the questions are too limited to enable an appropriate response. CTA has aimed to follow the format of the consultation document where possible. We have made comment on each Theme and outlined actions CTA, our members and their passengers ask to be included in the final published Strategy.

It is CTA's view the Accessible Transport Strategy (ATS) is a cross-cutting strategy identified by OFMDFM that DRD¹ has been nominated to take the lead for delivering. OFMDFM 'A Strategy to improve the lives of people with disabilities' document does not see transport as only that which is currently funded and delivered via DRD but all transport funded by the public purse irrespective of which Department it is managed by.

CTA engaged with the following people/organisations to help us respond to this consultation:

- CTA members in NI including but not limited to: Disability Action, Bridge Accessible Transport, the 11 Rural Community Transport Partnership Organisations
- Partners and other stakeholders: Cedar Foundation, Volunteer Now, Translink, Consumer Council, CT passengers, older people, people with disabilities including a local transport forum of people with disabilities.

¹ From April 2016 DRD is expected to become the Dept of Infrastructure. This response and the resulting ATS will be delivered by the new Department.

CTA Response

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

Can you say why? We are especially interested in your views on concessionary fares; the accessibility of our trains, buses and stations; and your experience as a customer of public transport and (if applicable) as a car driver or pedestrian.

CTA Comment:

In part: CTA met with a number of older people and people with disabilities who use public and community transport to ascertain their views. Those who have used public and/or community transport for some time agreed vehicles are more accessible and drivers (particularly on community transport services) provide great customer care and ensure the passengers' needs are first. Most of those interviewed were extremely concerned that reductions in budget have had a detrimental impact to their lives, reducing accessible transport options and limiting their ability to have a full role in society. Some people with disabilities questioned why the previous ATS did not stop DRD from reducing investment in accessible transport options. They raised concern that the DRD were 'ticking a box' by creating a Strategy that had no power to protect or enable investment to be prioritised into accessible transport options.

Both individual passengers and CTA members have agreed:

- There is an increased number of accessible vehicles in the Translink public transport fleet
- The recent introduction of Audio Visual communications on the urban Metro service is very welcomed.
Digital signage at bus stops along Metro routes is welcome.
- Improved access at urban Bus and Train Stops and for many main bus stations. Little or no improvements to rural bus stops.
- Translink staff has received Disability Awareness training.
- Concessionary Fares: The concessionary fare scheme has enabled many people to afford to travel on public transport.
It is disappointing that the Concessionary Fares Scheme in NI remains limited to Translink's provision of public transport services.

For a substantial number of people living in rural areas public transport is not a viable transport solution and therefore they are excluded from being able to avail of Concessionary Fares.

Some DRD officials and elected representatives are under the false impression concessionary fares are available for people using publically funded transport services such the Rural Transport Fund (RTF)'s Dial a Lift scheme. Dial a Lift passengers are only able to avail of a fare reduction because DARD provides DRD with revenue costs (Assisted Rural Transport Scheme) that subsidises transport for rural older people and people with disabilities. People who cannot travel on Translink services can apply for a Smart Pass but are unable to avail of Concessionary Fares because DRD limit access to the subsidy to only Translink's public transport provision. This is unfair and discriminates against older people and people with disabilities in rural areas.

If NI is to have an effective Concessionary Fare Scheme the ATS should have as a priority action point: extend the use of concessions to all publically funded transport, including: Community Transport, Taxi schemes, Health, Education and Private Coach suppliers.

- Individual passengers confirmed the rural Dial a Lift service delivered by community transport, was excellent when available. The operating times defined by DRD did not suit some rural passenger's needs (the subsidised service is available Mon-Fri, 8am – 6pm). Passengers confirmed they would be able to get out more if they had access to services in the evenings and weekends. They felt the lack of access at weekends meant for some they could not access church services, this was not an issue for people who were able to use the urban DATs scheme whose service was provided Monday – Sunday.
- Pedestrians confirm improvements have been made to paving surfaces where Public Realm works have been completed. There are still issues with regards people parking on pavements blocking pedestrian access. There are also issues with the colour differentiation of paving slabs and texture of tactile surfaces that should be addressed.
- Pedestrians reported the local of bus stops from hospital entrances caused a lot of issues for people with limited mobility and people with visual impairments. For example: the bus stop at the Ulster Hospital is on the main road. Passengers have to walk up a hill to the current entrance. The proposed new entrance is a half mile walk from the bus stop. No appropriate planning was considered to enable public transport closer access to the entrance.

- Some of those interviewed were disappointed Shopmobility was not considered in the document. For a number of people they had concerns that if Shopmobility was not discussed in the document that officials would not be required to prioritise this much needed service.
- Car drivers confirm there are issues with the number and location of disability parking bays outside Belfast. There is little work completed outside the Greater Belfast on the misuse of disabled parking bays. There are issues with regards to parking and drop off zones for people with disabilities in hospitals across NI (Mater, Royal and City Hospitals).
- Motability Car users asked if any government department was monitoring the deposits and monthly costs of Motability cars. All confirmed that no one spoke to them about the practicalities of having a Motability car when the individual was not the registered driver. No one explained that the financial benefit was lost if the individual did not have a driver available.

Do you think that there is a need for an Accessible Transportation Strategy (ATS)?

CTA Comment:

Yes: CTA believes there needs to be a strong ATS.

CTA believes the ATS should not be limited to within DRD. It needs to be a cross cutting strategy relevant to all transport funded by the Departments of the NI Executive.

The ATS should be used to ensure all transport funded by the public purse is held to account, to ensure it provides:

- An Inclusive service, able to be used by everyone
- An Excellent Quality of Service for everyone
- Excellent Customer Care for everyone
- Information is provided in all formats to ensure it is accessible to everyone
- All modes of transport in the network must comply with minimum, but high, standards of accessibility
- Regular reviews of both target achievements and passenger satisfaction are completed to ensure the transport network remains inclusive and accessible
- All bus stations, train stations, taxi ranks, drop off points (at all public buildings incl. hospitals, schools etc.) and stops are reviewed and accessibility including lighting, information and safety improved within the life of the Strategy
- Passengers, stakeholders and partners are at the core of service development giving a real voice to service users and suppliers
- To enable innovation and flexibility in investment, to ensure improvements to accessible transport provision are enabled as technology and physical resources advance

Our Vision for a new Accessible Transport Strategy is to have a transport network in Northern Ireland that is inclusive and accessible to all. Do you agree with this?

CTA Comment:

Yes: The document outlines a strategic approach but does not consider the detail of how this is to be achieved.

The last ATS included a raft of transport solutions to help improve access for older people and people with disabilities. The Strategy to 2025 refers only to Translink and has excluded: Community Transport, Shopmobility and even the private transport sector.

The document references the Integrated Transport Project but CTA members confirm there is no information available to be able to make comment on what the ITS aims to achieve. Who will be involved in the ITS? There is little information available to confirm if the ITS will include existing accessible transport supply or if a new model of delivery is being considered. The options document presented over a year ago is not available for people with disabilities to consider. There is concern the ITS could prioritise cost and commercial outsourcing rather than supporting an accessible, inclusive and community led approach (as delivered by community transport and Shopmobility). If this is the case then NI could end up the only region in the UK without investment in community and volunteer led transport solutions focused on prioritising the transport needs of people with disabilities. DfT and Local Authorities in GB have invested in community transport to ensure people with disabilities and older people have appropriate access.

There is no part of the vision to deal with car users or how to encourage people out of their cars to use the transport network. There remain a high number of car users in NI. Research confirms the number of people who use their car will remain at 66% of all road users. In an aging society the number of people aged 60+ who continue to drive will increase in the next decades. The uptake of the number of Motability vehicles is rising, even though there is evidence that many disabled people cannot always use this benefit because they do not have a driver. Given DRD's budget continues to prioritise road building there is no incentive to move from car to the transport network, perhaps this should be included in the vision.

Theme 1 and Theme 2

Theme 1: This theme is targeted at improving the accessibility of the public transport network. At a strategic level we aim to deliver this theme by maintaining and improving the public transport fleet and researching how to improve coverage of the public transport network. Do you agree with this approach?

Theme 2: This theme is targeted at improving the accessibility of the wider transport network. At a strategic level we aim to deliver this theme by improving the pedestrian environment and examining options to deliver integrated transport. Do you agree with this approach?

CTA Comment:

Translink, Integrated Transport and transport interchanges should be in the same Theme 1. Other road users (pedestrian, blue badge, car parking) should be in Theme 2.

For the public, the transport network is not perceived to be Translink on one hand with all other suppliers part of a wider, separate transport network.

If a person with disabilities:

- is going to school, they use publicly funded Education transport.
- is going to day care, they use publicly funded Health transport
- is travelling in a rural area where Translink service is not suitable or available, they use community transport
- is going from a rural area to a city, they use community transport to link them to Ulsterbus or a train

What is needed is for ATS and DRD to start thinking from the disabled person's point of view. They need to have a transport network that enables them to live a full and inclusive life. Transport needs to be able to get them where they need to go – this may require a multi-modal or linked approach. This means a mix of public, private and community solutions are needed to ensure people with disabilities have the right modal mix to meet their access needs. It should be a priority of the ATS to ensure the right transport mix is available and criteria set to ensure the right quality standard is met.

NI public money provides Translink, Education Authority and Health with money for vehicles. Community Transport, Private Operators and Taxi Operators provide their own vehicles with money generated from a mix of fares and other income. Shopmobility also provides many of its scooters with income derived via grant, donations and membership. The ATS should be setting a minimum but realistic standard of vehicle accessibility. Note: a low

floor vehicle is not appropriate for rural areas where there is no footpath as it still requires the person to step onto the vehicle. A passenger lift as used by community transport and Health are noted as being appropriate, by passengers. We have plenty of vehicles. They need to be optimised to enable an integrated transport solution suitable for everyone.

If government is going to buy or grant fund services then the driver training standard can be set to a minimum standard. E.g. Disability Awareness set as a mandatory course accredited through the Drivers CPC and replicated as a certificated course for volunteers. Indeed CTA has been working on a review of driver training to ensure the needs of passengers are a focus of a driver's role. The CTA approach considers requirements as laid down in TFL Big Red Book and comments from older people and people with disabilities what they want included in driver training to make using transport easier and better.

An action for ATS is to engage CTA in order to agree a standard and content of driver training appropriate to meet the needs of older people and people with disabilities that also suits public, private and community transport suppliers. CTA has been a leading provider of MiDAS across the UK. MiDAS has been a standard recognised as the only training that focuses on passenger's needs and treats training as a means to enabling accessible transport and access provision to be delivered.

The ATS should review the feedback, statistics and trends of older people and people with disabilities who use all forms of transport that receive public subsidy. It is disappointing the ATS have failed to consider the statistical information made available through both the RTF and TPPD, Health and Education transport. Counting only Translink figures means all those people with disabilities and older people who cannot use their vehicles are not being considered by government. If rural proofing had been properly applied then rural passengers would have been considered more in this document.

Other Road Users – separate theme

Blue Badge: CTA urge ATS to consider monitoring the scheme to ensure there is no abuse.

Pedestrian environment: CTA have been asked to include a request for the ATS to work with council partners to ensure the pedestrian environment is monitored to ensure street furniture, parking on pavements and misuse of disability parking bays is considered across both rural and urban areas. It is also important that councils work with the ATS to ensure planning decisions consider disability access and enable the transport network to be able to leave people off close to public facilities such as leisure or sports complex etc.

Parking: as councils have taken on the management of many public car parks
ATS should monitor the provision of disabled parking bays to ensure an
adequate number of bays are available and not misused.

Theme 3

This theme is targeted at improving the passenger experience. At a strategic level we aim to deliver this theme, by examining how those who provide transport services are trained to deal with customers; by encouraging mentoring or travel training schemes and by working with the voluntary sector to explore the potential of new technology. Do you agree with this approach?

CTA Comment:

No: The ATS has considered the issue of solely from a DRD perspective, not as a cross departmental issue. If ATS considers what other interactions people with disabilities have then they would see that there are solutions available in other department's activities.

The key issue is ensuring that an individual travel needs assessment has been completed. Every person with a disability has a travel needs assessment completed when they are at school. Unfortunately that assessment is not passed on to the person, their family or social services. That assessment confirms if a person can travel independently (safe to cross or walk along a road/footpath, make cash payments, read a sign or timetable, understand and tell time, feel safe surrounded by strangers, can ask for help, can get onto a vehicle, etc.).

As part of the preparation for leaving school ATS should require DE to ensure all people with disabilities identified as being able to travel independently are provided with travel training. This enables travel training to be introduced at an early stage and not left to the last minute, often because a group or demand responsive transport has been removed. Too many people with disabilities have a fear of the transport network because they cannot access support and information. Recently CTA, Down Community Transport and Translink officers met with a group of people with brain injuries. After an hour each person was confident enough to start using local Ulsterbus services independently. Some had been through a travel training course but that course told them about transport rather than show them how to travel. Travel training is subjective and can be expensive and time consuming. It would be more effective if schools and colleges were engaged to include this course as part of 'lifelong learning' curriculum. ATS should then monitor how many people complete independent travel training through school and through the life of the strategy measure if they continue to use the travel network for access for at least 5 years post school.

ATS needs to promote to all government departments to include as part of their funding criteria confirmation of how people will get to services. If DSD include an access question to all Community & Voluntary Sector (C&VS) and Housing applications and Health also have to consider all of a sudden

activities will be located near to the transport network and not so far away from routes that access is made difficult for people with disabilities. A proactive ATS will make significant increases to the number of people using the transport network and the promotion of the transport network as a first choice rather than last option.

Concessionary fares should be extended to all modes of transport available in the transport network. Continuing to limit concessionary fares to only Translink service discriminates against people with disabilities in rural areas.

Disability awareness training is not the only training that is required to ensure people with disabilities needs are met. Drivers will also need to know practical actions to ensure they can meet the needs of people with very different disabilities. This includes the practical ability to safely secure a wheelchair to the floor of a vehicle (both manual and powered chairs), how to be a guide, emergency evacuation of people with disabilities, how to deal with challenging behaviour (appropriate for people with dementia, autism or ADHD, etc.) and how to communicate with someone whose first language is not English (sign language etc.). The ATS should define the minimum training standard suitable for drivers and staff at depots/stations. CTA suggest the most practical training would be to require drivers to undertake a Disability Awareness Driver's CPC course accredited by Jaupt where course points are recorded on their driver's card, and that drivers who do not require the CPC complete the same course but receive a certificate (this would be relevant to volunteer drivers).

Theme 4

This theme is targeted at improving the accessibility of information. At a strategic level we aim to deliver this theme by looking at ways to improve the detail of travel information, how it is presented, and its availability within different formats or media. Do you agree with this approach?

CTA Comment

Yes: The process suggested is appropriate. Passengers and suppliers have agreed it is important that the whole transport network information should be included and not just Translink's services.

The Integrated Transport Pilot identified how better information can be provided by highlighting how people in rural areas could link to Translink to travel further.

CTA suggests ATS considers a total review of the Translink Journey Planner to consider how it can be simplified and an app created to enable mobile access to information.

Simplification of ticket options would help to ensure people with disabilities can avail of appropriate discounts if available.

The process to get a Smart Pass should be simplified. The process requires a person to complete the form, get a photo and then take both to a Translink depot for verification. CTA suggests this could be simplified if the same people who can verify a passport or driving license could do the same for a Smart Pass. Asking a person with a disability to get to a bus depot before they can avail of subsidised travel could be enough of a barrier to stop them from wanting to use the transport network.

Theme 5

This theme is targeted at improving working with partners and stakeholders to deliver transport services aimed at the needs of the user. At a strategic level we aim to deliver this theme by examining new ways to maximise meaningful engagement and participation. Do you agree with this approach?

CTA Comment

Yes: IMTAC provides an advisory voice to government however as was confirmed in their ATS stakeholder engagement event², their committee does not include the voice of rural older people or people with disabilities, unable to use Translink services.

It is interesting that IMTAC produced a document prior to this proposal's release³ that also excludes any reference to current accessible transport sector. IMTAC by its own admission has been opposed to the provision of alternative transport solutions, even though there is a wealth of evidence that confirms community transport does meet the needs of rural older people and people with disabilities. Indeed several independent research documents confirm people with disabilities prefer to use community transport because it is able to meet their needs.

Action for ATS: to review the balance of IMTAC to ensure there is a fairer balance of rural passengers and people who cannot use Translink services.

² IMTAC meeting to discuss ATS, Ramada Encore, 10 November 2015

³ IMTAC 'The Accessible Transport Strategy (ATS) 2025: Our views on the vision, strategic priorities and how to measure success for a new ATS', July 2015

Appendix i. CTA's response to the 2009/2015 ATS document

CTA provided a response to the previous ATS. It is worth noting some of our comments then are still relevant today.

1. Improvements to Public Transport provision

The physical network of accessible buses and trains has improved through investment by DRD and Translink into more appropriate vehicles. However, there is still some way to go to ensure the whole public transport bus network is fully accessible. Many rural routes are not regularly serviced by accessible vehicles unless a request is made in advance by passengers (giving at least 24 hours notice). With further investment the system will not require people with disabilities to have to pre-request transport when this is not a requirement of people without disabilities.

2. Bus Depots and Bus Stops

Investment needs to continue to improve bus depots and bus stops across Northern Ireland. Older people and people with disabilities need to be able to safely and easily use public transport from specified depots and bus stops. Vehicles suitable for urban transport are not always appropriate for use in the rural setting where there are few pavements and boarding takes place from a grass verge. A review of all bus stops in rural areas is required to ensure all stops are accessible. The review should look at lighting, availability of timetable and if stop has any protection from the elements. CTA recommends a review of bus stops across the whole of Northern Ireland to highlight and map where accessible stops are located and for plans to improve all others are in place.

3. Consultation

While MIU (Mobility and Inclusion Unit) has improved its consultation with older people and people with disabilities there needs to be more commitment and insistence that all transport related services are consulted on before policy design and delivery is completed (P04 A01). Prior to investment and commitment to deliver new or alter existing services (e.g. introduction of Dial a Lift in rural areas, amendments to Door-2-Door in urban areas, review of Easibus services or removal of specific rural routes) public consultation should be completed. The community should be involved in design of services to ensure proposed solutions will meet need. Designers and developers should

have to involve other stakeholder organisations such as IMTAC, CTA, NICVA, Age Concern/Help the Aged/ Mencap/ Disability Action/ etc.

4. Attitudinal Barriers and Communications

There needs to be an improvement in the government's activities undertaken to address attitudinal and psychological barriers that prevent or discourage older people and people with disabilities from using transport services and facilities that are available to them (Strategic Objective 5). CTA supports a public awareness campaign led by MIU not individual transport providers. Effective promotion of public transport as an inclusive solution will provide an awareness of services available to older people and people with disabilities but will help to create awareness services are inclusive across the whole community.

MIU is best placed to develop, with stakeholders, an interdepartmental and cross departmental marketing strategy. Investment from relevant government departments into a centralised promotional campaign will be more effective than funding individual transport providers who have already demonstrated little or no practical promotion of accessible services. MIU should co-ordinate accessible communications to ensure all formats are provided rather than advice transport providers to include option in their individual marketing programmes.

5. Buddying scheme

CTA would like to see a review and publication of a report on the Buddying scheme (P25 A07). The scheme originally developed in conjunction with Belfast Healthy Cities had potential to introduce or re-introduce older people and people with disabilities to the public transport solutions available in their local area. The pilot has been expanded outside Belfast but is changed to help people to make use of the Urban Door-2-Door system. CTA would like to review what travel training is delivered in that scheme, how many people have availed of the Buddy service and have been able to move on to independent travel, which forms of public transport they now use and how the scheme has developed social investment opportunities (volunteer recruitment and retention, use of older people / people with disabilities to act as Buddies and number of volunteers trained to deliver travel training). CTA are keen to explore the social value of the scheme and potential learning opportunities that could be developed across Northern Ireland.

CTA would like to work with MIU to provide travel training opportunities across the range of transport providers. CTA has a travel training agenda and trainer's courses that could be adopted to be rolled out as best practice across Northern Ireland.

6. Improved partnership working

ATS should create a Transport Forum where all providers are required to attend at least 2 meetings per year. The forum will ensure best practice; training and quality of service delivery are openly discussed and agreed. The public expect an accessible, quality and professional transport network. Government expect the same. Do all service providers meet that need and are aware of the expectations required through their services? An ATS action should include the formation of open dialogue across providers of publicly funded transport services to ensure funder's standards are maintained and understood across the whole provision.

There should be better use of stakeholders to provide support in other areas. CTA are listed in P04 A02 as providing guidance and advice on vehicle design, service co-ordination, better information provision, training standards etc in relation to CT operations. The effective, quality services provided by CT in Northern Ireland is testament to the work provided by CTA. The CTA has not however been consulted with on vehicle design, service co-ordination, information provision or training standards in other transport areas. The ATS should build partnership co-operation and learning by involving previously recognised stakeholders in more areas of the ATS.

7. Driving standards and training

CTA would like to see enforcement of P06 A01 to ensure all drivers and frontline staff providing public transport takes regular disability awareness and equality training. ATS has the opportunity to ensure transport funded by public money is provided by appropriately trained staff and for this to be included as part of the terms and conditions for funding.

ATS should add an action requiring all departments to add to terms and conditions of funding drivers of larger buses providing public transport must take a disability awareness/equality module through the new Driver's CPC periodic training. Only by building in this requirement will any positive changes be effected across the public transport system. As the Driver's CPC license and periodic training must be taken by drivers of all large passenger carrying vehicles there is no additional cost for government to insist such customer focused training is required by drivers and providers of publicly funded transport.

Rather than indicating a commitment to deliver training to staff all public transport providers must be required and evidence a nationally recognised qualification has been taken and training maintained. If transport providers are not willing to invest in the safe carriage and care of passengers with disabilities or older people then that provider should be excluded from public transport service provision.

8. Concessionary Fares

CTA welcomes the action (P30 A01) where expansion of concessionary fares will be reviewed. Concessionary fares are not currently available for passengers of Community Transport vehicles. Passengers avail of community transport because they are unable to access or avail of the conventional public transport system or they use community transport to link them to the public transport network. The passenger is not however able to benefit from concessionary fare until they use a Translink vehicle. This has resulted in an inequitable concessionary fare system. If you live on a Translink route then you can avail of a concession. If not then the publicly funded alternative mode of transport is not deemed to fit into the concessionary fare model.

Concessionary fares for people with disabilities needs to be completely reviewed. The SmartPass application process is not available in alternative formats. People with disabilities and in particular people with learning disabilities are asked to provide proof of identity by travelling to a bus station with several forms of ID which simply can not be produced. Many people with learning disabilities will not have a bank statement or utility bill in their own name or have a driving license or passport – how then are they expected to prove their residential address? Why can their parent or guardian's details not be used? The system has and does not consider the issues relevant to a person with disabilities.

Similarly an older woman who has never had a driving license with all her household utility bills in her husband's name is not bale to prove residency. The application process must take into consideration the needs of the people it is meant to assist.

Through consultation a more relevant and effective system should be introduced during the life of the new ATS.

Economic Environment

CTA is concerned the current financial situation will see many proposed actions delayed or shelved due to lack of resources. The ATS needs to have more power and must be taken into account at design, development and investment negotiations. Only when government commits to an accessible shared future can further improvements be made through ATS.

CTA propose DRD review:

How the ATS has been implemented across all departments

Requirements from and monitoring of transport providers to ensure all services include accessible; communication, delivery (including driver and front line staff training), appropriate vehicle provision and consultation with passengers.

Additional Inclusions for consideration in the ATS Draft Strategy 2009-2012

CTA propose the following additions to the Draft Action Plan for 2009-2012:

Resources for ATS

MIU to be tasked with securing resources to implement the ATS from DRD and the NI Assembly. The only fault of the ATS has been a dependence on other departments and strategy's to acknowledge and implement ATS actions. With investment MIU will be better placed to ensure the Action Plan is implemented.

Research

Research into accessible transport provision across Northern Ireland. The ATS should include a review of the range and type of accessible transport already available across Northern Ireland against the current population data. This should look at: public transport, community transport, private coach transport, taxis, rail and ferries (e.g. Strangford/Portaferry and Rathland ferry). By producing a map of accessible options across the region ATS can help all government departments focus investment and training in areas where accessibility should be improved. Funding for this research should come from DRD, DHSSPS and DEL. Research and the ultimate report should be managed by MIU but delivered by a mix of resources including Translink, CTA, Transport planners, NISRA and so forth to ensure a complete picture is known and will link into the next census data (2011).

Research into the needs of people with disabilities and older people. The needs of older people and people with disabilities have changed and continue to do so in light of our aging population, developments in healthcare and disability living tools.

The ATS needs to review and research the individual needs of people with disabilities to ensure government led transport solutions are appropriate. By using the database of people registered as disabled (in receipt of higher rate of benefits) would be an initial starting point for the research. Included in the review should be – SmartPass application process (both for older people and people with disabilities), concessionary fares, appropriateness of current fleet of accessible vehicles (bus and rail), types and models of wheelchairs used and transport requirements, communication needs, use of public transport, residential location (urban/rural), requirement for passenger assistant/s, travel patterns, reason for travel, etc. The research should look to how and why people use public transport and what reasons there are for not using public transport. The research should highlight opportunities of solutions that will

improve and make more effective accessible transport provision in Northern Ireland. The research will also update government knowledge on the needs of people with disabilities.

Research should take into consideration all forms of transport supported by public funds. This will review transport provided outside DRD such as Education and Health transport. The research could lead to the development of a cross departmental approach to the future of transport provision and integrated transport planning.

CTA is very keen to work with MIU on this project and welcomes the opportunity to discuss the potential government knowledge bank from this action.

Partnership working

ATS should have an action requiring all planned and development of transport solutions to include element of interdepartmental and cross department communications to give rise to furthering partnership working. This will ensure the various government department sections communicate openly sharing integrated solutions to create more effective transport provision across Northern Ireland. The public benefit from a shared agenda will see a reduction in overlapping or contradicting transport schemes. Through ATS the government has an opportunity to break out of 'silo' planning ensuring efficiencies are shared not only within individual government departments but across all government departments. The ATS has an opportunity to bridge all departments by creating guidance on how to ensure accessibility through shared provision.

Accessibility of Private Coach / vehicles

The OFMFDM removal of Part III exemption from Private Operators will require investment within the private sector for accessible vehicle alternatives. ATS should add an action to review the DRD grant for making vehicles accessible to consider extending this to all transport providers rather than only those vehicles / organisations linked to the RTF.

Similarly training and education for these operators will be required to ensure the same quality and level of accessible services is provided as is required from Translink or Community Transport.

CTA would like to develop a training package or accessible quality standard, in conjunction with MIU, to ensure these private coach operators and drivers will maintain the same recognised level of service as is provided by Community Transport.

Community Planning

All too often planning does not consider the future requirements of a community placing undue pressures on infrastructure such as transport, education and health. Transport and accessibility need to be considered from the initial planning stage. ATS should add as an action all community planning needs to consider transport (in the present and for the future population needs). Given the population of Northern Ireland is ageing the needs of that future population needs to be considered and planned for now. ATS should add as an action MIU production of accessibility guidance for planners of both transport and of community development (housing, location of health and education services, infrastructure etc).

Review of the s10b operators' permit and the effects on accessible transport provision

The ethos of the Community Transport movement is to provide affordable, accessible transport operated by and for the community. Community Transport meets the community's transport needs filling the gap where people find it difficult to access conventional or public transport. Community Transport operates under the s10b permit which is currently being reviewed by DRD/DOE. There is a threat the permit could be removed or altered so significantly the community may no longer be able to meet local needs. There is pressure for community transport to deliver services for government under contract rather than apply for grant assistance to meet the transport needs highlighted from within the locality / community. Substantial changes to s10b will increase social exclusion, increase rural isolation and create a community where older people and people with disabilities have no alternative transport solutions.

CTA encourage ATS to add an action to ensure accessible service provision led by the community is maintained and encouraged. For over 10 years Community Transport has received government grant aid paid through the DRD to ensure gaps in transport provision could be met. Should the review of the s10b result in a dilution of community transport's ability to meet need then who will support the aims of the ATS, who will provide innovative accessible transport solutions to meet those considered the most vulnerable in society? The Community Transport sector is an integral function of accessible transport provision in Northern Ireland. ATS should include an action to ensure the government, and DRD in particular, retain alternative methods of transport delivery to meet the individual's and small community group / association's access needs.

RPA

During the life of this Action Plan there will be many changes in Northern Ireland. ATS has the opportunity to provide education and training for the new

Council structures under the Review of Public Administration The future of transport management in Northern Ireland is as yet unknown. At present transport is the remit of DRD however this could change. Should transport move out of DRD and into Council responsibility ATS should prepare a training programme to ensure Councils and their officers are aware and prepared for accessible transport strategy and provision.

Review of Public Transport

The Review of Public Transport is due for consultation late 2009. There should be an action within ATS to ensure future public transport provision maintains as a primary consideration inclusive, accessible transport across Northern Ireland.

Regional Transportation strategy

MIU to ensure ATS is integrated into the Regional Transportation Strategy to ensure accessibility is at the forefront of planning and development of the Northern Irish transport agenda.

Transport provision post 2012

The Rural Transport Fund is due for review and is expected to conclude in its current format March 2012. An action for ATS should be the continuation of community and voluntary sector transport solutions in order to meet the needs of older people and people with disabilities who find it difficult to access conventional or public transport.

The ATS action should include the benefit of community led transport solutions and the possibility of amalgamating both RTF and TPPD into one funding unit to ensure both rural and urban dwellers have the same access to services provided through one government programme.

CTA would be best placed to provide support for ATS on the involvement of the community and voluntary sector as a transport supplier for future provision.